

EVENTS

THE GHIGLIA LEGACY

THE EIGHTH NEW YORK GUITAR SEMINAR AT MANNES COLLEGE

JUNE 25-JUNE 29, 2008

Oscar Ghiglia turned seventy years old this year, and a number of his students from around the world gathered in the Upper West Side of Manhattan at the Eighth New York Guitar Seminar at Mannes College to celebrate what became known as “Oscarfest.”

The first half of the opening concert of the seminar on Wednesday evening, June 25, featured the Newman-Oltman Guitar Duo—the artistic directors of the seminar, Michael Newman and Laura Oltman. They began with one of the many elegant and well-crafted duets of Ferdinando Carulli, followed by the New York premiere of *Raritan Triptych*, an attractive work by Paul Moravec commissioned for the Raritan River Music Festival. Newman and Oltman also played four pieces by Manuel Ponce, reminding us with their performance that Ponce wrote some of the most beautiful melodies of the twentieth century. They closed the first half of the concert with two of their transcriptions of the piano music of Albéniz, *Preludio (Asturias/Leyenda)* and *Rumores de la Caleta*. Michael and Laura are husband and wife and have been performing together for many years. They have developed a complementary sound and a musical and artistic understanding that few partnerships on any instruments can match. When, for example, they play the Albéniz *Preludio*, they are simply the left and right hands of a single pianist. Marvelous!

The same word could apply to the second half of the evening concert, a recital of rarely-heard music by Puerto-Rican composer Ernesto Cordero performed by various artists. Newman and Oltman returned to play Cordero’s sweet and lyrical *Canción azul*, and Lawrence Del Casale played a wonderful assortment of miniatures that spanned the composer’s career and displayed his facility in writing in many contemporary styles. Soprano Gretchen Farrar stepped in to replace Anna Tonna, who was unable to perform, in several of Cordero’s

songs; her lovely voice was ably and sensitively accompanied by Francisco Roldán, who also accompanied mezzo-soprano Nan-Maró Babakhanian on the last set of the evening. Babakhanian is a dramatic and charismatic performer, and brought the delightful evening to a satisfying ending.

Thursday night’s concert was another celebration of the guitar in ensemble. It featured the Waller and Maxwell Guitar Duo and the Tantalus Guitar Quartet. Anne Waller and Mark Maxwell have a duo that in many ways parallels the Newman-Oltman Duo; they are married to each other and have a wonderful understanding that comes from years of performing

together. Recently, Waller and Maxwell have taken to performing nineteenth-century duets on original instruments, Anne on an 1810 Panormo, and Mark on a badge-shaped 1829 Mirecourt guitar. They have also added a Southwell copy of a Stauffer terz guitar, which further expands the available repertory. Another neglected Carulli duet, *Andante varié et rondeau de Beethoven*, Op. 155 (on equal guitars) was followed by four pieces by Mertz for guitar and terz guitar—two selections

from the ultra-romantic and gloomy *Nänien Trauerlieder*, plus *Unruhe* and the reconstructed *Tarantelle*.

Some claim to have detected a strain of melancholy in Sor’s later works, but this is not apparent in his *Fantaisie*, Op. 54^{bis}, the celebrated “Spanish” fantasy dedicated to Mlle Natalie Houzé. Like the unnumbered fantasy he wrote for the same lady, at probably about the same time, there is a joyfulness and a playfulness, especially in the last movement, a sort-of *cachucha* which includes (as far as I know) Sor’s only use of the *rasgueado* technique.

When the Tantalus Quartet assembled on stage for the second half of the concert, the lady next to me exclaimed, “What cute guys!”—a fact which I include here just so that they can someday quote it in a press release. Cute or not,





the concert was great. Kris Anderson, Matt Cochran, Kevin Manderville, and Steve Mattingly are four old friends who studied with Bruce Holzman at Florida State. Each of them has all the technical and musical gifts necessary for a solo career. Their arrangements are clever and well-chosen, their programming is diverse and original, and their easy camaraderie on stage is charming.

They began with their transcription of Mozart's overture from *Don Giovanni* with great ensemble playing, lots of orchestral color, and more than a few virtuoso riffs. *A Feast for Tantalus*, a new work by Apostolos Paraskevis, is a fine piece for guitar quartet; the title refers to the ancient Greek myth, and the music is appropriately dramatic but unfailingly accessible, with moments that reminded me of Kurt Weill and Gershwin—or was that just the New York setting? Paraskevis told me after the concert that he was arranging the piece for guitar quartet and orchestra, and it will be a welcome addition to the limited repertoire for that combination of instruments. The quartet then played two Roland Dyens arrangements, one of Ariel Ramírez' *Alfonsina y el mar* and the other on Sor's *Mozart Variations*, Op. 9. Dyens'

arrangement of *Alfonsina* is lush and elaborate, so one forgets (or forgives) the loss of the insistent *zamba* rhythm that contributes so much to the haunting poetry of the original song. I have always loved Dyens' performances of Sor's music; in arranging the *Mozart Variations*, he adds a few notes and much understanding. I have always suspected that the lost Sor *concertante* for guitar and strings was based on his Op. 9, and this arrangement reinforces this supposition. The encore was the Sabre Dance from Khachaturian's ballet *Gayaneh* in a brilliant and exciting arrangement.

Thursday night's concert featured Canadian guitarist Dale Kavanagh, who is half of still another great husband-and-wife guitar duo, the Amadeus Duo. Tonight she played solo—fast, clean, powerful, accurate, musical—an

From the top: Bret Williams & Giacomo LaVita; Anne Waller & Mark Maxwell; the Tantalus Guitar Quartet: Matt Cochran, Steve Mattingly, Kris Anderson, & Kevin Manderville; and the Cuarteto de guitarras "Gentil Montaña": Juan Miguel Sosa, Aquizamin Garcia, Yeimy Manuel Robles Páez, & Alexander Parra Rios.



