

# CGSUNY NEWSLETTER

The Classical Guitar Society of Upstate New York [www.cgsuny.org](http://www.cgsuny.org)

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## President's Message

These days find us with continued, if not increased, concern over the virus, concerns over the state of our political and economic affairs, and who knows what else. The prospect of an isolated winter is a daunting one. We need one another more than ever, and of course we need music now more than ever. The Society is happy to announce its first (of many we expect) virtual soiree. It will be open for all members to attend and and for any member who wishes to do so to perform for the others. This will take place on Sunday December 6 at 4 PM via Zoom. Until then, do count your blessings, and keep playing, listening, and supporting good causes.

# 1977

As I ended my summary of 1976, my wife had given birth to our first child, and we were back to relying on my meager, unpredictable music income. Richard Feher at Stereo Lab, who always treated me very generously, helped me to make a guitar demo tape (as well as two more recordings in June). I was still commuting to NYC weekly for voice lessons. I sang another (successful) audition for the vocal program at Tanglewood.

I still wanted to be an oratorio soloist, and I decided to pursue a master's degree in voice. I thought that I had made a good impression on soprano Helen Boatwright at the oratorio workshop the previous summer. She was teaching at the Eastman School of Music. In February 1977 I sang an audition for the master's program there but was not accepted. I also sent an audition tape to the Yale School of Music. Tenor Blake Stern responded with a letter, saying bluntly that I lacked the necessary talent for success in this field. It is true that I wasn't singing with professional quality.

In April I performed as a soloist on a benefit recital at Hartwick College. I was the tenor soloist for Schubert's *Stabat Mater* at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Unadilla on the same weekend.

The highlight of the spring for me was to play guitar in Anton Webern's *Five Pieces, Opus 10* with the Chicago Symphony again, this time under the great conductor Carlo Maria Giulini. My wife and infant son came with me. At a performance, my wife happened to sit next to Leonard Slatkin, music director of the Saint Louis Symphony. We still laugh about his response to her attempt to converse with him without knowing who he was.

In July I reported to Tanglewood and performed frequently in vocal master classes, sometimes accompanying myself or another singer in Dowland songs on classical guitar. The voice teacher, Phyllis Curtin, was loving and supportive, but one of the other faculty members expressed doubt about whether I should accompany myself.

In September I went to Peoria, Illinois, to perform a recital at Bradley University, singing and accompanying myself on guitar in classical repertoire. I visited my parents and grandparents in Oklahoma City before proceeding to Texas. I performed a recital at Cisco Junior College and another recital at the home of Ruth and Jerry Mock in Alpine, Texas. Some of you may

remember that the Mocks used to publish a small classical guitar magazine. They were very kind to me.

In October I performed for the Auburn Arts Council in Indiana. In November I did a lecture-demonstration at LaSalle College in Philadelphia, followed by a recital at Prince George's Community College in Maryland.

In my previous installment, I wrote about performing *Final Alice* by David Del Tredici with the Chicago Symphony in 1976. That week I happened upon a conversation in the basement of Orchestra Hall in which Leonard Slatkin (see above) was talking about doing *Final Alice* with the Saint Louis Symphony and Minnesota Orchestra. I wasn't part of the conversation, but I offered my two cents, saying that they should use the musicians of the "folk group" (mandolin, tenor banjo, accordion, and two soprano saxophones) from the Chicago performances. Slatkin took my advice! So in December I finished 1977 playing tenor banjo with the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra.

## Don Witter, Jr. Remembered

Every so often CGSUNY features a member, or past member, of CGSUNY who has contributed greatly to the success of the society. As some of you may have heard, Don Witter Jr. died on April 6, of this year having reached his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. I was his first guitar teacher in New York having started with him at the Henry Street Settlement in the early 1970's. His ebullient personality and deep love of the classical guitar were in evidence from the beginning. He needed no prompting and he often brought in music I had only just discovered myself or hadn't heard of at all. His love of Latin American music was particularly pronounced.

He attended virtually every master class that came to NYC or Long Island or Queens or Brooklyn, (where he lived) that he could get to and every guitar work shop that was available at the time. He took private lessons with many great masters of classical guitar and jazz masters as well.

