

# The Classical Guitar Society of Upstate New York



The Newsletter

July 2021

## Calendar

**President's Message ..... Paul Sweeny**

**Recognition of Bill Simcoe ..... Dennis Turechek**

**Playing While Old.....Deena Freed**

**CGSUNY Soirée Review ..... April, May PDF**

Editors Note:

I requested an article titled "Reflections on Works That Work". Harry George Pellegrin and Gregory Dinger answered and I am so pleased to share their words with you.

I have other "titles" or ideas in mind

and am anxious to ask for thoughts about questions that you may have.

Please let me know if you would like to write an article or if you have questions that you would like others to address in an article.

Thanks, Janet [thisfineday@gmail.com](mailto:thisfineday@gmail.com)

**Reflections on Works that Work .... Harry George Pellegrin**

**Reflections on Works that Work ..... Gregory Dinger**

Saturday, July 24 @ 5PM .... The CGSUNY BOARD MEETING , on Zoom ...Please join the board meeting, listen to the discussions and make comments. Voting is reserved to board members. For a Zoom Invitation please email: Paul Sweeny [bpsimplegifts@earthlink.net](mailto:bpsimplegifts@earthlink.net)

Sunday, July 25th @ 5PM..... The CGSUNY SOIRÉE, on Zoom .... Please join us at the Soirée, play your best pieces, cheer on fellow members. Then, join in the “duet adventure”. We’ll be playing the Gavotte and the Giguetta by JS Bach. <https://www.classical-guitar-school.com/en/Files/2001.pdf>

## New York Guitar Seminar at Mannes

July 7 – 12, 2021

All online, lots of very special tribute events. Details and full schedule at:

[www.mannesguitar.com](http://www.mannesguitar.com)

## Lanciano International Guitar Seminar

July 27 – August 1, 2021

In-person in Lanciano, Italy PLUS remote master classes, workshops, and participant performances

[www.lancianoguitar.com](http://www.lancianoguitar.com)

WEDNESDAY, **July 14th 7:00 PM** at DAVENPORT CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Giancarlo Sidoli, Professor of Guitar at Hartwick College, Board Member of CGSUNY, an amazing player and composer. You won't want to miss this concert.

[https://www.facebook.com/events/535047281007854?context=%7B%22event\\_action\\_history%22%3A\[%7B%22mechanism%22%3A%22your\\_upcoming\\_events\\_unit%22%2C%22surface%22%3A%22bookmark%22%7D\]%2C%22ref\\_notif\\_type%22%3Anull%7D](https://www.facebook.com/events/535047281007854?context=%7B%22event_action_history%22%3A[%7B%22mechanism%22%3A%22your_upcoming_events_unit%22%2C%22surface%22%3A%22bookmark%22%7D]%2C%22ref_notif_type%22%3Anull%7D)

## Thoughts on Memorization

Some recent conversations have revived thoughts about one important aspect of our shared project of the classical guitar. Several years ago, our featured performer at the Fall Festival (back in the good old days when we met in person) played most of his program using a score. At that time it led to a spirited discussion of the importance of memorization and I remember being myself of two minds on the subject. One can make the point that unless the music for solo guitar is memorized the performer has not fully learned it. On the other hand, and I hold much more to this point of view now, if playing from memory leads to insecurity, the most important element-- the music itself-- likely suffers.

Deena Freed's article in this newsletter "Playing While Old" presents the perspective of someone with decades of experience. She provides some very good advice for amateurs (and for that matter for some professionals) of all ages and levels. In a nutshell: find the method that gives you the best result. Most of us can find expanded techniques for learning our music more thoroughly, and thus be better prepared for performing. This foundation work then leaves one in a position to play from memory or not, as a personal decision regarding one's performance. The fact that the great lutenist Paul O'Dette, whose preparation is impeccable, always plays from the score, certainly supports this. Many greats do the same, if only for some of their repertoire. In any case, what is true for pros does not need to apply to the rest of us; we can make our own best choices. Something for us to think about.

