

# Fret Wire

*The CGSUNY Newsletter*

**WINTER 2022/23**



## Fall Festival Coverage<sup>e</sup>

*The Classical Guitar Society of Upstate New York*

[www.cgsuny.org](http://www.cgsuny.org)

# 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:*

Our two amazing Fall Festival recitalists — Berta Rojas and Michael Leopold

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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.*

## WINTER 2022/23

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## *A Note from the CGSUNY President*

—Paul Sweeny

December 2022

Looking back over the past year of Covid, the Society has managed not only to survive but to thrive- a year in which we presented more events than in the past (and we have plans for yet more).

This year, as we strive to foster members' involvement, we will be making all CGSUNY board meetings, and their agendas, accessible to the entire

membership. Members will receive the agenda a week ahead and, upon request, a link to attend. Non-board members are welcome to observe and there will be time at the end of every meeting for questions and comments. We are eager to hear from you, and, as much as possible, we want to provide services and activities that are of interest to you. This could include other types of events, including elements

in our monthly Soirées.

This is your society, our goal is to serve our membership, community, and the guitar.

A happy holiday season and productive playing and practicing to all!

Cheers,

Paul



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

—Harry G. Pellegrin

### *What a Festival!*

Wow, not only did we get to actually see each other again, but, once again, we were privileged to have two phenomenal performers gracing our stage.

It was a great time, but there was a caveat. Some members were battling Covid so wisely chose to stay home. Such a pity though. Let's all keep a good thought and a fervent hope that next year will bring less illness!

Our headliner and regional; artist were brilliant! Michael Leopold brought a new [or old!] sound to our stage — the Theorbo and its voice thrilled those who had

never heard the instrument aside from recordings. It is a rich and delightful sonic treat!

Berta Rojas amazes. Not only is she a magnificent musician and sensitive artist, she is also a very warm, charming and lovely person. Her program, reviewed in this issue by our Deena Freed, and her master class, also reviewed here by El Presidente Paul Sweeny, were the stuff of legend. But I will let the reviewers speak!

I am sorry that this newsletter is reaching you two weeks later than I had planned—but the best laid plans...

On December eighth, I decided that running down stairs in loose slip-on slippers while wearing reading glasses was an acceptable risk. Well, I launched from an upper step and landed gracefully on my left shoulder and arm on a very heavy wooden chair. Result of this less than perfect landing? Frame damage. Three fractures with bone displacement of the humerus in the shoulder joint, and much bruising.

Needless to say that of this writing, I haven't been able to play guitar at all in almost three weeks. This should be an interesting comeback! The



pain has been severe. I will say this hurt more than when I fractured three vertebra in 1989.

So keep a good thought and a prayer for me. I am sleep deprived, cranky, bored, and without my guitar! On second thought, pray for my wife!

# Berta Rojas

## Concert at CGSUNY Fall Festival,

October 22, 2022

### Review by Deena Freed



I will try to describe, but will underestimate, the feelings of wonder and enjoyment that came up for me at Berta's concert. On stage, it's clear that she places herself in the context of the larger world with a sense of 'mission' that is an extra element playing into the harmony of her music. Her musicality and technique are exquisite, but the added quality adds a sense of peace and healing to her playing. It feels like a 'blessing' to attend her concerts!

The first part of the concert was dedicated to Ida Presti, who lived from (1924-1967). Ida was a French prodigy who played in a duo with her husband, Alexandre Lagoya. She is known to be a 'genius' and was underestimated. She died, tragically young, in Rochester, NY in 1967. Berta's dedication included mentioning that Ida had been an 'exceptional woman'.

Berta first played Ida's piece called *Segovia*, a lovely Spanish-sounding piece that highlighted Berta's gift for bringing out the beauty of melodic lines. Next came John Duarte's short *Idylle pour Ida Op. 93* which featured melodies set in an arpeggiated texture. The last piece in the Presti section was Ida's *Danse Rythmique* with Latin rhythms at a quicker pace, and lots of left hand movement.

