

Onward: Bringing Finger-Style Guitar to Other Universities

Rachael Carlson

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1 Introduction

The world of finger-style is faced with a beautiful problem: there is currently only one university program in the world which offers a bachelor's level degree in finger-style guitar. It is beautiful because there is a program which has the foresight to offer a program. It is a problem because the fate of finger-style guitar in the university is intimately intertwined with the success of this program and its graduates. From an extreme viewpoint, this program could be viewed as either the catalyst for the flourishing of finger-style in the university or the death knell for finger-style guitar. The intention of this paper is to establish a foundation upon which a proposal for a similar finger-style guitar program at a university can be built. This proposal can take many forms. I will be examining numerous possibilities for how a proposal could be constructed.

This topic is massive. This paper is a personal journey and it can be reflected in the language used in this paper. I am not going to be able to address each detail of a proposal to a university. While conducting the research for this paper, my aims shift, my tactics change. For instance, after speaking with Michael Chapdelaine, my vision of the future has changed. I plan on redoubling my efforts as a performer/composer as my avenue by which I may enter academia as a finger-style guitar instructor. Such changes as this are not to be viewed as hindrances to the completion of a paper. They are deeply related to the purpose of this paper.

2 Tactics

This section will examine the different manners in which it seems, to me at least, that I might be able to convince a university to offer or reveal the importance of offering an undergraduate degree in finger-style guitar performance. The first is to situate the instrument and its manner of performance within its contexts as a way to show the historical significance of the style. Second, I will attempt to look at how the style is existing in the present and how it might exist in the future as a way to anticipate its future successes. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I will discuss different ways in which I can development as a performer, composer, and scholar as a means to establish my own significance in relation to the style. I deem these to be tactics

which I should have in my back pocket, if you will, in case I am ever in a situation in which I might need to demonstrate the significance of the style or of myself.

2.1 Situation

This tactic takes two forms: first, the history of the guitar; second, the history of finger-style guitar as a genre of music. I will not spend too much space in this paper going into a detailed history of either of these subjects.

The purpose of situating the guitar within its contexts serves multiple purposes. First, it reinforces my own understanding of and abilities to discuss the historical components of finger-style guitar as a manner of playing the instrument and as a genre. Second, this is an area in which the scholarship is not as robust as it could be: the history of finger-style guitar is yet to be written. Third, deep knowledge of these subjects may aid in the pursuit of revealing the significance of finger-style to individuals who do not know anything about the guitar or finger-style in particular.

2.1.1 The History of the Guitar

This section of the situation tactic will go into detail on the development of the steel-string six-string guitar along with an examination of its predecessors, the seemingly mythic *guitarra latina*, the renaissance guitar, the vihuela, the baroque guitar, and the early six-string guitar. This section would be similar in focus and breadth to the Finger-Style Guitar: History & Performance class offered at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee by John Stropes.

2.1.2 The History of Finger-Style Guitar

This is one of most exciting areas of interest to me as a scholar. A history of finger-style guitar has not been written as of the writing of this paper. I have been formulating theories on how to discuss the history of finger-style guitar. The most convincing way, to me, to discuss the history borrows from studies on feminism.¹ In the historiographies of feminism, authors frequently use the term ‘wave’ to describe groups of contemporaneous feminists (i.e. 1st wave feminists, 2nd wave, etc.). In the case of finger-style guitarists, I believe that the history would begin with proto-finger-style guitarists who could be considered the first wave. These proto-finger-style guitarists would be individuals such as Arthur ‘Blind’ Blake, Huddie ‘Leadbelly’ Ledbetter, Charlie Patton, Lonnie Johnson, Robert Johnson, Maybelle Carter, and others who were playing the guitar with their fingers and not a plectrum during this era. If I were to produce a paper on this subject, I would most likely start by limiting the scope to the history of finger-style guitar as a genre in the United States. Even limited the scope to finger-style guitar as a genre might suffice.² It is important to understand one’s historical contexts. It is from these perspectives that one might be able to anticipate future developments of the genre.

1. It appears that Martha Lear of *The New York Times* was the individual who coined the term ‘first-wave feminism.’

2. The plectrum-style compositions of Michael Hedges propose a curious case in this respect. Perhaps not dissimilar to proto-finger-style guitar compositions such as “Guitar Chimes” by Blind Blake, plectrum-style compositions by notable finger-style guitarists could be considered finger-style in an honorary sense.

2.2 Projection

I see this tactic as having two subsections, the near-present and possible futures. The near-present would examine the changing landscape of the business of music. More specifically, I would attempt to find some numbers, real data, on the presence of finger-style guitar on YouTube and other internet sites as a way to establish the ubiquity of finger-style guitar. This information would help project the status of finger-style in the future. The goal of this research would be reinforce my perspective toward the future in a way that I can energize those around me to the unique possibilities of offering a finger-style guitar performance degree.

2.3 Personal Growth

After the interview with Michael Chapdelaine in which he said that he thought that I would need a D.M.A. in order to be hired as a tenure-track faculty member in guitar performance, the personal growth tactic become much more important to me. I realized that Chapdelaine might have been referring to classical guitar instruction in relation to his recommendation of a D.M.A. This leads me to believe that one way into academia as a finger-style guitar instructor could be through establishing myself as a performer and composer within the genre. This could perhaps fulfill an experiential requirement for employment.

2.3.1 As a Composer

A marker of success in the world of finger-style guitar as a genre is the performer as composer. The artists who are success who do not compose are in the minority. Their number can be counted on one hand. The finger-style guitarist as composer is a unique component of finger-style guitar. This generative characteristic of finger-style guitarists is one of the major characteristics which sets it apart from classical guitar.

I have taken private lessons in composition. I have received several recommendations for books which aim to assist in the composition process. One such book, recommended by Dr. Monhardt, is *Learning to Compose* by Larry Austin and Thomas Clark.³ This book is out of print, with used copies frequently selling for more than \$200. I have a copy from the university library which I will copy before I need to give it back to the library. Another recommendation, this time from Dr. Heinrichs, is *Musical Composition* by Reginald Smith Brindle.⁴ This book is easily available through book retailers with used copies selling for less than \$20.

In the next several months I will compose enough music to record an album of original finger-style guitar music. Once I reach this point, I will send my music around to various record labels to determine interest in my work. Record Labels of interest include: Candyrat Records, Righteous Babe Records, Constellation Records, and ECM Records, to name a few.⁵ Knowing that there is a possibility that none of the above labels will show interest in my work,

3. Larry Austin and Thomas Clark, *Learning to Compose: Modes, Materials and Models of Musical Invention* (Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown Publishers, 1989).

4. Reginald Smith Brindle, *Musical Composition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

5. "Home | CandyRat Records," *CandyRat Records*, accessed May 8, 2017, <https://www.candyrat.com/>; "Ani DiFranco and Righteous Babe Records official website - righteousbabe.com," *Righteous Babe Records*, accessed May 8, 2017, <https://www.righteousbabe.com/>.

I will figure out what is necessary to independently produce the record in order to continue my career as a performer.

2.3.2 As a Performer

I have worked diligently in Milwaukee to establish myself as a performer of finger-style guitar music. I believe that in the last ten years I have made a name for myself in Milwaukee. I have opened for Don Ross and David Wilcox. I have played at the Milwaukee LGBT Film Festival opening reception three years in a row at the Villa Terrace. I had a weekly gig playing music for the dinner crowd on Wednesdays at Centro, an Italian restaurant in Milwaukee's Riverwest neighborhood. I have played for various functions at UWM as a performer recommended by the Dean of Peck School of the Arts. As part of my degrees in performance, I have given three recitals as a solo finger-style guitarist. As a member of an ensemble, I have played for the Florentine Opera and in the progressive rock band sun rock man. As a lutenist I have played basso continuo with Camerata Milwaukee and fundraisers for Early Music Now.

I will be moving to Boise, Idaho at the end of May, 2017. I currently have one gig in Boise; I will be playing guitar and banjo in a production of the musical *Oklahoma!*. I have several goals, in no particular order, as a performing musician in Boise: first, find as many gigs in the area as possible; second, compose an album's worth of material; third, identify and begin working on beginning finger-style guitar repertoire with the aim of establishing a larger core of material for the development of finger-style guitar performers; fourth, establish a regimen of physical fitness which will help improve my ability to perform all of the above.

2.3.3 As a Scholar

This component of personal growth was discussed briefly above. I believe that it is possible to find a niche within the field of ethnomusicology with a study of the history of finger-style guitar as a genre of music. A published article in a scholarly journal can only assist in garnering a position in finger-style guitar instruction. I would imagine that there are few guitar instructors at an institution of higher education who also have published articles in scholarly journals.

