



The Classical Guitar Society of Upstate New York Newsletter

Summer 2004

Volume 2

President's Message



We set up chairs for forty people and wound up looking for chairs for two hundred. Is there anyone in upstate New York who didn't attend the Spring Concert co-sponsored by CGSUNY and Senator Tom

Libous? An astonishing

turnout!! Kudos to Valerie Tressler whose idea it was and who coordinated the venue, catering, and advertising in the Binghamton area, and to Gail Hamilton who spent tireless hours printing programs, tickets, brochures, etc.

Still, how to account for such an outpouring? Perhaps in times such as these where the art of making war, making money, and making politics seems to dominate our lives, the gentler arts are like manna from heaven. We fill a hunger in people who need to be reminded of higher humanistic aspirations.

Indeed, in my opinion, the tougher it gets in the practical, work a day world, the greater the need for musical events of the kind we experienced on the 18th floor of the Binghamton State Office Building.

We make music whether needed or not, of course, but it is always more rewarding to know that what we do is, in fact useful.

Dennis Turechek

The Classical Guitar Society of
Upstate New York presents:

**A
Classical
Guitar**

Spring
Concert

Featuring:
*Lou Romao
Petar Kodzas
From the Brigg*

Sponsored by
Senator Thomas W. Libous

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If you'd like to submit an article or announce an upcoming event in our next newsletter, please email Valerie Tressler @ Valry1@aol.com.

A View From the 18th Floor

By Tom Rasely

On Saturday, May 15th, members, players and friends gathered for the 1st Annual CGSUNY Spring Guitar Concert, sponsored by State Senator Thomas W. Libous.

People began showing up on the 18th floor of the Binghamton State Office Building around 10:00 am, enjoying the view of the Triple Cities area, and socializing. Then we got down to business.

Petar Kodzas (Eastman School of Music) sat down for a master class with two young men (Jon Tario and Dylan Neary, both from the Albany area). Petar shared his ideas on tuning, warm-ups, and how to approach new and old music.



At one point, Petar (half jokingly) identified the two major problems with guitar playing as being the right hand and the left hand. He then went on to suggest some practical techniques for each. It was very intense, very fruitful exploration of technique as a means to a more complete musicality.

The afternoon session began around 2:00 pm. A variety of players (members and non)

Some played, some didn't; some taught, some learned; some just visited. It was a fun time. We hope that we will see even more members/players at our next open meeting and players jam.

The evening event attracted around 150 people to the free concert. Lou Romao from Connecticut opened the program. Lou always brings his personal stamp of musicianship and style, plus a high-end energy, to his nylon-string guitar.



Next up: "**From The Brigg**" (or: The Artists Formerly Known As "From The Bridge"), a downsized trio, now with only two members: Dennis Turechek (guitar) and John Davey (bass). Whatever they're called, these guys presented an engaging set of improvisational jazz featuring original tunes as well as standards.

The evening was topped off with a fabulous performance by our special guest Petar Kodzas. Petar's artistry brings life to pieces that span 300 years of music. With a delicate but purposeful touch, he is able to make the listener aware not only of a beautiful melody, but of the underlying nuances and counterpoint. What a treat.

CGSUNY is dedicated to the promotion of all aspects and capabilities of the nylon-string guitar, and our 1st Annual Spring Concert was a perfect example.

We would like to thank everyone who came out to enjoy the evening with us, and especially to thank Senator Libous and his wonderful staff for making this event a reality.

For more information on upcoming meetings, concerts, or to become a member, please visit our website: www.cgsuny.org.

The Luthier's Corner: Guitars & Humidity Redux

By Bruce Walker

This is a short revisit of humidity and musical instruments. There was a more extensive treatment of the subject in our very first newsletter. You can find more information by revisiting it or on my website, www.walker-guitars.com.



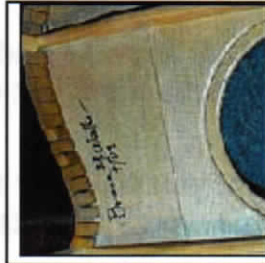
Lately I have encountered more instruments that have been over-humidified than normal, so I decided to address over humidification briefly. It is rapidly becoming my least favorite subject. It is very important nonetheless.

As the relative humidity of the environment (on a stand, in your case, etc.) surrounding your instrument increases, it will take on water and expand. As the wood expands, it has to move.

The usual results are that the wood will distort and glue joints will suffer. As a reminder:

- ⇒ The grain lines in the spruce or cedar top will raise and the ridges will show through the finish.
- ⇒ Glued joints will become more visible in the top and back.

- ⇒ The top and back will begin to bulge and there will be more pronounced depressions in the areas of the heelblock and tailblock.
- ⇒ The finish may appear to be sinking into the pores of the wood on the back and sides.
- ⇒ Prolonged exposure to excessive humidity can cause serious (real expensive) injury to your instrument. There may be loose braces, bridge or fingerboard as a result.
- ⇒ The obvious remedy is to lower the humidity when necessary. I cannot over emphasize the importance of **monitoring** your instrument's environment and taking remedial action when necessary. Beware of dampits, etc., without close monitoring.
- ⇒ **Remember: *Eternal vigilance is the price!***



Want a concert quality hand-crafted custom built guitar at less than half the price of a store bought instrument? Then look no further than our own **Bruce Walker** who through a combination of fortuitous personal circumstances, a passion for fine lutherie, and his rock-steady devotion to CGSUNY and its members, has put the guitar of your dreams within easy and affordable reach. Not only will you receive a fine guitar, but you will also have the distinct pleasure of working with Bruce as you select your guitar's components – fine woods, bracing and construction options, tuning machines, and rosette design – and then follow his work, step by step, with regular e-mail communication and tantalizing digital photos. You'll also have the pleasure of personally visiting him at his studio in East Branch in the heart of the Catskills, a pleasant day trip and a great excuse to take a break from your daily routine. Bruce is not only a superb luthier but a great host and raconteur.

