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JULIAN BREAM AT 60
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NEWS · REVIEWS · FEATURES

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Julian Bream

'THE GUITAR IS THE MUSIC OF THE STREETS'

JULIAN BREAM IN CONVERSATION WITH CHRIS KILVINGTON

IT'S a gorgeous June day in deepest Wiltshire; the unspoilt meadows are full of buttercups, there's barely a sound bar the hum of insects and the song of the occasional bird. The pace is slow going on slower. It feels good. I have come to interview Julian Bream at his home at the time of his 60th birthday, but I don't really want an interview as such, I just hope he'll talk freely . . . and that's how it turned out to be. Both at the time and afterwards I thought how much secondary meaning could be read into many of his comments, but I've refrained from unsubtly interposing my opinions here. I could be wrong, after all. And, besides, so much more fun for everyone to form his own opinion uninfluenced. The greeting was warm, and we were talking immediately.

CK: I'll show you this one to start us off. This is from an interview you did with Lance Bosman for GI in 1985, and you said 'guitar music is largely not intellectual music.' I'm very interested in that today. After all, you are regarded as a champion of quality new music and one of its greatest interpreters. What did you mean by that, or what might you have meant, and how would you reflect on that now?

JB: About 40 years ago I met the famous Italian composer Gian Francesco Malipiero, had an introduction to him, and played for him on both the lute and the guitar. He said: 'You know, they're two very different instruments, the lute and the guitar; the lute is music from the spheres and the guitar is the music of the streets.' In a sense that conveys exactly what I meant when I said that a lot of guitar music is not intellectual; the guitar is an earthy, sensuous, and ravishingly beautiful sound in the right hands. The music, or the quality of the music, is nearly always on the slight side, it doesn't have any grave intellectual import. I feel the guitar is an instrument of the senses; it has a great charm, and it has half a dozen pieces which could be said to be great, probably not half a dozen even. And the rest of its repertoire is, on the whole, rather lightweight. But that doesn't mean that a fine player cannot invest that music with great meaning. And in a sense it's more of a challenge to play the guitar repertory than that of the piano.

It's a paradoxical challenge. Does it bring out something special in the performer?

Yes. I think it was well summed up by Edgar Allan Poe in his short story, The Fall of the House of Usher. The anti-hero is a guitarist, and the gist of the idea as it affected Poe was that although the range of the instrument was not great, because of those very limitations there was a certain tension created in the performances which made them magical. He said it much more beautifully than that, of course . . .

But that's the message?

That's the message. The constraints and discipline can

PHOTO: COLIN COOPER

Julian Bream

be creative as well as sometimes being harmful to the creative process. You see, to play a dozen notes on the guitar beautifully – any notes – it can evoke such expressiveness. But its *how* you play those notes which is important. And *how* you link those notes, and *how* you use the diminuendos of the plucked string that in itself creates a myriad of silences; but it's those silences and the tensions between the impact of the next note it creates. That is important – that is the poetry.

Why does one get it right, so close to being perfect sometimes, and not at others? That's true, isn't it?

Yes, it's true, but that's the charm of public performance, that it's never the same. Even the instrument itself, because the density of wood is so fine compared to that of a violin for example. It's very finely calibrated, always subject to the prevailing conditions of the air, the humidity, the dryness and so on. Sometimes in a concert hall where it's too humid the instrument simply won't sing as you want it to. And when it's very dry the guitar can be rather shrill and un-giving. And your nails of course, their condition and length, and the state of your strings, whether they're brand new or three months old. . . should they have been changed (*much laughter*). Then the hall itself and its acoustic, which obviously very much affects the way you play. I always play a little faster in a dry acoustic, and I think that most people do, because you've got no assistance

from the hall to help the notes sustain and thereby achieve the phrasing as you want to present it. Another consideration, and a most important one, is the public. When you go to a concert there's such a wonderful – or *can* be, shall we say – such a wonderful frequency of

"To play half a dozen notes on the guitar beautifully – any notes – can evoke such expressiveness. But it's how you play those notes which is important"

feeling amongst most of the people, and that really feeds back to the performer. And if people are attentive and concentrating and willing to let themselves *go* into the music, then I think certain things can happen in a recital which make it a memorable, or at least a pleasurable, event.

This business about the audience – why should it not always be excellent? Every audience has surely come to be entertained or involved?

Well, I just wonder about that. When I was a student I used to go to concerts in London and they weren't hugely advertised as concerts are today. There was perhaps a little notice on a Wednesday in the Times or the Telegraph, but you had to know where to look. But the fact that you had to search and hunt, make an effort, meant that you weren't just some ordinary old concert-goer. And that is already a wonderful beginning from the point of view of the public. Nowadays promoters want to get as many egalitariun bums on seats as possible, because it is largely an economic exercise for them. And so the great thing is to find new audiences, and that comes about through advertising, the media, and so forth. They bring in people who wouldn't normally have gone to concerts 40 years ago. They think, 'Hello, I saw him on the box, perhaps it might be a nice idea to go to his concert.' So they go. You get people coming out of curiosity more than anything else. And sponsorship . . . I'll give you a typical example of a bit of dead wood in the audience. Nowadays, nearly all my concerts are sponsored, like the one the other night in Bath sponsored by the gas company. They gave their top employees tickets, with a special bar laid on for themselves and their friends – then they hear the concert and have a slap-up dinner somewhere afterwards. So its really just an outing for the company, and people are not going to say no to a trip to Bath, with a free concert and a free meal thrown in. It's very hard to get through to dead wood. And in a sense, if you succeed, you've actually achieved something! That's the problem with this modern sponsorship: admirable when it's working; but, finally, it doesn't always help.

What do you think would be the perfect audience, if such a thing could exist. Is that a silly question?

No, it isn't – although I don't think anything is perfect. London can produce a very good audience, the Wigmore for example. The one year I couldn't use the Wigmore I went to the Elizabeth, a cold and rather austere hall but not a bad acoustic. And I had one of the best audiences I ever had. Yet the Wigmore is the ideal hall for the guitar; when I was a kid just after the war all the great artists played there, I mean the very greatest! That was *the* hall, with just 500 seats.

Who were they?

Fournier, all his London cello recitals were given there. There was Victoria de los Angeles, all her early song recitals. Rubinstein . . . they were all that calibre of artist. To go there and hear them was a real treat, it was the perfect place. And the Segovia evenings there were just as magical! Whereas when he moved across the river to the South Bank into that very dry, large hall, I felt it was only half a musical experience. So I think that halls are very important as far as the quality of audience goes.

How do you go about choosing a new piece – and what are the processes for you between that and performing it? Quite a procedure . . .

An interesting procedure. These days you're asked for your programme maybe a year ahead, whereas before it was a couple of months. People want to get everything organised early and I find that rather sad. I've just been giving my programmes for next May, yet now I have the summer pretty much off to learn things and make records. I'll probably learn something that I'd like to play in my next season's concerts, but really I'm stuck.

You can't change?

