

Fret Wire

Summer 2024

The CGSUNY Newsletter



Articles!

Info!

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

On our cover:

Harry in Nassau this past Christmas...

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.

SUMMER 2024

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Contributors: (Past and Present)

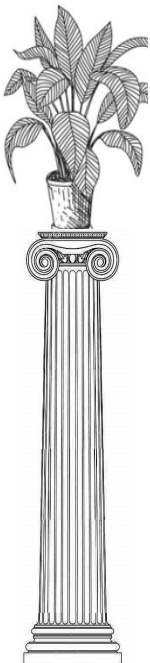
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A Note from the CGSUNY President

—Paul Sweeny

As the school years come to an end and we begin Summer, I hope all will find some contentment and musical pleasure in the coming months. The Society has one event planned for July: a fundraiser for us and for the Earlville Opera House to take place there on July 20.

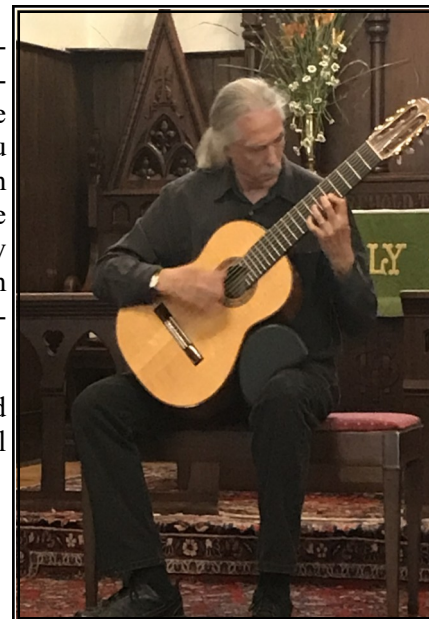
The annual Mannes Seminar in Manhattan is scheduled for June 25-28 and I look forward to the activities there and to catching up with the Society's dear

friends Laura Oltman and Michael Newman. The coming Fall will see, as stated elsewhere in this Newsletter, a concert in Binghamton by Marko Topchii on September 13, a fundraiser for Ukrainian relief. October, of course, will see our annual Fall Festival.

We are very happy to present headliner Tariq Harb and Rifembark soloist Chris Ladd. Look them up and check out their outstanding skills. Once again, those who plan to

stay in Oneonta on Saturday night can get a discount, this year at the Hampton Inn. When you make your reservation use the discount code DET, or, if registering by phone, simply mention the Classical Guitar Society.

All the best in health and musical activities to all of our members.



Fret Buzz from the Editor's Desk

—Harry G. Pellegrin

A great deal has been written about, and I am sure you have read a great deal regarding, the life and times of our past Secretary George Lesh. I am reminded once again today by a request to post a poster for a concert honoring him on the Facebook page. Of course, the newsletter will be sent out after the concert has occurred.

We remember George with memorial concerts that highlight young players and students because that demographic was very important to George so these are a very fitting tribute to a life of service to the next generation.

Have you ever seen the Beatles movie '*A Hard Day's Night*'? There is a wonderful line delivered by Ringo in which he says: "Being middle aged and old takes up most of your life". There is quite a bit of truth

in that statement. I believe many people feel that way. —and for good reason! The numbers bear it out. Still, it is not how George approached life. I have seen him in the midst of personal tragedy and illness, and observed someone who still approached his passions with the same vigor as he had done in a definitely brighter past.

Sometimes we will look at the calendar and the mirror—or the miserable hand we have been dealt—and decide to cut back in our involvement or even in our dedication. Hopefully you have never done that, but I know I have. I was contemplating writing this *Fret Buzz* this morning and wondered if I really needed to spend the time. Does anyone even read this stuff?

Maybe no one would even notice if this column had a "YOUR AD HERE" filler. Then I opened my email and found a message from Marc Hecker including a brief article he wished to submit for the newsletter. It kicked my mind into gear and I realized that, yes, the guitar is still important to me and will be important to others in fifty or a hundred years. So I had a WWGD moment —*What Would George Do?* He was always engaged and productive. That is his legacy.

So I came to the conclusion that as long as I was on the right side of the grass, I still had my passions to be professed and advanced. The guitar is eternal and just because we aren't doesn't



mean we shouldn't *keep on keepin' on*. That's what George taught me!

We have a wonderful Fall Fest '24 in the making and other concerts and events in the offing. Please attend as many as you can and tell a friend or three. I, for one, am looking forward to seeing friends and hearing wonderful guitar playing. And that, my friends, is an inspiration from George!

Tremolo



Recently, the Baltimore Classical Guitar Society presented one of their occasional online Master Class-plus-workshop events. The teacher was Lukasz Kuropaczewski and his technique workshop was titled “Quality, not Quantity”. He explained and demonstrated, in detail, a warmup sequence very new to me. The essence is to play SLOWLY (everything he showed was at quarter note=60, and he played no rhythms shorter than quarter notes), with *p* planted on the fourth string, plant *a,m,i* on strings 1,2, and 3 and pluck *a*, then *m*, then *i*, and then return all 3 RH fingers simultaneously to a fully planted position. Repeat. There were 3 phases: full plant followed by individual strokes and full plant on beat 4; full plant and individual strokes each of which immediately returns to the full plant (resulting on all staccato notes); and individual strokes played with a sequential plant. (There was also a LH component which I am omitting.) The thumb stayed planted on the D string throughout.

After playing along, and after the concert I performed in that same afternoon, I realized that this approach might be adapted for tremolo. As someone who is left-handed but who has always played right-handed, RH technique has always of necessity been an area of great interest. Tremolo of course is one of the most difficult areas of right-hand technique.

After some thought I came up with this variant of Lukasz’ exercise: plant the thumb on the third string, plant *a,m*, and *i* all on the second string, and-with the LH muting all the strings-pluck *a-m-i* (as above, very slowly). This is a 4-beat cycle: 1.) plant all 4 fingers, 2.) pluck *a*- 3.) *m*- 4.) *i*; repeat. This way you can combine any bass string (though the thumb never actually plays) with the tremolo on any string above it. It is possible to “play” the RH part of any tremolo piece this way, combining different strings for the thumb and for the other fingers as the music dictates. I have always found that one issue with tremolo is having the thumb, at least occasionally, play too loud and this can help with that. In any case, what I found was that, after practicing this sequence, SLOWLY, for a while, my tremolo was faster and cleaner than it had ever been before.