My experience in purchasing a Bruce Walker hand built classical guitar began last October 2003 when I attended the CGSUNY event in Oneonta. I heard many talented musicians and many fine guitars that day but remember being especially impressed with the sweet resonant tones of two Bruce Walker guitars that were played. After that, I was definitely disappointed when I didn't win the Bruce Walker guitar at the raffle held at the Dennis Koster concert later that evening. However, I did pay careful attention to the offer Bruce announced earlier that afternoon: a custom built concert quality guitar for the price of materials plus a \$1000 donation to CGSUNY. Wow – *what a deal!* I decided right then that I couldn't pass this one up. Now that I have the guitar and am enjoying it daily, I'm so glad I didn't.

But before going any further, let me take you on a quick personal tour of the guitars – and guitar playing – that preceded what has felt like finally *coming home* to my new Bruce Walker classical guitar.

It started in the mid 60's with folk music. At age 13, the Kingston Trio and the Limelighters were my gurus. My father bought me a cheap Japanese classical on which I banged out the chords to Tom Dooley. After several months, I took four or five lessons from Jerry Garcia (yes, *the* Jerry Garcia before his *Grateful Dead* days) who taught me some finger picking licks by writing out Bob Dylan's *Don't Think Twice* in tablature. Soon I was into rock with a rented Les Paul, my mother tearing her hair out in our thin walled California house; mostly surf music (Beach Boys, Ventures) and then the British invasion: Beatles, Stones, Them, Yardbirds, and the Animals. Eventually, I graduated from the rental to a Fender strat - maple neck with sunburst finish -- and joined a band called *The Majestics*.

Later in high school, I was in a group called *The Lower Half*. By the end of high school, however, jazz and classical were claiming more of my attention. I studied Micky Baker's jazz books and, with a piano playing English teacher, formed a trio which played standards. I didn't have a jazz axe but borrowed a friend's hollow body Grestch Country Gentleman. By that time, I had also traded in my Japanese classical for a Guild folk guitar. In college, with my rock band days behind me and with no thought as to the future value of a vintage Fender, I sold my strat to a Belgian rocker for \$80 to keep me in beer and cigarettes (oh, the foolishness of youth!). Meanwhile, I had dabbled in classical style guitar playing, attempting some Carcassi and Giuliani studies on my Guild steel string guitar (ouch!). Musically, I had become increasingly drawn to classical music in general and classical guitar music in particular: Segovia (his Bach album with the *Chaconne* a favorite); Julian Bream, John Williams, Narcisso Yepes, and Alexander Legoya. With all that classical music in my head, I sold my Guild dreadnaught folk guitar for an Aria, a mid-priced Japanese model on which I attempted to learn the first several Sor studies and some of Pappas' Bach arrangements.

After years of rock and folk and a little jazz, changing my technique wasn't easy. I had to shift the guitar from my right to my left leg and *completely change* my right hand position. I took several lessons from a local teacher in Cambridge, MA who compounded my technical confusion by having me switch to the Fernando Sor no-nails fingertip style that he had himself recently switched to. For college graduation, my parents bought me a Guild classical – a Mark V which a year later was smashed to bits in its case by vandals who broke into our apartment in West Philly. That was a blow. All I could afford as a replacement was a used lower end Guild classical that I bought through the new Philadelphia Classical Guitar Society. For many years after that my guitar playing languished as I pursued a doctorate in Psychology, got married, had kids, and succumbed to other claims on my attention. After moving to Saratoga Springs 18 years ago to take a job at Skidmore College, I had the good fortune to meet Joel Brown who helped rekindle my interest in classical guitar. Joel helped me purchase a new student guitar – a Dauphin. Later, I upgraded at a badly dinged but nice sounding Ramirez 2E. Wanting to try a spruce top model for a change, I then bought a German made Rowdon Hall guitar but I've never really felt comfortable with its slightly narrower 50 mm nut neck. Which brings me finally to my new Bruce Walker guitar. Brothers and sisters *I'm home at last!*

Waiting while that new guitar was being built was a bit like being pregnant – lots of positive anticipation but also moments of fear about the actual condition of the eagerly awaited "baby". Like an expectant parent, I was prepared to love it but also braced for possible let down. So I can't tell you how happy and relieved I was when I finally made the trip to play the instrument before the final adjustments were made and the finish was applied. My tremulous hands produced some shaky playing *but the guitar itself sounded wonderful!* In another month, my wife and I were back in East Branch to take delivery and share a pleasant dinner at an excellent local restaurant with Bruce and his lady friend Cheri.

Well that's my story. Thanks, Bruce for this opportunity to purchase one of your wonderful guitars. As a psychologist, I'll end by saying that if you don't choose to take advantage of this incredibly generous offer *you ought to have your head examined...*