Well, I do occasionally, but not much. And then my programmes do have a shape, a typical rather conventional shape. I play what I really like to play and if nobody likes it well, they can go home. To be able to take that attitude, well, at the age of 60 I feel you've earned that prerogative. So, yes, I only play what I like, music that stimulates me. And then I never, ever, get bored with pieces. But I do rest them, perhaps for a number of years, and then pick them up again, and I see totally new things. I'm doing that now with Lennox Berkeley's *Sonatina*. I took it on tour with me recently – I do that, look at other music, as assiduously I'm not always practising my programme in order to keep a sense of freshness – and I found that the old concept I had of the piece wasn't bad but that I just didn't bring out all the beauties which I now *feel* in the composition. I can tell by the fingerings I used. It's a very well-made piece, and charming music. I remember Britten once saying – and he never had a good word for any other composer, well maybe not entirely, but he was very critical of English composers in particular— 'That is very nearly a great piece' And coming from him you can be sure it's a damn good piece anyway.

To what extent is your interpretation planned in your dynamic and tonal phrasing, and tempo, and to what extent is it intuitive on the night?

Well, tempo is very spontaneous because as I mentioned earlier it is, among other things, to do with the acoustics and how you feel. You know, it's the old heart that sets the rhythm. Tone colour which, as you

know, I use rather a lot, well, I sort of work it out but not always. Sometimes I enjoy experimenting or reversing the colours, a passage taken near the bridge I might try beyond the soundhole and so forth. And that keeps one on one's toes.

Is that purely for the possibility of discovery?

Yes. And for fun. So that's what happens. Now, dynamics are largely pre-arranged; but the intensities of those dynamics are not.

And how does that happen?

According to the hall and the audience. If the audience is really concentrating you make them concentrate even more – well, you don't *make* them, you just do, it happens. Sometimes you can play so quietly, perhaps a tiny gentle artificial harmonic, but if you can get it to ring exquisitely with some left hand vibrato added it just has a certain magic. If the sound is good . . . such an important thing about the carrying power of the guitar is the actual sound you make on it. If the sound has a real centre, is really focused, then that sound *really* carries through the air. It doesn't matter about decibels; it gets there. and if the sound is not well focused, a bit angular or thin, that will often not register so much with people. It won't travel. I experiment a great deal when I'm performing, always trying to get the instrument to ring a bit more or to have a little bit more incision in the articulation. I'm always trying things and sometimes I fall flat on my face. But it's worth a try.
Tightrope walking?

Yeah, a little bit. But audiences like that. The ones that know, they know what you're doing and they're saying 'No, no, he's not going to get away with that one.' And you do or you don't.

It keeps it live, doesn't it?

That's it! I was doing a concert recently somewhere in Germany, and finished with Falla's *Miller's Dance.* And they're very serious in Germany. That fantastic last A minor chord right at the top of the instrument, I missed it by a semitone! And the whole audience collapsed with laughter. I was so annoyed with myself, but I have to say the audience enjoyed that. A complete semitone except, of course, for the open A, the rest was A flat minor . . . the very last chord of the concert. The audience just fell apart.

What else could they do? There was no point in being polite about it.

I just shrugged my arms and walked off. I can see that it was amusing and I was grateful that they laughed, but for me it wrecked the whole evening, I have to say. I felt I'd let the composer down. But that does happen from time to time, and it livens things up a bit! I'm always looking for the very best out of every phrase.

Do you think you're changing?

At the moment I sense I'm improving, somehow. It's a wonderful feeling. Something has happened. I'm enjoying the whole business of making music so much now – I mean, I always have, but in some ways even more now. As you get older, and this is not just to do with music, you begin to get rid of things which are a waste of time. You say 'I don't want to do *this*', or 'I'm getting rid of *that*'. I want to simplify life. Because since the beginning of time life has got more complicated, and there comes a time when you want to concentrate on what's truly worthwhile. And all the rest of the stuff – chuck it! I've cut out a lot of the waste of energy and time. You're not going to live for ever, you know time's limited, you suddenly realise that it goes at a hell of a lick. It seems only yesterday that I was 50 . . . so the great thing is to get rid of all the unnecessary stuff.

"I only play what I like, music that stimulates me. And then I never, ever, get bored with pieces"

Do you do exactly what you want to do?

I've always been idealistic about music. I suppose. One of the things I remember as a student at the College after the war was that we were an idealistic generation. It was a rough time coming through the war, but we had ideals. And I miss that now.

Ideals about what kind of thing? Social, musical . . . ?

Well, if you were in music, then in music. And other things too, of course. There weren't so many people doing things; there weren't so many people, period. And there was space, and there wasn't this sort of competition and this sort of elbowing.

You're talking about the musical world?

You bet – but also the world in general. There weren't the pressures, particularly on young people. Today they race into these competitions and if they win maybe get a prize of half a dozen concerts and a recording contract *if* they're lucky. That's a lot of pressure on a young person. My generation, we sort of matured into our profession slowly, and I think we were very lucky to be able to do that. Now its very different. It's the commercialisation of life and the competition of it all which has caused a lot of unhappiness for people in general.

Do you think there's any value in music competitions?

I think they can sort out the good players. Let's face it, in the old Communist ethic there was no such thing as competition, everybody had the same. But the Russians also had their music competitions, so they had to have something to sort out the great from the not so great. Even the Bolshevik Russians had that. They treat music very seriously, it's a genuine part of their system of education. Look what

wonderful artists come out of Russia – and they're trained at a very early age. It's terrific, it's wonderful. They become so deeply involved with the music itself.

"I"m always looking for the very best out of every phrase"

Like an actor can become his role, should a musician attempt to become the music, or maybe the composer?

One should think about the music deeply without the instrument sometimes, with only the score. We must certainly find out a bit about the composer and the environment in which he worked, it all helps. The important thing for a performing musician is that he must be the servant of the composer. And that would be very difficult if you've got a big ego, if you think you're just the greatest. Those people tend not to be the best interpreters, although they can be flamboyantly brilliant and good value. But as I see it, one's role is in the service of the music. And then to be able to convey that music in such a way that it's wholly convincing, utterly and totally convincing.

Absolutely unique for that occasion?

Yes. For that very moment it has to be nothing less than completely convincing. And that is a very great responsibility for a performer to bear in mind.

What do you actually think about when you're away from the guitar and working with the score?

The shape of the piece, and sometimes the fingering. It's getting to know the first note so that paradoxically you can almost hear the last note, so you can feel the whole sweep of it. It's hard to achieve. Two works of Bach ideally employ that idea, both in variation form: the *Goldberg* and the *Chaconne*. And then you go through an experience which transcends time. I use the word paradoxical because the transcendental quality of the music means that it is always stretching out, and yet the relationship between the variations always brings it back. So you've got this inhale/exhale situation, and it's that tension which can be so moving and so wonderful in a variation piece of that quality. Much best to look at that sort of thing away from the instrument.

Next month: How far can music express what words can't? What are 'wrong' notes? Why is it so hard to compose beautiful music now? In Part 2, Chris Kilvington continues his conversation with Julian Bream, whose 60th birthday was celebrated on 15 July.

REFLECTIONS ON JULIAN BREAM'S 60th BIRTHDAY

By GRAHAM WADE

THE first Julian Bream recital I ever attended took place on 10 November 1957, in the Arts Theatre, Cambridge. The programme was as follows:

Air, Rondeau, Hornpipe	Purcell
Overture	Weiss
Partita in A minor	J. S. Bach
(Prelude – Fugue – Sarabande – Gigue)	
Two Sonatas	Cimarosa
Variations Op. 9	Sor
(Interval)	
Garrotin-Soleares	Turina
Sonatina	Berkeley
Cancion-Campo	Ponce
Leyenda	Albéniz

At that time, for most of the public (even those who played the guitar), the repertoire, apart from that of J. S. Bach, was often quite unfamiliar. One listened with a sense of joyous discovery and delicious freshness to these pieces.