In 1995, Julia Crowe, a guitarist and writer did an article on musicians playing under the auspices of the MTA program called “Musicians Under New York” and it featured Don who had auditioned and won his banner the year before. He participated in this program for many years in addition to giving concerts around the city including a Weill (Carnegie) Hall performance which I attended on April 12, 2000.

CGSUNY members remember him attending CGSUNY’s first Fall Festival with Martha Masters and continuously thereafter for the next 14 years or so. He was always extolling the virtues of CGSUNY wherever he went and the many reviews he wrote for our newsletter are still a pleasure to read. He always gave our member’s performances informed and encouraging reviews. He could always spot the positive qualities of any performance on any level whether it was beginner, student, or featured performer. Did I mention that he performed on many of our Fall Festival programs and brought and played fresh and beautiful music every time.

He will be greatly missed by our guitar society and by the guitar world at large. I miss him already.

Dennis Turechek  
October 27, 2020

## Pearls of Wisdom

Laura Snowden stayed with me for a few days preceding the CGSUNY 2019 Fall Festival. She offered me a “pearl of wisdom” after listening to and watching me play. Her comment was,

“get your fingers settled onto the new chord early, before the beat”.

I was having trouble, getting the piece to sound smooth. Laura listened and then watched while I tried to turn the chords and notes into music. She could have said “get to the next chord faster”, but putting it in terms of the beat made sense to me. I’ve been concentrating on “getting there before the beat” ever since.

I’m grateful to her for that suggestion and also glad that I had the opportunity to meet her and to have a view of her life, the life of a traveling musician, up close.

Laura had to navigate new living situations and personalities almost daily while maintaining her playing/performance skills and taking care of her business, negotiating and booking concerts, navigating air, rail and bus systems and staying calm and beautiful through it all. She did it with grace and style.

A second “pearl of wisdom” came about because of the pandemic. As soon as we went into lockdown mode in person lessons came to a crashing halt. I wasn’t sure where to turn until I remembered a teacher telling me that he’d learned a lot by putting himself through a method book start to finish.

Julio Sagreras’, Guitar lessons, Book 1-3 was living on my shelf. I had tried a few of the exercises and loved the melodies in the book but, while I was taking regular lessons, I never had time for Sagreras. As I started to work in book 1 I discovered that each piece was a lesson that built on technique in the piece before and prepared the way for the piece coming next.

I started on page 1, determined to play each piece perfectly.

Right now I’m working on pages 50-56. I still have a way to go to perfection. About once a week I flip back a couple of pages and do a bit more polishing on an earlier piece and adventure into a new piece a few pages ahead. My playing is improving.

I’m trying to work up the courage to play for a Zoom soiree so yesterday I fiddled around on my Mac to see if I could see how I looked and sounded. I stumbled onto “Photo Booth” where I was able to record myself, video and audio. Recording myself on Photo Booth told me a lot about playing for an audience. I saw that I had to sit with my left shoulder facing the screen. That way my left hand and face were visible. I could see my hand hesitate on its way to a chord change leaving me with a clear visual of what needed more practice. Before finding Photo Booth I’d been trying to play in front of a mirror to see and correct hand positions and posture and other things that you can see in a mirror, but I’m finding that a video recording does the trick much better and it’s fun to watch, especially when you are your only audience.

My other adventure in learning guitar is also on line. I really want to learn to play jazz, I’ve been wanting this for a long time, but still haven’t been able to find my way. I checked out a bunch of lessons on the internet. I found that teachers on the internet are radically different from each other. I don’t think that some are great and some don’t cut it, rather that some personalities/teaching styles resonate better with me than others. There are also big differences in the costs for these programs.

I'm enjoying a teacher named Brian Kelly. His site is [Zombieguitar.com](http://Zombieguitar.com). He presents material using two or more approaches. One approach is the "see it, do it" method the other is the "theory included" method. (my own terminology) He has made many videos on each topic, ie: 12 videos about the CAGED system, 18 videos about pentatonic scales etc. I like to pick a topic or a "thing" I want to learn and to look at the video's that Brian has on his site. I often also google the subject and see what other teachers have to say about it.