Paul Sweeny, 6/2021  
President

## RECOGNITION OF BILL SIMCOE

One of the perks of being an original founding member is that, from time to time, I have assumed the honor of recognizing CGSUNY members who have contributed mightily to the success of our society. I've been waiting twenty years for this. I am referring, of course, to Bill Simcoe.

Bill holds the record for the longest continuous membership in the CGSUNY, except for myself I guess, and has participated in virtually every fundraiser we have engaged in over the years. Being from Albany, he had to travel many extra miles for many of these events, but he remained undaunted. He, like Sal Salvaggio, was also one of the gang of five who played on television as we worked to spread the word across upstate New York. I don't think Bill has ever missed a Fall Festival and was a board member from day one of our formation.

Bill is a modest, self-effacing gentleman and lets his guitar playing do his talking for him. The music he has brought to perform year after year is always fresh and unique. He loves to arrange and transcribe music for other instruments to guitar versions and readily enjoys working with flute, cello, voice and the like. He makes even familiar pieces sound new again with his arranging skills.

He also contributed a number of interesting articles for the newsletter including his pilgrimage to Bruce Walker's guitar builders shop and subsequent purchase of guitar, as well as a visit to The Rosewood Guitar Shop in Seattle Washington. Perhaps his greatest contribution though is his enthusiasm in spreading the good word about our society and bringing in many members from the Albany area including our fourth president of the CGSUNY, Fred Hellwitz.

Throughout all of this I don't think Bill has a clue as to how appreciated he is by all of our members. I don't want to upset the applecart by telling him, so I think I'll just remain silent.

Dennis Turechek

5/2021

## Playing While Old...

When I was a teenager, John Williams was just entering the guitar world. He was the 'young whipper-snapper' who played cleaner and faster than either Segovia or Bream. And even dressed in those puffy, Tom Jones shirts from the 60's. Now he's 80, and I'm inching up to that same age!

It was during that same teen phase, I fell dead in love with classical guitar. It was a 'classic' story: I heard the notes of Recuerdos wafting out of an open window in Manhattan as I strolled by, and was struck by a compulsion to knock on the door of a complete stranger to find out what that magical sound was. It is what I called my Pied Piper moment: I was totally transfixed and would follow that sound anywhere. And so I did.

Now, I have to tell you that both John and I have aged considerably since the time I was a teen and he was just a few years my senior! In fact, it's true for many of us. Even David Russell is 68 years old. And I have to add that my love for the guitar has grown and transformed in the ensuing time. It has been a beloved companion throughout my life. And... I have a deep investment in continuing to play the instrument as I reach my dotage and would like to encourage others to do so as well.

Here are a few practices that have helped me maintain my guitar playing as I have aged:

First, I continue to take lessons very regularly. Lessons are precious. Weekly lessons help to set goals, keep me striving to improve, and keep my learning sequential and logical. They stimulate my curiosity and keep me open to 'wonder'. I come to each lesson with musical questions and challenges. Lessons help shape my week and keep me happy and encouraged.

No, it's not 'silly' to be over 75 and still taking lessons.

Second, over the years I have gone to Physical Therapy, body-work, and specialized guitar teachers to help with the physiology of body mechanics. I have a daily stretching routine that keeps my shoulders and arms in shape as a result. I am prone to frozen shoulders, and other painful maladies otherwise. Some modalities that have helped are Alexander Technique, and Feldenkreis. I have regular massages, and do stretching/yoga exercises.

So, please consider that there may be 'fixes' to physical problems. See what the experts have to offer.

Third, I have adjusted my expectations. I've decided that if I was slated to become a child prodigy, it wudda happened already. So, I don't strive to play the Bach Chaconne. I do play Weiss and

Dowland and many other wonderful composers who write somewhat less challenging music. There are lots of slower, easier pieces that are simply gorgeous. I scan pieces for stretches I can't possibly do, runs that are too fast, and let the younger upstarts tackle them.