Try this; I would love to hear whether or not anyone else finds this helpful.

—Paul Sweeny

Enquiring Minds Want to Know...

Ongoing Questions as Posed by Deena Freed

Tales of tremolo. Considering that success in playing tremolo is sought after by most of us, what have been your experiences and words of wisdom to enlighten the tremolo journey?

I may be wrong, but I believe everyone's first exposure to tremolo was probably that moment their teacher assigned Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*. I know this was **NOT** my first exposure, but more on that later. I wasn't so much put off by the tremolo technique, but simply by the sheer length of the piece when played with all the original repeats in place. To my seventeen year-old fingers, it seemed to go on and on forever! After I had played the piece for my teacher for the first time, he modified the number of repeats and asked me if I had listened to "little Johnny Williams" recording of the piece.

I have read many differing opinions and methods for perfecting tremolo. Some of these I agree with and some I find ludicrous! Before I proceed, I will state that I will NOT be telling you the method I used to learn tremolo technique. Why? Because it is not my desire to provoke a debate.

I first attempted tremolo in my fifteenth year of life by learning a piece by Jan Akkerman, guitarist for the Jazz/Rock fusion band *Focus* entitled *Le Clochard*—remember setting the turntable to sixteen RPM and picking up the needle every few notes to try to cop a piece? The piece contains a brief section of tremolo and I painstakingly and painfully mastered how I thought the technique should be executed. By sheer dumb luck, I got it right, so when I played a tremolo for Albert Blain at that *Recuerdos* lesson a few years later, he was mildly shocked.

So what are my words of wisdom? First, listen to the teacher. The experience he or she has accumulated is not something to be despised. Second, if you are learning this on your own, remember that the thumb should usually be downplayed (less force and volume) as the tremolo is generally there to prolong the melody. It should not be overpowered by the accompanying (usually) bass line. And float like a butterfly; sting like a bee!

—Harry G. Pellegrin

Here's my rendition of that snippet of tremolo by Jan Akkerman.

Are You on the Right or on the Left?

Balancing classical guitar on right knee— How bad is it?

Although aspiring classical guitarists are traditionally instructed to position the guitar on the left knee while sitting, many musicians find it awkward and uncomfortable. This can often result from years playing acoustic folk or maybe electric guitars on the right knee or standing while using a strap. But many classical guitarists just cannot adapt to the left leg rule. Angling the instrument upward to the left at about 40-60 degrees can improve fretboard accessibility. Use of an adjustable metal bracket or cushion for the left thigh may be helpful as can a small footrest on the right for slight elevation. Nevertheless, it can defy natural posture for numerous musicians. Interestingly, history did not always support the left leg rule. Fernando Sor and other classical guitar pioneers preferred the right knee, and this is evidenced by drawings or photos when they happen to exist. Presently, Tommy Emmanuel also rests the guitar on his right knee. [Ed note: *I doubt Tommy considers himself a 'classical' player; he plays on steel, but is brilliant nevertheless.*] So why the ironclad dogma about the left leg? The instrument is theoretically more secure this way since it is nested with one's legs on both sides and the upper chest over it. When supported on the right leg, the right part of the guitar body is just floating in the air on that side. Also, satirically speaking, a right knee posture has been dubbed "unsophisticated and low class"

But I have read that, despite trying the more orthodox left leg rule for decades, some musicians just cannot ever get used to it and find it a continuous source of agony. I think that if performers function well musically and feel more comfortable using the right knee, teachers should exhibit more flexibility.



—Marc Hecker

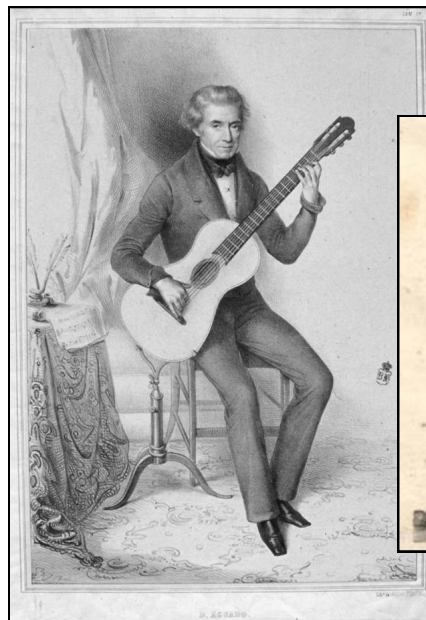
Editor's Note: Much the same as the fingernail debate has regularly reemerged over the past two hundred years, Marc Hecker brings up an interesting point of contention amongst players. Maybe *contention* is too strong a term, but it is a topic periodically resurrected to consciousness. In the picture and diagram below, we see Aguado's *Tripodion* invention intended to free the guitarist from the constraints of holding the instrument in 'correct' position — whatever that may have actually been considered to be. Please note that in the drawing of Aguado, the guitar is in much the same position as Marc prefers.

I wrote the following to Marc when he presented his article:

"Truth, If you have watched South American guitarists, the Assad brothers come to mind, they rarely play in 'correct' classical posture. They balance the instrument's lower bout on the right thigh. I find that puts too much need for support on my heft arm, but as it really works for them, who am I to cast aspersions? I believe it truly comes down to each player's individual physiology. We are all different in arm length, torso length, height, weight (yes, my belly gets in the way!) so personal comfort while playing must come into consideration. I started playing with a strap back in my rock days and found that if I sat down while wearing the strap, the guitar came to rest on my left thigh, so it was easy for me to adapt to the left leg posture. I can certainly see where someone who always played on their right leg would find it uncomfortable to switch."

So many thanks to Marc Hecker for sharing his insight into this topic!