3 Interviews

I wanted to discuss some of the issues that we face as academic guitar players with individuals who include finger-style guitar in their curricula as guitar instructors at universities or colleges. I found four individuals who do such a thing: Michael Millham of Gonzaga University and Eastern Washington University; Michael Chapdelaine of University of New Mexico; Sean McGowan of University of Colorado at Denver; and John Stropes of University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I was able to interview Millham and Chapdelaine. These were the first steps taken to construct a bridge between UWM's finger-style guitar program and other universities in the country. I was unable to interview John Stropes and Sean McGowan. The aim with the interviews was to determine how the instructor interacted with finger-style guitar in their respective positions and to determine a best course of action for an individual who is

interested in teaching finger-style guitar at a college or university. I have included transcripts of the interviews with the submission of this paper.

Michael Millham teaches only guitar majors at Eastern Washington University. At Gonzaga University, he teaches mostly music education students. In the interview Millham, indicated that the degrees that are offered by Eastern Washington University are flexible enough that if a student wanted to pursue a BA in Guitar Performance with an emphasis on finger-style guitar. This university is able to use “that secondary holder as a catch-all for people who don’t want to do the lute suites.”⁶ At Gonzaga, he has some performance students. Millham was not very clear about exactly how finger-style guitar interacted with his institution.

Millham in discussing advice for a finger-style guitarist who would be interested in teaching at the college-level recommended that

if somebody can play well, and they get well known in a town that does not have a guitar program *and* they have the piece of paper, then pitching the [unintelligible] guitar program. And then, once you get in you can teach what you want. Why not teach a finger-style program? It sounds cool.⁷

Millham’s interview was marked by a sense of optimism for the future of guitar studies in spite of the trends in university business structure to higher workers by using the “temp worker” model. A distillation of this idea can be stated by Millham thus: “This idea that a degree will buy you a job is false. Your skill and your attributes buy you a job and your degree is an envelope to package it in, in my opinion.”⁸

Michael Chapdelaine has a storied history within the world of classical guitar. He indicated that he had difficulties when first hired to work as a tenure-track faculty member of the University of New Mexico’s guitar department. He has mostly taught classical guitar at this level. However in the past few years he notes that its “been growing a lot...because I just took the reins off of the curriculum.”⁹ Chapdelaine notes that he has two years of programmed, classical study of the guitar. Once the student has progressed past this Michael asks the student “what do you want to play?”¹⁰ If a student wants to play finger-style guitar Chapdelaine assists them in that endeavor. Chapdelaine’s recommendation to students interested in teaching at the college-level is that he or she needs at least a DMA in classical guitar performance in order for a university to consider the application. Chapdelaine’s approach to finger-style guitar is very similar to his approach to classical guitar. He considers it all to be “polyphonic guitar music.”¹¹

There is a lot to consider in these interviews. I would charge the reader with carefully reading the transcripts of these interviews. They are two very different personalities and viewpoint on and in the pedagogy of guitar. Personally, there is a lot to consider as well. I can’t help but

6. Michael Millham, interview with the author on May 11, 2017, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI. Page 8 of attached transcript.

7. Michael Millham, interview with the author on May 11, 2017, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI. Page 10 of attached transcript.

8. Michael Millham, interview with the author on May 11, 2017, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI. Page 11 of attached transcript.

9. Michael Chapdelaine, interview with the author, April 29, 2017, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI. Page 4 of attached transcript.

10. Ibid., 6.

11. Ibid., 7.

want to side with Millham's recommendations as I have little interest in going back to school for a DMA in classical guitar performance.

4 Conclusions

Much of the work that I have done in this master's degree has been preliminary work. This paper is no exception. It is the beginning of a career in guitar performance and instruction. I hope that the excitement that I feel about this subject is apparent in these pages. I feel that I have a better understanding of how I can continue as a finger-style guitarist in the 21st century through the work that I have done for this degree.

References

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Michael Chapdelaine Interview

Rachael Carlson

Conducted on April 29, 2017

I have attempted to omit abandoned sentences and filler-words where appropriate in order to ensure that this document is as useful as possible. I have also written words without dialect.

M: Michael Chapdelaine; J: John Stropes; R: Rachael Carlson

J: Hey Michael

M: John, how are you?

J: I'm fine. It's nice to see you.

M: Good to see you.

J: Thanks for taking some time.

M: My pleasure.

R: Hi Michael good to see you again.

M: Good day

J: Why don't you pull up a chair as well?

M: Sorry if I look like a street person but I'm freezing.

J: Well what about, aren't you in New Mexico

M: Well, in my building they turn the heater off at a certain day. which should be fine and all of sudden it's snowing today. — and now they can't turn it

back on so I'm have my feet on the remaining parts of my video studio that weren't stolen, which is the lights, — video lights

J: Well, It's good, I mean, you're a survivor. Listen, I think you know I think you know the scope of this, Rachael's doing a project in which the goal is to try and understand a little bit more about how guitar programs are constructed around the country round the world and maybe to understand how a program in finger-style guitar in particular could become part of the system of universities or college and I know in talking with you it sounds like you've always included you know kind of an open minded approach to guitar within your program but

(2:00)

maybe we could just start by asking you exactly what degree tracts are available at the University of New Mexico?

M: We have obviously performance degree which is the one where we take the most liberity if someone wants to play other stuff we get to that and then theres music ed track usually they are so busy with their academics that we pretty much to straight ahead Bb classical until their recitals. A certainly composers we work on composing so that draws from pop music it draws from finger-style traditions and then for whatever else interests them and interests their composition teacher

J: so is that a BFA in composition you're speaking of?

M: we have a BFA but its just general. It would be a BM in Composition.

J: okay, and the education bachelor of music is a bachelor of music ed probably

M: correct

J: and then the performance program is that a BFA program?

M: it is a BM

J: okay

M: Bachelor of Music

J: okay and I notice that the name of another instructor guitar on the faculty

M: would that be mike anthony

J: yes

M: you know his

J: no

M: he's a badass

J: great

M: he's an old jazzer, like from the wrecking crew days. he did all the sessions in LA in the 60s. but his main thing was always jazz they call guys

J: so what does he

M: he retired a long time ago his wife moved here and started the dance studio

(4:00)

J: so what does he do at the university

M: good question

(laughter)

M: I never see him

j; does he teach guitar?

M: I assume he teaches jazz guitar because we do the jazz guitar program but they won't come near the classical studio they just You know they have that dichotomy of fear and also of superiority so they stay the hell away from me

J: we know about that here as well. We understand completely. Yeah there's a line. Okay. so to what extent you know we use the term finger-style guitar and its got to be one of the vaguest terms in the world. I mean its almost hilarious. But I think we understand each other when we use that term. To what extent would you say finger-style guitar is a part of your curriculum now.

(5:09)

M: It's been growing a lot in the last years mostly because I just took the reins off of the curriculum. And I decided that I'm just going to teach them whatever they want to know and so that turned into "oh I'd really like to do this tune that you recorded on this video." "Okay, fine. It's harder than anything you've ever played but you can play it if you want." And so they do. And now their starting to come in a lot with their own arrangements and its quite remarkable. The classical thing works so well for our generation because well that was the only alternative. And it had a discipline. And a curriculum to it that was rigid and rigorous. You know like we could walk in and feel like I was really becoming a college student following some program. You know these days it's a lot harder to interest a young student in rigor because they've grown up in an era where the worst thing that ever happened was the fact that they all got an A and they all got a medal they all got a trophy. So it's kind of hard, its hard to have that same discipline about as we did back in the 70s. So I guess that's the long answer to. We're doing it more each semester. For a while it was just one or tune things. But now it is most everybody is doing something instead of the classical rounds.

(7:00)

J: You mentioned that a while ago that you took the reins off. What precipitated that?

M: My divorce.

J: So that was actually related?

M: Well you know we have these various phases in life when stuff comes and knocks the hell out of us and then we get to decide what to hang on to and what to let go.

J: yeah, I know about that.

M: You couldn't be this age and not. It's not possible. So anyway, I got beat up pretty good for about three years. And lost everything. And then still get to pay her for the rest of my life. And I just decided that life is too short and its too difficult for me to impose my every set of parameters that I find to be important on all my so that's worth that. It been about 8 years

(8:12)

J: Did you get push back from your institution?

M: No they don't care. As long as I don't ask for money, they don't care what I do. They don't want to know. They care that it gets them their rehearsals and their ensembles. You know that ultimately their students all go to law school after they get out. And I don't know if they even play music is a hobby. Also my students stage of music. And they go on and figure out a way that—guitarists are very industrious—they all go on and figure out a way to make a living, and they do. So, The school doesn't care.