Fourth, in performing for others, which I do extremely rarely, I play easy pieces from the music. I feel more relaxed, I play better, and the audience is more appreciative. Most audiences cannot appreciate how hard a piece is and would prefer to hear something that sounds relaxed and beautiful. Nor do audiences particularly care about the memorization bit. I want to sound great when I play, but mostly I'm out to have a happy experience -- and not to 'prove' that I can play the hardest pieces.

Finally, I have stubbornness on my side: I just can't think of giving up something I've loved so well and for so long. I am determined to keep on playing and studying with a positive attitude and with the original love I had for the instrument. I don't think about age and limitations while I'm playing. In fact, I don't think I have 'lost' anything much over the years -- except maybe my ambition to become a child prodigy. I still push at boundaries, and I am happy grabbing what I can to 'keep on' playing as well as I possibly can.

I hope others will welcome these thoughts and will share their own coping mechanisms and the issues they have encountered as they have aged. Perhaps we can share information about what has helped most, how we have adjusted our expectations, and what pieces we may be enjoying. Perhaps some teachers can add to how they help students as they age. Perhaps we can form a parade of 'elder guitarist' with John Williams in the lead. I'll be following close behind.

Deena Freed

6/2021

Reflections on Works that Wor--Harry George Pellgrin

Link for April Soirée Review

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qNHZe0O3IW0Bjlc2zwt7Csfp6\\_tObnu4/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qNHZe0O3IW0Bjlc2zwt7Csfp6_tObnu4/view?usp=sharing)

Link for May Soirée Review

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tzkAtGHRKef359ByuCrHi9i6VEGol04X/view?usp=sharing>

# Reflections on Works That Work

Harry George Pellegrin

Well, I will try to avoid a shameless plug of my own 'Classic Guitar Method', which can be found on Amazon as well as the usual sources, and contains over 500 pages of material I have found useful with students over the years. And that has now become a shameless plug. With that said, there are indeed works that stand head and shoulders above the vast assortment of methods and tutorials one can find through even a casual search.

For the most basic of instruction, for the total neophyte, I have found two beginner's tutorials that are invaluable. I truly appreciate Fred Noad's 'Solo Guitar Playing' book –and for a reason that belies its name. This volume includes quite a bit of duet material. This is important to me as I find that as classical guitar players we spend quite a bit of time practicing and playing by ourselves. This isolationist situation can lead to a metronomic rendition that lacks soul, or, more frequently, a lack of proper timing; a loose pulse that is vague and fails miserably when incorporated into an ensemble setting. So Noad covers the bases nicely while teaching the basics. Honorable mention goes to Mel Bay's iconic 'Modern Guitar Method' (in seven volumes!) which, while geared to the contemporary plectrum-style player of the 1940's, is invaluable for teaching the basics.

Once the basics of note reading and timing have been decently grasped, I find the student benefits from what I call 'The Four



Evangelists of the Guitar'. Much as the Christian world has Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we as guitarists have Sor, Giuliani, Carulli and Carcassi. Mauro Giuliani's 120 Right Hand Studies are wonderful to discipline the student's right hand fingers into doing what the brain instructs them to do rather than what the fingers wish to do when left to their own devices. Of course, these 120 can and do become quite monotonous with their incessant tonic/dominant/tonic repetitions. With this in mind, I recommend Ferdinando Carulli's Preludes Opus 114. While Giuliani covers more ground, Carulli has given the student short works that actually sound like music. They are much more satisfying for the student to learn, Fernando Sor's Etudes as collected by Andrés Segovia into the ubiquitous collection of twenty will lead the student through a great variety of passages of varying difficulty that once mastered leave the student with a decent capability to stretch and barré. I also like to work with Matteo Carcassi's Opus 60 collection of etudes. While Sor covers more ground (through Segovia), Carcassi's work is melodious and includes some minor tremolo work that Sor misses. Once again, they are satisfying for the student to play through.

