OCTOBER 1995

CLASSICAL GUITAR

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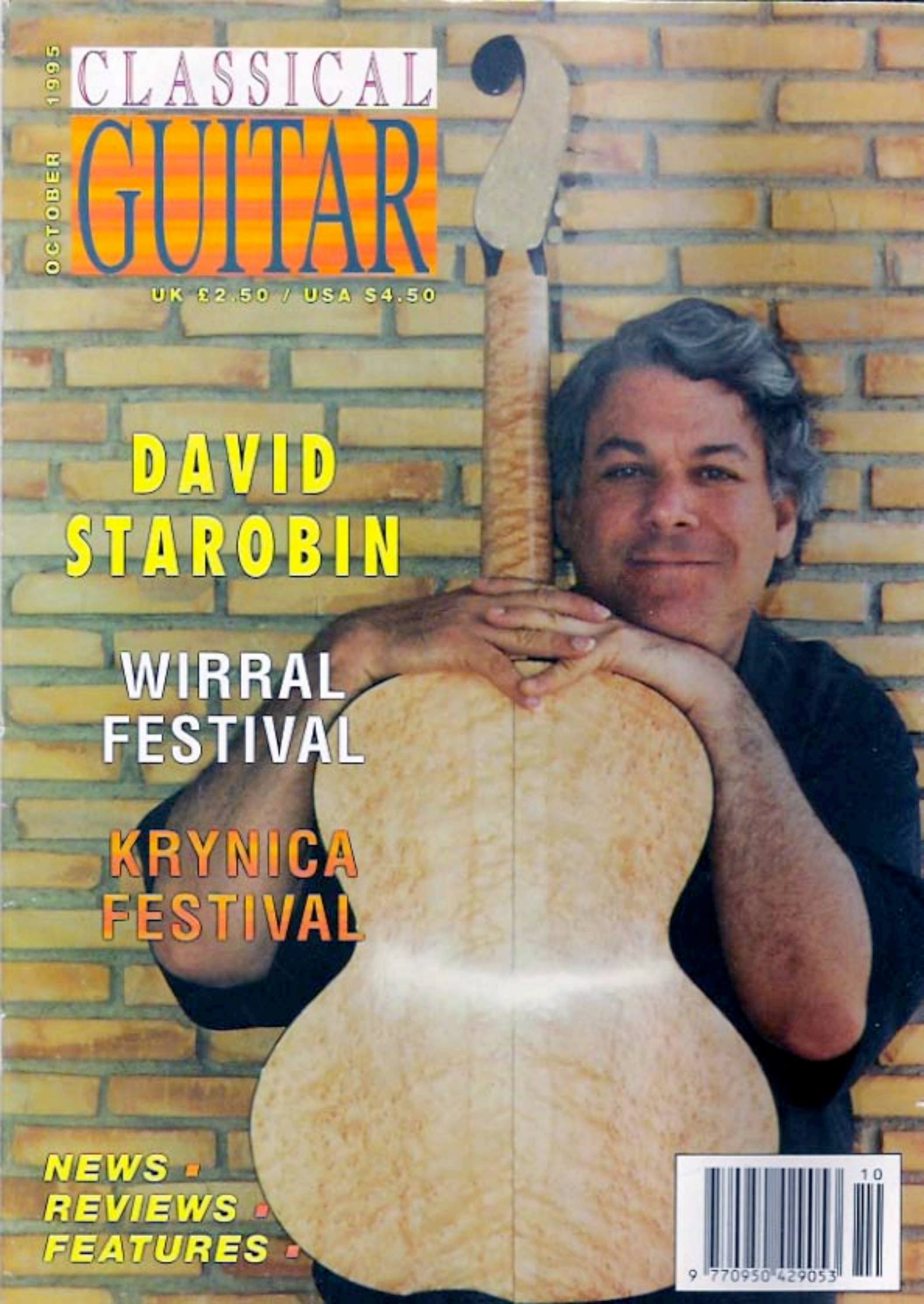

DAVID STAROBIN

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OCTOBER 1995

CLASSICAL GUITAR

VOLUME 14, No. 2

David Starobin – [illegible]

Wirral Fest[illegible]

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Krynica Fest[illegible]

AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTALISM

COLIN COOPER IN CONVERSATION WITH DAVID STAROBIN

SOMETIMES a guitarist sees the interview before it is published. My interview with the eminent American guitarist David Starobin, a champion of not only contemporary music but also, and perhaps surprisingly, the music of the 19th century composer Giulio Regondi, was conducted largely by that modern life-enhancing device, the fax machine. I asked him to answer any questions I had forgotten to ask, and he not only obeyed my request but actually rephrased some of the questions I had asked. Thus not every question issued from my lips, and even when it did, the structure has been changed by David's constantly creative and restless mind. I rather liked the result, and here it is, more or less untouched and unedited.

CC: David, would you please give us a few of your thoughts about the evolving range of the guitar's repertoire as we pass the 200th anniversary of the advent of the 6-string guitar?

DS: Allowing for the current breadth of taste and style, a discussion of repertoire would hardly fit within the confines of this forum. Especially if one regards more recent categories of six-string guitar playing – jazz and rock leap to mind – as part of the same 'E' to 'E' continuum. One can only say that the range of music played on guitars is just astoundingly broad!

CC: It is true that fixing the number of strings and standardising an instrument's turning has on occasion led to prolonged life and great fertility (look at the violin, for example) but does this really unite music of such disparity as Van Halen and Villa-Lobos?

DS: Certain characteristic voicings – well, hell, let's face it, the deliciously 'illicit' sound of parallel octaves and fifths is what makes so much guitar music such a turn-on. The basic moves of a Villa-Lobos on guitar, and 'Louie-Louie' are, well, cousins anyway.

CC: You are, of course, citing unusually extreme examples of stylistic similarity. Given the repertoire that you have chosen to perform and record over the years, it is clear that you don't equate the music work of the Assad Brothers with that of the Marx Brothers.

DS: Quite right. Now that we find ourselves in an era that makes the very democratic assumption that all styles and efforts are created equal, I greatly fear for the future of art that does not afford instantaneous gratification and comfort. It has been a luxury for me to be able to spend a lot

PHOTO: ALLEGRA STAROBIN

David Starobin.

of my time working on music which many consider 'difficult'. It takes the best efforts of both the player and the listener to deal with music that often is both unfamiliar and complex. The century long argument over 'style' has finally wound down – now we need to evaluate the individual object of art on its own merit.

CC: And the guitar has certainly acquired its share of grist for this mill, hasn't it?

DS: It has. One can only be delighted at the vast outpouring of repertoire that is flooding our fingers. LOOK OUT! If you don't watch carefully, you'll have missed this year's crop of a dozen or so new concertos and, easily, hundreds of new solos and chamber works. Now, this is what I call living! If only we had a central repository to catalogue this largely unpublished body of work.