(9:00)

I don't even think they care if I just didn't show up for a while. The students might mention it. And word would get around. And really, and I don't mean to sound cynical, I'm not at all I'm glad that its that way. And we're a very poor school. New Mexico is—as you probably know—we're 49th in almost everything but we're trying harder. And certainly in funding for education I think we are 49th or 50th. The worst.

(9:40)

So yeah, its pretty—I have a lot of freedom.

J: So try to talk about the extent to which that finger-style guitar is currently included. And how its included and when you bring in the repertoire and what kind of repertoire you bring in.

M: okay, when they start, everybody does kind of the same stuff. They all play they learn in line there's a page you can go look at about. It's on my web page. So you don't have to go looking for it. And it describes a good deal of what we do and it has this list of modes that I want all of my students to play as part of their daily routine. And so they all have to learn that. And then we learn op. 114 by Carulli, which is that set of 24 arpeggio studies. He calls them preludes. And then we ease in a little bit of Leo Brouwer, *Simple Etudes* and then some Sor Studies. Carcassi.

J: Is this on the University website or your own website.

M: I'm trying to find it. So I'll just send you the link.

J: Okay, great.

M: There's a lot of material here. So there it is. I thought there was a place on here where I could send you a note.

J: Oh, on Skype? You can just—

M: No, I got it.

J: Okay, you can just send it as an email attachment too.

M: Bam!

J: Okay, let me take a look.

M: So what you'll see is a rather lengthy treatise on how to make tone. And I think it's applicable to both styles, of course. Because good sound

(12:00)

is a really good thing.

J: Okay.

M: So this thing is called Lesson 1 Focused. I told this is a supply list, that's pretty obvious. And then I wrote another thing about technical things about the left and right hand that I think are universal and pretty helpful. And after that is a set of modes that I made up. Which are just a set of three notes per string I just have a little box for each mode so that you. They are not always three notes but they stay within a four fret area.

R: Oh I see, yeah.

M: And so then finally we ease into some Ponce Preludes and then some real repertoire, you know, Bach cello suites and the usual suspects.

(13:00)

And that's probably two years worth of stuff. Except someone who is pretty gifted already. And then we will start, you know, "what do you want to play?" I've got a couple of guys who really surprise me. I've got a guy who brought in a Jason Mraz tune. And did a good job with it. It's not a tune I would have

ever thought to arrange. And you know, I show them how I arrange. We talk about texture. We talk about polyphony. We talk about what to do with melody versus non-melody. And really the teaching in the finger-style is identical to the classical because its still all the same elements.

J: So after kind of two years of a set program you're happy to have people bring in what they are interested or

(14:00)

make suggestions about repertoire and you help them with it whether you're familiar with it or not you do your best to assist them in following their ambition on this.

M: Right. And very typically they want to play my stuff for which there is a great deal to choose from so that makes it easy. A lot of time they want to play my compositions too which you could call them classical you could call the finger-style it doesn't really matter. It's just polyphonic guitar music. Just like Hedges played. Just like Segovia played.

J: Do they sometimes work with the music of Michael Hedges?

M: You know, most of them don't know about Michael Hedges.

J: Oh

M: Which is too bad. And I don't really—I can't. It's like delivering them The Beatles or delivering them Chick Corea's *Return to Forever*. You know, its old stuff. Its their dad's stuff. And they just don't care. You know their pretty crazy about Andy McKee and some of the other CandyRat sort of guys. And I rarely will—We certainly will not work with TAB. If they can't find it with real music I won't work on it because, you know, TAB is a great way to look at architecture but it isn't a great way to look at what the design is. You know, I can't point to a 7 and a 3 and say that's a minor 3.

(15:40) J: Do you yourself play in unusual open tunings?

M: No. I only—I never change the top four. And I'll change the bottom two depending on the key. So frequently the sixth-string will end up at a D or a C and the fifth-string might go down to a G.

J: But it's not a large enough adjustment that you won't have a problem

reading it in standard notation.

M: Correct. Yeah, once I start tuning the rest—I can get by with the—not that we we’d ever use it, but I can get by with a lute tuning too. You know if you turn the G string down to an F# I could still stay on track because I use to do that so much when I was younger. But once you start doing you know, big boy tunings, Joni Mitchell and Hedges and all that, I just can’t do it. I want to know too desperately what I’m playing.

(16:45)

J: We find now that probably, I don’t know, half the repertoire use is in some manner of strange alternate tuning.

M: Right.

J: So all the students—and really tablature is the only recourse.

M: Yeah, no doubt.

J: In that situation. So it becomes much more valuable to students, actually. Or maybe even essential. But we usually write things out in parallel TAB and standard so even if you’re reading the tablature you can see the movement of the pitches quite easily.

M: Right. And you guys all study reading too besides finger-style?

(17:29)

J: Yeah. Yeah. But we don’t—we start with foundational elements of finger-style guitar which would include country blues and folk music and every manner of whatnot that has come before that fed into contemporary composing styles for finger-style guitar. So its a different approach.

M: Do you have a curriculum online somewhere that I can see?

J: No, actually not. But maybe we can talk about it when you come here next semester hopefully.

M: Sweet.

J: If that—presuming that all works out. I think it will, actually. But Rachael

has some questions for you. So I'm going to let you take over.

R: Okay. Thanks again, Michael.

M: Hey, my pleasure.

(18:25)

R: So I'm curious about how you first got into teaching guitar.

M: I needed the money.

R: Yeah?

M: I will never forget, I was in college, and my teacher, Bruce Holstman, said "I've got some students for." And I went "Okay." And he says "What do you teach from?" And I said "you know, one of those teaching books." He said "Okay." he gave me the number. And I had no idea. I had to go to these little kids house—the dad was a doctor or something. And I just figured it out as I went along. I guess I'm pretty good at it now.

(19:15)

R: And how long have you been teaching?

M: I guess, 40 years now.

R: Great. Great. Good work.

M: Well. Its good news and its bad news. I'm closer to the end. I know a lot more than when I was close to the beginning.

R: And those first students that you were teaching. Did you teach classical guitar to them?

M: yes

R: Okay.

M: At that time that was really all I had. I mean I played in rock bands before I got into college but I didn't have any kind of vocabulary to teach it.

(20:03)

J: I assume you were using the Aaron Shearer book or something then.

M: You know, I wasn't a Shearer guy until his final publications with Mel Bay. Which he himself pretty much denounced all of the stuff he had published before that. Which is pretty amazing. No there was no Shearer in our lives at Florida State in the 70s. We used Frederick Noad's stuff.

J: Oh.

M: And I told him one time when he was still living I said "You know I've probably sent your kids to college on the amount of learning the classic guitar"—no, no it's called *Guitar Playing*. Book 1. No. *Solo Guitar Playing*.

J: *Solo Guitar* yeah.

M: He thanked me and said "yeah, thanks for doing that." Fortunately you're not the only one. But I still use that book when I teach a beginner.

R: Okay.

M: Its great. It can't be improved on.

(21:15)

R: And then, when you started teaching finger-style guitar at the University of New Mexico did you experience any sort of resistance? I mean you sort of hinted at how your institution seems to have a hands-off approach to you. Have you experienced any kind of resistance, either from your colleagues or from the institution?

M: No. But for a while I kept it in the studio and didn't bring it into the recital but now its fine they play where ever they want.

R: Okay

J: But you—originally when you got that position they hired you as a classical guitarist, I presume.

M: Oh God yes. And that's what I was. You know I had no interest in anything else that was it. And that didn't change until after I won Winfield in '98. Even when I went to Winfield, I was a classical guitarist. They just didn't know it. Because the judges can't see you. And they just didn't know.

(22:28)

J: What did you play at that competition?

M: That was how I pulled this scam off. I played a blues tune that I wrote. And so, that was acceptable under any conditions. I played a waltz by Antonio Lauro. Which sounded a bit, you know, like all those fingerpicker guys were into Chet and into Lenny Breau and into samba rumba stuff and so a Venezuelan waltz by Lauro is—they don't know that's classical music. And so that fooled them. And then I played *El Colibrí* by Julio Sagreras which is just fast and "Oh my gosh how does he do that?" And then I played another one of my compositions that's somewhere between rock and roll and Shostakovich. So, yeah, completely bamboozled.

(23:25)

J: Do you think—I know we joke about this but do you really think they didn't spot the Lauro in your program?

M: They didn't know the repertoire. I know who the judges were now because years have gone by and they didn't know that repertoire.

R: That's a good choice too. From my understanding Lauro is, in a lot of those tunes, he is emulating the Venezuelan harp which is a steel-string harp. From my understanding. So, good on you.