With hindsight it becomes apparent that Julian Bream's programme on that occasion contained the acorns of development which would mature into the oaks of international achievement. Transcriptions, music of Bach, guitar works from the 19th century, Spanish music, and the repertoire written especially for him, were all there. But the entire landscape would be infinitely deepened, expanded, and brought to ultimate fruition over the years to come.

But there was a lot more to it than just the matter of the repertoire chosen. Equally significant was the presence of a unique musical intelligence and sensibility shaping each phrase and defining the identity of each piece. The notes were placed with a quality of response which moved the audience in a magical and mysterious way. The concert was a statement of experience, beauty and a feeling so intense that it could cut like a knife and induce a poignant anguish in the listener. In particular the quality of sound was a unique cantabile utterance. This was Bream's gift to the world – a quality of emotion and feeling within the playing which could wound with its sweetness and dazzle with its virtuosity.

In 1954, with Bream barely 21, the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* devoted 22 lines to him. This, considering that Segovia, 40 years older, received 24 lines, was a remarkable accolade:

BREAM, Julian (Alexander) (born London, 15 July, 1933).

English guitarist and lutenist . . . After his first public appearance as a guitarist at the age of twelve, at which he astonished his audience by his precocious brilliance and musicality, he received advice and encouragement from Segovia, and since then he has become well known as a performer on the guitar and lute and has both broadcast and appeared on television . . . He has transcribed numerous works from lute tablature and performed many of the keyboard compositions of Frescobaldi, Purcell, Bach and Rameau arranged for himself for the guitar and lute.

Julian Bream, 1953

By the time I first heard him in concert in 1957 Julian Bream was profoundly mature in both life and art. Music in his hands signified expressiveness, commitment, the power to move to tears, the capacity to draw upon a seemingly inexhaustible well of experience, of life lived to the full. Behind the playing was a remarkable range of experience already and an amazing career of over a decade had already been achieved. Bream was entirely equipped in performance in a whole array of recitals, broadcasts, film and recordings.

By 1957 he had played recitals regularly with one of the most renowned of British musical celebrities, Peter Pears. Already a number of composers, including Dodgson, Brindle and Berkeley, had written works for him. He had performed music for at least two films – *Sarabande for Dead Lovers* (1948) and *Chase a Crooked Shadow* (1957) – had mastered the lute and the greatest living British composer, Benjamin Britten had written *Songs from the Chinese* (1957) for the Pears and Bream duo.

By the age of 24 Bream had broadcast on more occasions than most guitarists would be able to do in several lifetimes. His early transcriptions had been published. He had performed frequently with leading

orchestras and received rave reviews from the leading newspapers. (On February 10, 1956, for example, *The Times* had commented on Mr Julian Bream's 'elegance and artistry' during a performance of *Concierto de Aranjuez* at the Festival Hall with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Anatole Fistoulari). Bream had made no less than five LPs. Already he had given hundreds of concerts, etc, etc.

By any normal standards these achievements were prodigious. Yet journeys are measured by the distance travelled, and we can now see that Julian Bream still had an immense way to go at that time before he arrived at his true destination. The decisive recording contract with RCA was just round the corner and in 1959 his recording career began with this company.

In 1964 Julian Bream became the first guitarist to be awarded the OBE. By the 1960s he was indeed at the top of his profession, performing at the most prestigious venues, a veteran of the great concert halls of the world's capitals and an inveterate global traveller on behalf of the guitar.

The way forward was unremitting work and endless self-development. In the 1960s the guitar was in danger of being dominated by the Segovian repertoire. Julian Bream, having recorded a considerable amount of this repertoire by the time he moved to RCA from the Westminster recording company, had many trails to blaze. The inclusion of the lute in his zone of virtuosity gave him virtually two careers to follow. In *The Gramophone* in 1968 he described the duality of his calling as, 'the guitar is my job, the lute is my hobby and I suppose you could say that I'm more interested in my hobby than my job.'

It is often forgotten how high a proportion of Bream's recordings consists of lute music. In this area he soon acquired a unique reputation, making a lute recital fascinating and life enhancing. Dowland now became alive and vibrant. In reviewing *Julian Bream Plays Dowland* (Westminster XWN 18249) (1957) in August 1960, *The Gramophone* exclaimed:

The reason why this disc is pleasing is first and foremost because of Bream's almost uncanny ability to grasp the essence of the music he is playing . . . This disc does more than a book for it shows that Dowland is no musty historical figure but a composer of first-rate importance and one of the greatest figures in Elizabethan and Jacobean times.

This was an enormous stride forward, and the public flocked to hear Bream's lute. This area also integrated with his pride in English music, so long neglected or despised. The Elizabethan Age was now commemorated in living art, and a sure link was established between the era of Dowland and the era of Bream. The foundation of the Bream Consort in 1960 was another unique step forward in the enjoyable understanding of Elizabethan music.

By 1963 Bream had recorded his own definitive interpretations from Segovia's repertoire. These included Bach's *Chaconne,* Frescobaldi's *La Frescobalda Variations, Sonata in E minor, K11* by Domenico Scarlatti, various Sor Studies, and selected works from Turina, Falla, Morena Torroba, Albéniz, etc.

Continued from page 4

be desired. If nothing else — and actually there is a great deal else concerned with tone, dynamics, phrasing and so forth — these two (fundamental) qualities can be improved dramatically with the guitar orchestra and a leader who is prepared to patiently explain and demonstrate rhythmic difficulties. The music is often single lines and is not usually technically awkward; the essence of all this work is *musicality.* Therefore it is perfectly possible to give full concentration to the element in hand — the rhythmic element. So often in solo work this is compounded by technical problems as well, and the player ends up fighting the music — and getting it wrong or at best sounding uneasy. But in the guitar orchestra, with a guiding hand, the comfort of playing with others, and the absolute necessity of good tempo, the level of understanding can increase greatly. Because this is what it is — understanding, not technique. Each player can increase his rhythmic vocabulary so that looking at a group of notes of various values can actually mean something coherent instead of seeming a completely incomprehensible mess. If anyone were to say this was educational training, I'd happily agree.

One other point. I hope the detractors of the guitar orchestra, in addition to listening in the future to any one of the several permanent groups, have already plenty of experience of hearing some amateur string ensembles, or symphony orchestras. Appalling intonation, complete lack of sensitive balance, rotten material, it can all be there too. *All* groups, guitar or otherwise, have to choose their repertoire wisely and work hard at detail; otherwise, yes, it's a waste of time.

So I hope those playing in ensemble this summer enjoy the experience and look to the possibility of carrying it on afterwards.

CHRIS KILVINGTON

Bream achieved a unique a number of recorded firsts such as the first all-Bach album (Westminster XWN 18428) (1957) (with the first guitar recording of *Prelude, Fugue and Allegro),* the first complete recordings of Villa-Lobos's *Preludes,* (Westminster XWN 18137) (1956), and the premiere recording of *Concerto in A* by Giuliani (RCA RB 16252) (1960). Bream was also the first to issue a recording of a live lute recital (RCA RB 6646) (1963), and two complete Bach *Lute Suites* (RCA RB 6684) (1964). (Bream was in fact the first guitarist to record a complete lute suite – previous guitarists merely recorded separate movements).