—Harry



On March 8th, I made a trip to New York City to see Laura Snowden perform at the Tenri Cultural Center on 13th Street.

I took Amtrak to Penn Station and stayed over at the Holiday Inn Express in Chelsea. The concert was sold out, the Tenri Cultural Center is a small venue. I arrived in NYC at 3 pm and checked in, did some office work on my computer and then had some dinner at a Korean restaurant nearby. With all the news of bad things happening on the subway I decided I would walk to 13th Street down Sixth Avenue. NYC is such a busy, bustling place! I thought I'd get run over by the bicycle delivery people!

I got to the Tenri Cultural Center at 7 pm and picked a third row seat. Maybe I should have sat front and center, but I didn't want to. I sat next to Josue Pagan, a guitarist and luthier who I had heard perform for the NYCCGS open mic on Zoom. I enjoyed his performance of his own "Medley". He knew about Antonio Tessarin, the Brazilian luthier who made my guitar. He studied guitar building with another luthier who studied with Tessarin. Josue is a big fan of Laura Snowden. We talked guitars and about our thoughts on Laura.

Laura Snowden is a joy to see perform. She is imaginative, expressive, precise, and in control. She can play masterpieces of the solo repertoire and bring them alive with fresh interpretation. She loves to arrange folk songs and she has a haunting singing voice. She includes vocalizations in her compositions and she is a conjurer and storyteller. She grabs your attention with the way she imbues every phrase with rubato, tone colors, and familiar and new guitar techniques.

She began her concert accompanying herself on "Black Is the Colour", and then immediately going into "Les Barricades Mysterieuses". She explained that she wanted the contrast of darkness and hope - and she played "Les Barricades" in a joyful, hopeful way.

Next she played the hell out of J.S. Bach's "Adagio and Fugue from Violin Sonata No. 1, BWV 101". I was mesmerized!

Then came a Snowden composition, "This Changing Sky", a meditation, a tone poem full of suspense, guitar tricks, colors and unusual harmonies, pauses and surprises.



"Song for Maria" was next, dedicated to her sister, the "love of her life" she says. Very poignant and melodic.

After an intermission, the second half began with Barrios, "Vals Op 8, No. 3 and Op 4, No 4. Laura has her own very expressive, joyful way of playing and a great technique that is so much fun to see.

Another Snowden composition "The Trap" was next. This was, as she explained, the darkest piece, and involved spoken words and a specially tuned second guitar. I must confess I couldn't follow the story. I blame my hearing.

Chopin's "Nocturne, Op. 9" was next - very artistically done with her own cadenza in the middle - a tour-de-force.

After Chopin she jumped right into two pieces by Maria Luise Anido "Variaciones Camperas" and "Air Norteno". Incredibly fast. Short and sweet.

Next - two folk songs, "Carrickfergus" and "Parting Glass". These were a different level of musical experience, reminding me of the folk music of the 1960s and 1970s. The comfort and nostalgia of old tunes brought to life.

"Tarantelle" by Mertz was the last piece in the program. This played with as much imagination and drama as all the other pieces - Laura does not get tired!

After a standing ovation, as an encore Laura performed the prelude to Barrios "La Cathedral" -so sweetly done as to make a person just melt.

I have been to many classical guitar concerts in my life, and this was one of the finest I have ever witnessed.

—*William Simcoe*

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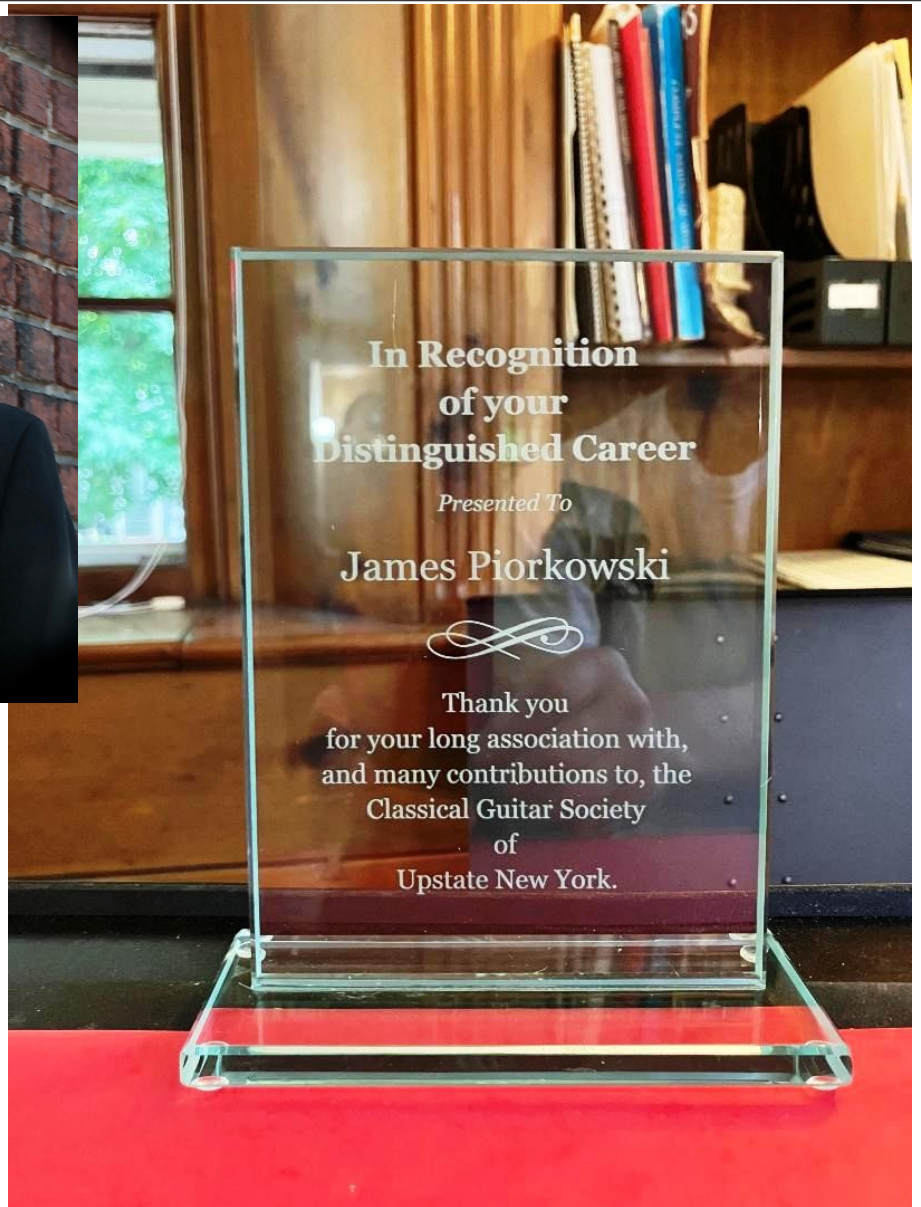