CC: Along with this repertoire comes the task of bringing the best pieces to the fore and allowing the lesser works their natural fate. How do you view the job of programming guitar recitals and recordings?

DS: With so much choice, it is certainly a much easier job than it was even 15 years ago. I try to programme the best guitar music from the past

and balance that with interesting music being written today. Hardly a revolutionary programming concept, I'm afraid, but guitarists have been notoriously lax in their treatment of older guitar music. Not bothering to play this music on appropriate instruments, we have frequently ignored many of the best works of the past, choosing instead to play a few old favourites. I think this neglect of our patrimony is in part fostered by the intense commercialism that fuels today's music 'business'. The 'music industry' does not easily allow the budding professional the opportunity to explore and perform little-known repertoire as Art, whether old or new.

"Now that we find ourselves in an era that makes the very democratic assumption that all styles and efforts are created equal, I greatly fear for the future of art that does not afford instantaneous gratification and comfort"

CC: You raise a number of interesting issues. Do you believe that the use of so-called period instruments gives the performer a 'pipeline' to some sort of artistic truth, or are we merely passing through another phase in the endless debate over the importance of 'how it sounded then?'

DS: If one looks at the differences between the early 19th century designs (Staufer, LaCote, Panormo, Sherzer, etc), and the modern guitar, the greatest difference is in the size of the instruments. Whereas a typical string length of today is 66cm, the instruments of Sor and Giuliani's time averaged around 61cm. For players of average to large hand size (let alone those with below average-sized hands), these smaller-scaled instruments give the player a better chance of creating the kind of left hand legato that is required to expressively play the music of a virtuoso like Sor. I have seen hundreds of players struggle to make this music sing on a guitar – and sing it must! If the player is fighting left – hand strain and fatigue, there is not usually much energy remaining for 'artistic truth'. Playability! That is the domain in which an indisputable case for the use of small string-scale guitars can be made.

CC: What of 'authenticity' and the particular sound that these old instruments make?

DS: It is undeniably a treat to hear 19th century music played well on a beautiful old box, but a period instrument is only an instrument after all, and no guarantor of 'authenticity'. We humans will hopefully always play with inspired, personally idiosyncratic notions of what 'then' was like. With exhilarating and terrible clarity, our own era has defined itself for history by documenting ourselves so pervasively. As the media crush turns into a deafening roar, one can only be grateful for those wonderful little mysteries that shroud our knowledge of the guitar's musical past!

CC: You have recently put away your Staufer copy in favour of a newer 'hybrid' instrument. Would you tell us something about this instrument?

DS: In addition to an exquisite 1844 LaCote that belongs to Rose Augustine, I have been playing instruments by the English guitar maker Gary Southwell during the past seven or eight years. At first Gary built me period reproductions – in the style of Panormo and Staufer. During the past four or five years, though, we have been experimenting with the transfer of many of the Staufer design characteristics to a larger, more 'modern' instrument. The present instrument that I am playing is Gary's most radical yet in this direction.

CC: How so?

DS: It moves towards 19th century design and late 20th century design simultaneously. On the 19th century side, it uses the body size and materials typical of a Sherzer (larger body than 'early' 19th century instruments, is constructed of European spruce top, with back, sides and neck of bird's eye maple), has a 63cm string length, and uses the magnificent Staufer 'adjustable action'. On the more modern side, the instrument uses fan-style bracing, and is equipped with a built-in microphone and a piezo bridge transducer whose stereo output can be mixed, equalised and amplified at the player's discretion.

CC: Such experiments frequently have positive results as well as, inevitably, some compromises. Can you speak critically about how this instrument actually works for the player?

DS: First off, I must praise the greatest guitar invention ever forgotten – the Legnani/Staufer adjustable action. This simple device, which allows the neck to pivot, thereby changing the action, is a godsend for the serious player! One can make adjustments for different kinds of musical applications (solo, chamber), for humidity changes, character of composition, size of venue, or how the player feels on a particular day. Until you actually use this divide on a daily basis, it is difficult to understand how much compromise the

player using a traditional 'glued-neck' guitar must make. On average, for a programme of mixed styles I'll change action two or three times during the course of a recital. This particular guitar is too new (three months old) to fully appraise its already considerable sonic qualities, but it is the instrument upon which I am currently playing both 19th and 20th century repertoire.

CC: You are known for your close work with composers on the development of new compositions for guitar. Many of these works are little known to CG readers. Would you single out a few that you regard highly?

DS: Among the most recent pieces, I would mention George Crumb's *Quest* for guitar and five players; Poul Ruders's *Etude* and *Ricercare* and Michael Starobin's *Joshua Variations* for solo guitar, and two pieces by Mario Davidovsky: his *Synchronisms No. 10* for guitar and tape, and his *Festino* for guitar, viola, cello and contrabass.

CC: I understand that the composition of George Crumb's *Quest* took more than five years to complete. Was the piece worth the long wait?

DS: Yes, it was. *Quest* is an authentic piece of American transcendentalism – an uplifting chamber work featuring guitar amidst an exotic array of instruments. The last movement weaves the hymn tune *Amazing Grace* through a truly haunting filigree of plucked and struck sounds. I have actually had a longer wait than five years for *Quest*. I initially asked George for a piece in 1971, and am fortunate that he has tolerated my nagging over the decades!

CC: What about *Etude* and *Ricercare* by Poul Ruders?

DS: Poul Ruders has written a remarkable guitar solo. The *Etude* serves as a quiet prelude – a difficult left hand study that quietly yet maniacally traverses the entire fingerboard. His *Ricercare* is, I believe, an important contrapuntal creation for our instrument – a dramatic structure of about eleven or twelve minutes' duration, composed in two, and then three independent voices. That Ruders, who does not play the guitar, somehow pulled this off strikes me as nearly miraculous. He has composed effectively for the guitar before, but never with such fullness of invention and meaning.

CC: Ruders's *Psalmodies* for guitar and ensemble, which I enjoyed so much at its premiere at the Purcell Room, is a work of great emotional range. Are the two pieces related?

DS: Hardly at all. *Etude and Ricercare* is a work of singularly concentrated purpose and style. *Psalmodies*, on the other hand, holds a freer rein, transforming its materials across what some might consider to be stylistic barriers. I love this about Poul's music. His stylistic inclusiveness gives his music transformative possibilities of an almost Ives-sized range!

CC: Mario Davidovsky's pieces require an amplified guitar. How are you achieving this?

DS: In a way, I've recently regressed to age 12 and my rock band days – lugging amps and stuff to gigs. If I am using a particular auditorium's house system, I bring along a Rane AP 13 preamplifier. If I am using my own gear, I recently purchased a Fishman Acoustic Performer Pro amplifier, which does an outstanding job. Both of these units allow me to separately mix and equalise the microphone and transducer. Davidovsky's pieces require a decent amount of amplification. He prefers *Synchronisms 10* to be projected at a rather bracing level, and in *Festino* the guitarist needs to be the leader alongside his aggressive cohorts.