Bream pushed the guitar beyond the limits of Segovia's own repertoire at the same time as he conquered the traditional repertoire. Steadily he amassed and recorded the new wave of compositions dedicated to him, bringing novel dimensions to the concepts of the repertoire. These new works in the early years included Berkeley's *Sonatina,* Arnold's *Guitar Concerto,* Britten's *Nocturnal,* and *Songs from the Chinese,* Walton's song cycle, *Anon in Love,* etc. Of these the most significant at the time was Britten's *Nocturnal,* which propelled the guitar to a unique prominence in the area of contemporary expressiveness. This masterpiece of the guitar brought in not only a variety of new techniques but the supreme manifestation of the new and adventurous language available for the solo guitar. The *Nocturnal* became a kind of challenge which recitalists, eminent composers and the public would respond to, setting new standards of inspiration and possibility.

The *20th Century Guitar* album of 1966 (RCA SB 6723) became the inspiration of the young and changed attitudes towards the new in a radical way. The first recording of Britten's *Nocturnal,* Smith Brindle's *El Polifemo de Oro* (which Bream had played in the 1950s), Henze's enigmatic *Drei Tentos,* and Frank Martin's *Quatre Pièces Brève* (1933), topped off by two Villa-Lobos *Studies,* altered the perception of the younger generation of players. The process was followed up seven years later with *Julian Bream 70s,* with Richard Rodney Bennett's *Guitar Concerto,* Rawsthorne's *Elegy,* Walton's *Five Bagatelles,* and Berkeley's *Theme and Variations.*

The dislodgement of the domination of the Segovian empire was fully achieved during this period between 1966 and 1973. This was a pioneering period during which the vocabulary of the guitar recital was utterly modified and the guitar, instead of looking back to the late Spanish romanticism of the 1920s, now entered the world of the contemporary composers.

The patterns of development during these years and afterwards are extremely complex. For Bream also changed our awareness of other composers in his own inimitable way. It was Bream who first delved into Giuliani's *Rossiniane* and *Grand Overture,* into Sor's *Fantasias* and *Sonatas* and hitherto obscure extended works of Aguado.

But over the last 20 years Bream has given us massive interpretations of the works of Villa-Lobos, Albéniz and Granados, regular re-recordings of *Concierto de Aranjuez* and a revival of Rodrigo's *Tres piezas españolas.* The contemporary works dedicated to him from Tippett, Maxwell Davies, Brouwer, Takemitsu, etc, continue to proliferate. From the late 1960s onwards very many of Bream's transcriptions have been published, opening a treasure trove of new concepts of editing and fingering, for all his texts are rich in detail.

On the occasion of Julian Bream's 60th birthday we can take stock, give thanks and marvel at the prolific creativity of the man, his energy, his boundless enthusiasm and commitment, and the sense of vigorous and abundant life which emanates from him. We can listen to his recordings and chart the inexorable progress and patterns of his genius, developing through the years an amazing revelation of so many things we had never previously thought possible in terms of either lute or guitar. The general public throughout the world has a great love of him and his art, while the cognoscenti of the international guitar community are practically speechless with admiration as they search for further superlatives. For in a shifting, treacherous age, Julian Bream represents a total integrity which has never been compromised. His art has put forward at all times the purest and finest spiritual values of the European musical tradition.

THE SOLO GUITAR MUSIC OF JOAQUIN RODRIGO

By GRAHAM WADE

Part XI: *Un tiempo fue Itálica famosa* (1980)

AFTER *Tríptico*, composed in 1978, Rodrigo once again gave the guitar a rest for a while, embarking in 1979 on a solo work for cello, *Como una Fantasía* (inspired by an Asturian song) and *Preludio y Ritornello* for harpsichord. These were followed by *Líricas castellanas* for soprano and instrumental ensemble (1980) and in 1981 Rodrigo completed *Concierto como un divertimento* for cello and orchestra, written for Julian Lloyd Webber and *Tres evocaciones (Homenaje a Joaquín Turina)* for piano.

Tres evocaciones is a cycle of impressionistic scenes of Seville, recalling that Turina was born there and also composed descriptive cycles for piano. Furthermore Rodrigo's sequence *(Tarde en el parque, Noche en el Guadalquivir* and *Triana,* where dawn breaks over the city's gypsy quarter), recalls Debussy's *Iberia,* also divided into three chronological sections *(Par les rues et par les chemins, Les Parfums de la nuit, Le Matin d'un jour de fête).*

Thus Rodrigo, in his brilliant Indian summer, reaches out to link up not only with his great Spanish colleague, Joaquín Turina, but with Debussy, about whom Manuel de Falla had written:

Without knowing Spain, or without having set foot on Spanish ground, Claude Debussy has written Spanish music . . . Debussy, who did not actually know Spain, spontaneously, I dare say unconsciously, created much Spanish music as was to arouse the envy of many who knew her only too well. He crossed the border only once, and stayed for a few hours in San Sebastian to attend a bullfight: little enough experience indeed . . . from this experience of Spain, his imagination moved further on. What he wanted was to concentrate on the evocation of Andalusia's spell. This can be seen in Par les rues et par les chemins, *and* Les Parfums de la nuit from Iberia, La Puerto del Vino, *the* Sérénade Interrompue, *and the* Soirée dans Grenade.

(On Music and Musicians, Debussy, Manuel de Falla, ed. Federico Sopeña, transl, Urman and Thomson, publ, Marion Boyars, London, 1979).

Those who wish to follow up the influence of both Debussy, Turina, and indeed, Falla, on Joaquín Rodrigo, should immerse themselves in a recent recording, *Joaquín Rodrigo, The Complete Music for Piano,* performed by Gregory Allen (Bridge Records, USA, BCD 9027A/B). In doing so one can also learn much about Rodrigo's guitar music which becomes illuminated and understood with new perspectives, deeper insights, and a myriad of cross-references of great value. (For example, the recording includes the pianoforte version of *Zarabanda lejana* [1926], primarily known as a guitar piece, and featured in David Russell's recent British tour).

According to *Hand in Hand with Joaquín Rodrigo,* (page 272) by Victoria Kamhi de Rodrigo, towards the end of 1980 '. . . Joaquín was depressed and gloomy and nothing could distract him. His creative work had stagnated during the last months'. It may have been around this time that Rodrigo wrote *Un tiempo fue Itálica famosa (Once upon a time Itálica was famous)* for solo guitar, dedicated to Angel Romero. The published score puts 1980 as the date of composition, though the *Catalogo General* has the date 1981. It is thus possible that this work contains a personal reference as well as a harking back to an ancient civilisation and the passing of empires, mutability and the fading glory of all human endeavour.

The title of the piece or the town of Itálica may not be immediately familiar to all our readers. Itálica is in fact a ruined town a few kilometres north west of Seville, a Roman colony built by Scipio Africanus in 206 BC for the veterans of the Second Punic War, and the birthplace of the Emperors Trajan (52-117). Hadrian (76-138) and Theodosius (c.346-7). In the 2nd century it was at its peak of fame and development but in the 5th century was pillaged in the barbarian invasion and later further destroyed during the Moorish invasions. Some of Itálica's raw materials were actually used to build Seville. The ruins have a paved street system, the remains of the city gate, a forum, a mosaic floor, and an amphitheatre that once had a seating capacity of over 30,000.

