

# *Fret Wire*

**SPRING 2023**

*The CGSUNY Newsletter*



*Reviews*

*Articles*

*Guitar Stuff!*

# Fret Wire

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Our membership is encouraged to submit articles and compositions for possible inclusion to the Fret-Wire editorial staff for consideration. Please contact Harry at [recitalguitarist@verizon.net](mailto:recitalguitarist@verizon.net)

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***On our cover:***  
Welcome Spring!

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### *Our Mission*

*Our purpose is to promote the education, appreciation and cultural awareness of the classical guitar and other associated instruments as a non-profit presenting arts organization.*

## SPRING 2023

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## *A Note from the CGSUNY President*

—Paul Sweeny

I write this on the first day of Spring, a time of hope and new possibilities, in the shadow of so much uncertainty. As musicians and music lovers, we have a great tool to express the positive and fend off the negative. With the classical guitar, that most personal of instruments, we have all of that power at our fingertips.

I am excited that we

have the final phase of last Fall's Festival coming up next month.

On Sunday April 16 we will present a remote Collegiate Recital. We have students lined up from Eastman, Crane, Fredonia, Mannes, SUCO and more. Once the details are all set I will ask members to spread the word (and the Zoom link) through any social media and

whatever other channels you might have. We appreciate your support of all kinds.

*Happy Spring and happy playing!*



**Like us on Facebook!**

## *Fret Buzz from the Editor's Desk*

—Harry G. Pellegrin

Spring is a time for new beginnings. I have lived "*Now is the winter of our discontent...*" as William Shakespeare wrote in Richard III. But the seasons change. This was a rough Winter for me on a personal level. Elsewhere in this issue I will describe how I have attempted to return to the love of my youth, but let it suffice to say that while my struggle continues and is very much an uphill climb, I am beginning to see the fruit.

I have, since, December eighth, watched every YouTube video in existence. Guitar reviews and tutorials (some good, some trash) cooking shows, ghost hunting videos, a channel entitled 'Fascinating Horror', and

even camping and bush craft presentations. In other words, nothing has escaped my careful scrutiny. Have you ever watched 'Joolz Guide'? He films walking tours of London. London is interesting on a number of levels—so many famous musicians have lived and died there, among other great artists, writers, thespians, sculptors, etc. Buildings where these luminaries have lived have plaques attached to them giving a brief history of that person's involvement at that address.

If you wish to see where Jimi Hendrix died, or where John Lennon and Yoko Ono were busted, or the house where Gary Moore lived (near a pub, I wonder...) one can track down the plaque.

Find the address and see the building. So I spent many an hour walking London with Joolz and visited Abbey Road, St. Johns Wood, and visited the former sites of famous rock venues of the 1960's. While not a classical guitarist's obvious form of entertainment, it was the music scene of the 1960's that spurred on my interest in music and hence my discovery of our instrument. I believe we all have a Stratocaster on Les Paul somewhere around the house.

What does this have to do with CGSUNY? It made me wonder how many of us found the classical guitar thanks to the British Invasion. I'll wager that most of



us over 50 came to the guitar this way and quite possibly many others from younger demographics as well. Maybe one of you would care to write a blurb about how popular music brought you to the classical guitar. I am asking for articles!!!!

Thanks in advance!

# DUBLIN GUITAR QUARTET

—Kenneth Meyers



## Concert Review

Friday, February 3, 2023, 7:30 PM  
Wellin Hall, Schambach Center for Music and the  
Performing Arts  
Hamilton College

The Dublin Guitar Quartet appeared recently in recital as part of the Performing Arts Series on the campus of Hamilton College. It was a chilly Friday evening with some of our usual winter weather: sideways snow, temps in the 20°'s, and a forecast that predicted you were likely to stay home. Those who made the trip were rewarded with a beautifully eclectic program by one of the premiere guitar quartets active today.