James Piorkowski

James Piorkowski's recitals have been heard in Spain, France, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Argentina, Jamaica, Canada, and throughout the United States.

James Piorkowski is retiring from his position as a SUNY Distinguished Professor at the Fredonia School of Music, State University of New York, serving as head of the guitar program since 1983. In 2006, Piorkowski was the recipient of both the President's Award for Excellence and the Robert W. Kasling Award for Scholarly and Creative Excellence. He was the recipient of the University's William T. Hagan Young Scholar/Artist Award in 1998.

For eighteen years, Piorkowski was a member of the world-renowned Buffalo Guitar Quartet. The pioneering BGQ toured internationally and released four highly acclaimed recordings. *Guitar*



Player Magazine declared that the Buffalo Guitar Quartet was "one of the world's premiere classical guitar ensembles."

We at the CGSUNY are honored to have Jim Piorkowski as a friend and mentor and we wish him continued musical joy in his retirement.



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Ken Meyer sits down for an in-depth interview with Jim Piorkowski

James Piorkowski, Distinguished Professor of Guitar at the State University of New York College at Fredonia will retire this year after 43 years at the helm of one of the most important guitar programs in the country. In recognition of his long relationship with the classical guitar communities of Upstate/Western New York, and continued support of the CGSUNY organization, we thought it fitting to spend a little time with Jim and reflect on his career, accomplishments, and future. As a former Fredonia student and later faculty member, I was privileged to call Jim both a mentor and a colleague and had a great time reconnecting with my friend of many years. Our conversation begins shortly after Jim returned his office keys for the last time.

Ken: I'm wondering how these two moments compare: Receiving your keys to teach at Fredonia, who you were, what you thought about teaching, and then what it was like this time around, turning them in for the last time.

Jim: I love that. I love that frame. Well, I started in 1983, and it was part time, there were two guitar majors in the studio. Ensemble was small... (laughter). I was also teaching Music Education and Music Therapy guitar classes and Recital Seminar. I remember that following semester, we had another student come in, so we had three students at the end of the first year. I was relatively new to Fredonia; I had a niece who majored in piano performance, so I had some inkling of what was going on. My predecessor, I knew her and her work, but I didn't know more than that. During that first year, I realized that this was a cool and very energetic place. The faculty were strong and dedicated, and I thought I would really like to make this a long-term thing. I was motivated to recruit and create a larger program.

Regarding my own teaching, by this time I had been working for two years in other college programs in Buffalo and started teaching when I was in high school at my brother's music store, Matt's Music. I had some experience, but I was still green. I think about students that I had early on, though they've said very complimentary things about me, I knew that I didn't know much. But it's in hindsight and I think that's wisdom, when you realize you know less than you know, and there's still a whole world out there, which keeps us addicted to the whole game, right? Because you want to learn more. So, I think that was the beginning of that understanding that I want to grow it. I also wanted to make it vibrant beyond Fredonia, bringing in guest artists, clinicians, and master classes. And we did a lot of that early on.

Shortly after that the Buffalo Guitar Quartet became artists in residence. That helped recruit and I think inspire some of the other students. So, in the late 80s, some of the students said, "How come we don't have a guitar quartet? We have a large ensemble. We have enough for a separate quartet, why don't we have something like the Buffalo Guitar Quartet student level?" I said, "I don't know, it's a good idea, let's do it." So, I created this by audition only, membership group, and expected professional level results and dedication. So, I think my trajectory from 1983 through 2024 has just been, I just want to do great work and I want my students to do great work. I want them to excel; whatever I can learn to help facilitate that, I'm going to do it and plug it in.

Every time I took a sabbatical leave, I came back excited to teach again because I had gained so much, either through a recording project, or teaching at conservatories or observing teaching in conservatories in Europe and saying, ah, this is good, I can bring this back. I was always enthused and re-freshed and recharged. It was just a week to week, month to month, semester to semester kind of incremental growth that you don't even realize you're going through. Like seeing a youngster at three years old and then you don't see that person for a year, they've really grown. Well, it's day by day, right? That's how I felt about myself as a teacher, as a musician, as a composer, and the program reflected that.

So, handing in the keys, let me say this, because I had thought about this. I realized that I'm really starting to get good at what I do. And I should be at my best, right? After all this time.

If I'm not, then I should have retired three years ago or five years ago. It was like the Buffalo Guitar Quartet. When we disbanded, the group never sounded better. We were at the top of our game. I mean, the Venezuelan concert, I still remember that because I just came back from the dead, from food poisoning. And we played the next day, and it was, I remember it was just stupendous. Unlike aged athletes who were injured and hobbled and doddering around, still trying to do it. We broke up at the end of that. I feel that way with my Fredonia career, ending it before I realized, oh my gosh, I'm mailing it in or I'm not reading it, that would really bother me.

Ken: How about the commute to Fredonia from Buffalo. You've been doing that for a long time. What do you do during the drive? Podcast, playlist, thought?

Jim: Almost every year. Well, I would say, let's say three quarters of my career at least, I've had a commuting partner...

Ken: Oh, so conversation...