Un tiempo fue Itálica famosa is a superb work, deeply impassioned, virtuosic in its demands on the performer, and using some of the emotional depths and guitar techniques of flamenco. The piece can be divided into two sections: *Lento/Allegretto* and *Allegro moderato (ritmico),* with a reprise of the first section as a *coda.* The *Lento* has elements of the *tarantas* and a multiplicity of rapid scalic passages, and the *Allegretto* moves into a chordal texture, fierce discords exuding a kind of savage and regretful nostalgia before further cascades of scales and arpeggios.

The *Allegro moderato* evokes the mood of the sevillanas, and the characteristic blend of strummed chords and single note melodic passages. The finale is particularly demanding with energetic and rapid scale runs of the utmost velocity.

This is a brilliant work full of fire and *duende,* strangely melancholy but deeply stirring. Has its somewhat obscure title deterred would-be recitalists? One hopes not. This is yet another of Rodrigo's finest pieces, as *Invocación y Danza* was for some years, waiting to be discovered, the kind of work which, given a suitable performer, would prove scintillating on the concert platform.

(To be continued) . . .

RUGGERO CHIESA (1933-1993)

THE death of Ruggero Chiesa on June the 14th, six weeks short of his 60th birthday – he was born on 1 August 1933, two weeks after Julian Bream – robs Italy of a scholar, editor, musicologist and teacher of the utmost distinction. He had been suffering from cancer for some years.

He is best known as the creator, in 1972, of *il Fronimo*, a guitar magazine renowned for its elegance of design and its uncompromising scholarly approach to guitar matters. Closely associated with the publishing house Edizioni Suvini Zerboni, it was not only the very first Italian magazine for the guitar and the lute, but over the years achieved under his editorship a prestige and a distinction unknown to any other guitar magazine, before or since. It is not too fanciful to suppose that the decision in Italy to introduce official diplomas in the guitar (as late as 1984) owes at least something to the influence exerted by Ruggero Chiesa and *il Fronimo*. It was an influence that extended well beyond the borders of Italy, despite the problems associated with language.

Ruggero Chiesa was also a professor of the guitar at the Milan Conservatory of Music. He had studied the guitar with Carlo Palladini in Genoa, later attending the Accademia Chigiana in Siena, where he furthered his guitar education with Andrés Segovia and Alirio Diaz. It was there, too, through study with Emilio Pujol that he acquired his enthusiasm for early music, particularly for the lute and the vihuela.

Among his own pupils who have achieved distinction are Emanuele Segre, Massima Laura, Elena Casoli and Leopoldo Saracino.

An important contribution was his editing of the complete guitar works of Nicolò Paganini. In addition he edited over 150 works by various composers, and among his many publications are the complete works of Luis Milán, Francesco da Milano and Michelangelo Galilei. Among contemporary composers, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Bruno Bettinelli, Franco Donatoni and Aldo Clementi all dedicated works to him. In 1992 this magazine was delighted to be able to publish his 4-part article 'The Guitar Works of Ferdinand Carulli'.

Ruggero Chiesa originally studied at the Istito Navale at Camogli, the small town near Genoa where he was born, and went on to hold a sea captain's diploma. While he was still at school he began to learn the guitar, and was faced with a choice: travelling the seaways of the world, or travelling the world of music. It was the guitar's great fortune that he chose music. In an interview published in this magazine in1985 (Vol.3 No.11) he found similarities between the two occupations: 'Journeys on the sea always involve the imagination, and so does music. When I looked at old maps I thought of making voyages of exploration, and now I explore the world of music.'

That interview concluded with the hope that he would one day visit England. It was never fulfilled; and now Ruggero Chiesa has embarked on the last voyage of all. *Addio e buon viaggio.*

Colin Cooper

Ruggero Chiesa

John W. Duarte writes: Ruggero Chiesa was among those announced as members of the jury of the recent competition in Sanremo but he was prevented by illness from coming; it was sadly terminal for he died of cancer soon afterwards. I first met him in Venice Mestre in 1973 when we were fellow jury-members in the Castelnuovo-Tedesco Composition Competition, and for the last time in a similar situation – the Maria Callas Guitar Competition in Athens in 1984. During the last 20 years we had however been in steady contact through his involvement with the Italian quarterly *Il Fronimo*, an academically oriented and high-quality publication of which he was the editor from its first issue in October 1972. He was a notable scholar and teacher, whose work survives in his very many editions of guitar music (of all periods) with the Italian house of Suvini Zerboni. These encapsulate Chiesa's persona – serious, conscientious, attentive to every detail, and motivated by his love of the guitar and its music; what they do not reveal is the pleasantness of his personality and the sense of humour, the luxury of the exercise of which he occasionally permitted himself. He was a man of integrity, devoted to working for the benefit of the instrument and its players, rather than to self-aggrandisement. Such men are rare and his departure will be widely mourned, not least by me.

