



CGSUNY NEWSLETTER

The Classical Guitar Society of Upstate New York August, 2020

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President's Message

Life has indeed been interesting, to say the least, since we have all been locked down. Luckily that doesn't keep us from playing the guitar, in fact playing (and practicing) become both more urgent (for mental health) and more available due to the absence of so many other pastimes. So many guitar-related activities have been affected, but many have found a way to proceed. I attended many sessions of the 20th annual Mannes Summer Guitar Seminar. All events were online, and I ended up seeing more than I would have had it actually taken place in NYC and had I actually been able to attend. There were several fantastic concerts (though one of the best had a bizarre latency problem of a 3-5-second delay between sound and sight) along with Master Classes and lectures. Our sister Society, the Mid-Hudson, has been hosting remote Soirees and we are working on scheduling one for our membership- stay tuned.

One parting thought: the guitar world lost one of its greatest heroes with the death of Julian Bream, a musician of immense skill, drive, and

significance. We would occupy a very different musical world had he not lived (and check out the Times obit if you can- he was instructed on more than one occasion while a student at the Royal College of Music to refrain from bringing his guitar to school). I mourn him even more because of the important place a long-ago performance of his at Cornell had in my personal life. May he rest in great peace and harmony, and may we live up to his example.

RIC CHRISLIP

Ric Chrislip Biography cont'd

In 1975 I was trying to progress as a singer. In January I sang an audition for a vocal apprenticeship with the Santa Fe Opera (where I had played with the orchestra the previous two summers), but without success. An ex-girlfriend offered me a free apartment temporarily in Sandy Hook, Connecticut, so I moved there. It was within commuting distance of NYC, where I was still making contacts and doing auditions and small gigs. It wasn't long before my rent-free welcome wore out, so I moved back into NYC, staying with a rich acquaintance whom I had met on a plane from Chicago a couple of years earlier when I came to sing in the Chicago Symphony Chorus at Carnegie Hall. (I basically couch-surfed from the time that I left Chicago in April 1974 until February 1976, when I got married and joined my wife in Oneonta.)

In February I got a gig as one of three guitarists for *The Way of Jesus* by Alan Hovhaness with the American Symphony Orchestra. Martha Nelson of the Society of the Classic Guitar put me in contact with tenor and guitarist Richard Dyer-Bennet, and I sang for him at his apartment. He arranged for me to perform for his manager, but nothing came of it. Martha also arranged for me to perform a solo recital for the Society.

In March I sang an audition for a vocal program at Tanglewood that summer, and Lukas Foss hired me to play guitar for *Stanza I* by Toru Takemitsu with the Brooklyn Philharmonia. My new couch-surfing location on the upper East side was not far from the apartments of Lukas and his principal cellist, so I was included in their carpool to Brooklyn.

In April I got to play guitar for Lukas' *Percussion Concerto* with the New Jersey Symphony under Jesse (not James) Levine. The next month I went to Chicago to play guitar for a Paganini trio on a Chicago Symphony chamber music concert. While I was there, I played a solo voice and guitar

concert at Aurora College for the Fox Valley Classical Guitar Society and even recorded a solo interview with Studs Terkel on WFMT.

Having been accepted for the Phyllis Curtin Seminar for Singers at Tanglewood, I moved to Lenox, Massachusetts, for the summer, renting a hot attic room. But in July I was also commuting around for a concert engagement: thanks to my NYC contacts, and having played guitar in a Cavalli opera at Santa Fe the previous summer, I was hired to play lute for Cavalli's opera L'Ormindo at the Caramoor Festival. Suzanne Bloch, NYC lute pioneer and daughter of composer Ernest Bloch, was put in charge of lutenist preparation. Up to that time, I had had no successful experience with a lute. Suzanne kindly loaned me a large single-string lute for the occasion. One of the other two lutenists for the opera was Patrick O'Brien, the master lute and guitar teacher of the Northeast. Pat was kind to me and complimentary of my singing, and I took a few guitar lessons with him. My connection with Pat was valuable for years to come.

Richard Dyer-Bennet, in addition to his apartment in NYC, had a house in the woods outside Great Barrington, Massachusetts, not far from Tanglewood. He invited me to visit him there, and he also came to hear me in one of the master classes which was part of the Tanglewood vocal program.