Jim: Yep, and sometimes it's in music. Previously, I had someone from the Spanish department, who lived on the westside of Buffalo. The last 10 or 12 years, it was with our cello professor who lives five minutes from here. Thankfully, everyone that I've commuted with were smart, bright, interesting people. So, I've learned, I've been entertained, I've been known to crack a joke or two during the commute, and that makes it much more pleasant, and of course, then I'm not driving all the time. I won't miss the commute, but I will miss the camaraderie with my colleagues.

Ken: I remember registering for classes at Fredonia and standing in a line with a piece of paper and a pencil, now my students do it during their advising session, and from their phones... Aside from those obvious things, what changes have you noticed in academia over your 43-year career?

Jim: Well, I mean, obviously, you know, with technology, as you were alluding to with the piece of paper and computer cards, I mean, that's really streamlined things. You know, I think with all of those ancillary changes or procedural changes, the core of what I do, and I think most of our colleagues do, hasn't changed. I like that because what we do is such a formative procedure, a formative input into a human being. One of

my colleagues, our viola professor, David Rose, wrote in self-evaluation when he was up for renewal towards tenure. He started out his essay by saying, there are two people in the room, the teacher and the student. I thought about that, and I think, you know, that is rare, thinking about in a college place, college level classroom, lecture halls, a lab might have 12 people in it, one on one. That aspect of studio teaching, that hasn't changed, and that process of studio teaching, I think the thing that, especially with a new student, that must start out and gradually come to fruition is the matter of trust, of the student trusting the teacher. I find that to be one of the most sacred aspects of what we do, because once you earn that, you must maintain it and have the student be aware that, you know, you're on their side.

And then regarding ensemble, this is something I was thinking about because one year before I started at Fredonia; I became a member of the Buffalo Guitar Quartet. We would tour and do master classes. Rarely, in a university setting, when we would do a class, would there be any, there wouldn't be a quartet, there wouldn't be a trio, we might get a duo, mostly soloists, there were no ensemble programs in the 80's. So, our ensemble program at Fredonia with the larger ensemble, and then the separate quartet, and then eventually chamber guitar with guitar and voice, guitar and violin, whatever, as, you know, that became a real prominent aspect and grew. Then I would notice more and more guitar societies, universities, and conservatories, embracing the guitar ensemble concept or quartet, whatever. That's been interesting, I think that change has been fascinating...

Ken: How long did the Buffalo Guitar Quartet (BGQ) exist before you joined?

Jim: They started in 1975. It was a student quartet that Jeremy Sparks created for his graduation recital. He did the Vivaldi D major lute concerto for four guitars. He played the guitar part and arranged the accompaniment. The guitar professor at the time, Oswald Rantucci said, "This is great!" He had this wonderful Italian accent, "You got to keep doing this, you know, make some more arrangements", you know, and he really motivated Jeremy to do that, and Jeremy loved doing that. There was some membership changing because people would graduate and move out of Buffalo. Eventually, it became solidified and they were all professional (non-student) musicians. I was a fan of them, you know, I would go to their concerts and watch them perform. I was younger. So, then I joined in 1982 and I was just newly married and, you know, just bought a house. Things were really crazy, but it was a new thing back then. You had the Romero's, there was a group from England. I think they were called the Omega Quartet. There was Laval Trio in Quebec and the Amsterdam Guitar Trio. That was sort of it. There was a Tarrega Quartet that existed for a short time, too. But, you know, on the whole planet, that was it. So that evolution of ensemble and guitar quartet becoming a standardized ensemble genre is interesting to look back in retrospect.

I remember talking to Roland Dyens about this early on because he knew I was in the quartet and there was a Paris Guitar Quartet that was playing one of my pieces. Some students of his were in that. He was saying when he would be asked to write for an ensemble or a quartet, he didn't like it. You know, it's like, no, I'm a soloist and that's my world. He said, "I don't know why I didn't, maybe because I didn't

play in the quartet." As he started getting involved with that, there would be large ensembles, you know, doubling the part, tripling the parts, and he would conduct and coach. He really took a love to it, you know, and of course, then he eventually wrote a lot of pieces, a lot of beautiful pieces, a lot of arrangements for that setting. So, that's been fascinating. I think that's one of Fredonia's strengths, the ensemble program...

Ken: Yeah, I was very grateful. I think most of the students, all the students that I've talked to, we always speak highly of that experience, especially if we got a chance to go somewhere, which is something you tried to do often.

Jim: You know, every former Fredonia guitar quartet student, regardless if they went to Venezuela, or Spain, or whatever, they said that it was one of the highlights of their musical careers, not only in education, but just that they really loved the experience. That was always satisfying to hear because I loved it, and why wouldn't you love it if you're dedicated, and you can make great music together? Making social music is wonderful, right? And so, I'm not surprised at that, but it's very satisfying.

Ken: As we reflect on your career at Fredonia, I'm wondering if there are significant memories either musical or non-musical that stand out.

Jim: One of the things that jumps out in my mind was when the LAGQ was touring with Shingo Fuji's, *Shiki*. I think that was the first time I had ever seen anything like that. We signed up to be the accompaniment for one of their concerts. As always, you know, you have your seniors who are playing high level rep all the way down to your freshmen who were still getting fundamentals together, and they're all in because we needed an orchestra. They're all involved.

So, I told them right out of the gate, "We're not going to do this if we're not aiming to be the best guitar orchestra that the LAGQ ever plays with on this tour, and no matter who they played with, if it's a conservatory guitar program or not, if this isn't going to be the best experience that they've had, we're not doing this." This is what we're in for, and they signed up for it, they bought into that. It wasn't smoke and mirrors, I wasn't just saying this to psych them out. I really meant it. I said, "We're going to do this so well, and we're going to have it memorized. All four movements, accompaniment memorized." We worked really, really, hard.

I remember in Rosch Recital Hall, our first rehearsal with the LAGQ, the guitars are set up on risers and the quartet walks out and Bill, who looks at me, said, "They don't have any music stands. They don't have this memorized, do they?" I said, "They do." And he was like, holy cow. All right. So, they did it, and the students were very well prepared.