Supplementing these lesson type etudes and preludes, I use Albert Blain's '700 Years of Music for the Classical Guitar' book. I have the feeling this book is a recital program that Blain had prepared back in the mid 1960s as it follows the then-common practice of arranging a program from earliest to newest date of composition (rather than as a series of emotions leading to a climax or conclusion regardless of when the pieces were written as is – thankfully—done more often today.) There are some real gems in this collection, some Bach, some Scarlatti, Leyenda/Asturias, as



well as a rather austere Trouvère piece from the 13<sup>th</sup> century 'Come with me My Giselle'.

After these basic etudes, preludes and exercises have been successfully completed—and with pleasant 'candy' pieces from '700 Years... ', the student is ready for longer works such as Sor's Magic Flute Variations and Bach's first cello suite. I have had very good results with this approach. One must keep in mind that each student is an individual with a specific set of needs and a specific desired outcome. For that reason I have used at least three different methods (not including my own) with my students over the years. Both the method as well as the repertoire has to be tailored to the student. To do otherwise is to, at best, invite lethargic and disinterested progress, or, more likely, frustrate the student who then turns away from our instrument.

## “Reflections on Works that Work”

In this article I'll address choosing pieces of music for students that I, as a classical guitar teacher (for several decades), have found to be effective. A separate issue is dealing with requests to play a given piece from the student. That can be a positive (it means the student is attracted to some music, and maybe has done some “independent research”) but it can also be problematic (what if the piece is too hard for the student?). I've occasionally cautioned a student NOT to play a piece yet (because I think it's too hard) and suggested - with humor - that they can “thank me later”! Occasionally, for some people however, it can be a useful learning experience to struggle with a piece of music, ultimately unsuccessfully, that you were warned not to waste time with. But a good teacher should try and spare their students that hassle!

The more typical situation I find is students don't have much of an idea of the breadth of the classical guitar repertoire and are therefore wide open to being assigned music. I actually think that is part of what qualifies a teacher to teach: they should know the repertoire and be able to make judicious and helpful (to a student's progress) recommendations of what to play. And by “know the repertoire” I mean: have played much of it (and that includes owning the music), have played much of it in concerts, and be familiar with much of it from recordings. It's also good, usually, not to over-emphasize one type of guitar music (from one time era or composer), in order to foster an appreciation for the

breadth of the repertoire. Later, on their own, a guitarist may decide to specialize, in early music, or contemporary music, or South American music, etc. But to equip a student with repertoire that “average” listeners will enjoy (if played well, of course), I think it helps to bear in mind that variety helps. A specialty audience will enjoy their one style, but more typically a little bit of several styles will please everyone.

As a young teenager I studied the classical guitar for 4 years with the late Luis Garcia-Renart (and when he was on vacation in Mexico each summer, I took lessons on his recommendation with his top student, Terry Champlin). That model of how I was taught I think was effective. I don't do everything the same as my teacher did with me, but his overall approach I agree with.

That said, he told me in my first lesson with him, that he would teach me (I paraphrase) as if the goal was to “be Segovia” - and Luis was actually not that big a fan of the great Segovia. But he meant the goal was to get to the top of Mt. Everest! (Garcia-Renart was also splendid cellist and conductor, a prize-winning cello student of Pablo Casals and Rostropovich, and his guitar inclinations were towards Miguel Llobet and Julian Bream). So he worked me really quite hard - Mt. Everest is quite a trek! He didn't guarantee I would achieve that exalted level of playing (the Segovia/Mt. Everest analogy), as he recognized that everyone has their own individual level of talent, but he saw his job as a teacher to equip the student properly for that lofty goal.

I try to use that approach with students in a music program at the several colleges I teach at, though the limited preparation of many incoming students presents a challenge to that premise. I don't necessarily feel that standard is as valid with private students who are learning classical guitar as an avocation. Yet I can't really teach with a motto of "you don't have to work that hard, since your goal isn't to be the best" in a competitive musical marketplace; someone, somewhere, always could hear a student play, and I want my student - even if he's not assailing Mt. Everest! - to (A) bring pleasure to the listener, (B) do justice to the music being played, and (C) have a positive experience with their performance.

