

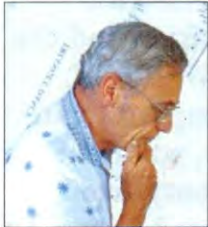


The Classical Guitar Society of Upstate New York Newsletter

Spring 2004

Volume 1, Ed. 1

President's Message



I recently received a letter from one of our members questioning CGSUNY's process for choosing

performers at member meetings.

There was concern that performers were "hand picked" and that other times, announced member meetings didn't happen at all.

It was suggested that the Board establish a written policy so members would know what to expect.

I realize that our member meetings aren't functioning as we had originally planned—as open, informal performance opportunities held after board meetings.

After advertising these meetings for the past two years and having very little participation, we have been grateful whenever anyone has specifically requested an opportunity to perform.

Thus, the few "hand picked" performers we've had were actually requests from members.

Much of the reluctance to perform at member meetings has been exacerbated by prolonged board meetings, which eat into the time we've set aside for performances.

Accordingly, in an effort to better accommodate our members, we've decided to separate member meetings from board meetings.

They'll now be held quarterly at various venues throughout upstate New York. Board members will be responsible for finding appropriate settings like coffee houses, libraries, restaurants, private homes, churches, and the like.

Keep in mind that all regular board meetings are open to CGSUNY's general membership, and we still encourage everyone who has an interest in what goes on in these monthly sessions to attend.

The purpose of this message is to illustrate the importance of member participation in the daily workings of CGSUNY.

If I hadn't received that letter, the policy with respect to member meetings would have gone on unexamined. This policy is not written in stone, by the way, and we welcome your ideas, suggestions, amendments, corrections, etc.

CGSUNY's a grass roots organization and since we're not heavily endowed, we can be more flexible than most. It's crucial that member participation becomes the norm, and not the exception.

Dennis Turechek

Join us!

When: Sunday, March 21

Time: 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Where: Latte Lounge
Main St., Oneonta

To Play: Contact Gail @
musicalm@hancock.net

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CGSUNY Spring Concert: May 15th

CGSUNY, in collaboration with State Senator Thomas W. Libous (Binghamton), will be hosting a Spring Concert, featuring internationally acclaimed guitarist **Petar Kodzas**, on Saturday, May 15th on the 18th Floor of the Binghamton State Office Building.

The concert, which is **free** and open to the public, will begin at 6:30 pm with Connecticut-based guitarist **Lou Romao** (www.louisromao.com). Romao, a fellow CGSUNY member, will be performing a variety of classical pieces and original compositions.

For you jazz enthusiasts, we have **From the Bridge**, the chamber jazz trio featuring double-bassist John Davey, classical guitarist Dennis Turechek and violist Amy Merrill. The Bridge performs a unique blend of original compositions as well as the works of Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus, Villa-Lobos and Lauro Almeida.

Our featured artist, Petar Kodzas, has performed throughout Europe & the United States and has participated in several international competitions, including the Guitar Foundation of America Guitar Competition and the distinguished Walter W. Naumburg Competition in New York City, where he was among twenty-five guitarists selected from around the world.



Petar Kodzas

Mr. Kodzas' program will include classics by Bach, Duarte, Rodrigo, Tedesco and Mertz.

Please mark your calendar and join us in Binghamton on the 15th. It's sure to be a memorable evening!

Petar will also be hosting a **Masterclass** on the 15th at 10 a.m. in the Warren M. Anderson Community Room.

Where: Warren M. Anderson Community Room
Binghamton State Office Building, 18th Fl.
(44 Hawley Street, Binghamton 13901)

When: Saturday, May 15, 2004
6:30 - 9:00 pm, followed by reception

Performers:

6:30 pm: Lou Romao
7:15 pm: From the Bridge
8:00 pm: Petar Kodzas

Cost: Free of Charge & Open to the Public
General Seating

Bring your guitar!



Lou Romao

Choosing a Guitar

By Bruce Walker

As a luthier, I'm often asked for advice about how to choose a new guitar. Here's my take on the subject.