We had 25 students, some from Evan's, Buffalo State studio. I wanted to include them to be able to share this experience from the Buffalo State program. And the quartet was saying, let's try this. Let's put an accent here. I mean, they knew the piece much better than I did. So, they changed some of the interpretation.

The students got it right away. They knew what to do. So, Bill calls up Shingo Fuji, the composer, right afterwards and said, "You're not going to believe this. This ensemble at Fredonia memorized your piece and they played the snot out of it." Shingo wrote to me afterwards and was so grateful for our investment into his music. And any composer would be, right? And the concert, Rosch was sold out, it was just phenomenal. It was really, really a high-level experience. That stands out as one of those watershed moments where the students caught my vision, caught what I presented, what we could do, that this is possible and made it happen, you know? So that was a cool thing. Very, very satisfying.

We had a similar thing with Miles Jefferson Friday. He wrote this piece called A Falling Loop a few years ago. I said, "I'd love to do this live with electronic accompaniment." It had been one of those pandemic era amalgamations, where everyone records a part and it gets put together after the fact. So, we had to figure out a lot of stuff, like how to sync with a computer accompaniment, and how to count... There are times when there's no beat, there's no pulse, you know, it's amorphous. I remember being up in the middle of the night trying to think of solutions, you know? Like, I don't know, and I'm sick because I don't want it to be embarrassing. We worked really, really, hard, did all sorts of problem solving and experimentation, and it really worked, like it really came together. The composer was extremely satisfied with the way it played out. So those kinds of things, where the students are challenged to something, and I'm challenged, you know, because we haven't done this before. We've got to figure out a way to do this, and if it's going to be schlocky, we're calling it off, you know, because that's not what we're aiming for. Those were really, really, great experiences.

And I think, you know, with the influx of guest artists coming to Fredonia. I mean, we've had the LAGQ, Paul Galbraith (with and without the Brazilian guitar quartet), Marcin Dylla, Parkening, Ralph Towner, you know, just all these wonderful, wonderful musicians. That kind of energy that you get when you bring that kind of talent. Roland Dyens was in residence a couple times, and he really embraced our program. So yeah, here's another killer memory. Oh my gosh. So, the Fredonia guitar quartet, this was early 2000s, they learned *Ville d'Abril* by Roland. It's a solo composition and then he made a quartet version of this piece. Hard piece, crazy meters and compound rhythms. It was very tricky. And then it was Evan's idea; Roland was coming to town. Let's have a tribute concert for Roland and we're just going to perform for him; you know, music of his, music that inspired him, or that was inspired by him, some of my compositions that he helped me, like, find the ending or something. The Fredonia Guitar Quartet played this piece and when they finished, he stood up and gave them a standing ovation. Like he was just knocked out as to how well they played it. Like they really got it. And again, challenging piece, musically, technically, they nailed it. I remember after the concert, he was complimenting me, complimenting them, you know, profusely. He was so gracious. Well, that January, I get an email from Roland saying, "Jeem, a little gift for you and the Fredonia Guitar Quartet." He wrote *Filmaginaires* and dedicated it to the Fredonia guitar quartet. Now you commission a guy like that, it's going to cost you a few grand, right? It's a gift and it's a gorgeous

piece. I was just knocked out by that whole aspect of us learning his music and trying to learn it in a way that if he heard it, we didn't know he was going to hear it. But eventually he did, that he was proud of it. He was satisfied with it to the point where he would do that. And that was a group which I took to Germany and France, and Roland, on his recommendation, got us some gigs in both countries. He said, "I can vouch for these musicians. They will be pro-level." That was Anthony LaLena, Mike Mendoza, Mario Robano, and Hazel Montes. So, one of the things that I learned way back, and it's still, and I've shared this with you when you were a student of mine, is that, whatever you do, people will somehow notice. So do great work, you know, because eventually it pays off, the people that will notice will recommend you for something.

Ken: You've taught so many students over the years and I know that your approach is going to be individually catered to each student, but I was curious to know if there were composers, pieces, and/or technique manuals that you've gravitated to over the course of your career.

Jim: Well, that certainly has changed. You know, early on, there was sort of a canon of etudes and repertoire that everyone was expected to learn. You would go through at least a lot of the selected studies by Sor (Segovia edition), Carcassi, and then eventually the Brouwer joined that group of etudes, right? I think those were the staples for a long time. In repertoire, you wanted to hit the major composers, especially somebody like Villa-Lobos and Ponce. I also want my students exposed to different historical periods. So doing lute music transcriptions of Dowland and his contemporaries. Dowland is such an incredible composer, and if we can play some of his pieces on the guitar, it's a super gift. Of course, you're going to explore Bach, but you also want to explore other Baroque composers. I have found a real love affair with Corbetta and his music. I really think he was great. He was someone that transitioned from the accompaniment role to a soloist role; he was very important in that. But then as the years go by, there became so much more repertoire available to us. When I first started out, Barrios was just rediscovered...

Ken: Yeah, I was just thinking when you were talking about composers, it is true that there is so much more available now...

Jim: Right, and not only just, you know, contemporary composers, but again, like a historical figure like Barrios. Whoa, where did this come from? So as there became so many more pieces and, you know, like you look at the Royal Conservatory series, all those compilations of all sorts of different composers, you know, I think that the variety of hitting good music is... the possibilities have expanded greatly. So, for any student currently, what I try to do is give them exposure to the different historical periods and different technical aspects. You have all sorts of beautiful, effective and enjoyable pieces to focus on technique. I do have stacks of technical books that people send me, right, slur books, and string crossing books and so on, and they're good. They're really good, but what I have preached to my students is that someone found a problem on a piece and created this technique to not only solve the problem on the piece, but to help that technical aspect in their playing and so my approach has been, let's create our own technical solutions, right? You're having trouble with this. Let's do something like Odair's favorite drill from the pumping nylon, you know, let's create our own little cross-string spider crawl thing,

whatever, you know, because really, ultimately, we must create our own solutions. So that's been the way that I like to lead a student. How do we solve this problem, based on what we know is the challenge of the problem, and maybe our deficiencies of technique at this point, how do we improve it? How do we solve it? And it's a creative, fun thing, you know, like rhythmic variations...you want to get a scale moving or an arpeggio, you do dotted rhythms or triplet forms, and it's fun, it changes things, you know, and so I think that aspect is really important for a student to discover on their own, because ultimately, they have to be teaching themselves, right?