In line with how I was taught, I think a student should be working on several items of music (pieces or etudes) per week. With completely new to classical guitar students I've found over the years various short pieces, by various composers, that get the ball rolling and are enjoyable to play and hear. A Carcassi Allegro in A minor, a Carulli Andante in C major, Karl Scheit's Renaissance Dances, etc. Though I have a lot of respect for the Frederick Noad books, I don't normally insist that a student buy any one book. I do recommend they acquire at some point a "100 Choice Pieces for the Classical Guitar"-type book. In my experience, not all the pieces will be that great, nor will be the editing/fingering, but it's a good resource (and good for practicing sightreading - a whole other discussion). Pieces that are in the public domain, I

don't have a problem making a copy of for students, and I've lately taken to doing my own "editions" (with music-printing software) with my own fingerings and editing. (Though it can be instructive having a teacher change "the book's" fingerings.)

As to complete books of pieces by a single composer, I feel I was blessed (by Garcia-Renart) to have been taught with the *Lecciones de Guitarra* of the Argentine player/composer Julio Sagreras. Of the six books he wrote I find books 1-3 are the best (with most of his musical gems in Book 2). A contemporary of Agustin Barrios, Sagreras had a wonderful gift for melody & harmony that he could distill into short one-page pieces that also focused on characteristic technical issues of the guitar. Sadly, with the exception of "El Colibri" I have not found any of his "concert pieces" (and I once bought a nearly worthless book of 48 such pieces) match his "lecciones" in inspiration.

I'm quite traditional in feeling that the guitar studies of Fernando Sor and Mateo Carcassi are foundational to becoming a good classical guitarist. Their contemporaries, Aguado and Carulli and Giuliani, also wrote some good pieces of that type, but with a much more hit-or-miss track record for musical achievement.

I think the very popular book of twenty studies by Fernando Sor, selected & edited by Segovia (hereafter called the "Sor 20") is a very worthwhile collection of some of his best pieces, but they're all quite hard (even the first few), at least to play them musically (with phrasing and reasonable tempi). I usually refer to Carcassi's 25 Etudes Op. 60 as "the old testament" and

the Sor 20 as the "new testament" in the sense that they're both necessary (for a complete Bible!); but one should come first, and the Carcassi are slightly easier & more approachable (odd, since they were written, historically, after the Sor pieces). Part of my thinking on that issue, in all honesty, is that was how I was taught them (first the Carcassi, then the Sor/Segovia book). I advanced rapidly with that approach, and I know Garcia-Renart's approach was rooted in musical values, so I agree with it.

In general I think it makes sense to do the Sagreras in the order he wrote them (Book 1 then Book 2, etc.), and the same with the Carcassi Op. 60, but not so necessarily with the Sor 20 (partly because that order was determined by Segovia, not the composer). However, with avocational private students I don't think it hurts to skip around in both collections. But there is something to be said for appreciating the subtle increase in level of difficulty both books present (#17 harder than #14, for example), which can best be experienced by doing them in order. And developing a feel for which pieces, by either composer, you prefer (and teacher & student may not always agree on that, which is fine) is fun too, so leaving pieces out is a shame.

I'm really big on Sor's guitar music (and I've also sung some of his vocal music). Sor wrote several sets of studies (Op. 6, Op. 29, Op. 31, Op. 35) each containing 10 or more pieces. It would take forever and be overkill (IMO) to do each piece in order in each Opus number! The Segovia book is well-ordered, and he did pick twenty of Sor's best pieces, but I also think he left out a few good ones (Op. 35 No. 9 for instance, which isn't that hard and is quite wonderful); and his "editorial" stance is no longer valid - particularly changing Sor's notes & harmonies without any



explanation. And some of Segovia's fingerings are questionable - though some are also terrific. I think a good way to learn that book is to do the pieces in Segovia's order, but with access to Sor's original editions for comparison and occasional use instead of using Segovia's (or perhaps another editor's) alterations. I think Segovia was a great great player (though not my favorite) but not much of a "scholar." Then again he never went to a music school and certainly was not inculcated with a very academic approach to music, and there are plusses & minuses to that aspect of his musical personality.