MUSIC SUPPLEMENT

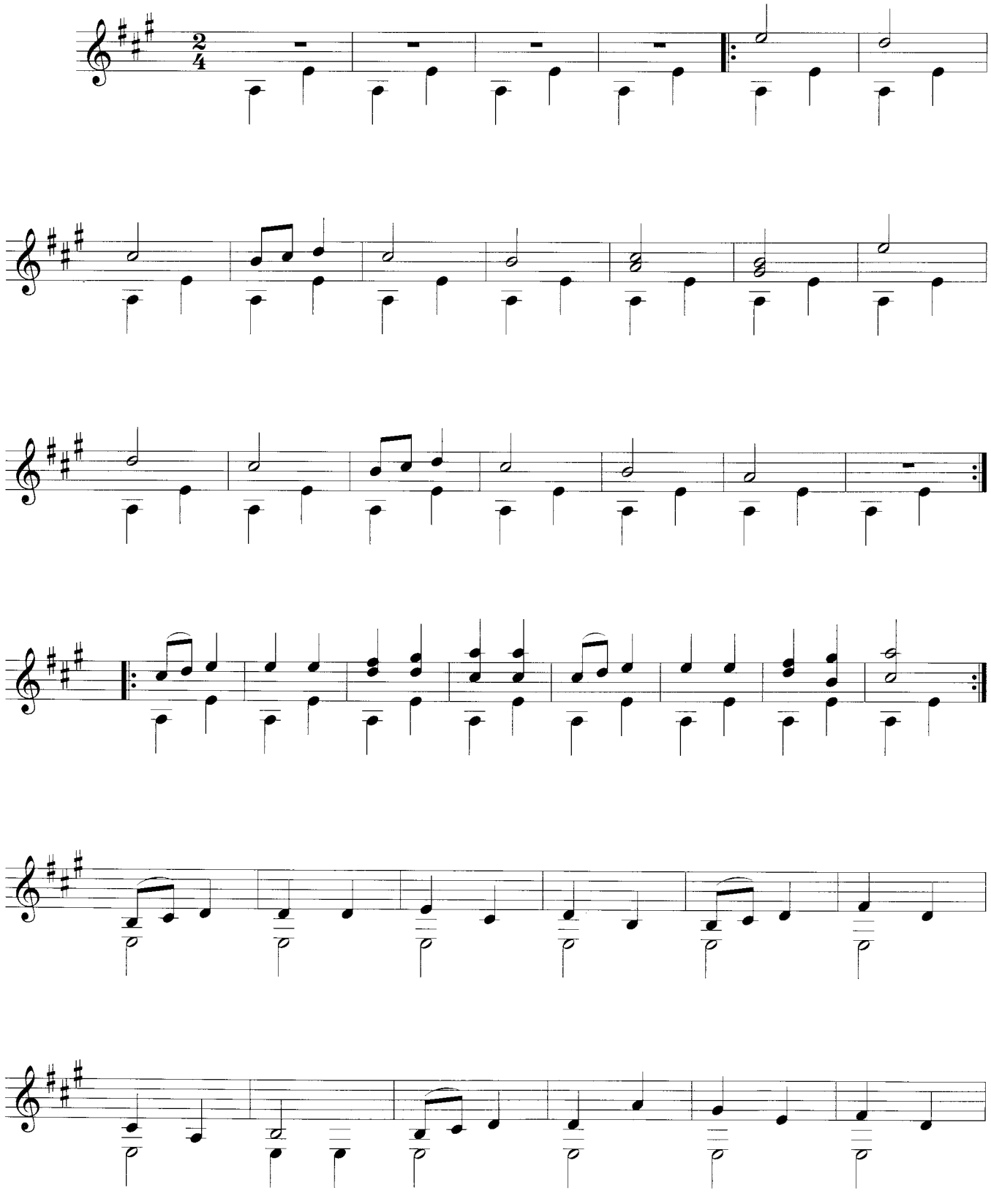
EDITED BY NEIL SMITH

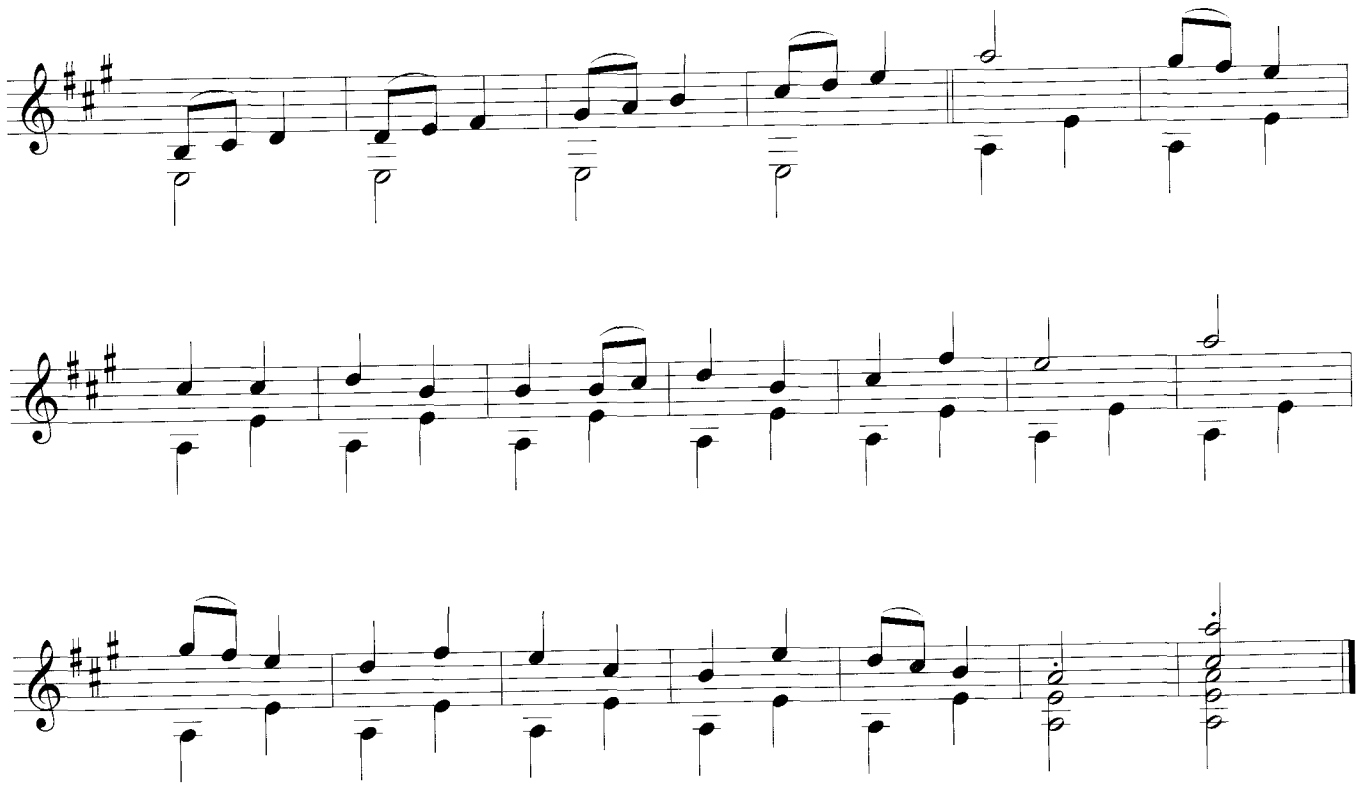
MUSETTE by Neil Smith

Originally a Musette was a type of bagpipe (and a piece) having a drone accompaniment. Here, the thumb plays all basses (rather staccato) and most of the piece works with a barré in 2nd position. The slurs all move along strings, never across. Note that some of the repetitions are not identical. The piece can be used for instruction in barré playing or alternating bass or for slurring practice.

Musette

Neil Smith





SEGOVIA – A CENTENARY CELEBRATION

By GRAHAM WADE

Part VII – Segovia and his edition of Sor's Studies

IN the post-war years from 1945 onwards Andrés Segovia did not neglect an important aspect of his life's work which flourished alongside his recitals, recordings and the acquiring of new compositions. This was the matter of editing music for publication, whether transcriptions, editions, new music from his chosen composers, or the direct promulgation of his ideas in periodicals such as *Guitar Review*.

In 1945 Segovia published his edition of Sor's *Twenty Studies for the Guitar*, which became over the years one of the best-selling book of studies in the 20th century. Over the last few years there has been some criticism of both Segovia's editing and of his playing of these pieces.

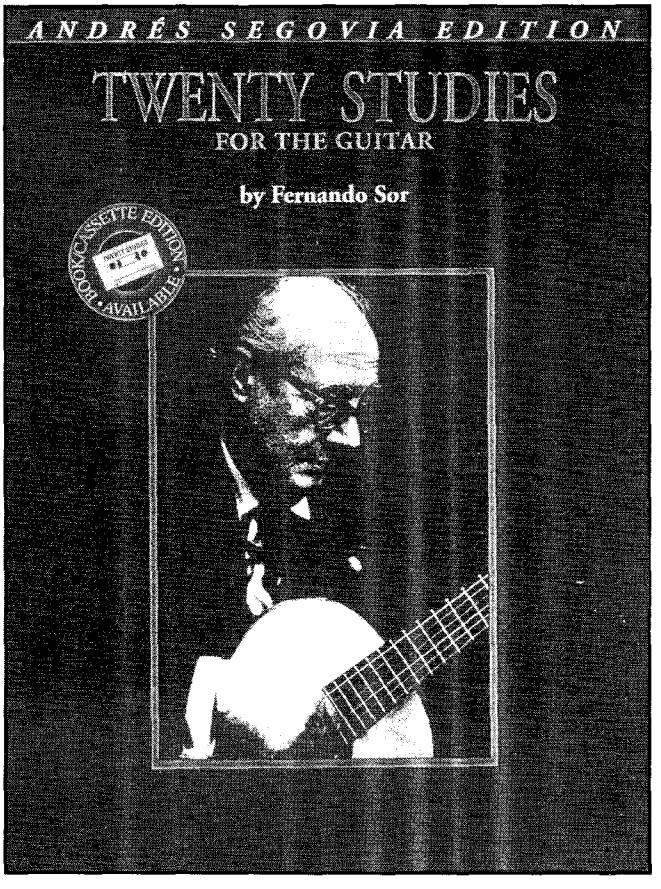
Such criticism is as pointless as blaming Wanda Landowska for playing on a harpsichord that was historically less authenticated than those built today or Julian Bream for giving us magnificent Dowland in the 1950s and 1960s on a Rubio lute that was heavier (and therefore had greater *sostenuto*) than the original Elizabethan lutes. Segovia was rooted in the historic evolution of the guitar in the early part of this century and his actions carried their own intrinsic logic and rationale.

