

GUITAR IN THE NETHERLANDS

By GUY TRAVISS

The following compilation of short articles concerns classical guitar in the Netherlands. It is intended to show a cross section of classical guitar activity for this region of Europe, and how it is being supported there. All visits were made in May 2010.



Concertgebouw, Amsterdam.

Matthew McAllister live on Radio 4nl from the Mirror Hall, Concertgebouw, Amsterdam

Bernard Haitink, Dutch conductor and violinist, once described the Concertgebouw as 'the best instrument in the orchestra it houses'. Built in 1881, when it was declared that the Dutch capital should have a proper concert hall, the Concertgebouw is today recognised as one of the world's leading recital halls and is home to the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. One of the rooms within the neoclassical architecture is the Mirror Hall, notable for its crystal chandeliers, antique mirrors and Doric pillars. It was here that Matthew McAllister performed in front of a studio audience during a live radio broadcast. Radio 4nl hosts the live Sunday morning concert from the Mirror Hall each week for the programme *Spiegelzaal*. The programme is presented by Hans van den Boom, an icon of classical music in the Netherlands.

For McAllister, this was an opportunity to exercise the concept behind one of his latest discs, 'What I've done with this album is record *Cello Suite No.1* by Bach and Brouwer's *Suite No.2* for guitar. The Brouwer begins with a very

similar prelude to the Bach, and for me the two seemingly merge out of each other. Many guitar recordings have very diverse repertoire flung together in a big melting pot. This often happens when players are trying to make their



Matthew McAllister and Hans van den Boom before the broadcast.

mark, and I have been guilty of it myself. McAllister's complementary recording material is in the first place an attempt to offer a more interesting listening experience. But for this to work the listener needs to lend themselves to the idea of ordered listening. In performance, this is something McAllister can control through instruction, and in practice the concept is highly effective. But do modern day listening habits present a problem when dealing with recordings? 'These days people buy single tracks on iTunes, and that takes music out of its context. Pink Floyd recently won a court ruling regarding *Dark Side of the Moon*, which can now only be sold as a complete album. I'm not going that far, but I am trying to encourage anyone listening to my recording to sit down and listen to the album as a whole. I get frustrated with people not treating music as they treat a book or a film'.

The Odyssey Piano Trio also featured on the broadcast performing Rachmaninov's *Trio elegiaque No. 1 in G minor*, and Odyssey pianist Grace Kim also performed part of Mozart piano sonata KV 330. The event certainly brought the guitar and its repertoire into focus, 'I wasn't really thinking about what the other performers were playing. I began with Bach which made me feel very much at home on the platform with people playing Mozart and Rachmaninov', says McAllister.

Podcasts have given radio a boost in the 21st century. And with downloads of *Spiegelzaal* numbering well into the thousands, McAllister was well aware of the sense of occasion, 'I felt under quite a bit of pressure because it was such a huge concert for me, but I really enjoyed the experience. It was wonderful to be there and to see the posters showing all the people who had played there in the past'.

For the second half of his set, McAllister performed a short piece of lute music from the Scottish renaissance and a second Scottish piece, *Neil Gow's Lament for his Second Wife*, 'I feel it is very important to include Scottish music in my programmes, audiences tend to receive it well and it offers them the chance to identify with me on a personal level. I feel at home playing music from Scotland, understanding the style and character of the music means I can convey a very strong interpretation of it', says McAllister. Naturally, we tend to favour native interpretations for their inherent authority, and McAllister certainly presents Scottish music with a degree conviction to support that idea. The sentiment was also taken up by presenter Hans van den Boom as he introduced these final pieces. National style is particularly evident when dealing with folk influenced music, and through these pieces McAllister showed a sound world that really engaged the studio audience, and most probably those listening in real time or otherwise.

Gitaar Salon, Enkhuizen



Gitaar Salon, Enkhuizen.