M: It was a stroke of—the whole thing was like destiny because my life as a classical guitarist was pretty much destroyed by the Segovia incident. And so I was not working nearly as much as I had been before that happened. So I was looking for a way to get more opportunities. And I was reading *Finger-Style* magazine and *Acoustic Guitar* and I kept seeing these like same 5 guys all over the place and they all had this credential which was "National Fingerpicking Champion." "I guess I better get one of those." So I found out it was in this cornfield in Winfield, Kansas. Basically the Woodstock for bluegrass people. I really thought a lot about how I would do it. And what repertoire might work.

(25:00)

And I didn't know any pop music, yet. So that wasn't an option. And I had a handfull of compositions of my own and then a handful of classical things that could sort of be passed-off as something hip. And so, Bam, I got the

prize.

J: How old were you in that Segovia class? Were you in your 20s?

M: I was 28. 29.

J: Oh, you looked quite young.

M: Yeah, the age gods were good to me until recently.

R: So how did you get your position at the University of New Mexico? So you mentioned that you were hired as a classical guitarist.

M: Yeah, in those days there were quite a few professor gigs that would come up. Two or three a year.

R: Okay

M: I had a part-time gig at Metropolitan State College in Denver that was eventually going to turn into a full-time gig. This New Mexico thing came and so I auditioned and they hired me.

(26:20)

J: What year was that?

M: That was '85. What I didn't know was they had just fired, two years ago, the most beloved man in New Mexico, who was a Cuban guitarist named Hector Garcia. And he didn't suggest that he was the true Segovia, he made it clear that Segovia was a fraud and that Hector Garcia was the Chosen One to classical guitar in the world. This state—I'm looking out at it—here it is. Here is my state.

R: Oh wow.

M: This state is half latino. And so this Cuban guy—and he's high Cuban, you know—Cuban's can be so proud and so convincing. So he was really loved more than anybody in the state. When I replaced him—you know, this young-looking 29 year-old white guy from Denver—it was bad. This university of sued by several groups. I was sued. I was harassed until I got tenure six years later. Then they finally just ignored me.

R: Wow

J: What was the nature of the suit?

M: Well, I would say racial discrimination. That the only true people who could teach classical guitar had Spanish blood.

J: Why did he get fired?

M: He had some personal problems. He couldn't make it to school anymore.

J: But he got fired, he didn't quit?

M: Well he had tenure. I don't know exactly what they did but I think that they harassed him to death. And so one day he just stopped going. And he stopped coming long enough that they could make a case to dismiss him. But unfortunately he didn't leave. And so he and all of his compadres just made this young guy's life living hell. I even had my children threatened. I would have people coming to my office regularly threatening me. It was crazy.

(29:00)

R: Now moving to the present. How students do you have now that you might consider to be finger-style students?

M: Leaving our original statement that everybody who plays polyphony is finger-style I have 15 students. Of them, probably 10 of them are playing some form of non-classical polyphony. And an awful lot of it is again my compositions or my arrangements because they are just readily available. And I like it.

J: That's material that you've published. So its easily available to them?

M: Easily, yes.

(30:00)

It's become a problem for the pop tunes because I got busted last year by Hal Leonard for my arrangements so those aren't really available anymore. But I think that I can show them to them.

J: My view is that within the context of a private lesson when you and a

student are in a private room, you can jot down anything you want and hand it to the student.

M: That's right. That's still possible. I can't sell them.

J: You know, Hal Leonard is right here in Milwaukee.

M: Maybe you can drop by and put in a good word for me. The problem is years ago when I started making these arrangements, I have well over 100 of them, I asked them and they said "you're too small, it would cost us too much to administer your publishing than we would make off of it. And so, no you can't have the license."

J: Now, if I remember correctly they have a full-time person just sending take-down notices to YouTube Channels.

M: Oh really?

J: Yeah.

M: I didn't know that they cared about YouTube. Because they still get paid. Because they monetize all of the pieces that I didn't write. So I think their okay with YouTube covers.

J: Maybe so. Do you know how long that's been possible on YouTube

M: I would imagine since the first time that a Hal Leonard person had a chat with his lawyer. We have something, I forget what we call it, a compulsory license or something that the owner can monetize it and that's what you do in exchange for using copywritten material.

(32:00)

J: Yeah. That's my impression to. However, that wouldn't cover publishing. That would be book publishing would be different entirely.

M: Wow, that's a very contentious area. That's like stealing people's land, they just don't like it.

J: So I guess that the topic then is what do you think the future will hold for finger-style guitar program's that might crop up in other institutions. Is it likely that they could crop up? Is it always just going to be considered a

surreptitious plot that you just have to sneak into a university curriculum? Is classical guitar ever going to open up to welcome more input? Will classical guitar ever get its nose out of the air?

M: You mean out of its ass?

J: What ever metaphor you're looking for. What do you think?

M: I know this is hard to believe but I think the answer is 'no.' I don't think they ever will. I think that because when I get invited to be on a classical guitar festival and its not infrequently that that happens they don't bring me around because I can play classical, they bring me around because I draw an audience. And they have no interest in anything that I do that isn't classical. And even though I'm sort of the obvious link between the two, what most of these guys know—I know most of the people in the classical world, and I guess that I know most in finger-style world—they just don't seem to want to polay together. Its really bizarre. Of course its fear based. The problem for the classical side...

J: I think our signal just froze. Can you hear us?

(skip to 35:28.94)

J: Sorry we got cut off just when you were about to say the most important thing.

M: I was on that really dense V chord with the 9th in it blaring away. I might have forget

J: You know players like Ben Verdery or Andrew York who also have, or even Bill Kanengeiser, people who have, they have marketed themselves as people who do something more something outside the boundaries of classical guitar. And you were saying that you're called upon in that same capacity.

M: The problem they have of course is that an awful lot of the writing in finger-style world is not very sophisticated. They may have very sophisticated technical tools. Combination of percussion and pull-offs and slurs and things they can do is really astounding and they have a fantastic groove and sense of rhythm that coming out of finger-style's heads is wonderful. But most of them can't write. I mean, its your job at Wisconsin to help carry on—it did start with a very good composer, this whole movement with Michael hedges was a

great composer. And a lot of times I think there's a mistake that one he did was, he was a great guitar player, and he truly was, but the reason he was so great writer. And if the finger-style world doesn't get its writing a little bit better, of course most of them don't go to college. So I think its [unintelligible] who are going to help them to notice that their not writing, Because most of them are metal guys and basically they are writing metal tunes. You know, there's verse A, Verse B which is Verse A with a little more stuff. there's not much development of material and its not because their not talented but their just not trained.

(38:19)

J: Well, that's interesting that there's some, its circular in a way. If students are not in the academy, if they aren't learning to become better writers...Do you think that its healthier for finger-style to stay out of the academy. Because if its out of the academy they don't have to do, they just get to create their whole deal and they can run with it as fast as they can. Or if finger-style guitar is in the academy will it become so well organized that it will no longer be interesting. That would be another aspect of it.

M: Yeah. I think we're seeing saturation certainly of finger-style. And I think we're seeing also the ceiling of composition. And learn Haydn and Beethoven. The problem with everything, and of course the reason that classical music is dead, is because we always have to think better and we have to get more clever and we think of ourselves as artists the same way that physicists, like scientists do, which is that we always have to go find something new. And we saw that happen in painting until abstract expressionism everybody just thought its ugly so they went through and just started going back. And music when we finally get abstract expression, which is basically Schoenberg, even though its highly serialized it all sounded like ass and just because its original it had some excuse to exist in the academic world. And so I guess the thing I'm trying to say is if we don't grow we just disappear, I think. So I think the only hope for finger-style is what you're doing, otherwise it's over. I just saw the monkey guy...guitar monkey...

R: FretMonkey?

(42:00)

M: Fretmonkey. So you know that guy was so excited about it that he was going to come out and take on CandyRat. And he had a core of five or seven

guys and they're all just incredibly skilled. And the world didn't say "thank you". It just said "Huh, here's this again."

J: Did you enjoy some of those players? I'm not familiar with their work.

M: I don't hear a lot of melody. And if I don't hear a lot of melody and if I don't hear a lot of harmony I don't like any music. Even with Lady Gaga if she doesn't find her way around into a melody I start to get kind of eyeing for the exits. And so I think most of them FretMonkey guys who are incredibly good at reproducing the things that are easy to recognize in Andy McKee or Hedges but not necessarily the content that it carried. And so its just of a logging [?] of derivative stuff.

(43:00)

so yeah, those guys need to go to college.

J: So do you have any recommendations for someone, like Rachael, who might be interested in proposing to, cold calling some university about establishing a finger-style guitar program. Any advice?

M: Well it sounds like you have a real musical background. You play counterpoint and study harmony. If somebody mentioned Late Beethoven String quartets it would mean something to you.

R: Mmmhmmm.

M: I think that you have a chance of at least getting an audience with those kind of folks. Obviously its probably why you're doing what you're doing.