The primary areas to pay attention to are:

1. Construction
2. Feel
3. Sound
4. Cost

Sound is obviously the most important aspect of any instrument. It is, after all, what the instrument is made for.

I once was advised by a well-known luthier that first a guitar needs to be attractive. His theory is that a prospective buyer needs to be drawn to the instrument in order to have a reason to pick it up and play it. Only then will the guitar's sound and playability be revealed.

For this reason, we will examine the four areas in the order of construction, feel, sound and cost.

Construction: Look carefully at the instrument and notice if seams are even and closed. Make sure that the bridge is in the right place and that the frets are correctly placed. (For exactly how to measure this, please contact me). I've seen many guitars with the frets out of place or the bridge in the wrong position. As you can imagine, those instruments will NEVER play in tune. Yet there are many such guitars being played every day.

Check inside the body of the guitar to ensure it's clean and neat. Carefully tap around the perimeter of the top and back to check for buzzing or rattling produced by loose braces. Check if the top is deformed in front or behind the bridge.

Check that the neck is straight and the frets are level by sighting down the neck. The plane of the neck should terminate just below the crown of the bridge. Also make sure the tuning machines are tight and operate smoothly.



Feel: Next, hold the guitar in the playing position and notice how it feels. The neck should be smooth and comfortable. It should gently fit the hand. The instrument should be balanced so that it isn't too heavy at the headstock.

A guitar that is light and tightly built will be more responsive, sound better and be easier to play than a heavier one. Many instruments are overbuilt and heavy in order to preclude warranty problems for the manufacturer.

Sound: Now we come to the meat of the story! If an instrument sounds good to you first, and to your audience second, it must be good. It's as simple as that. But not!

Sound is an elusive subject to define. For our purposes, it includes tone, balance, separation, sustain and intonation.

Tone is purely subjective. The instrument must sound good to you or you will not enjoy it and therefore not play it much.

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Balance simply means that the guitar has bass and treble that each stand out. Neither should be weak. All instruments have areas of the fretboard that are weaker than others, but none should be pronounced.

Separation is often overlooked. When playing chords, do you hear individual tones rather than just a homogenous sound?

Sustain simply means that the notes last rather than quickly die. Lower notes will usually resonate longer than higher notes. Sustain is also affected by the density of the wood used in the neck.

Not incidentally, the harmonics played on a guitar should be clear and bell-like. They should ring out and have good sustain. Keep in mind, however, that the quality of a harmonic is affected by the position in which the string is plucked. If it's plucked on a vibrating node, it'll be clear and loud. If plucked elsewhere it'll be somewhat muted.

Intonation is a favorite subject of mine.

To read a detailed article on intonation, please visit my website:

www.walker-guitars.com

So now we can check out how the instrument sounds to us. Keep in mind that no matter what a salesman may tell you in order to sell you an instrument, the sound can rarely be improved without significant expense.

Cost: A good guitar can be purchased for just a few hundred dollars. A good guitar can also be purchased for thousands of dollars. What you are buying may be significantly different from what someone else purchases.

Many people buy automobiles for tens of thousands of dollars and it may only have a life expectancy of 10 years or less. The same person may never consider spending even half as much on a musical instrument, even if it meant their livelihood or their happiness, and would last a lifetime. Go figure!

When purchasing an instrument, remember that unusual features may negatively affect its resale or trade value. Make sure that if the instrument is new, you get a good warrantee. A lifetime warrantee to the original owner should always cover a good guitar.

A small amount of effort in selecting a guitar will pay off in the long run. You have a right to be assured of satisfaction with the purchase. Remember that in addition to the cost, you are purchasing an instrument that you will hopefully spend thousands of hours enjoying.



To end this subject, you might want to check with CGSUNY about its guitar purchase program. You may be able to get the guitar of your dreams while helping your society and saving over 50% on the price!

Flamenco City

The final event of the 2004 New York City Flamenco Festival took place at the Beacon Theater and featured no less a personage than **Paco de Lucia**.

The lights dimmed and before a packed theater, Paco de Lucia walked leisurely onto the stage to roaring applause—just he and his guitar.