CC: Please tell us about your brother's new piece.

DS: Michael's *Joshua Variations* was written to celebrate the birth of his first son. It's a very loving and tender set of variations on a tune sung to Josh by his mom.

CC: Does Michael play guitar?

DS: No, but he certainly had his ears full of it while we were growing up. He earns his bread and butter in Hollywood and on Broadway. The occasional arm twist by his big brother seems to get results though! He is now at work on a song cycle for baritone and guitar, whose premiere is planned for my October Wigmore Hall recital.

"I believe that it is time for players to take responsibility for their actions"

CC: For the last few years you have played programmes consisting only of music by Giulio Regondi. Why did you choose to do that?

DS: My work with the Regondi expert Douglas Rogers has given me a window onto the little-known and little-respected world of Victorian music. I've gone as far as purchasing an antique Wheatstone concertina upon which I'm very slowly making my way through Regondi's method. Doug has generously shared his knowledge of Regondi's life and art with me, for which I am eternally grateful.

Despite the fact that so little of Regondi's guitar music has survived, when programmed cannily there is enough variety and high quality music to

make a good solo programme. I feel there are only two 19th century guitar composers that I could have attempted this with – Sor and Regondi. Perhaps also Giuliani, but his best works are his chamber and concerted pieces. Mertz had trouble with large forms, and Coste seems to me too often harmonically uninspired. With the aid of a few transcriptions from Regondi's concertina music, I've been able to fashion a nicely representative evening.

> ***"It is gratifying to be part of a movement that has given the instrument more backbone for the future"***

CC: It has been difficult to evaluate Regondi's contribution because of the scarcity of information, both musical and biographical. With the first recordings of his concertina music, we begin to see a much different picture of this artist's work. How do you rate Regondi?

DS: Such a musician had to be experienced personally. The descriptions of his playing – so intimate, so warm-hearted, so dextrous – indicate a major performing talent, and this on two entirely classes of instrument! Regondi's compositions perfectly exploit just these qualities. Unfortunately, we shall probably never know the extent of Regondi's virtuosity and musicianship. Though there has been real progress in the recovery of the concertina's forgotten techniques and repertoire, the works of seemingly transcendent virtuosity (most notably Regondi's two concertos and *Hexameron*) remain unplayed.

CC: Along with your guitar playing, you conduct, you are the president of a very busy recording company, the chairman of two university guitar departments and the father of two children. Do you ever have any spare time?

DS: My family is certainly the centre of my life. I chart the all-too-quickly advancing years by watching my kids grow. My wife Becky is also my business partner, so we are always connecting in one way or another! In my spare time I enjoy surfing the Internet, and read whenever I can.

CC: What have you read recently?

DS: I'm a new fan of Don DeLillo's books and am trying to read everything the man has written. I've just finished Robertson Davies's latest, *The Cunning Man*, and am about to re-read Ford Madox Ford's World War I masterpiece, *Parade's End*.

CC: Any final thoughts about the 'state of the guitarist's art'?

DS: It is gratifying to be part of a movement that has given the instrument more backbone for the future. It is for the younger generation of players to search out the best of this new repertoire and raise the standard of what is heard. Too often, still, the 'classical' guitar is played as a party instrument, regurgitating the same tired fluff. This situation has been compounded by industry pressure to make 'career moves' and play just about anything as long as it is 'pop'. I believe that it is time for players to take responsibility for their actions. A repertoire now exists which could put the guitar on equal footing with any solo instrument, excepting the piano. We must see to it that this repertoire is identified and taught to the next generation. I completely reject the notion that the guitar does not have a lasting repertoire of quality!

CC: Thank you for that.

DS: You are most welcome, Colin.

Recent recordings by David Starobin:

Regondi: *10 Etudes*, with concertina works. BRIDGE 9039, 1993.

Coste: *Caprice* Op. 13; Sor, Op. 30, Op. 56 and other works; Regondi: Op. 23. GHA 126022, 1993.

Lennon: Zingari (concerto); Powell: *Setting*; Davidovsky: *Synchronism #10*. BRIDGE 90942, 1993.

Carter: *Changes* (with 7 other Carter compositions). BRIDGE 9044, 1994.

Regondi: Op. 19, Op. 23, with concertina and vocal works. BRIDGE BCD 9055, 1994.

Ruders: *The Bells*; Sorensen: *The Deserted Churchyards* (conductor). BRIDGE 9054, 1995.

Ruders: *Etude and Ricercare*, with orchestral works. BRIDGE 9057, 1995.

Schoenberg: *Serenade*, Op. 24 (Robert Craft, conductor). KOCH 3-7263-2HI, 1995.

Crumb: Night of the 4 Moons (banjo) with Dawn Upshaw. NONESUCH, release: Autumn, 1995.

THE GUITAR IN IBEROAMERICA

PART 18: RASGUEADOS, PART 5.

By RICO STOVER

THE high points over the last few months concerning Latin American rasgueado technique could be summed up as follows:

1) There are 9 basic movements involved
   1 downstrum with a single finger
   2 upstrum with a single finger
   3 downstrum with differing sequences
   4 upstrum with differing sequences
   5 staggered downstrum in sequence
   6 staggered upstrum in sequence
   7 continuous roll
   8 flat hand damp
   9 closed hand damp

2) Compared to punteado playing, the height of the right hand may be lower to perform rasgueados.

3) There can be involved a different kind of movement for the right hand/wrist; that of turning, much like the motion used when twisting a doorknob.

4) 'String jumping' may be involved, which, the reader will recall, involves playing (with different finger combinations) on the bass strings and then 'jumping up' to strum the treble strings with the same finger combination (and vice-versa).

5) Extreme repetition is necessary to master basic movements.

6) Listening to Latin American guitarists play rasgueados is an important part of the learning process.

7) Rasgueado 'shorthand' uses the following symbols:

= downstrum in a bass to treble direction

= upstrum in a treble to bass direction

= staggered downstrum

T = strum with fingers the treble strings only

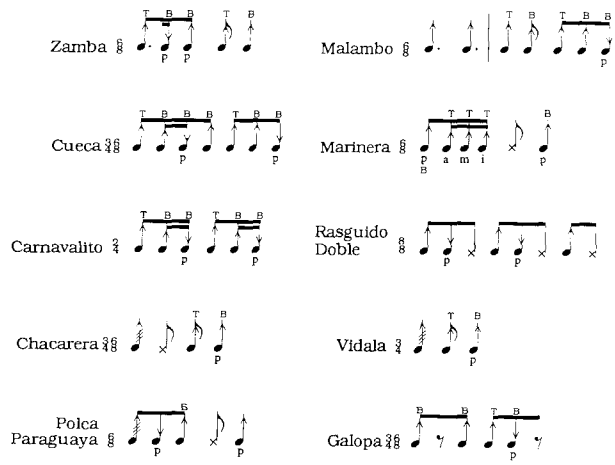
B = strum with fingers the bass strings only

p = strum with thumb only

Music Example 1: Rasgueado shorthand symbols

When the letter B is seen underneath a note (instead of at the top), that indicates the thumb plucking a *single bass note* only.