Berta's tribute to Ida Presti continued as she referred to a 'definitive' recording of the Torroba *Sonatina* made by Ida at the age of 13. This well-known Segovia favorite has 3 movements. It was delightful to hear Berta's rendition which contained a gentle and beautifully blended approach to the sounds. I particularly noticed that she 'romanced' the chords rather than playing them with the dramatic 'slam' that I was accustomed to.

Berta announced a program change when she started the second half of the program: she deleted Sergio Assad's *Anido's Portrait*, substituting Three pieces by Agustin Barrios. I'm sure the Assad piece was great, but Berta playing Barrios is BLISSFUL. Berta has a special affinity for Barrios since they both come from Paraguay and they just seem like 'soulmates'.

She started with the gorgeous tremolo piece, *Una Limosna por el Amor de Diós*. This guitar masterpiece is a great comfort to me, especially with Berta's delicately nuanced tremolo and clear statement of the tremolo melody. The next added piece was *Maxixe*, a virtuosic and energetic dance piece with Brazilian roots. Then she played *Chôro de Saudade*, and did me the honor of dedicating the piece to me!! Barrios' *Tres Danzas Paraguayans* followed, which includes some familiar pieces. I noticed that the way she played chords was particularly effective; you could hear the 'block' sound of them while at the same time you heard the individual notes. Her final selection was *La Catedral*. This is another guitar masterpiece. Berta played the beginning *Preludio- Saudade* majestically and the *Andante Religioso* quickly and with grace. I simply felt transported. Her encore was Barrios' *Julia Florida*. It was the most beautiful, time-stopping performance of that beautiful piece that I've ever heard. I think I forgot to breathe.

Berta has a calm, tasteful style of playing. She certainly has virtuosic abilities, but she uses her skills to serve musical phrasing at all times. She blends her Paraguayan background into the expression of the music, combining a deep feeling for sound and rhythms. Her concerts feel like a meeting of souls and her music is a healing gift.

# Berta Rojas Master Class

## Berta Rojas Master Class

—Paul Sweeny

It has been said that those who cannot do, teach. While this is occasionally true, it is an insult to so many teachers. In the music world we are blessed to have artists who are both great performers and outstanding teachers. We had the great fortune of hearing Berta Rojas play a superlative concert on Saturday night, followed the next morning by a demonstration of great teaching. (And by the way, the opposite of the old saying is sometimes true- not every great performer has matching skill as a teacher.) Four different students played for Berta and she worked with each in a different way, focusing on what they most needed, and getting tangible results right away from all (and this immediate success depends on the quality of the students). And on top of that, she always kept the audience in mind and even got them involved in the process.

The first performer was CGSUNY Vice-President Donna Noyes-Grosser. She was a last-minute substitution for a student who had a family emergency that kept him from attending. Donna played the *Torija* movement from Federico Moreno-Torroba's Castles of Spain suite. Berta had Donna isolate the melody (reminding everyone the importance of that awareness) and had everyone sing the melody. It immediately came into clearer focus in Donna's playing. Berta also turned the piece into a duet, alternating call and response in a way that clarified the form of the composition.

Next came Jesse Angrist, a high school student who studies with Harry George Pellegrin. He played the beautiful *Una Limosna por el Amor de Diós* a tremolo piece by Agustín Barrios. Berta had performed this piece in her concert Saturday night, so Jesse and the rest of us knew that she had deep knowledge of this composition by her Paraguayan compatriot. She spent time working on Jesse's tremolo technique, echoing what Scott Tennant recommends in his *Pumping Nylon* (a book Berta recommended): playing the pami sequence slowly on the first string, playing all notes staccato by immediately planting the next finger. This provides the muscles a good habitual pathway which can then gradually increase in speed and become legato. (On a personal note, it has long seemed to me that this exercise is more useful if played on the second string. It is more than possible for the fingers to play on the first string making bigger movements which then are not accurate when transferred to other strings.) Berta also worked with him on the issue of posture, one of those near universal issues for so many of us. [Ed. Note: *Jesse and I have been working on this piece since Jesse literally has no nail on his right index finger. Berta spent a few minutes trying to attach an artificial nail, but to no avail — this is a route we have also attempted—also with no success. His tremolo is still better than most folks' because he has been so challenged by this obstacle. —Harry*]

