

On tour to Uncle Sam

By: Mathieu Daniël Polak



The huge distances between the fifteen cities where I have given carillon concerts last summer, was the only culture shock that I have experienced during my six weeks journey to the USA. Luckily my girlfriend and Co-pilot Ruth Sonco Tello navigated me to me to all the places.

On July 11, at the Rochester University, I gave my first carillon concert. There was a student at the concert which was seriously interested in a Carillon study. I saw in it a good opportunity to tell him about the Dutch Carillon school. In America, commonly the artist goes to the listening place after the concert to chat with the visitors. After the first concerts, I received a cheque that I could cash out at the local bank. We are not familiar with the phenomenon 'check' in the Netherlands. In America the credit card in the payment traffic plays a large role. Take this with you always. The debit card (debit card) you can leave at home because that is pretty much nowhere accepted in the US.

The hospitality, with which Ruth and I were greeted, was great. After the concert on the campus of Penn State in Erie (PA) on 14 July, the family Franforter prepared for us a vegetarian meal. At other concerts such as on the Alfred University (NY) on 12 July, the family Buckwalter invited us out to dinner. At all carillons there was a possibility to try out the instrument in the afternoon. I have made good use of that possibility.

One of the highlights was giving a concert at the world famous Yale University in New Haven (CT) at July 15. As already mentioned, the distances were phenomenal. With the rented Dodge drove eleven hours from Erie (PA) to reach New Haven. But it was more than worth it. The Guild of the Yale carillon students was very professional in organizing the concert. After the concert they and their teacher Ellen Dickinson took us out to dinner to a vegetarian Indian restaurant.

After the first week Ruth and I have been to New York City for a holiday. Although we have enjoyed all the beauty that the Big Apple has to offer, the little things like eating a pretzel at the square of the Metropolitan Museum make the best memories.

In the week of 20 to 26 July we were on family visits in Tennessee. There I had a concert at the Linnie M. Barger Memorial Carillon in Ooltewah in honour of my sister who died of lung cancer at June 26, 2016 and lived in the nearby Cleveland (TN). The summer was very hot and in the southern Tennessee should there still be a few degrees Fahrenheit added. The organization of the Ooltewah carillon prepared ice cream for all listeners.

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My first concert of the Michigan series was on July 28 in Saint Hugo of the Hills. It was great meeting David Enos which until then I knew only from Facebook. In Kirk in the Hills I have played a wonderful Petit & Fritsen carillon of 77 bells. The surroundings were very beautiful as well. The carillon was a gift from the Fruehauf family. Dennis Curry is the carillonneur of Kirk in the Hills. Dennis is one of the organizers of the World Congress 2017 in Barcelona and is on the board of directors at the GCNA.

At most concerts the carillonneur could be followed at a screen. In Valley Forge (PA) I had bought a button with the American flag on it. The American flag is considered of great importance so I had a good move. The Valley Forge carillon is a tough instrument. The town is of historical significance because George Washington spent a winter there with his army. It was nice meeting the carillonneur of Valley Forge Doug Gefvert.

My programs were appreciated. I had basically two programs prepared. The program for four – octave carillons was made up of carillon music from a selection of countries and consisted mainly of original carillon music and own arrangements. The program for two - octave carillons consisted of melodies on which I improvised. At the Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church in Detroit I played a program of improvisations. Although it is a two octave carillon, it sounds very majestic. Carillonneur Jenny King came up at the end of the concert asking me to play some encores.

At the Beaumont Tower in East Lansing (MI) I was invited by Ray McLellan to give a carillon concert. The carillon is on the campus of the Michigan State University. I regret not having bought some T-shirts over there.

The second last concert took place on the Cook Carillon in Allendale (MI). It was a pleasure to see my good friend and colleague Julianne Vanden Wyngaard after more than 15 years again. For the event, the flag of the Netherlands was attached next to the flag of the USA which was a nice gesture of the organization.

The final concert on the carillon of the St. Chrysostom's Episcopal Church in Chicago (IL) was delightful. What I liked best of that concert was that a group of children came looking at the keyboard.

To the performers Kimberly Schafer and Jim Fackenthal I gave two books with the music of the American concerts. Chicago is perhaps as the city even more attractive than New York so a must for the tourist.

With such a great journey it is impossible to thank all host carillonners in an article but I am grateful indeed for their hospitality and their help making this journey into an unforgettable tour to Uncle Sam!