Below are a number of popular Latin American rasgueado patterns written in this shorthand, which are offered not as definitive forms but as acceptable basic versions, for with rasgueados there are many ways 'to strum' involving so many variables that it boggles the mind in a certain sense. I have only touched on the fundamentals (which are not all that simple) of a formidable topic. Suffice it to say that if any readers out there have learned how to play the *zamba* correctly solely from reading this series, then my hat is off to them. That would be quite remarkable. But it's quite a bit more complex than that. So . . . *¡Buena suerte! . . . y hasta la próxima.*



Music Example 2: Rasgueado/strumming patterns

MUSIC SUPPLEMENT

EDITED BY NEIL SMITH

PRELUDE No. 3 by Patric Standford

The Three Preludes were published in 1979 and copies of the complete set are available from RTS Partnership, 17 Bradford Road, Wakefield WF1 2RF, UK. Fax: (01924) 370 454.

BAGATELLE by Martin Vishnick

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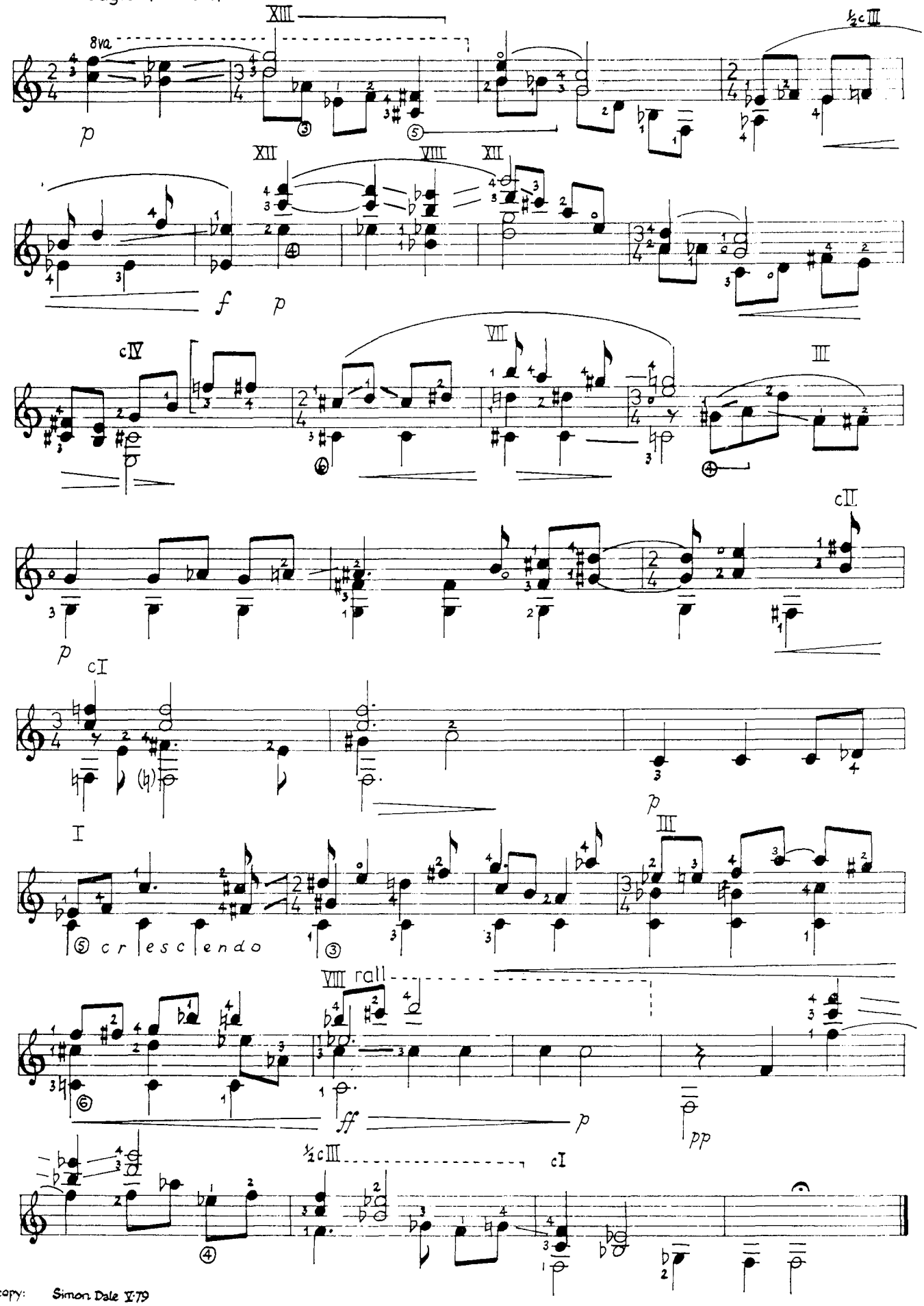
PRELUDE No. 3

Adagio (♩=48ca.)