Frank Koonce in his edition of *The Solo Lute Works of Johann Sebastian Bach* (publ. Kjos, California, 1989) mentions the four types of editions of published music – 'Performance, Facsimile, Urtext or Critical'. In Segovia's case, as with other great performers of his era, his interest was primarily and exclusively in the 'performance edition' which Koonce describes as follows:

A Performance Edition adapts the original text, providing technical and musical solutions for the performer while taking the capabilities and limitations of a particular instrument into consideration. Although performance editions often are helpful in learning new literature, they nevertheless reflect the opinions of their editors and tend not to distinguish between original and edited material.

Nowadays a frisson of horror often accompanies the concepts of the 'performance edition' in the realms of academia, though for the grass-roots guitarist such an edition is often a good investment in terms of the learning curve. A different approach, if not an entirely different psychology, characterises a performance edition compared to the other forms possible. In the category of performance editions (of a wide variety of works) can be included series over the last 30 years by Julian Bream, John Williams, Siegfried Behrend, Vladimir Mikulka, Narciso Yepes, Carlos Barbosa-Lima and Kazuhito Yamashita.

In Segovia's prime, the word 'musicologist' was an insult when applied to a recitalist. (In his autobiography he uses it in clear disparagement [Page 119] when he mentions Pujol, 'not the musicologist but the managing director of the Palau'). Nowadays of course musicologists are more esteemed members of the community, daring sometimes even to criticise Julian



Bream for lifting his lute from its case and performing with nails! In rare instances, instrumentalists move towards becoming respected as musicologists as well as recitalists, a progression that proved difficult, if not impossible, for musicians of the old school such as Tortelier or Menuhin, Richter or Horszowski, etc.

Segovia's perennial concern was performing on the guitar to large audiences. But he was, in himself, of extreme musicological interest, representing within his art most, if not all, of the beliefs and performance conventions of the early decades of the 20th century. For better or worse Segovia cared more for his public than he did for scholarly opinion of a theoretical kind. His principles of performance practice on the guitar, inherited and developed from late Spanish romanticism, were very clearly defined for him.

The principles of the historical approach of Segovia's generation to the art of interpretation are analysed in a recent publication entitled *Early Recordings and Musical Style, Changing tastes in instrumental performance, 1990-1905* by Robert Philip (Cambridge University Press, 1992, £35). This book, of extraordinary scholarship and insight, is a useful antidote to those who judge past performance practice by the application of a new regime of applied regulations recently written into a mythical rule book, from which no performer, ancient or modern is

permitted to deviate without censure. Robert Philip delves into early recordings to find out how people played and what their concepts of performance were, to compare with performance practice today, and to warn against too dogmatic a stance when deciding on matters of authenticity in performing music of the time before recordings were possible:

The performances of the early twentieth century, therefore, are volatile, energetic, vigorously projected in broad outline but rhythmically informal in detail. Modern performances are, by comparison, accurate, orderly, restrained, deliberate, and even in emphasis. When we describe early 20th century performance in this way, we are describing the performances of, among others, Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Rachmanino, Richard Strauss, Bartok, Stravinsky and Poulenc. Given the clear links between the performance practice on early recordings and the descriptions of the late 19th century, we can also be sure that early recordings take us quite close to the practice of Mahler, Brahms, Debussy, Wagner and Tchaikovsky. Late 20th century musicians, with their interest in constructing the performance practice of the past, are bound to ask what one should do with this information.

Early 20th century recordings and documents demonstrate that any literal reconstruction of the past is impossible . . . On the whole, modern musicians who try to reconstruct the styles of the past adhere quite closely to modern notions of clarity and control, however much they may apply certain rhythmic rules of particular periods . . .

(Op. cit. Page 235).

Segovia's deep-rooted concepts of performance practice, founded on early 20th century stylistic considerations, influenced his edition of the Sor *Studies* in specific ways. One outcome was to seize upon the *Studies* as a cornucopia of possibilities for technical progress allied to worthwhile music 'achieving the right balance between the pedagogical purpose and the natural musical beauty', (from Segovia's Preface to the Sor edition). He also identified the latent technical aspects which his point of view as virtuoso performer seemed essential to maintain dexterity and daily mastery:

The studies of Sor which are published here can be used not only for the development of the technique of the student, but as well for the preservation of it at its height for the masters. They contain the exercises of the arpeggios, chords, repeated notes, legatos, thirds, sixths, melodies in the higher register and in the bass, interwoven polyphonic structures, stretching exercises for the fingers of the left hand, for the prolonged holding of the cejilla *and many other formulas which, if practised with assiduity and intelligence will develop vigour and flexibility in both hands and will finally lead to the better command of the instrument.*

(from Segovia's *Preface* to the Studies, 1945)

Complaints have sometimes been voiced that Segovia's edition gives an unbalanced view of Sor, who after all wrote many more than just 20 studies. However, the selection of these studies, which in recital terms had evolved since Segovia's early days in Granada, is a worthy representative selection of some of the best concert studies. Many young players proved the efficacy of Segovia's edition and choice in laying the foundations of an impeccable technique. John Williams, for example, recorded all 20 studies as in the edition, on HMV CLP 1702/Westminster WST 14138, issued in 1963, a recording precedent followed by other guitarists including Lucien Battaglia, Jose Luis Gonzalez, David Tanenbaum and Narciso Yepes (who included a few more). Guitarists who recorded either individual studies or a selection from the Segovia catalogue are myriad but Bream, Diaz, Almeida, Caceres, Santos and Per Olaf Johnson, are a few of the many. Segovia gave practising guitarists a precious inheritance in 1945 when his edition was first published, and its effects have been incalculable on thousands of aspiring players throughout the world.

(To be continued) . . .

THE GUITAR IN IBEROAMERICA

5. THE TECHNIQUE OF BARRIOS

By RICO STOVER

'BARRIOS studied with me all the school of Dionisio Aguado, the complete method of Fernando Sors and all the compositions of Julián Arcas and Carlos García Tolsa.'

Gustavo Sosa Escalada (1877-1943)

THESE remarks, made by Barrios' first (and only) guitar instructor, reveal the solid foundations upon which Barrios formed his technique. His eclectic harmonic style freely mixes 18th, 19th and to some extent early 20th century characteristics. None of these qualities by themselves merit any particular attention or praise; what makes Barrios so interesting is the fact that he *unifies* these particulars, expanding technique in the process to make possible the extremely harmonic music he conceived.

