

# La douce France

*Report from the concert journey to France (July 13-27, 2018) by Mathieu Daniël Polak*

In July 2018 I have been on a concert tour to France. Thanks to the hospitality of the organizers of the carillon concerts it was for Ruth and me not only a work trip but a true holiday as well.

The first concert was scheduled on July 15. On July 13 we left the Netherlands and spent the night in Orleans. This city is best known for Joan of Arc, a girl that has played a decisive role in the Hundred Year's War between France and England.

On July 14 we traveled to the region of Occitania. In the evening we arrived in the village of Sainte Croix. It is a picturesque village in the mountains. There, we were warmly welcomed by Gabriel Birague and his wife Mireille. They grow their own fruit and vegetables. We were richly treated to food and drinks. Mireille speaks Spanish what was very pleasant for Ruth.

Gabriel took us to Villefranche de Rouergue on July 15. At the carillon of the Collégiale Notre-Dame in Villefranche de Rouergue I gave a concert. At this day the finale of the World Soccer Cup took place. After the concert we saw the soccer game at a house of a friend of Gabriel. Because France won the Cup, I went up the tower once more and played the National Anthem of France. Once home in Sainte Croix, Gabriel opened a bottle of champagne to celebrate the concert.



Gabriel Birague and Mathieu Daniël Polak  
Villefranche de Rouergue

The surroundings of Villefranche the Rouergue is magnificent. In the village of Villeneuve we made a stop to buy baguettes. Every Sunday a market takes place in Villeneuve where people sell products from the region. At July 16, Ruth and I said goodbye and went to the east side (Rhône area) of France.

Because the next concert was due July 20, we had a couple of days of leisure time. We decided to settle down in Roanne, a city nearby Charlieu. In Charlieu the second concert took place. From Roanne we made a trip to Mâcon, city of birth of the French soccer player Griezmann. In Vichy we went shopping. We expected to find a lot of stores with Vichy beauty products, yet we did not find any of those.

At July 20 I gave a carillon concert in Charlieu. It was a tiny carillon with a range of two octaves without pedals. Opposite of what one would expect, it played really heavily. During the concert I needed plasters to cover a wound at the little finger of my right hand. In Charlieu we met Jean Bernard Lemoine (JB). After the concert he drove with us to the village of Nâves Parmelan where we would be stationed during the upcoming concerts. Just at the foot of the mountain we stopped and JB went in his own car. He guided us to the village of Naves Parmelan. We stayed in a little hotel named Chez Panisset. In this pension time stood still. The residence was offered to us by the concert organization.

July 21, I gave a carillon concert in Annecy. Because Ruth and I wanted to see the town, we went to Annecy quite early in the morning. The lake of Annecy is beautiful. It is not deep and the water is very clear.



Ruth and Mathieu in Annecy

JB told us that Annecy is nearby Genève (Switzerland). Comparable to the concert in Villefranche de Rouergue, the audience listened and observed the concert in the tower. Therefore, it was important to tell something about the music and carillon in between the pieces. The program which I sent needn't be followed too strictly. I let some children play music with me as well. I hope my presentation brought new sponsors to the carillon of Annecy.



Concert Couvent de la Visitation - Annecy  
With music contributions by children.

After the concert we went with JB to the top of the mountain. The mountain has a height of 2000 meter. On the top it is much colder than in Naves Parmelan. We were offered a dinner. Next to the restaurant there was a meadow with cows. The cows had bells on their necks. JB called those cows a traveling carillon.

Sunday July 22, we were invited by the family Lemoine to have dinner at their house. They prepared a vegetarian meal for us. (Ruth and I are vegetarians). According to French tradition, we brought the dessert. Ruth and I became fans of the French. They are very charming and elegant people with interest in others. They don't like so much to speak English. Fortunately, I had French in High School so could manage to communicate. After lunch we went to Lyon. At the city hall of Lyon (Hôtel de Ville) I gave a carillon concert in the evening from 21.00 to 22.00 o'clock. The City Hall is a true Palace. There was a square with blue chairs. Many visitors listened the concert. I posted photos on Facebook. From the reactions I felt it was a big honor to play a concert there.



City Hall of Lyon

The day after we went to Taninges. I told the audience about the music in English and JB translated it into French. In the tower there is a museum about harmoniums and carillons. I tried a harmonium and it was fun doing so. JB likes Lithuania a lot and went several times to

Lithuania to give carillon concerts. There are some posters and photos about Lithuania in the museum.



Taninges (Saint Jean Baptiste)  
Audience on benches nearby the carillonneur

At July 24 we said goodbye to Jean Bernard Lemoine. From Nâves Parmelan to Perpignan is a half a day drive. In the evening I called carillonneur Laurent Pie and made an appointment to try out the carillon of Perpignan at the morning of July 25. I gave Laurent and assistant Marie a copy of my book Viva el Perú. Viva el Perú is a book with arrangements of Peruvian music. It is my tradition giving hosts books as a present for their hospitality.

Head carillonneur Elizabeth Vitu was in Belgium so I gave Laurent one extra copy to hand to Elizabeth.

The concert ended with a piece which I composed especially for the carillon of Perpignan. My piece 'Et je danse' is inspired by a poem of Arthur Rimbaud. Thanks to Elizabeth, Et je danse will be published at ACME (American carillon Music Editions).

After the concert we went to dinner. At the way back to the hotel we saw people dancing in the street. This dance is familiar to what I have seen in Barcelona. Indeed, Perpignan is nearby Barcelona and both are part of Catalonia.



Meal in Perpignan

July 26 Ruth and I headed for Germany to start a new adventure. France is a huge country. We drove 800 kilometers yet realized we had to find a place to stay the night even before leaving the border of France. We chose Metz which turned out a beautiful city at the border of France and Luxembourg; a worthy finale of our journey to France.