Patric Standford

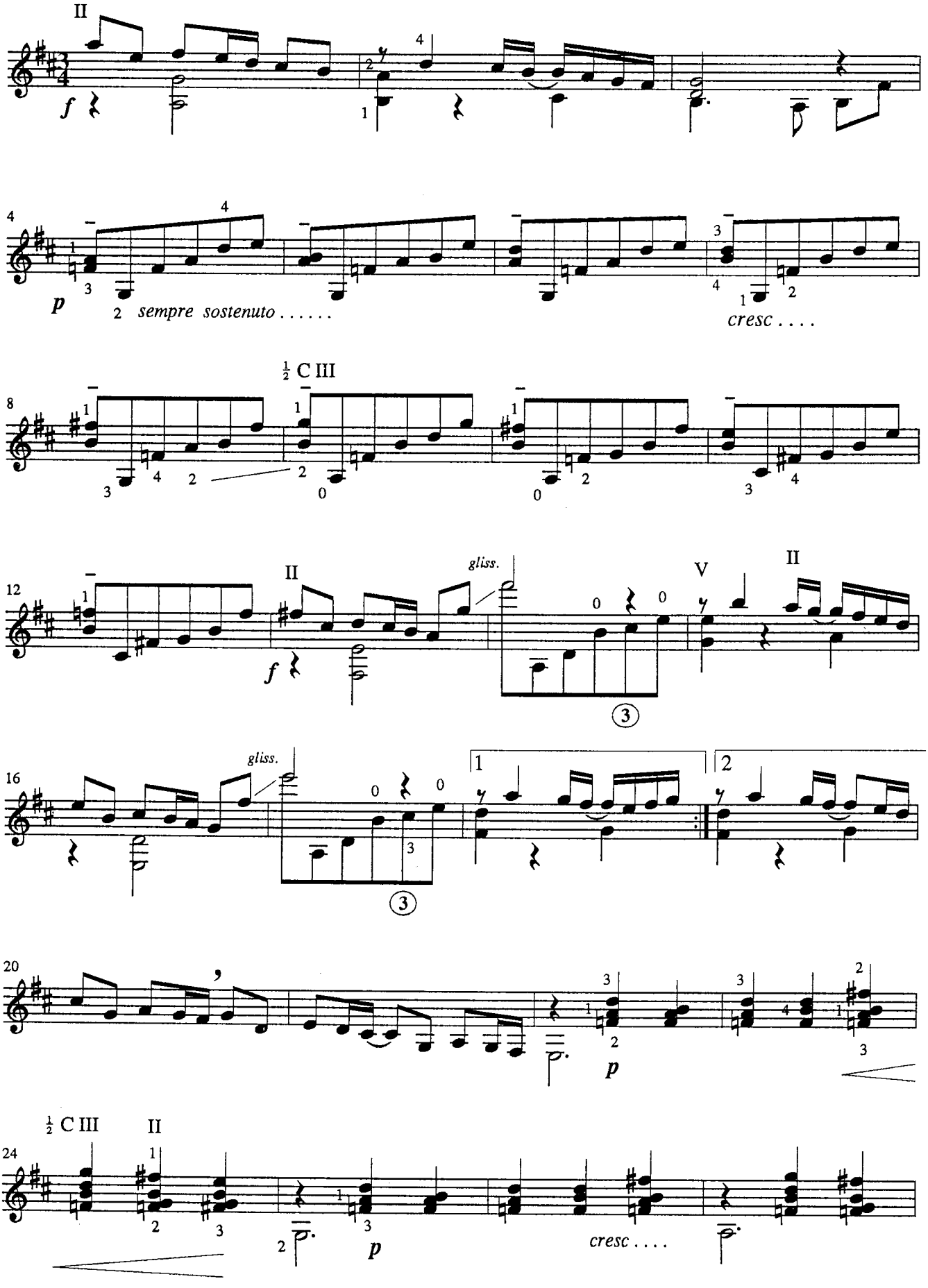


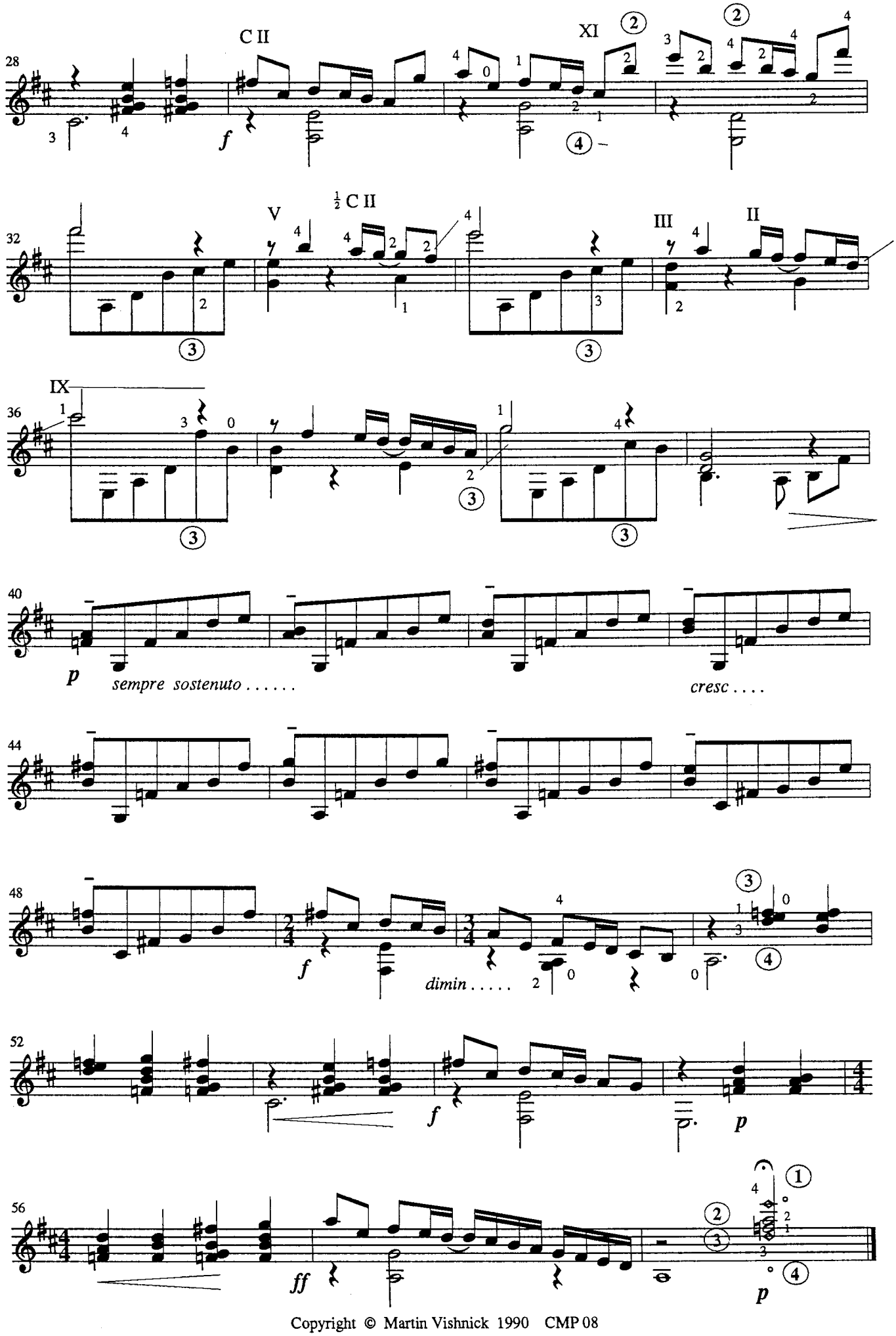
copy: Simon Dale V·79

BAGATELLE

Martin Vishnick

Allegro, ma non troppo





THE WORKS FOR SOLO GUITAR BY ANTONIO LAURO

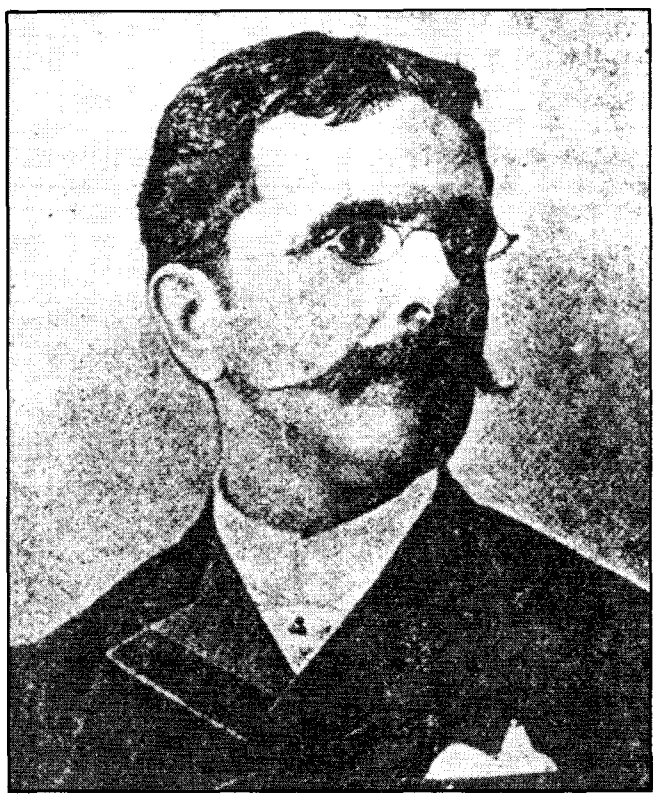
Analysis and Interpretation

By LUIS ZEA

PART 9: THE VALSES – MARIA CAROLINA

'NORMALLY written in the minor mode, the first part is melancholic and leisured; the melody undulates smoothly, full of voluptuous abandon. But as the second part begins the rhythm is enlivened and kindled, the enthusiasm bursts, and the large, open eyes of the brunette glow, and she moves her graceful figure in vertiginous turns showing her stately movements which follow that ardent and passionate music. Then comes the third part to temper such fits of joy, and to establish a kind of festive and gallant dialogue. Our valse, however, usually consists of only two parts.'

SUCH eloquent description of the parts of the Venezuelan *vals* is given to us by the Venezuelan pianist and composer Salvador Llamozas (1854-1940), and was first published in 1883 as part of an essay about the Venezuelan *vals* written for the magazine *Lira Venezolana*[1].



Salvador Llamozas

Apart from his activities as a musician Llamozas was also a man of letters. In 1882 he founded this fortnightly magazine, which was devoted to music and literature and which received contributions from some of the most renowned Venezuelan writers and composers of the time. Among the latter group were Federico Villena, Manuel Azpúrua, Leopoldo Sucre, Francisco Tejera, Jesús Suarez and S. Llamozas himself. According to Calcano (1953, p.400) *Lira Venezolana* was the best publication of its kind in Venezuela. It is therefore unfortunate that it lasted for just over a year.

My quotation of Llamozas is relevant to us because it is a vivid and telling portrayal of the three-part Venezuelan *vals* and can thus enhance our understanding of *Maria Carolina*, which is one of the very few *valses* by Lauro in ternary form. Besides, it comes from a man who happened to be the piano teacher of Antonio Lauro. Calcano tells us (op. cit, p.400) that Llamozas's talent and reputation as a teacher and his vast culture allowed him to become the central and most respected figure of the musical life in Caracas during the first half of this century. Lauro also speaks very highly of his teacher and calls him *Don* Salvador Llamozas[2].

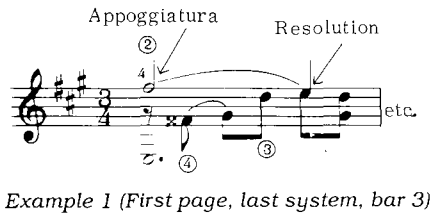
Maria Carolina is one of Lauro's most beautiful *valses*. The original title of this *vals* was *Iliana*, but for some reason Lauro changed his mind and decided to call it *Maria Carolina* instead, which is the name of one of his nieces.

Considerations for Performance