(44:00)

With going to college and studying guitar. Yes, someone's got to do it. I mean it can't just go away because Hedges died. I mean, he's been dead too long. But it hasn't gone anywhere since he died. If you showed me the best composition of any finger-style guitarist currently working, I would say, "oh well that's not as good as "Aerial Boundaries"" or "that sounds a lot like "Aerial Boundaries."" I heard one by a really famous guy lately. And fortunately he wrote on there that it was a tribute to Hedges. It was like "wow, this is Hedges" well it wasn't it was almost Hedges.

(45:00)

So you go to a Thai restaurant and they have pasta that isn't always Thai and you're thinking "wow this is almost Italian." Am I right? Has anybody done anything better than Hedges?

J: Well, a couple of people. You know I was thinking too, I don't know if I have your mailing address. If you could send me your mailing address, I'd be happy to send you something that you might find interesting.

M: cool

J: and then I don't know if you will find any of this interesting but we have tried to stay up and we are obviously looking for the best material possible but that's come out in the 20 years since Michael passed away. I can't believe that its been that long. I don't believe it. I refuse to believe.

M: Yeah, its pretty insane.

R: Sort of thinking more personally about myself. Do you think that its necessary to have a performance and recording career before a University or college will take somebody like me seriously as a candidate for an instructor position?

(46:35)

M: As far as I can tell, the way it works now is they're looking for a Doctorate and their looking for competition victories.

R: Okay.

M: And I don't think anybody can get hired anymore without those.

J: Well you're talking about a DMA in classical guitar for example. Or just in miscellaneous PhDs?

M: I think to get a gig teaching guitar at a university you need a DMA in guitar performance.

J: and by that you mean classical guitar performance?

M: Until we find a way to make it broad again. I mean that's a pretty daunting taSK.

J: Well I think there, the world wound up with way too many with masters degrees in classical guitar. And that was no longer a distinguishing credential.

M: right.

J: of course in guitar generally the situation is a little bit different. there are hardly any DMA guitar programs in Jazz guitar specifically although there would be degrees in Jazz Studies. More likely. General jazz programs

M: right, I think USC has one, Indiana has one,

J: I think northwestern has a program in Jazz studies or I'm not sure what they call it exactly. Around the world when you travel around the US are there any spots that you think are interested in a broader definition of guitar that you play with your fingers?

(48:55)

M: I see them going the other way. It just seems, its a pedagogy that is so self serving that it creates little Mussolini's, the classical guitar pedagogy. The only thing that will make them change their mind would be the need for money. Because once you've been indoctrinated—and you know, I was very much in the Borg myself for a long time—once you've been in, you're in. It's like being a Moony. You remember the Moony's.

(50:00)

J: Rev. Moon.

M: A religious group back in the 70s. You have everything you need. There's warmth and there's nurturing and theres mutual respect, all these things and they all play at each others festivals. Nobody cares about it. You get really sad.

J: Well that is an interesting comparison.

M: And I love classical music. And it's just over. The only people we see who are really kind of getting ahead are the one's who are creating their own music. We see, this guy who is going to be on the Internation Guitar Night named Marek Pasieczny. He writes his own music and he plays the hell out of his guitar. He has like 45 doctorates. I don't know how he can have so many degrees and not already be in a wheelchair. But he is amazing and he is

getting tons of work and its because when he shows up he has something to say that sticks. So I know that classical dies. I know that I will be playing the same fifteen pieces. Its not going to work much longer. So I think, What I am saying is that there is a huge hole for finger-style people who have some level of sophistication to go in and grab work.

(52:05)

I don't know how its going to ever fit in academic though.

J: Why do you say that?

M: I think you guys froze. You froze a while ago.

J: Can you hear me?

(skip to 54:05)

J: Can you hear me? I know our video and audio of you is out of sync...

R: Are you aware of other universities in the cournty or in the world who offer or include a finger-style curriculum?

M: No. I think we're it.

J: Okay, well power to the people. Michael thanks very much I really appreciate you taking some time. You've been very generous and it nice to hear to talk. I'm charmed by your philosoophy.

M: I don't want to be depressed. Sometimes when I, I'm so invested in classical music and I just see it, unless everybody starts writing, that's what classical music was in the past, it didn't have all of these trained robots who only played the repertoire that was approved by the grand potentate. People loved music and they learn how to play it. That is the beautiful thing about finger-style, pretty much every one is original in their intention. And if we can figure out a way to convince them that it would be good for them to study Beethoven instead of just the finger-style guys that they love there is no question that a kindred spirit is in all of this. There is not one that is necessary more weak than another, you know. If you give them the training they're going to turn out to be great. And I know you can appreciate this because you have been doing this as long as I have because you have been trying to take this out of the classical box. You're doing the right thing.

J: Thank you. I appreciate your thoughts greatly. Will you send me your mailing address?

M: I will.

J: And I would love to send you a package of stuff that you might find interesting. And we can continue this conversation

Michael Millham Interview

Rachael Carlson

Conducted May 11, 2017

I have attempted to omit abandoned sentences and filler-words where appropriate in order to ensure that this document is as useful as possible. I have also written words without dialect.

M: Michael Millham; J: John Stropes; R: Rachael Carlson; K: Keleren Millham

(00:26)

J: wonderful! Very nice to see you. Rachael Carlson here.

R: Hello. Nice to meet you.

J: Michael, I know that we have a lot to catch up on. Didn't we talk about 20 or 30 years ago.

M: Yeah, I think that's about right.

J: Yeah. How have you been in the mean time?

M: Playing guitar and well.

J: Good

M: And plenty of it.

J: I still run into Dan Schwartz. In fact, he was just sending me some text messages this morning.

M: Dan is a long time friend, for sure.

J: He's a good guy. We've got a guitar builder, Jason Kostal, who's coming into town. He just build a guitar for Willie Porter apparently. And Dan's been going to be coming down and have dinner at the end of the month. So I'll be seeing him soon. He was just on his way to his gig at the airport.

M: That's pretty fun. Will Boulé ran into him at the airport the first time he came out to work with you, I believe.

J: So, the. Thanks for sending Will this way, he has been a real treat. What a load of enthusiasm.

M: Real quick. The story on Dan Schwartz is that my wife and I used to tour with him when he would come out this way. So we have done a bunch a trips up and down the California coast and Oregon and things like that. Playing colleges and coffee houses and pubs and whatnot. Now we met through Billy McLaughlin who I met when I was probably younger than you.

J: And I met Dan through Tuck Andress initially. I remember Tuck had run into him and he was in for a concert. And he said "Hey, this kid will be in touch with you. Treat him okay."

M: Cool. But I think it panned out already. He got some good skills out of it. Some standard notation and everything.

J: So everything seems to lead forward. Right now Rachael is doing a paper on—it's kind of a survey on what guitar programs around the country and around the world include finger-style guitar and how they manage to do that. I'm talking about college-level programs. So I thought it'd be interesting to interview you on this topic. There aren't that many to speak of. I mean are aware of any other programs which include finger-style guitar in anyway whatsoever.

M: Aside from yours, not really. Not really at all. It's largely a function of having a player that is excited enough about the genre to push for it. Is what it boils down to.

J: I know there are a few cases where people are teaching guitar in colleges and because they have some interest and expertise some of the students wind up studying finger-style guitar. And there's the program in Denver that Alex de Grassi always reminds me of with Sean McGowan.

M: Oh yes.

J: Who you could say that's kind of the finger-style jazz program because Sean plays with his fingers but it strikes me as pretty much being a jazz program where finger-style guitar is used. But anyway, let's start from the beginning. Let me ask you a couple background questions.

M: Shoot.

(4:00)

J: What colleges or universities do you currently teach at.

M: I currently teach at Gonzaga University in Spokane Washington. And then Eastern Washington University which is a state school. That's where Will came from. That's in Cheney, Washington. Which geographically—I mean it is 18 miles away.

J: So when did you begin at each of those schools?

M: I just finished, literally, I turn in grades this week at Gonzaga, and that will be my 16th year there. Eastern is 10.

J: When you began at each of these schools, in what capacity were you working? I mean, what you were doing on the one hand and what programs you were involved in.