The DGQ is known for their adventurous programming, interesting arrangements, and frequent nod to the many sub-genres of the minimalist style. Their program for Hamilton College followed suit by featuring the music of five living composers, pieces originally conceived for string quartet, and piano

compositions by Philip Glass and Rachel Grimes.

The program began with Bryce Dessner's, *Aheym*; a piece in one movement, originally commissioned by the Kronos Quartet. The DGQ offered a very convincing interpretation and successfully navigated the idiomatic differences between the string and guitar quartet. Dessner, a Grammy winning composer for his work, *Murder Ballades* is an American composer and guitarist based in Paris.

The evening also featured selections from the *Piano Etudes* of Philip Glass and the *Book of Leaves* by Rachel Grimes; each of them are wonderful additions to the guitar quartet repertoire. Here and in the string quartet, the challenges of registration were met by the DGQ's two, eight-string guitars.

And of course, some pieces originally written for guitar quartet. *Gongon* by William Kanengiser is a delightful composition and the group performed it wonderfully. Although originally composed for Kanengiser's Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, it is an arrangement in the sense that it uses prepared guitars (à la John Gage) to imitate the music and sound of the Balinese Gamelan ensemble. Rubber bands, metal clips, and other items you might find in a kitchen drawer are placed on the strings of each guitar, and suddenly it no longer sounds like a guitar.

The last piece on the program (not including the Irish-themed encore) was *Ninkasi*, by Marc Mellits. Marc was a fixture in the central New York scene before moving to Chicago a few years ago. *Ninkasi* was the Mesopotamian goddess of beer and brewing and the piece was fantastic. It showcases Marc's ability to bring real subtlety and nuance to the minimalist genre and the DGQ performed it brilliantly. The subject matter is also a natural fit for the dual stereotypes of a composer who loves IPA's, writing music commissioned by four guys from Ireland.

The DGQ will be back in October, this time in Syracuse. You should go and then we can grab a pint after the concert. :-)

# JIVI KIM

—*Kenneth Meyers*

## Concert Review

Saturday, February 11, 2023

Proctor's Theatre

Albany Symphony; Kalena Bovell, guest conductor

Classical guitarist, Jiji made her Albany Symphony debut performing Joaquin Rodrigo's, *Concierto de Aranjuez*. If you are not familiar with Jiji, stop reading and go to YouTube...

Jiji is a guitarist equally at home on the thorniest of new music for both the classical and electric guitar. She has won two of the

most coveted teaching positions in as many years and currently serves as the professor of guitar at Arizona State University. She will begin her tenure as the professor of music in guitar at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music in 2023. In 2016 she became the first guitarist in 30 years to secure first prize in the Concert Artists Guild Competition. The last few? LAGQ, The Katona Twins, and Manuel Barrueco.

I have heard Jiji in online performances for the Austin Classical Guitar society but prior to this concert, I had never heard her, or the Albany Symphony live. The *Aranjuez*(?), I've heard of it...

The *Concierto de Aranjuez*, is arguably Joaquin Rodrigo's most famous composition. He has four other guitar concertos and yet when someone asks if you'd like to do the Rodrigo, everyone knows the one they mean. It has been arranged by Mile Davis, Chic Corea, Buckethead, Carlos Santana, Spinal Tap, Led Zeppelin, and the Modern Jazz Quartet (just to name a few). It was composed in 1939 and premiered in 1940 by its dedicatee, Regino Sainz de la Maza. Since then, it has been a rite of passage for every professional guitarist performing in front of an orchestra.

Inspired by the gardens at the Royal Palace of Aranjuez, the honeymoon destination for the newly wed, Joaquin and Victoria, the piece is both an evocation of the happy days of their honeymoon and a response to Rodrigo's devastation at the miscarriage of their first pregnancy.