Ken: ...And that action leads them to identifying, recognizing, correcting, developing and then they have a toolbox of skills that...

Jim: Oh, yeah, okay, that'll work for that, that'll work for that. Right. And that tool sheet that I put together years ago, for productive practicing, you know, right hand alone, left hand alone, singing, rhythmic variations, I mean, again, those aren't my exclusive tools, but things that I've picked up from other musicians, and things that I've created on my own, okay, this worked for this, I'm putting on this on this list. I mean, that tool sheet was for me... how can I fix this? Let's try that one, you know, and then so I would give that to my students and say, you know, let's see how we can apply some of these tools. I think that's the most important aspect of what I do in teaching is to equip a student to find solutions to identify problems, as you said, and then find the solution.

Ken: Can we include the tool sheet in the in the newsletter?

Jim: Oh, yeah. You know, I'll send you an updated one, because it constantly morphs.

(He did and it is included at the conclusion of the interview)

Ken: Can you share some things you've learned by balancing a career between performing composing and teaching?

Jim: I find that each one of those aspects, as I delve into it, complements the others. For example, composing. I was 40 years old when I first considered myself a composer, even though I had composed before that. For many years, I was a musician who composed. It's like if I have a leaky toilet, I'm not a plumber. I might be able to fix that, but I'm not a plumber. But after my first sabbatical, composing half of the Freedom Flight album. I came away and thought, I think I'm a composer now. And so that aspect made me think about interpreting other music, other composers' music in a very different way.

And assessing meter, pulse, groove, phrasing, gesture, all that stuff. Not only as I would interpret someone else's music but for how I would have a student interpret that. And I find, you know, in the old days, you know, you sang in choir, you did your theory work, you did everything. You learned to improvise, you learned basso continuo, you know, figured bass, you learned everything. And I think that is so essential for a well-rounded musician that, you know, even if you're not going to be a composer, compose. Even if you're not going to improvise on stage, improvise. Even if you might not be a professional teacher, teach something...

Like this morning, I had three students here, they're all siblings. And they wait for each other, but they're in the same room. The

youngest guy, eight years old...I was just teaching about playing in seventh position and doing this melody and how do we relate the notes and then all the configurations, you know, circle three, what does that mean, you know. And then I had him explain to his sisters, "Teach them what you just learned." Because as you said, you know, you teach it, you understand it. So, all those aspects, I think, are really valuable, even if that's not going to be a primary aspect of your being a musician, but to do them is really important. I was really pleased when that block of my overall work, being a composer, eventually came into being because it just enriched me so much as a musician. And the fact that this piece didn't exist before, you know that feeling. Like, wait a minute, this is so cool! This music never existed until now! You know, so, yeah, balancing it all. The one thing that I have a challenge with, I have to say, is when I'm in composing mode, it's hard for me to practice other repertoire, because I just want to go back to that. I want to keep kneading the bread and watching it rise. So balancing, it's like, I must take this hat off, put this hat on, all right, now I got to practice, learn this repertoire, hone it, and get ready. Balancing can be tricky, but it's very healthy.

Ken: OK, so in closing, what's next? Now that you don't have to be anywhere, what are some of the projects that you've got coming up in the future?

Jim: There's a couple of judging and adjudicating things that I have scheduled already for next year. They coincidentally came right at the last week of classes. I have a commission for a set piece for a competition for next year. I don't know if that's supposed to be made public yet so, I can't get into specifics but what's fun is I already started and I think I have the introduction done. If I like it enough, it will be eventually for that competition. If I don't, it'll just be for my own pleasures. I don't know. But the fact, again, that I have the time to just, you know, really hone a few measures here and there and make sure that it's wonderfully satisfying. One of my colleagues in the art department, who retired a few years ago, was talking to me recently, and he said, "I want to share something with you about my retirement. I've learned to follow my curiosity and that's been my guide." I like that and I think the fact that I will have that freedom of time and how to apply my time, how to work in my time, I will be able to do that more. And I'll be able to explore the things that I'm curious about more. So rather than the things that I have to do... and there's going to be so many things that I have no clue what will happen. It's just like when I started at Fredonia 41 years ago. I had no clue that I would take students to Spain, or Germany, or wherever. I had no clue that it would lead to distinguished professor rank. I didn't even know what that was. I had no aspirations for it. It wasn't like, you know, I want to, you know, I just worked, and someone noticed it and then said, you know, you're eligible for this. You're a candidate. I said, "What is it?" They said, "Well, it's the highest ranking you can get in SUNY." I said, "Oh, really, that's a lot of work to apply for it." And they said, "Do it." You know, like, none of that in 1983. Yeah, I couldn't imagine. So that's how I think about what's next. You know, there's going to be a lot of things I can't imagine.

—Ken Meyer with Jim Piorkowski

My Tools for Productive Practicing

James Piorkowski

Plan your work, and then work your plan.

"*Don't confuse activity with achievement.*" - John Wooden

JP's Toolbox

singing

left hand alone

right hand alone

rhythmic variation

discover the composer's intent

S.T.P. (stretched time practice)

P&P (play and prepare)

make it *more* difficult

fragment chaining

tip management

mentalization

backwards practicing

separate voices/line/layers

score perusal: form and analysis

exclusively observe left hand

exclusively observe right hand

simultaneously observe both hands (eyes closed)

fingering all notes in left hand, play only melody or bass

with right hand

practice in *this* now, so you can perform it in *that* now

critical review: perform for microphone (audio recording)

self observation (mirror or video recording)

perform for others (friends, family, etc.)