His starting solo was slow and pensive; he seemed almost ill at ease. Sitting alone with legs crossed and a guitar resting on his right thigh, Paco took us on a rambling musical journey through the Andalusian psyche.

The piece came alive in rich flamenco form as he brought it to a fiery ending. One can almost draw a structural parallel between classical Indian music and how flamenco performers often end a piece by speeding up, getting louder, and stopping so suddenly that the listener is left spinning in the ensuing silence.

This should come as no surprise, as flamenco music is the child of Gypsy culture, and the Gypsies are the long lost children of India.

Indian musical influences are evident elsewhere in flamenco. I have seen tablas, as well as ghatam, included in a number of percussion kits.



Ghatam is a large clay jar with an additional hole on the side that is opened and closed with one hand while the other hand slaps the top and sides to produce a ringing, ceramic tabla-like sound. Indian percussion blends nicely within the flamenco idiom, almost giving it more of a ring of authenticity (if such a thing can possibly be said). Cajon and ghatam were the percussionists' instruments of choice this night.

Paco was joined for his second piece by Israel Escobar and Enrique Carbonell on percussion, and Hermania Garbarri and Victoria Borja on vocals. The women had beautiful voices with which they spun out high winding melodies with a lot of gypsy feeling.

This piece was lighter in tone than the first, and was followed by an alegrías for guitar and percussion in which the spirit of the evening began establish itself. Then came another guitar solo and another ensemble piece, this time featuring percussion, palmas, guitar and electric bass.

The bassist, Alan Rodriguez, is Cuban. We were informed at the start of the show that the first ten performances of this tour had to be canceled because the FBI wouldn't give Sr. Rodriguez clearance to enter the country. So, as we can see, politics and music don't mix—or certainly only on a very superficial level.

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After intermission, the entire ensemble took the stage for the rest of the evening.

Onstage, from left to right, were the percussionist, the bassist, a vocalist (who also played ghatam, guitar and bouzouki), Paco, a wind player (flute and saxes), and the women.

They began with Zyryab, from the recording of the same name. I missed the mandolina part that is heard at the beginning of the recording, with its winding, charming melody. Paco filled in for it nicely with his guitar, though, and when the flute came in everything fell into perspective.

Next was a bulerias, Patio Custodio, from his new album, "Cositas Buenas." A catchy, rapid-fire melody shared by both bass and guitar is the driving force behind this piece. Paco's playing is effortless. His right hand hardly moves, yet produces tone to spare, seamless tremolos and endless rasgueados.

Like all true masters, Paco de Lucia projects a powerful, almost mystical presence over the stage and he makes even the most difficult passages look effortless to perform.

One gets the impression that, regardless of how loose or improvised the performance of the chicks in the nest may appear to be, all takes place under the eagle's wing. The dart of an eye here and a slight grin of acknowledgement there, kept the group on a course of musical perfection.

The rest of the second set possessed an easy energy that brought the crowd to its feet, crying "encore!"

Paco returned to the stage alone and bowed humbly, after which the band came out and launched into "Entre Dos Aguas."



Paco de Lucia

This early classic is a seminal example of what would become nuevo flamenco. "Entre Dos Aguas" and his recordings with El Camaron, along with "Zyryab" and "Sorroco," are essential to understanding Paco de Lucia's music.

Oh, let's not forget his latest, "Cositas Buenas", which is a great return to his roots while still playing on the edge. But then, all this "understanding" is secondary. What's important is simply to listen, be moved and enjoy.

Frank Galante

Upcoming Event

Come see the **Claremont Duo**, featuring three-time Grammy award winning cellist **Maxine Neuman**, and internationally renowned guitarist **Peter Ernst** perform pieces by:

Girolamo Frescobaldi,
Johann P. Schifferholtz,
Nicolo Paganini,
Gabriel Faure,
Allen Shawn; and
Astor Piazzolla

⇒ **Tuesday, March 23rd**

⇒ **7:30 p.m.**

⇒ **SUNY Oneonta's
Instructional Resource
Center (IRC 3)**

⇒ **For more information,
contact Gail Hamilton @
musicalm@hancock.net
or call (607) 865-8775.**

See you there!