The next two players were students of Jim Piorkowski at SUNY Fredonia. Jim has a close relationship with our society, having played a Rifenbark recital several years back and also having consistently sent students for our Collegiate Recitals. And in fact, two current Board members came from Jim's program at Fredonia. Ian Underwood played the Tárrega *Gran Vals*, a piece in 4 sections, in three different keys. Berta guided Ian through finding and expressing a different character for each (and pointing out the once-ubiquitous Nokia ringtone in bars 13-16 of the opening). Her assessment of the quiet and upper-register E Major section was that "now the children have taken the dance floor". In the technique area, she worked on posture and breathing. Again, this was useful for both the student and all the players observing.

The final performer was Frankie Ferri, who played the Léo Brouwer classic *Elogio de la Danza*. He played very well and Berta encouraged him to maintain a solid pulse during the opening section. What had already been quite strong got even more powerful. They spent time on one tricky, delicate arpeggio, trying out different fingerings and arriving at a good solution, which Frankie was able to absorb right away. The process illustrated is of course a great one for all of us. During the *Danza* section Berta praised his strong rhythmic sense and, using a very cool metronome app from her phone (with accompanying gestures), added that all Latin rhythms are "up, never down".

After some questions and answers this wonderful Festival came to a close. I was left sad at the end, but more importantly, deeply inspired. Berta was a great performer, a great teacher, and simply a wonderful human being. All who attended were fortunate indeed.



# GOING TO BAT FOR SEGOVIA

Andres Segovia was a giant! Now, there are a number of 'giant killers' around these days, and some criticisms are warranted, no doubt. But whatever your predilection is, you are going to be dealing with a giant. It is difficult to imagine what the classical guitar might be like today without Segovia's legacy. Perhaps the greatest contribution he made to the classical guitar was his insistence that the gentle guitar could not only fill a large concert hall with sufficient sound but also, with sufficient paying customers. He envisioned a day when the guitar would garner the same respect as other frontline instruments of the orchestra: The violin, cello, piano, harp, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, coronet, tuba, flute, etc.. To that end he encouraged composers to compose solo works and concerti for the guitar and orchestra, and many complied. After almost eighty years of public performances in most countries of the world the guitar was finally accepted and regarded with great respect. Soon music departments all over the world would offer classical guitar performance and doctoral programs in their curricula; perhaps the best sign that the guitar had arrived. It became normal to hear the guitar with other instruments in concerts of duos, trios, quartets, quintets, and even in opera where the guitar was in the original score. And yet...

When I moved to Upstate New York from NYC in 1979, the Glimmerglass Opera Company was establishing its present reputation as a top flight musical organization. I auditioned for The Barber of Seville and was hired to play the guitar part that year. I subsequently played Don Pasquale and Falstaff in succeeding years. In 1994 Glimmerglass had a new music director and was planning to do The Barber of Seville. I immediately sent a letter of application, sending my resume reviewing my history with Glimmerglass to the personnel manager and thereby throwing my hat in the ring. The date was January 6, 1994. I also sent copies of that letter to the steward of the opera orchestra and to the president of the union. January, February, March, April, May, June---crickets!!! I learned in late June from the principal flutist of the Glimmerglass Opera Company that a harpist had been hired to play the guitar part in The Barber of Seville!

The new music director and conductor of Glimmerglass had a bad experience with a guitarist in the past and decided to substitute the guitar part with a harpist who was his friend. The harpist needed just one more performance that year to gain tenure in the orchestra so the motivation from management's side was clear and understandable. It was also contrary to the language in the contract with the local music union. The contract states that, "The Opera agrees to hire

additional musicians as required by the original score".....later on in the sentence it offers exceptions where scores are not original. The score being used that year by the Opera was an original score! Also in the contract it states that any exceptions had to be signed by the opera orchestra committee along with management by February 15 of the performance year. I was assured this had been done but in fact it was signed by the chair of the orchestra committee only and not the orchestra committee itself. There were members of the committee who were blissfully unaware that a guitarist had petitioned for that job as late as June.

Many letters flew back and forth between me and the steward arguing the legal and moral aspects of the case at hand but the steward, with moral support from the local union, as well as the federation prevailed upon the remaining orchestra committee members to sign off on the exception agreement during the intermission of the first performance of The Barber Of Seville! You would think that that was the end of the story.