MUSICAL CHARACTER AND IMAGINATION: Llamozas's description of the *vals* is not meant to be taken literally. The idea is to use it as something that can inspire you, or as a stimulus to your imagination in order to achieve a more convincing characterisation of each part of the *vals*. For example, listen to how 'the melody undulates smoothly' in the first part, or how 'the rhythm is enlivened and kindled' in the second, or how the third part comes to 'to temper such fits of joy'.

TEMPO: As Lauro does not give a speed marking I would suggest somewhere between ♩ = 138-152 as a suitable tempo for this *vals*. I also feel that a *slightly* increased tempo suits the exhilarating character of the A major section.

APPOGGIATURAS: Again remember that appoggiaturas and their resolutions make sense if and when they are played *legato*, and that resolutions need to be treated with delicacy.

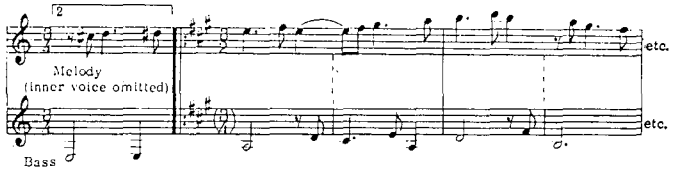


Example 1 (First page, last system, bar 3)

Apart from the above example see also Example 3b and Examples 8a and 8b below.

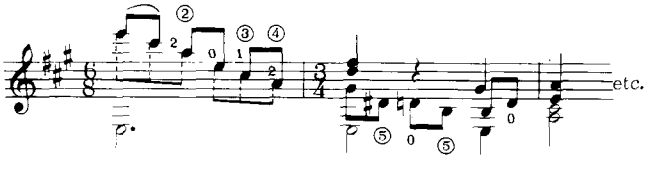
LEGATO: And talking about *legato*, I suggest that you try playing the melody of *Maria Carolina* aloud, and aim at achieving a *good, consistent legato* quality throughout. To begin you could try doing this very slowly, focusing your ears on the intervals of the melody and making sure that you connect all the notes. Then do the same at the desired tempo. This is a simple and effective practising habit which increases your capacity to hear *legato* articulation. Remember too my previous comments about 'singing with the instrument.'

INTERPLAY OF METRES: In the middle section (A major) there is an exciting super imposition of metres similar to the one we found in *Petronila* (see August article). In *Maria Carolina* though, the two metres continue their interplay for almost 16 bars. Here it is the repetition of the rhythmic cell ♪ ♪ in the melody that suggests its shift from 3/4 to 3/2, as illustrated in the following example:



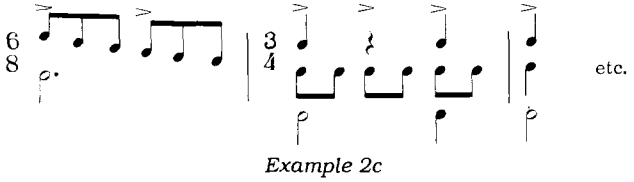
Example 2a (Beginning of middle section)

By hearing the melody in the metric background of 3/2 (whose beats are twice as long) one feels that it has more time and space to move forward, and as a result the melody becomes more agile and one will find the whole passage easier to play too. The beauty of it all is that this is happening while the bass steadily continues its course in 3/4. Toward the end of the section the sudden appearance of successive quavers moving in the same direction (i.e. downward) now suggests a return to 3/4. In order to create more rhythmic interest I prefer to hear the first group of six quavers in 6/8 and then shift back to 3/4 in the next bar, as indicated below:



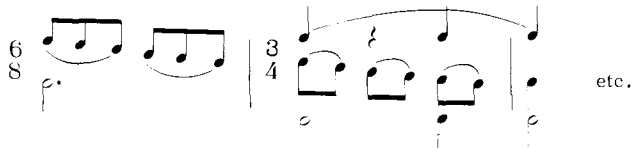
Example 2b (End of middle section)

I should clarify something important here. When I suggest the rendering of these bars in 6/8 and 3/4 I do not mean that their beats have to be accented as if the notation was as follows:



Example 2c

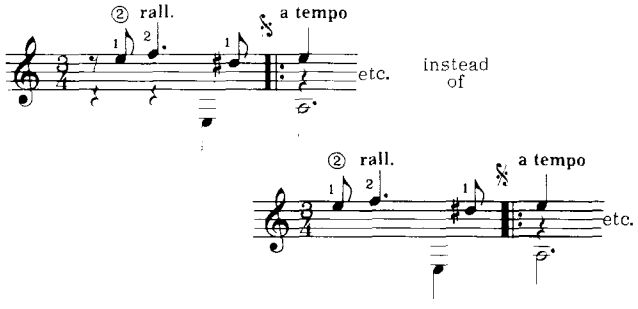
If you like you can try using the accents but *only* as a first step toward getting the feeling of the metrical changes. A closer representation of the desired effect would really be something like this:



Example 2d

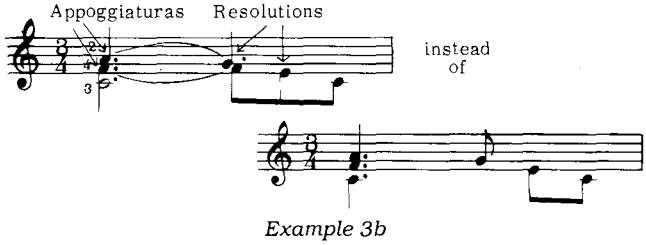
The idea is to *group* the notes rather than to accentuate the beats, and that you can make this phrasing audible to the listener *without* using accents. Furthermore, such accents would produce an unmusical result. The same applies in Example 2a above.

NOTATION: Although the notation of the opening of the *vals* is clear enough it can easily create confusion because the bar is incomplete. I think it is easier to understand the rhythm here if we read the full bar as shown below:



Example 3a

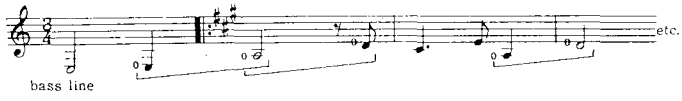
In a few other places there are very minor inconsistencies such as omission of rests and dots which I do not really need to point out since they will be self-evident. However, there is one more place that requires clarification. In the third section (i.e. last page), third system, bar 2, Lauro's notation is again incomplete. I think that what he had in mind is:



Example 3b

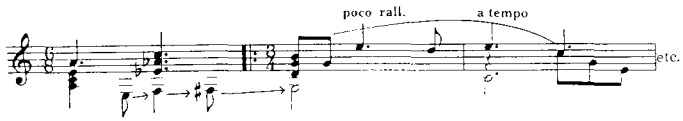
DAMPING OF OPEN STRINGS: The frequent use of bass open strings means that we have to be careful to prevent them from ringing more than they should. To this end bear in mind that the awareness of the harmony facilitates the stopping of the basses. Why? Because it is much nicer (and wiser too) to think of having to clarify a beautiful harmony than of cutting a sound just because the sound mustn't be heard any more. The goal of clarifying the harmonic changes emerges inasmuch as one hears them in the first

place. The stopping of the basses then becomes the spontaneous and inevitable 'by-product' of reaching that goal. This is a practical example of what I said in my previous article concerning the importance of having specific musical goals: every technical problem worth considering is at the same time a musical problem to the extent of often disappearing once the musical problem is solved. Try this with the opening passage of the A major section, for instance, which has several open strings in succession:

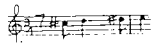


Example 4

TIMING: The timing of the passage that links the first and third sections can be tricky:

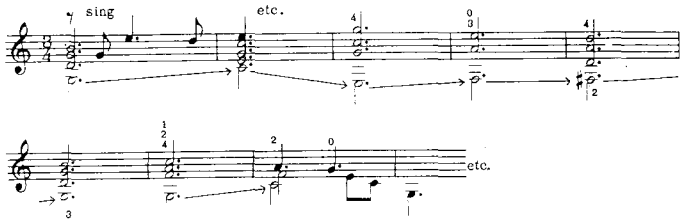


Example 5

Do not be distracted by the unexpected F minor 7th chord, and notice that it is the chromatic rising bass underneath it which will help you move along. You don't need to emphasise the bass; just hear it in 6/8 and let it lead you naturally to the following bar. It is interesting to see that this chromatic bass is reminiscent of the beginning of the theme which opens the second section  and which Lauro now uses as a transition to the next section.

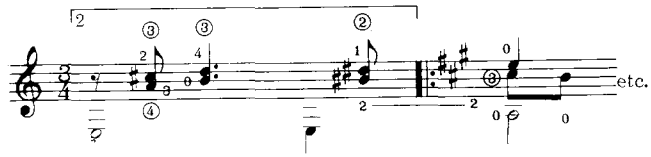
Once you get to the G major chord I suggest that you start the new phrase immediately and make the *poco rall.* on the dotted crotchet E because – if I may use an analogy here – it is really on this note that you can 'take time to enjoy the panoramic view of the new territory where you have just arrived (you're now in the land of C major!) before you proceed to re-start your journey a *tempo* on the next bar', as Lauro has indicated. I also suggest that you do the *rall.* at the beginning of the *vals* in the same way, i.e. taking your time on the longest note (dotted crotchet F) and then go on to the following bar to start the vals *a tempo*.

HARMONY: Lauro's admiration for J. S. Bach becomes evident in the care that he takes when choosing his basses. They just sound right! In the first eight bars of the last section, for example, the bass line deserves all the attention that we can give it to make it sound beautiful. As we've done with other *valses* already, sing the melody of this passage and listen to the bass while you play the following harmonic reduction:



Example 6

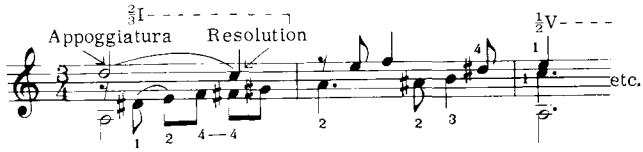
FINGERING: Lauro's fingerings are very sparse. I would like to suggest left-hand fingerings for the following places which – I think – facilitate their execution:



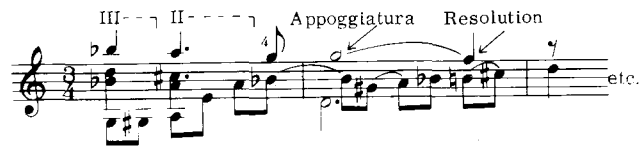
Example 7 (Beginning of middle section)

See also the finger I have provided for the first bar of Example 8a below.