M: They're slightly different. Gonzaga is out of the Jesuit University system. And for their music, they do have music majors, and they have some that are really good. But its largely a, their idea is to have well-rounded graduates. So they love a lot of people participating in music. In our heyday we would have a hundred people taking guitar with three instructors. And I got hired originally to teach beginning guitar classes. Literally, we were on our way out of the Bay area to Portland—we were doing some gigs in our van (the same one that Dan Schwartz has been). And the cell phone kicked on. You know, the service kicked on coming out of the Red Woods and it was Gonzaga saying can you come back and teach these classes in a couple weeks. Because I was one of the better known guitarists in Spokane at that time. Do you mind doing this? And I was like “yeah, that sounds like fun.” So that's how I ended up at Gonzaga. And then of course, you get people that come along and want to major in guitar and get that kind of thing happening. My first guy that ever

graduated from Gonzaga a kid named Evan Everest who was the first person to graduate on the guitar performance track—classical. And his now wife but then fiancée was a journalism major and she got a job out in the middle of nowhere because that's what happens when you get a journalism degree. You've got to take the city beat your first job. And she ended up in Ukiah, California. And guitar being a small thing, that's where Evan met Alex de Grassi. So Evan, the first guy to graduate with a performance degree from Gonzaga is the one who introduced me to Alex. And he was the last of finger-style guys, my heroes, who I had not met. I had met all of them. You know, I met Pierre, Michael, and Laurence you know. Alex was the last dude. Great guy.

(6:30)

J: So you were hired initially at Gonzaga to teach class guitar?

M: Yep, beginning class guitar and then you know private lessons as well. Overflow. Through those I ended up working with majors. And that's really. The beginning class is more recreational. It's people who are pre-med and mechanical engineering and life sciences and they are taking guitar because cool credit. And it's like "As long as you're taking guitar, let's make sure that you're good at it."

(7:00)

J: So they have a performance degree on the books when they hired you?

M: The performance degree came shortly after I was hired. They had an overarching bachelor of arts degree. That's why Evan was the first performance degree, he's not the first guitarist to come through there. But he is the first to do the Junior Senior recital for thirty minutes one hour track.

J: Was that a BFA then?

M: That would be a BM.

J: BM okay. And do you they also have a, yeah okay. And the class guitar was just an elective credit for whoever wanted to take it. Was there other guitar instructors there at that time?

M: Yes. Yes. They actually—and that's the deal, they had two instructors, who

for various reasons, departed from the program leaving a void. So the guy that was left and everybody who was outgoing said “well, the best guy to take this, as the quote goes, Michael Millham, and good luck finding him.” Because we were vagabonds we lived in our van essentially. All of our stuff was storage and we didn’t have a lease or an apartment. We had cell phones and a Toyota Previa. And about four grand worth of PA. We had these speakers and a guitar or two. And so that’s what the deal was with the cellphone.

(8:07)

Now Eastern was a different deal. That thing is, I actually left another position with a local university to start the program from scratch there. And kind of jump it. I started with one student. That’s a music major. It’s a state school, a little bit more affordable. I only work with Majors there. I don’t teach anybody recreationally. They have performance majors. But music majors, music ed, composition and guitar performance.

J: So those are the three programs at Northeastern that include guitar? Music ed, what did you say, composition and guitar performance?

M: Those are the tracks where I tend to have a lot guitarists. I’ve taught some people that are saxophone performance and guitar is a second instrument. It’s largely either instrumental performance. The large majority something like seventy percent are music ed, getting ready to go out and teach in the secondary ed market. You need a primary instrument and some percentage choose guitar. And in composition there’s a lot of people that do comp track that are interested in writing for guitar as well.

(9:11)

J: Its funny by comparison to our program here, the licensure requirements for music ed in the state are so heavy that its all a person can do to get through the program without having to without allowing themselves time to take guitar. Which would be very useful in a school setting. So I’m glad to hear that you have a little more flexibility where you are.

M: So your music ed majors have to have a primary instrument though.

J: Yeah but it’s like music ed band, music orchestra, music ed vocal, and music ed guitar is not in the list.

M: That is astonishing. As you probably know, the NAMM association has told us that guitars have out sold every other instrument combined since like 1974 or something. People that come out with guitar proficiency, that can actually play, like sit down in front of people and play a piece, they can pretty much write their own ticket and start a class guitar thing and turn a .6 appointment into a full-time appointment just by that. So by that, at least in Washington its a great time to do guitar.

J: That's nice to hear. So take your student load at each of these schools can you give the proportion of one type of student, one program type of student to another.

M: As far as like—

(10:45)

J: Like at Northeastern, how many students do you have and what programs are they coming from? Are they participating in.

M: Its split you know, I would say the majority of people that I have at Eastern Washington are performance majors. They're there to play guitar. They're interested in going on and working professionally in some capacity. Second to that would be composition mainly because we have a brilliant comp guy. Who is sort of cutting edge. He was just recently written up in *Newsweek* and *The New York Times* for some of his ideas. So attracts people—

(11:30)

J: So what is this composer's strength. What instruments does he enjoy working with? Writing for?

M: Experimental music and computer music. And he is on the cutting edge for working with natural sciences and composition. One his students is a comp major whose primary instrument is guitar just wrote this great piece of music based on the proteins of the heart and how the protein sequences unfold. I'm not a science guy. I don't profess to understand it but I was watching the premiere of that at a recital the other day and thinking "this is the first new thing I've seen in music since maybe minimalism. Very cool."

J: So was it a guitar tune.

M: Yes. A three movement suite based on the proteins of the heart.

J: Oh, that's nice. I mean its nice that your composition instructor's happy to include guitar as instrument and not deal entirely with computer generated music.

M: To be honest, a lot of this program stuff is really just personality driven. If I take a comp student, I'd be like let's look at this Carcassi etude. And what I want to you do this week, you need to write something to get your hands, you know you can either do the Carcassi etude, which is great, or we can take the same basic chord progression, analyze it, and then go okay, take another meter, put it in seven and extend them all by using jazz harmonies. One 7ths and 9ths or whatever and come back with something. Once the comp guy figured out that these tunes were actually going to work he sort of gave me free rein to include them.

(13:00)

He's got his program but he loves the addition of guitar. Its been a nice collaboration. That's because he just a great guy and I like to think that I get along well with people. That's how it worked out.

J: That in itself would an important component of any university program. Folks who get along and can create a friendly atmosphere for growth.

M: It boils down to trust. We don't have a finger-style program at Eastern. But what we do have the ability to do is do a BA in performance. We have some flexibility. And the performance degree Bachelor of Music is "here is your literature" and you're expected to have movement from a 20th century concerto by your senior year and you have to have your Baroque suite. All the stuff that goes with classical music, René Izquierdo stuff. And then the BA is like "well, you can sort of do whatever you want." What I'd like is for someone to do a junior and senior recital working on the music of Alex de Grassi and Michael Hedges and Pierre Bensusan if they so desire. Or jazz or whatever it is. So that ends up being the catch-all. And once there's a certain amount of trust. Will Boulé wanted to pursue that and its like "well, let's pursue it."

J: Now what was Will's degree? The name of it?

M: BA in guitar performance with an emphasis on finger-style guitar. If he wanted pursue guitar performance he would have had to learn lute suites and

Tarrega and things like that. I think that's great if you enjoy that music and you live for it. And you wake up hungry to just like dissect it. But if your thing is Pierre Bensusan and Laurence Jubar arrangements and all that then I wouldn't wish another for you. Like I wouldn't want to study heavy metal myself even though I like listening to it. Everybody has their own thing. For Will, let's make this degree work for the student rather than cram the student into a little degree box/basket. There is enough trust in the department. The first time Will got up and played a good rendition of "Layover" everybody's like "this things cool, let's run with it."

(15:00)

J: Let me go back I want to make sure that I understand this clearly. Will's degree was a BA in Music.

M: Yeah.

J: And you're calling that a performance degree.

M: It was a BA in Music, Emphasis: Guitar. We are using that secondary holder as a catch-all for people who don't want to do the lute suites.

J: And the people who want to do the lute suite. What degree are they pursuing?

M: Bachelor of Music Performance.

J: Okay. So you consider the BA to be a looser structure where more is possible?

M: It's a great degree. All it boils down to is a little bit more liberal arts. Totally legit degree and we are using that as a way to allow students to participate in what they want to do.

J: Yeah, more flexibility.

M: We can have Mark Hyphen from the San Francisco Conservatory, Michael Partington from the UW come and do the classical recitals but we can also bring up Pierre Bensusan, Laurence Jubar, Alex de Grassi. All of whom have come to visit the program.

J: That's nice. You know the way you put it reminds me, I don't know if you

remember who Duke Miller was at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles where Billy McLaughlin went to school.

M: Yep.

J: With Scott Tennant and Bill Kanengeiser. It was a good class. They just had programs in classical guitar, and studio guitar was the way they divided it up. Maybe they still do. Duke allowed Billy to exist. Knowing that he wasn't aiming at either of those. And it was really nice. It was nice that a person like Billy has been allowed to exist. Without the good judgment and generosity of that program director at that time, he would have had to fit into a square box.