On August 5th I wrote the personnel manager:

Please return my resume as soon as possible. I had not realized at the time how tacky the Glimmerglass Opera Company had become in recent years. Even the appearance of an association with the opera is damaging to my reputation as a musician and as a human being. Thanking you in advance for attending to this matter. Sincerely,  
Dennis Turechek

But wait, there's more. I then gathered up all the correspondence I had accrued with the steward of the orchestra committee, put it in a big box, stirred it with a stick and sent it to the Federation. Within a week we heard back with the Federation admonishing the union to prepare to file a grievance against the opera and agreeing that the union had not properly interpreted the language in the contract. They had second thoughts about a week after that saying they didn't think the union could win a grievance when they had been so derelict in representing my interests in the first place. Instead, they wrote a letter to the opera company telling them that they must hire what is in an original score and no instrumental substitutions were allowed and that failure to follow the language in the contract exactly would result in grievances being filed.

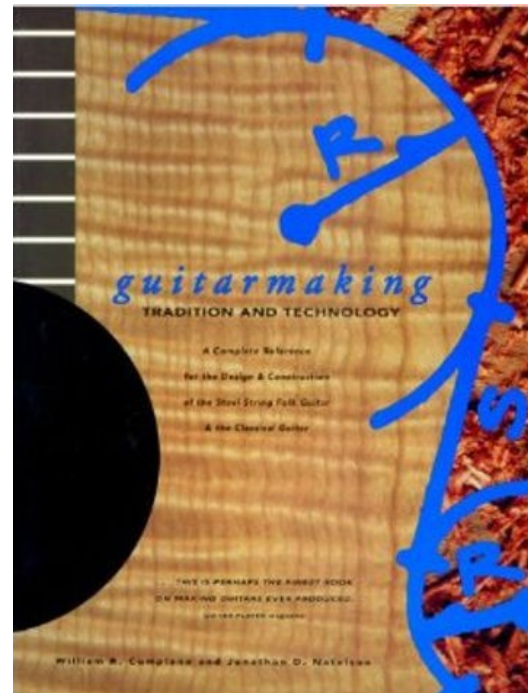
I was subsequently kicked upstairs to vice president of the local that fall. It is easier to watch a trouble maker if they are in an official capacity! Rumors had been flying around that the only reason I had pursued this harp for guitar controversy was because I wanted to gain work in the future. At a meeting with most of the orchestra members spreading those rumors I handed out copies of the letter demanding my resume be returned. That stopped all the rumors.

The next year the opera decided to do Don Pasquale which calls for 2 guitars. In perfect character the opera wanted to do an instrumental substitution of harp for guitar(s). They complained bitterly that they were being treated unfairly and raised quite a ruckus but the union held firm. Two guitarists gained employment that year. To this day, guitarists have been hired when required in an original score. Even an opera company can learn. Where ever you are Andres, I hope you are smiling.

Dennis Turechek  
10/25/22

***Please read if you are looking for a  
new classical  
(or steel string)  
instrument!***

I am writing this post to anyone, but especially anyone who lives in the New York/New England area. In Northampton, Massachusetts is a wonderful luthier named William Cumpiano. Bill has been making guitars for many years, but also teaching others to construct guitars. He is also a published author of numerous articles, and the book GUITARMAKING: Tradition and Technology.



Bill's website is: <https://www.cumpiano.com/home>

Bill's method of teaching has involved working 1:1 with a student over a number of weeks. They visit his studio each day, working to craft a guitar to their specifications and under Bill's tuteledge, and return home with a guitar they have made themselves. Bill makes a guitar alongside the student, showing each step in the process. You can read the many testimonials on his website.

This is the part where you might have an interest. At the end of an amazing career, Bill has a number of the guitars he has made as a teacher, both classical and steel string. He is offering these in his "In The White Sale", at significant savings.

—Daniel Diamond





See you next quarter in  
the Spring Issue of

# Fret Wire

*The CGSUNY Newsletter*

*Have some news?*

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you wish to present to the  
membership?*

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