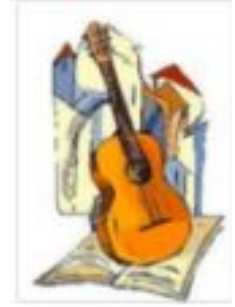


# CGSUNY NEWSLETTER



The Classical Guitar Society of Upstate New York

[www.cgsuny.org](http://www.cgsuny.org) 627 Flax Island Road Otego, NY 13825

January 2021

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**January 17th .... The CGSUNY SOIREE .... January 17th at 4PM, Zoom**

Dear Members and Friends,

CGSUNY held our first Virtual Soiree in December. We're hosting the next Soiree on Sunday, January 17th at 4pm and we expect to hold a virtual soiree on the 3rd Sunday of each month for the foreseeable future.

We'd love to see your face, hear your story and hear your play. No pressure, only if you'd like to play for us.

Several board members have told me that they plan to play. I'm looking forward to a good time with beautiful music. Hope you'll join in.

In case you don't get a Zoom invitation please send a request for an invitation to

Giancarlo Sidoli [sidoli1210@yahoo.com](mailto:sidoli1210@yahoo.com)

Paul Sweeny [bpsimplegifts@earthlink.net](mailto:bpsimplegifts@earthlink.net)

President's Message ..... Paul  
Sweeny

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Rasely

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### President's Message January 2021

There is an old curse: "May you live in interesting times". I had more interesting experiences in 2020 than I care to remember. I join all of you in hoping for better days ahead.

I look forward to our next monthly Soirée next Sunday 1/17 at 4. Please attend, play if you would like, or just listen. The minor miracle of Zoom has helped keep us together (or at least less asunder).

One element I particularly appreciate is the ability to "attend" concerts without having to be present. While there is truly no substitute for live, in-person concerts, I have attended many performances (and classes) during this time that would have been completely inaccessible otherwise. With just a bit of searching we can all

find amazing musical events. Keep vigilant and make the most of current limitations.

And as a postscript, earlier today in the second episode of “Pretend It’s a City” (now on Netflix) I saw a beautiful description by Fran Liebowitz about the power of music to make us happier. Check it out, truer words have rarely been spoken. That truth is more important now than ever.

Be well in mind, body, and spirit.

### Things My Students Have Taught Me

This little item is something I have thought about for some time. Perhaps it could become a regular feature for the newsletter if other teachers have similar musings.

Exhibit one:

Paula Hajar was the student's name and she was a math teacher. I had been experimenting with ten tone composition, that is to say using a scale with ten tones rather than 12 and had wondered for some time how many possible ten tone scales existed. I finally arrived at the answer by laboriously writing out every sequence of notes I could find and discovered there were exactly fifty-five such scales. Feeling very proud of myself for making this profound discovery, I asked Paula at her lesson, "How many arrangements of ten tone scales do you think there are?" Without blinking she said, "Fifty-five!" I said, "How in the world can you know that?" She said, it is just one plus two plus three plus four etc.. I knew I shouldn't have cut those math classes way back when.

Exhibit two:

I don't remember the name of this next student. It was his first lesson at Hartwick College. I asked him to play a C scale to get an idea where we would be starting. He played a perfect C scale from the top down to the bottom!

I said that in 30 years (at that time) of teaching guitar I had never had a student, when asked to play a scale, play it from the top to the bottom. I asked why he did that. He said, "It's just a fingering." It has been said that the Greek modes were written and probably played from the top to the bottom. This student reminded me again of how we unconsciously become slaves to our systems of thought. Obviously, melody goes up and down in actual practice. As does life!

Dennis Turechek

12/28/20

### Sojourning with my Guitar, Tom Rasely

A sojourn is a temporary stay. That describes much of the past 9 years. In 2012, we moved to southern Indiana in order to be closer to our grandchildren. That made it a 5 ½ hour trip instead of the 16 hours from NY. The musical scene (in fact, the entire arts scene) in southern Indiana is fairly dismal, and that's being polite. There is no such thing as an Arts Council as New Yorkers know them; virtually no performing venues that would accommodate my style of playing. I did a few incidental gigs, and I taught at a local music store. My main musical outlet was working with the high school choir on their annual concerts, part consultant, part bass player, part guitarist.

In 2015, we decided that being even closer to our daughter's family was important so we moved up to southwestern Michigan. That made it a 2 ½ hour trip. The music scene in southwestern Michigan is very easy to describe: folky. I participated in a regular open mic venue, "wowing" them with my instrumental fingerstyle. Everyone else was either a folk singer or a folky singer-songwriter. Good people but not a very challenging/satisfying situation.