When the Tanglewood season ended, I resumed couch-surfing with church acquaintances, this time in lower Westchester County. I was teaching voice one day a week to students at Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Yonkers, giving a few guitar lessons, and playing organ and conducting a church choir in Scarsdale. In the latter part of September, I attended a church singles weekend further north in the county, paying my way by performing at the talent show. I hit it off with a young woman who happened to be there from Oneonta.

After a recital at a historical site in NYC, I drove to Missouri in October for solo appearances at Missouri Western State College and Central Methodist College. When I returned to New York, I attempted a trip to Oneonta to visit Tina, the young woman whom I had met in September. My old Volkswagen broke down on the Thruway, and I had to junk it. Tina was not happy about having to drive to Monroe to retrieve me, but we had a weekend to become more acquainted.

Heading west again, I did a few private performances in the Chicago area and then a recital at Hannibal-LaGrange College (now University). After I sent lots of letters seeking gigs at colleges and community arts councils, Tina and I drove to Tennessee and Oklahoma at Christmastime to meet each other's parents. I was nearly penniless. We had not had much time to

get to know each other, but I asked her to marry me. After thinking and praying about it for a week, she finally consented on New Year's Day, 1976.

MUSICAL BIO OF GEORGE LESH

George Lesh began his musical career at the age of 5 years when he started studying the piano at Ray Cramer Studio in Abington, Pa. He continued his studies through elementary and high school, adding the oboe to his repertoire in band in high school. At West Chester University, he majored in music education, studying piano under Benjamin Whitten. Throughout his career, he took advantage of other graduate music education opportunities at Ithaca College and Westminster Choir College.

He started his career teaching band and chorus in Slatington, Pa. He moved on to teach vocal music in the Sayre Area School District and finally spent the remainder of his vocal music teaching career at Unatego Central Schools for the next 34 years, retiring in 2008. While employed at Unatego he was elected zone representative for NYSSMA to advocate for music education.

While teaching music at Sayre, he became director of the barbershop chorus and after moving to Unadilla, he also directed the Midstatesmen barbershop chorus in Oneonta for a few years.

When he moved to Unadilla, the Sayre chorus gave him the gift of an acoustic guitar, that he taught himself to play. He used the guitar to accompany singers when there was no other musical instrument available in school, social and church venues.

Once he retired, he gifted himself a classical guitar and took lessons from Dennis Turechek. Eventually he became the secretary of the board of the Classical Guitar Society of Upstate New York. He was instrumental in helping to advocate for the classical guitar and plan the yearly festivals held each fall.

He was also a church organist at Sacred Heart Church in Sidney, NY for 17 years and at the time of his passing, he was the church musician at the Unadilla United Methodist Church for the past 20 years. He has played for just about all the churches in the surrounding communities whenever requested.

George and his wife, Louise met at college through their mutual interests in music. They enjoyed singing together whenever they could. He assisted her in her direction of children's choirs at church. Together they encouraged the musical pursuits of their children.

George was his daughter, Heather's first piano teacher. She was one of his accompanists in choir in high school. She graduated with a bachelor's and master's degree in piano performance and pedagogy from Westminster Choir College in Princeton, NJ. She taught for 15 years in Concord Community Music School in NH before teaching in the music department at Hartwick College, Oneonta, NY. His sons have also been involved in music as well. Ben was in chorus and band in high school. Ben, an English teacher, is the theater director and collaborates with his colleagues in producing high school musicals. He sang in a band after graduation from college and continues to enjoy singing whenever he can. Brian was in band in high school, playing drums. After attending college, he taught himself to play the acoustic guitar with the help of his dad. He now plays in a cover band for enjoyment many weekends. Jon was also in choir and was involved in the musical productions in high school. He still continues to enjoy music whenever he can.

Julian Bream

OPINION | COMMENTARY | CULTURAL

COMMENTARY *Julian Bream:*

Spellbinding

Talent, Inquisitive

Taste

The classical guitarist, who died Friday, broadened the musical horizons of his instrument through his sensitive playing and wide-ranging repertoire.

It's a safe bet that Julian Bream, who died on Friday at 87, would be remembered if he'd never done anything but play guitar. After Andrés Segovia, he was the best-known classical guitarist of the 20th century, a player of limitless sensitivity who could hold an audience spellbound simply by plucking a few quiet notes on his unamplified instrument—but who also tossed off more technically demanding pieces with the panache of an old-time barnstorming virtuoso.