breathing awareness/management

physical self-direction: be the giraffe

vary practice locations/backgrounds

S.L.F. (slow, loud, floppy)

thud/buzz/clear

befriend the frets

play with mute

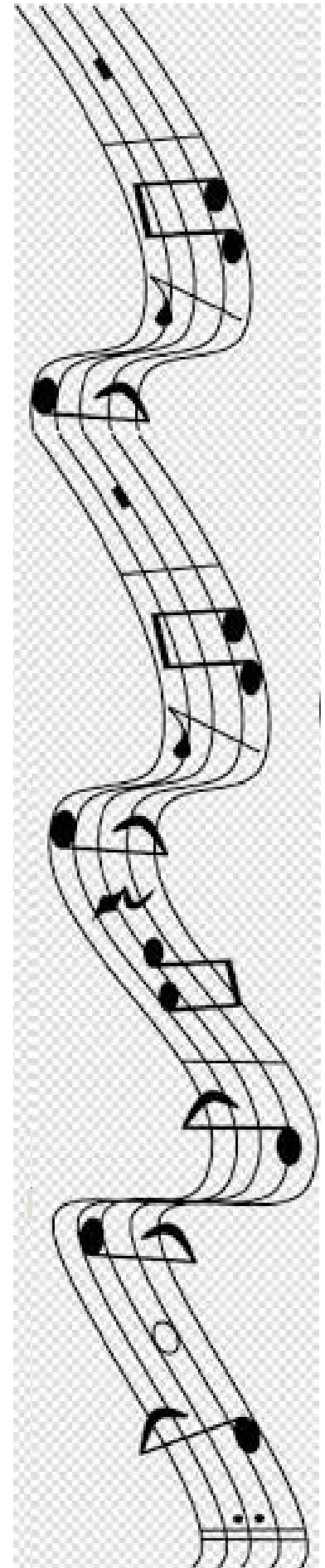
Trust the process.

Embrace the process.

Enjoy the process



Marko Topchii



I am extremely excited to announce that the Society will be sponsoring a concert by last summer's GFA Competition winner Marko Topchii. He will appear on Friday September 13 at Trinity Memorial Church, 44 Main Street in Binghamton. The proceeds from the concert will all go to much-needed relief in Ukraine, Marko's native country. Part of the winner's prize is a concert tour arranged by the GFA and I reached out as soon as I could to the Foundation's tour manager (who coincidentally was a student of João Luiz and performed in our Collegiate Recital last year). After many emails back and forth, as other dates and venues were arranged, we were able to secure the September date. After one date I requested turned out to be unavailable, the only date before late October that would have worked for us was taken. I want to extend heart-felt thanks to the Great Lakes Guitar Society, who had already reserved that date but who then generously relinquished it so that we could have it. They will present Marko at the Skaneateles Library in the Spring (giving many of us two chances to hear him). I particularly want to express my gratitude to James Horan, who arranges those concerts, and Ken Meyer, who serves on both the Great Lakes and Upstate NY Boards for their cooperation.

I first heard Marko Topchii in a competition sponsored by the Baltimore Classical Guitar Society last year. I thought his performance (live streamed) was stunning and was a little disappointed when he was awarded second place. He made it to the semi-finals of the GFA Competition last summer (conveniently taking place in Manhattan), where I was able to hear his semi-final performance and then his triumphant performance in the finals. His first-place award was so well deserved; this is truly a world class player.

In the past, due to the generosity of my predecessor, Fred Hellwitz, our Society had for a few years presented GFA winners (these performances took place at St. Rose College, which sadly is no longer in operation). The last of these was several years ago and I am glad to revive that tradition. I hope we can get a large audience and can raise a lot of money for a worthy cause. I appreciate that our Board has agreed to forego any profit so that all monies raised can be donated. I have been working with a local organization called *Together For Ukraine* and they have and will provide support in many ways. I write this practically on the 80th anniversary of D-Day, and think of that sacrifice as we take this small step to defend democracy and resist tyranny.

—Paul Sweeny

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monthly Virtual Zoom Soirées

CGSUNY is now offering Monthly Virtual Soirees open to our membership. We will host a Zoom meeting on the Third Sunday of Every Month at 5pm and send information out to our membership. Members may come to perform or watch the Virtual Soiree.

Any questions can be directed to current Secretary, William Simcoe, via email:

wsimcoe@gmail.com

The Question for next quarter's issue:

Have you ever had to overcome a physical injury that left you either unable to play or playing with discomfort?

All members feel free to respond!

The George Lesh Memorial Scholarship

concert was held at Bainbridge Townhall Theater on June 2nd. Students from Bainbridge Guilford CSD and members of The Classical Guitar Society of Upstate New York played ensemble music together for the first half of the concert and then soloists from CGSUNY played after the intermission. The students played a variety of instruments including nylon string guitar, steel string guitar, electric guitar, ukulele, mandolin, and the electric bass. The ensemble selections included two folk tunes, two J.S. Bach selections, and two songs from 1990's video games. The students performed melodies and rhythmic accompaniment while members from CGSUNY played the harmony and bass parts. Volunteers from CGSUNY include Paul Sweeny, Giancarlo Sidoli, Ben Ellis, and Dr. Ken Meyer. Dennis Turechek was also in attendance to help spread the good word about CGSUNY and collect donations. The concert was co-hosted by the Jericho Arts Council in Bainbridge and helped with obtaining the Bainbridge Townhall Theater as the performance space. The concert raised over 600 dollars for the George Lesh Memorial Scholarship and donations continue to arrive via snail-mail. The concert has been held for the past two years on the first Sunday in June at 2pm and we plan to continue that tradition. George Lesh was a pivotal member of the CGSUNY Board and served as the secretary for many years. Most of you probably remember his smiling face, bright personality, and absolute love for music if you attended Fall Festivals in the past. The scholarship is awarded to graduating seniors who plan to attend college for a music degree of some kind and they must commit to music track while maintaining exemplary grades. Students must submit an application, obtain letters of recommendation, and provide an audition video to the George Lesh Scholarship Committee for consideration. If you are interested in making a donation to the scholarship fund or would like to share a story about George Lesh with the membership for a future article, please contact Matthew Downey via email. mdowney@cgsuny.org



See you next quarter in
the Fall Issue of

Fret Wire

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
your Society's
quarterly newsletter!

I know, I
look like
Kenny!