About the time my mom was closing in on 90, my sister moved away from Oswego where she and mom lived, so in 2018, we decided that it was time to return to NY, having established our relationship with our grandkids. We found a place in Fulton, and moved yet again. In the past 3 years we have been working on our house (anyone who is friends with me on Facebook has followed this process). And in September of 2020 mom passed away, but we decided to remain in the Fulton area, where a wonderful new Community Arts Center was built. Musically, it was starting to feel like home. And then the pandemic hit and everything shut down.

Throughout this entire time, I spent most of my musical energies writing. Since that first move to the Midwest, I have produced 40 albums worth of music, pretty evenly split between instrumental and vocal. Within that discography, are two albums of solo classical/fingerstyle guitar arrangements:

"Sweet Hour of Prayer" is a collection of traditional Christian hymns.

"Airs & Atmospheres" is an album of arrangements of popular classical pieces drawn from the orchestral and piano repertoire.

As many of you already know, I don't call myself a classical guitarist. I don't play the standard literature, I don't play Bach, and I still stand up (with a

strap) when I play. I never studied the guitar per se, but learned by listening and working my way through several guitar methods, most notably the Aaron Shearer books. While I was a music major (vocal) at OCC in Syracuse and at SUNY Fredonia, I took every music theory related course that was offered, and went on to apply all that knowledge to my guitar playing.

Presently I am working on a Christmas album of original vocal songs, and have plans for another solo fingerstyle collection of traditional folk songs. I want to thank Sal Salvaggio in particular for showing so much interest in some of my tunes. It is a very definite confirmation for a composer to have someone else play his music.

This year (2021) I have several milestones: I will turn 70 (and no, Paul Simon, it is NOT terribly strange to be 70, it is simply next), and my wife and I will celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. As things open up, I am hoping to be doing a little more playing, and possibly some teaching. And, I am writing.

FYI:

Link to “Airs & Atmospheres” on Amazon

Airs & Atmospheres

[https://smile.amazon.com/Airs-Atmospheres-Tom-Rasely/dp/B07931BKZL/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=tom+rasely+Airs+%26+Atmospheres&qid=1607882034&s=dmusic&sr=1-1](https://smile.amazon.com/Airs-Atmospheres-Tom-Rasely/dp/B07931BKZL/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=tom+rasely+Airs+%26+Atmospheres&qid=1607882034&s=dmusic&sr=1-1)

And “Sweet Hour of Prayer” also on Amazon

[https://smile.amazon.com/Sweet-Hour-Prayer-Tom-Rasely/dp/B081TQMJ8N/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?dchild=1&keywords=tom+rasely+sweet+hour&qid=1607881634&s=dmusic&sr=1-2](https://smile.amazon.com/Sweet-Hour-Prayer-Tom-Rasely/dp/B081TQMJ8N/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=tom+rasely+sweet+hour&qid=1607881634&s=dmusic&sr=1-2)

## My Walker Guitar

I began playing the classical guitar in 1987. I had just moved to Albany. I had been active as a musician in Glens Falls and was looking for something to do in Albany, so I answered a newspaper ad calling for a meeting of people interested in a new Capital District Classical Guitar Society (CDCGS). Ray Andrews, who was organizing a guitar ensemble, said I could participate in the ensemble with my steel stringed guitar, but I soon bought my first classical guitar, a Dauphin, from Drome Sound, and started taking lessons from Tony Sano at Drome Sound.

I was involved in the CDCGS from its beginning to its end, and was the treasurer. I helped with the arrangements for concerts held in Albany - GFA solo competition winners and international artists. I met the concert artists , helped with transportation and accommodations, and socialized with the artists. I loved it.

From 1987 to 1990 I studied under Tony Sano. In the 1990s I studied on my own, subscribed to Guitar Quarterly and Soundboard, attended the National Guitar Summer Workshop in Connecticut, the Guitar Seminar at Eastman School of Music, and some GFA festivals. At the workshops and festivals there were vendor fairs and luthiers exhibiting their guitars, providing opportunities to try out classical guitars. Joan Mullen held house parties for CDCGS, and after we got to know each other she invited me to participate in her guitar ensembles, and she also introduced me to the Monday Musical Club of Albany. In 1998 I decided to become more serious about my development as an artist, and auditioned to be an artist member

of Monday Musical Club. Once accepted, I started to think about finding a better instrument.

In June of 2000 I attended the Stetson International Guitar Workshop in Deland, Florida, and for the next several years I returned either to attend and participate or just to hang out with friends and go to the evening concerts. They had a large luthier exhibit with builders and sellers from all over, and I tried all the guitars and listened to others try guitars.

In 2000 I travelled to the Oneonta area, responding to the startup of a new guitar society. I met Bruce Walker, Gail Hamilton, Dennis Turecheck and Sal Salvaggio and others who were organizing CGSUNY. Bruce Walker made a generous offer to build a classical guitar for members, asking only that they collaborate on the design and pay for the materials. I jumped on that offer.