In addition to "studies" (aka lecciones, exercises, etudes, estudios) one needs to play pieces of music composed with no ulterior motive (namely of improving one's technique by dwelling on a tricky aspect of it). The guitar repertoire is loaded with fine music from an earlier or later era than that of Sor/Carcassi/Sagreras. I have students shuffle around between renaissance or baroque pieces (either for guitar or lute, or transcribed), or more "modern" music from the 20th (or even 21st) century.

The latter includes what used to be called "the Segovia repertoire" (all those pieces composed for him, or inspired by his playing): by Ponce, Torroba, Turina, -Tedesco, and others (Villa-Lobos sort of belongs in there), as well as guitar player/composers from the beginning of the 20th century on (Tarrega, Pujol, Sainz de la Maza, Barrios, Lauro, Morel). The great studies (as well as his concert pieces) by Leo Brouwer are fabulous at opening up students to newer trends in composed music, and other more recent player/composers also attest to the still-happening nature of composed music. It's easy to get



stuck in the past, with great offerings from Mudarra & Sanz & Sor & Barrios to choose from; but the timeline continues . . .

Of course, decisions have to be made as regards difficulty level with all that music. The fact that Segovia played such pieces inherently means they were intended for top-level technique, though they aren't all equally demanding. For most students a piece that would've been easy for Segovia should offer plenty of challenge! Again, a qualified teacher should know those pieces well enough to help with those decisions. And occasionally you should play a piece you love even if it's a bit too hard, but you do your best with it and feel a sense of satisfaction and ownership! (And maybe ask your teacher for something easier next) And music written by either a "competitor/contemporary" of Segovia (like Barrios or Llobet) is going to be similarly - if not more so! - challenging, let alone music inspired by the next generations (Bream, Williams, Isbin, etc.) of players.

Last item to mention: I'm not big on "method books" (or "how to" videos either, though they can be helpful). Yes, many of the great players (particularly of the 19th century) wrote methods, but they weren't expecting students to learn from those books on a deserted island. A teacher can use a method book and make judicious cuts in it, or point out other possibilities (even what they consider to be mistakes in the book or its approach).

Also, a great deal of guitar music does not include fingering indications for the Right Hand, and a correct RH technique (I'm not talking about the position of the hand, but the choice of

which fingers to pluck with) is really vital to becoming proficient. My hunch is guitar composers expect aspiring players of their music will have teachers who will help them with the RH fingering choices. Even advanced transcriptions by Segovia, Llobet, Bream, Williams, Barbosa-Lima, Barrueco, Fisk, etc. seldom have sufficient RH fingering. It is a very time-consuming task to plot out good RH fingering (though worth the while) so I think some editors just leave it to the player (and/or hopefully their teacher). It is a tough ask to make one's RH do what those little *im* & *a* indications are telling you to do, but that's how you get better at playing an instrument: increased control of your limbs (in this case the fingers of your right hand).

But it's worth it - we have (I like to say) a "wonderful" (guitar & lute player/composers and transcriptions), if not "great" (the great composers of Western music) repertoire, that can be the source of a great deal of pleasure.

- - Gregory Dinger

Greg is a professional classical guitarist who teaches in the lower Hudson Valley (privately and at SUNY Ulster, SUNY New Paltz, and Bard). After graduating from the New England Conservatory his sizable resume includes masterclasses with Barrueco, Fisk, Hand, Isbin and Parkening, performances of concerti by Vivaldi, Villa-Lobos and Rodrigo and chamber music with several ensembles and many individual players & singers, as well as solo recitals over the past 30 years. He is part of the Mid-Hudson Classical Guitar Society and also currently plays in the dance band Fishbowl; he also teaches kung fu. His website is: [www.gregdingerguitar.com](http://www.gregdingerguitar.com)