Yet Mr. Bream did much more than merely play guitar. He doubled on the lute, the guitar's ancestor, and was responsible in large part for the postwar revival of interest in that long-forgotten instrument. He led his own ensemble, the Julian Bream Consort, one of the first period-instrument groups, and appeared frequently in recital with the tenor Peter Pears, a professional relationship that was immensely valuable to him. "I learnt a lot from Peter about phrasing like a singer, which is what we all try to do on instruments," he told an interviewer in 2007.

Most important of all, Mr. Bream commissioned and gave the premieres of solo pieces and concertos for guitar by many of the leading composers of his time, among them Malcolm Arnold, Lennox Berkeley, Hans Werner Henze, Toru Takemitsu, Michael Tippett and William Walton. Unlike Segovia, who disliked all but the most conservative 20th-century music, Mr. Bream did more than anyone else to modernize his instrument's dusty repertoire. Above all, he persuaded Benjamin Britten, Pears' partner, to try his hand at writing for the guitar, and the result was the 18-minute-long "Nocturnal After John Dowland" (1963), the first large-scale masterpiece for solo guitar and a piece that Mr. Bream performed so superlatively well that his first recording of it, made in 1966, remains to this day the benchmark for all other guitarists.

At the same time, Mr. Bream was no less impressive an interpreter of Bach, Dowland and the Spanish classics that Segovia favored, and the fare he offered at his recitals ranged widely, at once delighting and challenging those who came to hear him. Moreover, he recorded nearly all of his repertoire for RCA and performed frequently on TV, making it possible for those who came along after he retired in 2002 to appreciate his artistry.

Mr. Bream was a bluff, down-to-earth man with a quick wit and a bottomless reserve of anecdotes about his bumpy life as an itinerant musician. He came across in conversation not as a Great Artist but as a regular guy, and it was no surprise to learn that he was a jazz buff (he named his dog "Django" after Django Reinhardt, the great gypsy jazz guitarist). It was the instrument itself, not any one kind of music, with which he initially became obsessed. "I just knew I had to play the guitar," he told an interviewer for Gramophone, the British music magazine, in 2013. "I found I could speak through the guitar. Because you have the feel of the strings with both hands and it's up against your solar plexus, it's real, and so there's nothing between you and the music."

Mr. Bream performed often in the U.S., and I had the good fortune to hear one of his last New York recitals back in the '90s. By then his technique was in audible decline, the result of a 1984 auto accident that smashed the bones in his right elbow, but he still had the power to hypnotize his listeners with nuances so subtle that you held your breath as you listened. The audience, as always when he performed in New York, was full of other guitarists, and I happened to be sitting next to the jazz guitarist Gene Bertoncini, who was agog from start to finish. When Mr. Bream finished playing Albéniz's haunting "Granada," one of his signature pieces, Mr. Bertoncini looked at me and whispered, "Exquisite!"

Julian Bream's epitaph will not be hard to write: He ranks alongside Jascha Heifetz and Vladimir Horowitz as the classical musician who more than any other defined the musical horizons for his instrument, and his name will always be recalled with warmth whenever a younger guitarist has occasion to perform one of the pieces that he commissioned. There can be no finer monument.

—*Mr. Teachout, the Journal's drama critic, is the author of "Satchmo at the Waldorf."*

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DEENA FREED

I've been so fond of him forever. I saw him in NYC several times and at Ithaca College. I have a really beautiful DVD about his life. It's probably a good time to be watching that. I also thought of Laura Snowden and her gorgeous playing. Legacy.. It's a good thing.

HARRY PELLEGRIN

No matter how long a life, no matter how productive and beneficial to humanity, we all die, It's just a pity that so much is lost in this one life. A great performer and a great teacher and historian. He will be sorely missed.

DENNIS TURECHEK

The most powerful version of Etude #11 by Villa Lobos was rendered as an encore at Town Hall in NYC in the 70's, I think it was, by Julian Bream. I still remember the power and drama of that performance to this day. He was one of the few major players of the time who did not come from Segovia. May he rest in music!

MATT DOWNEY

Music from The Legend Of Zelda : Ocarina of Time

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1qxcNpyBLQxfGz2I6wDYNHQJy1TWXpH7P?usp=sharing>

This link provides access to trio guitar arrangements of music from the hit video game - The Legend Zelda :Ocarina of Time. These arrangements were created for Internal Creations - a non-profit program that brings guitar to after-school programs in NYC. I played this video game a lot as a kid and thought Guitar Trio might be an appropriate medium for the tunes. Happy practicing!

-Matt Downey