For the guitarist in the Netherlands there is good cause to visit Enkhuizen, a small town less than an hour's drive from Amsterdam. Here they will find the Gitaar Salon, a somewhat atypical example of a guitar society of sorts.

The Salon belongs to Pieter Nanne Groot and his wife Willemien Groot-Stam, and is based at their home and business, Hotel Recuerdos. The hotel itself, whose name derives from *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*, reveals something of the owners' passion for guitar, and guests who come simply for the accommodation it provides won't fail to notice how the instrument has in some way influenced every aspect of interior design. But the



Irina Kulikova concert at the Gitaar Salon.



Johannes Moller teaching at the Gitaar Salon.

centre piece of the hotel is the concert hall which Pieter has been developing since he purchased the property in 2001.

The building had in fact belonged to Pieter's grandfather, but it was sold out of the family before Pieter could inherit. Reclaiming the property and creating a concert venue restored tradition in another sense: during German occupation in the Second World War, the building had been used to host musical performances in secret, since activities of this kind had been made illegal. The Culture Room, as it was known, is now the modern day site of the Gitaar Salon.

The Salon was setup by a group of friends and guitar lovers who were in need of a platform for their instrument. They recognised that, despite the instrument's popularity, internationally acclaimed guitarists are often happy to perform in smaller venues, 'The fragility and complexity of the sound and introverted nature of the instrument amounts to the fact that only few guitarists can rise to a level where they can access a mainstream audience. So we wished to be one of the organisations who could support concert guitarists on all levels and deliver to audiences what they rightfully deserve', says Pieter.

Since 2004, the Salon has invited performers such as Gary Ryan, Irina Kulikova and Johannes Moller to perform at the Salon. Visiting artists are also invited to give masterclasses and workshops, making the Salon an attractive prospect for a gig. Moreover, the in-house audio-visual editing suite enables each performance to be documented with a quality far exceeding the current standard set by YouTube (See Vimeo and YouTube for samples).

Pieter and Co-founder Thomas Peperkamp look after all the Salon's didactic elements. They are also both Artistic Directors, and between them organise the Salon's concert series, 'Next season we will be providing a strong programme. For classical guitar, we are proud to present some of the finest young artists who will perform in the intimate setting of our concert hall. We are pleased to be welcoming back Irina Kulikova, who gave a memorable concert last time. Johannes



Workshop at the Gitaar Salon.

Moller will also be returning once again, this time as winner of the GFA guitar competition, and he will be performing some premieres of his own music for the Salon audience. These concerts are just a few of the highlights', says Thomas.

The Salon hosts around two concerts per month and expects to have around 30 audience members at each event, 'In practice we soon discovered that the podium was often more easily filled than the hall itself, but through the efforts of all the guitarists who have contributed, we have managed to create a new audience that is very much into guitar. And in the five years that we have been going, we have created a guitar podium where the artists as well as those who come to listen define us', says Pieter. The Salon is recognised as an independent body that can apply for government funding, which it frequently does, in addition to sourcing support from private sponsors. For Pieter, this is a 'Back up for less attended concerts'. However, when you consider that Pieter and his team can accommodate and present performers on their own premises, they are under less pressure to attract a full house every time.

Certainly, to sample what the Gitaar Salon has to offer is the best way to understand what it is all about. A significant portion of the Salon's clientele is found in the guitar-playing demographic of the Netherlands, but there is also a healthy number of followers who can be subsumed under the catch-all term 'enthusiast'. Also those attending concerts, often to the surprise of the Salon hosts, represent a wide catchment area, suggesting something of the Salon's appeal. At the very least, if you are looking for a short break somewhere where those around you can empathise with a late night practice session, this is the place for you: www.gitaarsalon.nl

Twents Guitar Festival, May 13 to 16

2010 marked the fifth edition of the Twents Guitar Festival. For many this will be their first encounter with the event, owing to its recent creation. A relatively simple title, Twents, for a festival of this kind does to some