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Book Report: *Damiano* by R.A. MacAvoy¹

Master Class in Finger-Style Guitar

This book is centered around the character Damiano Delstrego, a young wizard and musician living during the period of the Italian Renaissance. Damiano is a student of the archangel Raphael who teaches him lute. Damiano's hometown of Partestrada is visited by the Roman General Pardo who sends his troops to find the inhabitants of Partestrada. This leads Damiano to strike a bargain with the Devil in order to try to ensure that Partestrada will exist in peace. Damiano then goes back on this bargain by asserting his love of God.

This book is a struggle. I wanted so badly for it to be a good book. At the end though, I came to the conclusion that it is just not what I wanted it to be. It is poorly written: there is little to no development of setting or characters, moral philosophy is hinted at but never developed, and the plot is weak. I chose this book for the book report in the hopes of finding some great examples of clear, lyrical writing about plucked-string instrument performance. Sadly, all of it is contained in the first chapter. I hesitate to go further into the trilogy as it does not reveal a potential sense of satisfaction. On page 6 and 7 of *Damiano* is the only really interesting writing. This is when Raphael takes the lute from Damiano to demonstrate that simplicity can be an interesting component of a performance.

Roberta Ann MacAvoy was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1949. Her first book, *Tea with the Black Dragon* is quite highly regarded. It was nominated for the Nebula Award in 1983² and the Hugo Award in 1984.³ It won the Locus Award for best first novel in 1984⁴ and helped MacAvoy win the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer in 1983. Interesting to us as finger-style guitarists, R.A. MacAvoy suffered writer's dystonia. In an interview with *Lightspeed* magazine, MacAvoy that it is a

rare neuromuscular disease characterized by paralysis and pain...[with] almost no research as to the cause of it. My own guess is that I came off too many bucking horses in the mountains and landed on the back of my head,

1. R.A. MacAvoy, *Damiano* (Garden City: Nelson Doubleday, 1983).

2. Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, Inc., "1983 Nebula Awards," *Nebula Awards*, accessed May 14, 2017, <http://nebulas.sfwaw.org/award-year/1983/>.

3. "1984 Hugo Awards," *The Hugo Awards*, accessed May 14, 2017, <http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-history/1984-hugo-awards/>.

4. Mark R. Kelly and the Locus Science Fiction Foundation, "Locus Awards 1984," *sfadb: science fiction awards database*, 2017, accessed May 14, 2017, http://www.sfadbd.com/Locus_Awards_1984.

or that I took too many spectacular falls on the kung fu mat, with similar results.⁵

Similar to Billy McLaughlin's much-documented battles with Focal Dystonia, R.A. MacAvoy used Botox injections as a way to paralyze the muscles that cause the permanent 'charley-horse.' In 2011, R.A. MacAvoy released her first novel since the diagnosis of dystonia, *Death and Resurrection*.

References

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- MacAvoy, R.A. *Damiano*. Garden City: Nelson Doubleday, 1983.
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5. Steven Gould, "Interview: R.A. MacAvoy," *Lightspeed: Science Fiction & Fantasy*, no. 20 (January 2012), accessed May 14, 2017, <http://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/nonfiction/feature-interview-r-a-macavoy/>.