CONTRAPUNTAL TEXTURE: What I said earlier on about *legato* playing applies with equal force to all the other voices too, particularly because *Maria Carolina* is one of the valses which evinces a more elaborate contrapuntal treatment. The following passages, for example, deserve a special attention because of the beauty and richness of the contrapuntal texture:



Example 8a (bars 8-9)



Example 8b (bars 11-12)

It is in passages like these that Lauro shows a strong influence from his composition teacher V. E. Sojo, who developed a highly personal style of harmonising popular melodies, one of the features of which is the use of chromatic contrapuntal lines. The goal is to unveil the transparency of the whole texture as a result of one *hearing* it. Good contrapuntal playing is really the outcome of good contrapuntal hearing. The more intense and refined your hearing is, the closer your fingers will spontaneously follow what you hear.

Notes

1. The quotation appears in Calcaño, 1953, page 384 (see bibliography) and comes from the issue of July 1st, 1883 of *Lira Venezolana*. The English translation is mine.
2. *Don* is a title given to a very distinguished person.

Bibliography consulted

Calcaño, José Antonio. 1953, *La Ciudad y su Música* (2nd ed, 1980, expanded reprint of the 1953 ed). Caracas: Fundarte.

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FUNDAMENTAL PERSPECTIVES

PART 26: PERFORMANCE ANXIETY CONTINUED

By JIM FERGUSON

A RUSH of adrenalin in response to a threatening situation can enable some people to do what would otherwise be impossible – like run faster than an attacking grizzly or muster the strength to fight it off. While some musicians report that they can turn that biochemical surge into something positive that helps them play faster or enter a 'zone' where they can do no wrong, more common reactions include muddled thought processes and right-hand tremors that run counter to accurate, well-considered playing.

Last month, a letter from Les Wright of Brighton that appeared in the June issue led me to initiate a discussion of some of the possibilities that can help minimise or eliminate stage fright. Now let's wrap things up with a few additional considerations.

Some years ago, Mariano Cordoba, the well-known flamenco guitarist, told me that he thought 20 per cent of a player's technique should be held in reserve, since he felt that performing in public resulted in an equivalent loss. The implication of that opinion is two-fold: (1) the closer you get to the edge of your technique (its upper limit), the more likely something will go wrong, and (2) secure, well-developed chops can enable you to 'play through' right-hand jitters and other physical manifestations brought on by stage fright. So if you're the kind of person who sees red flags going up at the prospect of public performance, here are a couple of lessons to be learned: (1) Never perform the most difficult pieces you know, and (2) continually strive to advance your technique, making technical studies a part of your daily practice ritual.

Both of the preceding conclusions, which have at least a fair amount of reason behind them, lead to a few other stress-minimising strategies:

- Consider playing pieces that are obscure. Playing repertoire that listeners aren't familiar with can not only help facilitate feeling a personal connection to a piece (thereby increasing your comfort level with it), but also help reduce the confidence-eroding suspicion that others are going to compare your performance to a well-known recording. (A friend of mine who has been preparing for an important concert is applying exactly this strategy).
- Your repertoire should include music that is well within your capabilities. There's nothing wrong with playing music that is technically undemanding; however, 'easy' pieces with high musical integrity can be hard to come by (more on this in an upcoming instalment). Begin to break down the association between the difficulty of a piece and your worth as a musician. Many concert players perform relatively undemanding material – not necessarily only because it offers a bit of relief; it's also important to like what you play. But an easy piece gives you something to fall back on should performance anxiety rear its ugly head. I've been to many concerts where a well-known player has made last-minute changes in the pieces he or she was advertised to play. Such changes usually arise for one of two reasons (please take this with a grain of salt): (1) Either the artist's management was too cheap to have new programmes printed, or (2) the artist began to have second thoughts about whether he or she could successfully play a given piece that night. The fact that something easier is invariably played in place of the original selection suggests the latter reason. Call it a hunch.
- Since stage fright can trigger memory lapses, always know a piece inside and out. One rule of thumb dictates that you should 'live' with a piece for a year before performing it in public, an idea that may seem extreme and can often be impractical. Nevertheless, there are several approaches that can help you indelibly ingrain music that you've just begun to work on. One involves separately learning the necessary right- and left-hand movements, while another concerns being able to write out the score from memory, down to the smallest detail. It can also be helpful to be able to mentally 'play' a piece's every aspect without touching your instrument. Understanding the elements that are used can be constructive, too, including scales, arpeggios, cadences, modulations and textures.

Here are a few other ideas – some reasonable, others more radical – that performers and public speakers have found to be successful.

Breathing: One reflection of the onset of panic is erratic breathing, which can impair your ability to function at your normal physical level. While you are playing, continue to take breaths at regular intervals. Awareness is the key. Keep in mind that some guitarists tend to hold their breath during difficult passages, so look for this in your playing. While breathing techniques often do little to dissipate panic once it's descended, they can help you relax before a performance – especially if you experience 'butterflies', a stomach-centred fluttery sensation. Here's a four-stage approach called 'square breathing' that might prove helpful; each part should be

done over a four-second time frame: slowly inhale, hold, slowly exhale, wait. Repeat this process four times. Alexander Technique – a kind of holistic approach to relaxation that some performers have found useful – integrates breathing, posture and awareness into a single method.

Drugs: Some musicians who experience symptoms of performance anxiety, including shaking of the hands, have turned to 'beta blockers', a class of prescription drugs that affect the neurotransmitters that slow down the heart rate. One such substance is Propranolol. Consult your doctor to see if this route is right for you.

Hypnosis: is yet another possibility, although its effectiveness can be hit or miss. Bear in mind that it can wear off, necessitating more sessions.

As you may have gathered by now, there are many approaches to alleviating performance anxiety. Finding what works for you is the final task. Regardless of what you try, nothing can replace experience. Acclimating yourself to playing in public remains the most common solution. Last month I listed several ideas concerning how this can be gradually accomplished – a concept that, incidentally, is called 'encounter therapy' in some psychological circles. In addition, there is no benefit to denying, ignoring, or dreading the impact of stage fright on your playing. Viewing the resulting symptoms with curiosity and even humour or anger will be healthier in the long run and better enable you to effectively deal with them.

And if stage fright occasionally pays a visit even after you've established a history of successful performances and taken every precaution, consider heeding the advice of the wise Sioux chief Plenty Coups: 'There are things in life we do not understand. When we meet them, all we can do is let them alone.'