M: A degree is just an abstract concept until somebody gets inside it and vivifies it. It's like Aaron Shearer letting Michael Hedges exist in Peabody. To some extent that happened. If that guy was forced to study 20th century concertos and lute suites, he probably would have been good at it, but the musical landscape of guitar would look vastly different. I'm sure Billy could have done "Capricho Arabe" just as well as anybody but we wouldn't have somebody with an absolutely identifiable signature sound. I truly believe that we are here to support the students, in my opinion.

J: You know the story with Michael though. He was actually scrubbed out of the classical guitar program after his first year at Peabody.

M: Yeah. I think he was working with Ray Chester or something.

J: Yep. Again, maybe it's just another way of looking at what turned out for the best for Michael. The fact that he wasn't accepted into this more tightly delineated program.

M: In a more kindly way, wasn't Astor Piazzola scrubbed out of the comp program with Nadia Boulanger. That whole quote about "you can either be a second-rate classical composer or go back and be the best composer for Argentinian tango."

J: That's right.

M: Take Will for example, he could have done the classical thing. He's a very smart guy. He's a wicked hard worker but it's like "why, he likes this other thing and he's good at it. We need more of this other thing than we need people doing the 20 Sor studies." I think that there's more opportunity for

graduates. The finger-style thing is not going away. And there's more opportunity for people who go out and start finger-style programs in community college than there is classical at this point.

J: How would you imagine, if someone like Rachael is just coming out of UWM with the second masters degree, one in Liberal Studies and one in Finger-style guitar performance. How would you recommend that someone like Rachael would go out and try to pitch the idea of a finger-style guitar program at on of hundreds of schools in the US?

(19:17)

M: Liberal studies means you can be a blogger. You are talking about somebody who will be carving their own niche anyways. I will say this there's this idea that you are going to go out with your degree and your going to get tenure-track position and all that. And those things are all kind of going by the wayside. At the time that I have been at Eastern I have seen the amount of tenure—I've been there 10 years, right?—and the number of tenure-track positions have been cut in half in the time that I have been there. Everything is going to a part-time deal. And I'll tell you the whole reason that I'm teaching at these universities and not somebody else is because my picture was in the Weekly and I was on every TV station. They'd play a radio ad and I had CDs and stuff up. If somebody can play well, and they get well known in a town that does not have a guitar program *and* they have the piece of paper, then pitching the [unintelligible] guitar program. And then, once you get in you can teach what you want. Why not teach a finger-style program? It sounds cool.

J: It sounds like you're saying too that once you get in, you have a lot of flexibility to move a program into the area of your own specialty.

M: One thing that everybody needs to remember, in education we are moving to a business model nationwide. Make no mistake about it. It's no different than pitching yourself to a theater for putting on a guitar summit. Pitching yourself to the weekly publication in your town for an article. Pitching yourself to a record label, if those even exist anymore. I guess some are still out there. The whole point is that you have to create your own deal. A lot of these is, a piece of paper is a gateway so when they are doing their accreditation they can say "Yeah, this person has a masters. And yeah, its from Wisconsin's finger-style guitar, but it's still a Masters in Music." And then its like, do students like you? Are you producing students in good numbers? And are

they producing good sounds? And that is what it boils down to. This idea that a degree will buy you a job is false. You're skill and your attributes buy you a job and your degree is an envelope to package it in, in my opinion.

J: You mentioned living in your van with cell phone. Was this your early idea for a path to drum up your own place in the world?

M: No. I'm married to a singer and we put a bunch of tunes together. The very first performance that I did that wasn't classical—when we're out of school we moved to Spokane and I got a chance to do an opening for Ed Gerhard. And the guy that was producing went "Hey! You and Jill are doing some stuff. We'd love to have you open for Ed Gerhard." At the time, we had written four tunes that were really, really good. Strong finger-style. And we're like "Yeah, maybe. I don't know. What are you looking for?" And he goes "Maybe four tunes. Just a short set." And I go "You're on!"

(22:15)

And the response was good. Finger-style and voice. Big magnetic pickup and all that kind of stuff. Well let's do more of this. We like performing. I had to do a CV recently to—you have to do these things to keep your employment—and I was going to through all our taxes, which fortunately I've kept, and I've discovered that we have averaged over a hundred shows per year for over 20 years. We just never stopped. And back when we were touring with Dan Schwartz it was more like 150 a year because we are playing the rinkeedink little coffee houses on the way in between colleges for 50 bucks. Muddy Waters in Arcadia California for 8 people and those things. We still play out all the time because its what we want to do. So it wasn't like it was a grand plan and we're going to conquer the world with arts. No, it's fun. We're young and we can live in a van. And we're together let's go play a bunch of shows. And we just haven't stopped.

(23:05)

Got one this weekend. Two. Three. Three this weekend.

J: Sounds good. Rachael? You have some questions?

R: You've pretty much asked most of the questions that I had. I get the impression of how you're going to answer this question already but I'll let you know what the question is. I'm wondering what your thoughts are on the

presence of finger-style guitar in a university. Do you think it belongs there? Should it be there? Or would it be better for the health of finger-style guitar as a genre to not be in a university setting?

M: Yeah. That's a can of worms. I think it's a great idea because more options is better for degree programs. Again, my opinion.

R: Yeah.

M: The push on—if you look at the history—you know John going to be able to—you've probably forgotten about more programs than I know. You've been in the game a long time and started a bunch of programs. But my sense is this guitar thing kind of, you know, sort of is a byproduct of maybe 1928 and Andres Segovia coming over and maybe getting people to start to think a little bit differently about guitar versus banjo or whatever. Then you start getting some of the first programs, early on. On the coast, big cities. And they became pretty much a classical thing. We're starting to get where there's a jazz thing. And now the big push is to do what's called modern band. You've probably heard that. Popular music programs. I don't know. Is the program that you're working with an accredited music school?

R: Here?

M: Yeah.

R: Yes.

M: Like through NASM?

J: Yeah. We're at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. So it's a state university.

M: Then you know that you maintain accreditation you need to have people who have doctorates in music education. That's the most recent. You may have had to do a search if you didn't have somebody already. To maintain accreditation through NASM you need to have somebody who has a doctorate in Music Education. A lot of those doctorates are coming out of coastal schools more than I can think of in particular. And there's a real push with that to do popular music. There's actual programs where you can go study Dave Matthews and Pat Metheny and things that are popular. And when you look in that context, and you spread out in that direction, then why

not have something where we're pushing towards proficiency with Pierre Bensusan, and Alex de Grassi and John...whoever?

(25:42)

J: Are you saying that programs that include popular music will ultimately be required to have people with PhDs teaching them? Or DMAs?

M: No. I'm saying that as far as accreditation NASM has recently instituted this requirement. That you have to have somebody with a doctorate of music education on your staff to be an accredited music school. I know that because that led to a rush of hiring three new music ed directors in the schools in Spokane where I teach at. Because none of them had somebody with a doctorate. They want to maintain their accreditation so all of a sudden these positions were created and these searches were done. With that comes this idea of moving towards more modern bands, pop ensembles, and songwriting classes. By the way, I have co-taught a songwriting class with my wife. I'm totally on board with that. I think its great. What I'm saying is there's, not a loosening, that's the wrong word. As long as we maintain some academic rigor I think it is fantastic to have different genres. More biodiversity is better.

J: In classical guitar now, more and more people, as I am sure you're aware, are staying in to get a DMA degree. Just because there are really a lot of classical guitarists with masters degrees. It's hard to distinguish yourself if that is your terminal degree. And I don't know if I see the real health in getting a DMA in classical guitar performance. It seems like an odd idea in one sense. It would be easy to say "well, if you didn't figure out how to be become a classical guitarist after getting a masters degree maybe you're not made for it. Sticking in school is maybe not the thing for you." But I can see that people are staying in school for classical guitar just to have a higher terminal degree when they apply for jobs. And I can also imagine that in the future, hiring classical guitarists won't be based so much on how they play as what degree they have. Because schools will be competing to look good in their catalog with DMA degrees. But I don't know how that relates to finger-style guitar. Because in our world there aren't a lot of people that have credentials who also have an interest in finger-style guitar.

M: Well, these things are all cyclical and subject to timing. Which is why I say that—when things are talked to Will about a masters in finger-style guitar right now and you can correct me if I'm wrong but I believe the masters *is* the

terminal degree in finger-style guitar.

J: Correct.