I was listening to David Russell a lot and I told Bruce I loved the sound of his recordings using his cedar-top Greg Byers guitar, and that became the starting point for the design. I also wanted the guitar to be strong enough for accompanying the cello and other instruments and singers. I visited Bruce's workshop in East Branch many times and saw the guitar develop through the stages of construction. The guitar has a relatively large body and a slightly wider fretboard than normal and a french polish finish. Bruce was making two guitars and when he had completed my guitar and I had been playing it for a few weeks he contacted me and gave me a choice to try the other guitar and choose which one I liked the best to keep. I picked the second guitar.

One of my friends in Florida, Jesse Tan, is a collector of classical guitars. He allowed me to try guitars by some great builders including Gilbert,



Smallman, Friederich, and Velasquez. He took an interest in my Bruce Walker guitar, tried it and liked it very much. Another friend in Florida, guitarist, teacher and luthier Elman Concepcion, tried the guitar, liked it, and thoroughly examined it on his workbench to see the internal construction. I was so pleased with their interest and comments.

My new guitar was an inspiration for me, and I stepped up my activities as a performer. I recorded a CD, performed with cellist Lisa Nielson, played for tango dancing events in Albany, performed with flautist Beth Williams, and organized ensembles with Monday Musical Club friends. I performed frequently in Florida, and performed for tango dancers in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Connecticut. In 2006 I travelled to Turkey to perform at a guitar festival in Ordu. Although I was a bit scared travelling to Turkey during that time, it was a wonderful experience and I made friends with guitarists from around the world. Scottish guitarist Matthew McAllister said my Walker guitar was the best sounding guitar when we had sound checks one day in the concert venue. I was very happy with his compliment since there were so many wonderful guitars at the festival and Matthew is a player I very much admire.

Tragedy struck my Bruce Walker guitar in 2007. I travelled to Florida and due to a delayed flight ended up on a small airplane so the guitar to be gate checked. When I arrived at my hotel and opened the case the top was cracked and partially detached from the side of the guitar. Bruce Walker was no longer working on guitars, so I turned to Michael Collins for the repair. Michael made it playable again, thankfully, good as new except for the finish. I considered that "mileage".

In the 2000s I set up concerts, collaborated and performed with French guitarist Thibault Cauvin, Argentine guitarist Jose Luis Merlin, Brazilian

guitarist Marcos Vinicius and others, and I had an opportunity to try their guitars. I got the bug to buy another guitar. Being without a guitar while the Walker was being repaired made me think it would be good to have two guitars.

CGSUNY member guitarist Eugenio Reis had a small business selling guitars by Brazilian builders. Eugenio and his wife Maine were originally from Brazil and they had a home for a time in East Greenbush. They participated in CGSUNY events and hosted many house parties. I enjoyed listening to Eugenio play and trying out the guitars he owned and those he was selling. Those visits to Eugenio's house led me to purchase my Antonio Tassarini guitar in 2007, a beautiful spruce-top guitar, number 545 by Tassarini. At that time the famous guitarist Paulo Bellanati was performing using a Tassarini guitar, which I considered a great endorsement.

Since 2007 I have used both my Bruce Walker and my Antonio Tassarini guitars for practice and performing. I tend to use the Walker when I am performing outside or in a busy setting, and I am not so worried about getting dings since it has already had a major repair. I also feel it responds very well to forceful playing. The Tassarini has held up very well and has few scratches, so I still feel it is my new guitar of which I should be more protective. The two guitars have different characters. The Tassarini is set up extremely well for the comfort of the left hand, and it has wonderful tonal clarity. The Walker wider fretboard is sometimes an advantage, and it has a very warm tone with lots of overtones. Some music just seems better on one guitar or the other.

To those who are looking to purchase a classical guitar, my advice is to try the guitars of friends and listen to other people play the guitars you are

checking out. Hear guitars from two sides - the player side and the listener side. Finding a venue to try a variety of classical guitars is not possible during the COVID-19 pandemic, since vendor fairs, festivals and workshops will be virtual for some time. You can do research by checking out the excellent quality YouTube videos by guitar sellers like Siccas Guitars and Guitar Salon International that feature great players and guitars. We are all doing more shopping on-line now, so I guess the same goes for guitar shopping.

Buying a hand-made classical guitar can be an intimidating process. The instruments are fragile and the sellers are concerned about how they are handled by the potential buyers, especially if they do not know you, so there needs to be some socializing as part of the process, and some demonstration of your level of playing.

Making a beautiful and artistic sound on the classical guitar is of course not only a matter of having a beautiful and well-made instrument. You make the guitar come alive with how you play it. You change the quality of the sound of a guitar by playing it regularly, making it resonate, and adjusting your technique to capture its best qualities.

I am forever grateful for the opportunity to have found and joined CGSUNY and to have a guitar built by member Bruce Walker.