Jiji's performance was simply stunning. It was passionate, articulate, and at times transcendent. The Albany Symphony, under the baton of guest conductor Kalena Bovell, gave a very inspired reading that served as a wonderful accompaniment to Jiji's impressive interpretation. In addition to being a famous concerto, the *Aranjuez* famously features some of the trickiest passages in the guitar repertoire. The development section of the first movement, the cadenzas in the second movement, and the contrapuntal passages in the third movement are all fiendishly difficult by any measure. It is also a challenge for the ensemble; not just in terms of balance and tempo but a little deeper into the weeds of entrances, arrivals, and articulation.

I have heard this piece more times than I can remember and Jiji's performance with the Albany Symphony stands out as one of the better ones I've witnessed. I urge you to see her if you have the chance.

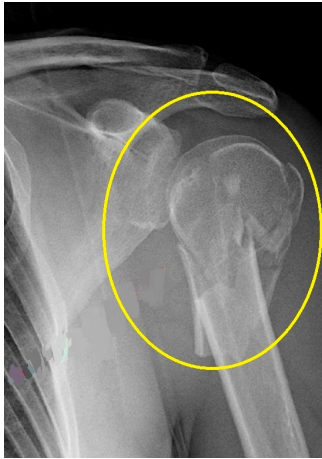




crazy with the unharmonious cacophony of open string harmonies. I couldn't get my left hand up to the peg head to tune an open chord! [Please see the examples below.]

At week five the final sling came off. It should have been at week six, but I was personally done with the restriction. At this point I tried to get my left arm up to the neck. I couldn't get even to the ninth through twelfth to perform a simple 1,2,3,4 finger walk. So ended week six. By week seven, and after physical therapy, I was able to reach to the seventh fret and do the 1,2,3,4 walk, but on one string only. [See complete exercise following Giuliani's, at fifth fret.]

Okay. Imagine you are a guitar player (not too difficult for this audience, I am sure!) and you have just found out you will have your left arm immobilized for six weeks minimum. Two thoughts come to mind immediately. Practicing will be impossible for the duration, and how can I ever maintain some capabilities through this hiatus? This supersedes the massive and lengthy sessions of recriminations for getting oneself into this situation. I hope no one of you ever finds yourself in this predicament. I did.



At first I was told that the actual bone damage – three displaced fractures of the head of my left humerus—would take four weeks to heal, but two additional weeks for complete structural integrity. I figured I'd have no pain after four weeks and merely have to take it easy for another two weeks. Hmmm. The surgeon took a look at new x-rays at the four week mark and compared these with my CAT scans from the day after the disaster. Yes, everything was healing well, no further bone displacement. Surgery was off the table *at this point*. Good news. Bad news though: My left hand was swollen to the point that I could not move my fingers, my joints hindered by the swollen flesh surrounding them. [Conventional wisdom has total healing time taking up to one year.]

From the first week, I clumsily held my guitar and ran through the Giuliani right hand 120 –sans chords. This exercise sounded abysmal, but it kept my right hand from atrophying. There was little hope of using left hand fretting as I was all trussed up with straps and gizmos. I could barely hold the guitar in position for the right hand workout.

But I did.

After the first hour of this, I decided to distill the exercises down to just a few — I was driving myself and my wife

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# ***RANDOM MUSINGS -- PREPARATION***

—Harry G. Pellegrin

I have been pondering musical preparation. A student of mine is doing some pit work for a theatrical production and we were discussing his state of readiness. We decided that with continued periodic ‘performances’ both at home and in rehearsal, he would have no problem. This train of thought led me through my own experiences with performances—some successful and some disastrous. One success? A good handful of years ago our Fred Hellwitz was scheduled to play the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall. Two weeks prior, Fred suffered an injury and would be unable to perform. So with two weeks lead time, Fred asked if I wouldn’t mind covering for him. As I had been preparing a program for other recitals, it was no real problem to say *yes* and feel comfortable doing so.