M: Do you have a terminal degree in your discipline? Is your discipline something that will attract students. I think the answer to both of those is “yes” and “yes.” There’s employment potential if you want to go the university-route. This is something where we’re working on fitting in a discipline that probably predates the human species, which is to say music, into an academic environment. In a lot of things, the degree is, if you’re philosophy researcher [unintelligible] that terminal degree makes a lot of sense. We have a constant friction with administration, gently, some of our best players are people that may not even have a masters. They’re here because they have a chair position in the symphony. So they are clearly the top trombone player. The reason they didn’t continue on with a masters is their students say “you got a symphony gig. Thank god you don’t have to go spend money on a masters and a doctorate.” It really boils down to skill-based versus credential-based, and that is not say that—I can think of a couple of people who have doctorates in guitar that are smoking players. I’m just in awe of them. And that also be [unintelligible] of doctorates like well you know, not going to performance is their strong suit. And that’s okay. Bottom line though is if you’re going to be in music, I think being responsible for producing a sound that people want to hear is the only way to be employed. And that could be being a great composer. It could be having a gift for conducting a middle school choir. It could be being a performance guitarist, violinist, it could be a lot of things. But ultimately if you can’t produce a sound then, you know, maybe there are other things that would—you know, mechanical engineering would provide a better starting salary. Does that make sense?

(30:23)

J: Yeah.

M: And one other thing about the finger-style thing. Is there a big difference between finger-style guitar and classical guitar? In some ways, synaptically and biomechanically they’re very similar. And where is that music. Is Pierre Bensusan a finger-stylist with what he’s doing? And is Andrew York a classical guitarist with what he’s doing? It’s not a bright line. There’s a very ephemeral veil between the two disciplines. And then pop guitar. Is the guy that plays really heavy jazz, you know is into John Scofield, is that guy the pop

guitarist or is somebody like Laurence Jubar is when he is arranging Beatles is it? Where do we draw these lines? The bottom line is if you want to teach a university, can you inspire students to produce good sounds and do you have a piece of paper that can back it up? You can probably find a job somewhere.

J: Okay. Any other thoughts?

R: No.

J: Listen. Its nice talking with you. Thanks for spending some time with us. I hope we'll be able to talk further and maybe run into each other one of these years.

R: Thank you very much.

M: That would be nice. Been a long time since I've been in the Midwest.

(31:31)

J: Do you ever get this way?

M: We have in the past. It would be fun to come out and do something. As long as we are on the subject, we'd love to come out and do something at the school. There doesn't have to be a bunch of dough involved. It'd be fun to do something where we are covering four hundred years of voice and guitar including original finger-style guitar—finger-style and voice material, classical material. Maybe something can be done there.

J: Do you do classical voice and guitar?

M: Yeah.

(31:57)

J: Like what kind of repertoire?

M: The usual stuff. We do a lot of stuff written for us. But we'll do stuff like Clive[?], Corderro, Dowland, and Bellini, and all that stuff.

K: Barber.

M: Barber. Samuel Barber. That was my wife, by the way. We also write our

own music. Keep in mind. We've been at this a long time. We have been married 24 years and have been singing and playing together longer than that. So our public performances where there are like—for summer festivals—we'll have a Barber tune, a Bellini tune, four bards in DADGAD, some Jetro Tull covers, maybe a Zeppelin tune. There are only two kinds of music: the good kind and the other kind. And we do the good kind.

(32:39)

J: That might be fun. I put in a proposal to bring in Michael Chapdelaine. Speaking of players that are a little bit tricky to pigeonhole coming up this fall, it might be nice to have you come this way some time.

M: All you have to do is ask. We'll work it out. We've got a place to stay with Will and all that. By the way, Michael, I mean I hired him for the first Northwest Guitar Festival I hosted and he had a headlining spot. And he was very controversial. Because in the world of classical music he is a controversial guy. And I'm like "oh, this is so healthy."

J: When was that?

M: 2007, I think. It was definitely a classical guitar festival. I wanted to have some other options and I thought Mike was a fantastic—he certainly got the credentials. You know his place was to play loud and do pop music. Some people loved it. It's the typical thing, where in his recital three quarters of the room got up and moved closer and one quarter left. It was that kind of...

J: Yeah. I'm thinking along the same lines. It would be nice to have him come in here just to shake things up a little bit.

M: Sure. Sure. And plus he is a great player. He's a great guy. I love being around him. So Rachael I want to know what you're plans are. Talk to me about what you want to do.

R: I'll be graduating in tens days or whatever. My family and I are moving out to Boise, Idaho. Which I think is maybe six hours or so south of Spokane.

M: Yep.

R: I'll be working on an album of original finger-style guitar music, which I have about half-done already. And I'll be basically pursuing a performance

career with the aim to either do the performance thing or/also find a position at a university and hopefully make the network of finger-style guitar in academia just a little bit bigger.

M: I think that's a great idea. Out of curiosity, why Boise?

R: That's a good question. My mother and her partner offered to let my wife, my son, and I live in the first floor of their house. It was basically a financial decision. Looking at Boise, it actually seems that it might actually work to my advantage, as well. I haven't found too much finger-style guitar going on in Boise. I think there is one player out there that I'm aware of. I don't remember his name but my mother has a couple CDs of his.

M: Yeah. His naming is escaping me too. We've met him and have one of his CDs. And he's probably ten years older than I am. I'm not sure with Boise and whether Joseph Baldisari is still there at the state university but there is bunch of colleges around there. And Boise has been very friendly. Dan Schwartz has played regularly down there back in the day when we were in the band and not living in a place with four walls. We used to go there fairly regularly and play Boise State. Albertson College in Nampa. There's a bunch of small places out there. Its become a little bit of an affluent tech community so don't turn your nose down at doing private teaching. The reality of the universities is that as we move toward the more temp worker model just like everybody else, like law enforcement in the US and postal service, and probably medicine and everything else. You can make as much money teaching privately. No harm in that. Now that said, I'd love to see another finger-style guitar program, specifically finger-style, that would be extraordinarily cool. Because again there aren't that many of them. So I would encourage you to do that. Boise is very cool. There are some good places there. And Moscow is just a little bit north of there. McCall is a little bit north of there. Spokane's not that far away. You want to come and play, you let me know. We can make something happen.

R: Wonderful.

M: And the arts are so tough. Somebody has to support the artist until 40 at which point they support the arts after that. That's another thing to say. Reminds me of my favorite joke. Here is one that I will leave you guys with. "How do you know when a musician has been staying at your house?"

R: How?

M: “They’re still there.” There’s nothing wrong with keeping your resources tight. Keep your expenses—your overhead low and just make a name for yourself. If you play well and you play out you’re going to attract students. That’s just the way it is. This desire to produce sound, again, it predates the human species. It’s not going away. I think that’s the missing ingredient. I think that people assume that people will be attracted to the piece of paper. And remember when you were in middle school or when you were first—John you know—when our generation you know—the first time I heard Michael Hedges was like “what the hell is that and how do I do it?” And this is before John put out his transcriptions. Those were a god send. You get a little red line and you’re hard wired to biomechanical skills to produce that. In a way we didn’t have Tarrega and [unintelligible] or whatever. That idea that you hear something and you want to tackle it that’s what [unintelligible] students. Guitar is really popular. You’ll find a way to contribute a lot to the household just by going out and playing. And it won’t take that long. It isn’t going to happen the first month. But don’t be surprised if you’re like “hey, teaching guitar is kind of cool.” And then the irony is we don’t need the university position. And they’re like “Hey do you want to do some teaching here because you have a studio of 30 students that are actually out playing fingerstyle.” That’s just how it works. Everybody likes getting on a [unintelligible] train including the university.

(39:04)

J: Well thanks again. Its fun talking. I appreciate your sense of humor and your perspective on all of this. Let’s be in touch. And if I can ever help you with anything, with your program, let me know, okay?

M: Well, keep your masters healthy so that I can send students that way.

J: Yeah. Do you have any that are looking in that direction now?

M: There’s one guy who says “yeah, I might want to do some of that finger-style thing.” And its like “let’s get started now.” People are drawn to what they are drawn to. I have one student who really likes 19th century music and that’s awesome. And other people like 20th—some people like Baroque—some people like whatever. And I don’t think that you should spend playing music that you don’t love because you can’t get through the music that you want to do in one lifetime. There’s too much. So if something isn’t floating your boat find another program. The fact that you have a place

to put somebody like Will, you've seen, he's a hard worker. It's nice that there was somewhere that he could go. Otherwise he'd be teaching privately somewhere or performing or whatever or god-forbid working on you know a lute suite in some masters program some where. You know what I'm saying? So keep your masters degree healthy and I'll see if I can send some students your way.

J: Okay. And if I can help you with anything let me know okay?

M: Well, let's do a gig in the fall. We'll come out there and we'll show you what can be done with crush honor [?] stuff

J: Okay. Let's consider that.

M: Rachael, look me up when you get to Boise. Its a cool place. And I'll probably be down there in the summer too. There's a little Suzuki class I want to take. Our god-daughter lives down there so, what the hell, might as well make a trip.

R: Sounds good. Sounds good.

J: Okay. Thanks again.

M: Okay. Talk to you guys later.

J: Ciao.

R: Bye.