But of course emotional expression and imagery – the qualities that John Williams refers to as Barrios' ability 'to make the guitar speak' – are the main priorities. *Nothing in Barrios is ever done for purely intellectual reasons* – the 'brain' is always at the service of the 'heart'. Music is primarily for expressing emotions. This was Barrios' creed, something he felt naturally and spontaneously. It is extremely difficult to create music for guitar that is expressive of specific emotions and/or images, employing traditional harmony with an advanced technique, and come up with something that will be universally valued. But that is just what Barrios did.

Truly large-scale works (sonatas, suites, fantasias, concertos) are not found in Barrios. His longest piece lasts about seven minutes (the three movements of *La Catedral*). He was a master of form, but owing to his lack of education and opportunities, he never attempted to compose for guitar and orchestra, or for guitar and quartet, etc. He did not function in the academic or traditionally 'classical' world of music of his time. His activities were almost exclusively within the world of guitar and, though he occasionally played with violinists (Eduardo Fabini in Uruguay and Raúl Cabezas in Costa Rica), he very rarely performed with any other types of musicians. Thus his attention was focused on the relatively short forms preferred by latter 19th century guitarists – Tárrega's *Capricho Arabe* or *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* (paradigms of descriptive romanticism which he discovered around 1917).

Around 1915 Barrios began studying Riemann's text *Musical Lexicon*, commencing serious study of classical music (Bach, Chopin, Beethoven, etc). By 1918 a significant qualitative advance can be noted. Studying and transcribing the classics while simultaneously absorbing the Tárrega technique, his evolutionary (revolutionary?) concepts began to take musical form:

Un Sueño en la Floresta	May 1918
Romanza en Imitación al Violoncello	December 1918
Gavotte-madrigal	December 1918

In matters of guitaristic technique, then, an Aguado-Sor-Arcas-Tárrega foundation is seen. His harmonic

Agustin Barrios Mangore, 1923

style he developed in analysing/transcribing Bach-Chopin-Beethoven-Schumann (in addition to his solitary study of Riemann). But there is one other element that really sets him apart: he was a Latin American romantic. He comes from a world which composer Aaron Copland described as 'uninhibited, abundant, non-critical, romantic', concerned with 'the langourously sentimental and the wildly orgiastic mood . . .'

I suppose this is the basic reason why Latin America has such a predominance of short musical forms: intense emotions and 'orgiastic moods' are not *essentially* intellectual, and as such their expression need not involve the grand architectural forms of a Bach suite or a Beethoven symphony – works of art that proceed from a different hierarchy of aesthetic values. There is a traditional lack of intellectual pretentiousness in Latin American music, and the accent is on the sensual/emotional. This basic truth about Barrios is probably what turns certain types of people off: to play him one must be passionate – you have to expose yourself *emotionally*. And this gets into all kinds of other things: psychology, aesthetics, philosophy, spirituality (whew – pretty heavy stuff!): ultimately how one feels about the act of making music – what is it really all about? (Being one of those in favour of 'wildly orgiastic moods' at least several times a week, I have no problem embracing a 'pro-passion position' as regards the act of playing). Uruguayan guitarist Agustín

Carlevaro (Abel's older brother) recalls Barrios (whom he heard in 1927) as the most emotional and passionate guitarist he has ever seen.

1919 must have been quite an intense year for young Barrios: his gigantic talent was burgeoning with the beginnings of a 'new' repertoire. By 1920 he had composed:

Mazurka Apasionata	June 1920
Vals No. 3	July 1920
Allegro Sinfónico	July 1920
Estudio de Concierto	July 1920

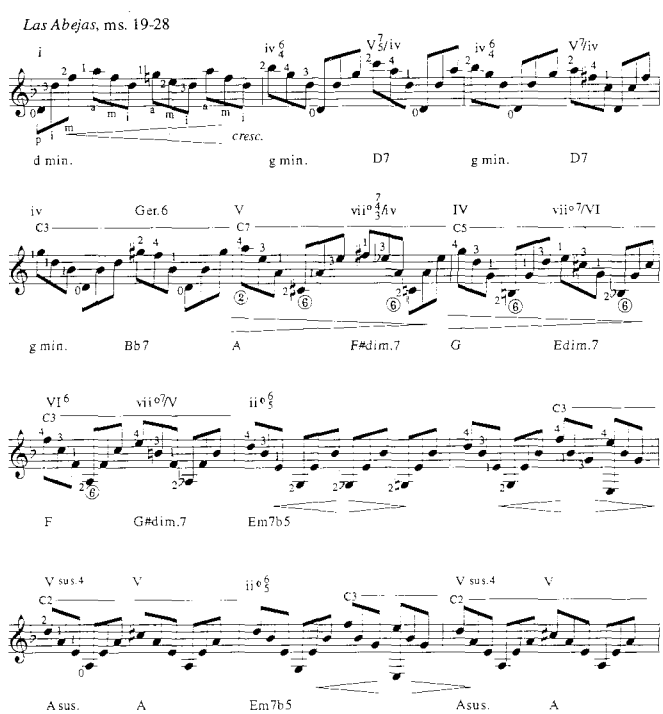
Already with these seven works he had 'broken through' and had achieved the basic characteristics of a repertoire which the classic guitar had never seen before (Leo Brouwer's comment that Barrios 'fulfils the gap that was never quite completed by the Romantics' underscores this assertion): always harmonic, requiring maximum virtuosity, embracing all major areas of technique, involving the full range of the instrument (which in many instances demands long stretches). Barrios felt the need to include a high c on the first string at the 20th fret (which he used in *Un Sueño en la Floresta)* – a parallel to his musical achievements during these years: taking a traditional, accepted form and expanding it to achieve more expressive possibilities. If there is any doubt as to the claim that Barrios does indeed go *más allá* ('further beyond') Tárrega, compare *Un Sueño en la Floresta* with *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* – the Barrios tremolo is more complex technically and musically and it is decidedly more difficult to play. Which one is the more 'expressive' is highly subjective – *Recuerdos* is a great masterpiece, a tremendously soulful and revolutionary piece for its time (written around 1898). It will forever hold a special place. However, the last time I heard John Williams, he closed his concert with *Un Sueño* and brought the house down. *De gustos no hay nada escrito.*

Three more important works appear in 1921:

La Catedral	April 1921
Prelude in g minor	April 1921
Las Abejas	September 1921

It is curious, but to me these three works are undoubtedly Barrios at his very best. This year has to be seen as a zenith, more so in quality than quantity. From the creative standpoint, he was 'off and running', and in the ensuing two years he composed *Vals de Primavera, Contemplación, Vals no. 4, Jha Che Valle, Arabescos, Minuet in A, Aire de Zamba, La Samaritana, Estudio in e, Minuet in E, Confesión, Serenata Morisca, Oración, Capricho Español, Danza en Re Menor, Danza Macabra, Marcha Heróica, Vals no. 2, Habanera, Leyenda Guaraní, El Hijo Pródigo, Cajita de Música, La Calesita* and *El Arroyo.* And of course he continued doing transcriptions of his favourite European composers as well as Latin American music in all its forms (light classics, popular music, folk tunes and dance rhythms).

Las Abejas ('The Bees') is a truly remarkable work – an arpeggio study to be played at a breakneck *allegro brillante* tempo. Also scales, ligados, position shifts – they're all in there. Here is one of my favourite passages:



If the guitarist can play this passage smoothly with the required velocity, the descending phrase featuring a chromatic bass line gives the aural impression of flowing movement – perhaps a swarm of bees?

Next time I will continue my analysis of Barrios' phenomenal music. Until then, adiós, y hasta la próxima.