My most disastrous performance was a brief one a few years back where I had to play some repertoire I hadn’t performed in decades and decided as it was a very short performance of fifteen minutes, I would simply read the selections. Well, due to unrelated issues, I didn’t sleep for two days—and minutes before stage time my printed music magically disappeared. Thinking I might get by on memory, well, I didn’t. I shudder reliving those painful few minutes.

These memories guided (threw) me down a rabbit hole of *why*’s. I came up with three categories of preparation. A good friend of mine once said “***You don’t practice a piece until you can play it perfectly, you practice it until it is impossible to make a mistake.***” I am still not absolutely convinced this is an attainable goal. I have heard true masters flub a phrase here and there. So, I said to myself, what are the boundary markers and what is achievable?

The ideal level one can achieve is to be **PREPARED AND CONFIDENT**. One has, after thoroughly learning the piece, regularly practiced it and successfully performed it before an audience or recorded it in a professional setting. The player can walk out on stage knowing deep within his or her soul that this is something he or she CAN do! There are no gnawing doubts—not even the faintest twinge of fear. This is how I felt when I walked out on stage to fill in for Fred. Of course, I did worry that the audience would be a bit

put off by the substitution! However that had nothing to do with how I believed I could perform the music.

A slightly less secure level of comfort for the performer is simply being well prepared. That sounds a bit strange; let me explain. The player is introducing a new piece into a program, it is fully memorized and well rehearsed. It is, however, new *in performance* before an audience. There will be some underlying trepidation, but after that first satisfyingly successful performance, the piece moves into the category described previously.

So, let’s address the elephant in the room. What is the worst level of preparation? This is the level of prep you will often find when the new student performs his or her first student recital. The student has worked through the piece, possibly—*possibly*—worked all the technical hurdles through, maybe has it mostly memorized and has played the piece correctly one or two times in practice. Maybe with the fates smiling, maybe with a good tail wind, and maybe with divine intervention the piece will be performed successfully. Typically the student will sit down in front of the audience and, as stage fright grips, says ‘*Whose hands are these?*’ as they begin to shake all on their own. Then the student thinks ‘*Which end of this thing do I blow into?*’ From there he or she may make it through the first one or two measures—until the nerves, the shaking, and the lack of confidence take over. The ensuing memory fade or technique failure brings the music to a halt. Silence ensues. The student’s first foray into performance ends in a seeming disaster followed by some half-hearted sympathy applause. Didn’t this happen to most of us when we first started performing?

The upshot? Even at the fifty-two year mark of guitar playing, I have to strive to make sure I am in the first category of preparation—prepared and confident. By knowing my pieces, having performed them before an audience repeatedly (and that’s why family and friends are crucial—we have a built in ‘comfortable’ audience upon which to experiment) I will have the ability to give an audience a performance worthy of them having bought a ticket, rushed their dinner, got a baby sitter and come out to hear me.

# See you next quarter in the Summer Issue of

# Fret Wire

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By week ten, I was able to play two octave major and minor scales. Three octave scales covered more frets than my arm could. But I am still working on it. Chording is rather sketchy at this point as well — my index and middle finger no longer bend well enough to depress the third and second string. However I can barré and half-barré which allows me to (slightly) harmonize my truncated Giuliani exercises.

Why do I relate all this? I am airing a warning as well as offering hope. It is my most sincere wish that none of you ever have this type of injury and protracted recovery. Be careful! I wouldn't wish this injury on Hitler. Well, maybe... What I want you to know that, if this ever befalls you —pun intended—although slow in coming, there is a confident expectation. Research says I may be dealing with the results of this injury for up to twelve months. I am so jealous of all of you who can play our instrument. The worst part of this whole ordeal was having tons of time and still be unable to play my guitar! Enjoy what you have; never feel that you are missing out on something if you are healthy,

*Have some news?*

*Have an idea for an article?*

*Have you written a piece that  
you wish to present to the  
membership?*

**Consider submitting it for  
possible inclusion in  
*Fret Wire*  
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