Top row, from left:
 Elena Papandreou,
 Michael Newman, Dale Kavanagh;
 Bottom row from left:
 Marco Cappelli, Joe Ravo,
 Oscar Ghiglia.



incredible concert which included the Lennox Berkeley *Sonatina*, Op. 51 (I've never heard it played better), and her solo guitar arrangement of the second movement of Villa Lobos' *Guitar Concerto*, interspersed with a number of her own compositions (which are excellent). After the intermission

we heard Mariner's Gate, an ensemble consisting of Danny Mallon, percussion; Joe Ravo, guitar; and Brian Glassman, bass. I didn't like the sound of Ravo's electric nylon-string guitar outfit, but there was no faulting his consummate skill as a performer, or that of Mellon and Glassman. After a few instrumental selections, they were joined by Désirée Halac, a fine mezzo-soprano/contralto, born in New York but raised



Left column, from the top: Giacomo LaVita, Kevin Manderville, & Bret Williams; Berit Strong, & Phillip De Fremery; Bruce Holzman & Matt Cochran; Tom Johnson & Antigoni Goni; Apostolos Paraskevis & Bruce Holzman; Middle column: Michael Lorimer & Pam Kimmel; Clare Callahan & Peter Argondizza; Wendi Littoral & Bret Williams; Right column: Richard Provost & Berit Strong; Karen and Ron Borczon; Kim Perlak & Richard Long; Madeleine Davidson & Mark Delpriora.



Top left: Elena Papandreou, Michael Lorimer, & Pam Kimmel;
 Top right: Larry Schnitzler, Oscar Ghiglia, & Elena Papandreou;
 Below right: Anne Waller, Fiona & Mark Maxwell.

in Argentina, who stole the rest of the concert.

Friday afternoon's concert featured still another guitar duo, the La Vita-Williams Duo, and another quartet, the Gentil Montaña Guitar Quartet from Colombia. Giacomo La Vita was born in Florence, Italy, but raised in the U.S. and is a graduate of Mannes; Bret Williams is an American from central California who studied with Adam Holzman at the University of Texas. Their program included Sergio Assad's *Jobiniana No. 1*, two sonatas by Scarlatti (K. 531 and 547), and Piazzolla's *Tango Suite*, all played with wonderful precision and—like the Assads—always from memory.

The Cuarteto de guitarras "Gentil Montaña"—Aquiza-min García, Johna Olaya, Alexander Parra, and Manuel Robles, with guest artist Edilson Gómez Lagos—were at a disadvantage when one member failed to make it through the gauntlet of our visa-granting bureaucracy; Juan Miguel Sosa filled in on short notice. It appeared a seamless substitution to me; I enjoyed the music and couldn't tell which of these fine performers was the sub. They played popular and characteristic Colombian music but, unlike much of contemporary American pop, this was music of subtle sophistication, with attractive melodies and intricate rhythms. The concert ended with several pieces by the great Colombian composer Gentil Montaña, the quartet's namesake, including a fine arrangement of his popular solo, *Porro*.

The Friday evening concert was shared by Elena Papandreou and Marco Cappelli. Papandreou (who has also been known to play duets with her husband, Oscar Ghiglia) played an exemplary concert. Giuliani's rarely heard *Variazioni*, Op. 112, shows the composer at the top of his form, with charming *bel canto* melodies emerging from a simple theme, followed by a furious Rossinian finish. Only the finest players, blessed with both refined sensitivity and great virtuosity, can show



Giuliani's music to its best advantage, and Papandreou is clearly one of these. She also played a Chopin *Nocturne* (Op. 32, No. 1) in her own arrangement, and Roland Dyens' *Triaela*, a three-movement work with a bass *scordatura* that the composer dedicated to her. With his characteristic humor, Dyens has supplied some intriguing titles for the movements: Light Motif (Takemitsu in Brazil), Black Horn (When Spain Meets Jazz), and Clown Down (Gismonti at the Circus). But such references can be obscure. Just as I couldn't hear the folk song *Farewell to Nova Scotia* anywhere in Dale Kavanagh's composition *Briny Ocean*, Dyens' Clown Down mostly made me think of the Henry Mancini theme to the film *Charade*. Neither of these observations is intended to be critical of the music; I suspect you just have to see the scores.

Triaela is vintage Dyens—witty, accessible, and flashy—and Papandreou's performance (she has an entire CD dedicated to his music) was magisterial. After a standing ovation, she returned to play a piece by Nikita Koshkin, another composer whose music she has recorded extensively.

Marco Cappelli's concert was not pretty, but it was interesting and provocative. Normally I hate concerts that are

self-consciously avant-garde, but the music was more interesting than it might have been, in part because of the variety of the pieces presented, but especially because of the obvious conviction and discipline of the performer. Cappelli played on several different guitars. The first was an electric classical guitar with an additional set of strings that ran diagonally across the fingerboard and under the usual strings—a sort of electrified *chitarra d'amore*. His first piece was *Amygdala* by Elliott Sharp; most of the performance consisted of Cappelli tapping the strings, Van Halen style, creating repetitive sequences of notes that overlapped electronically and made the most of the overtones created by the extra strings. As in rock music, its insistent rhythm added to its attraction, and the precision with which Cappelli performed the atypical techniques made it clear that he took it all very seriously and had practiced it diligently. His integrity gave the music (if you agree to so define it) a certain credibility.

There is an unfortunate school of guitar composition that might be called “chimpanzee music.” It consists of doing those things to the guitar that a bored chimp might do if one tossed a guitar into his cage. He taps the top, then the back, then the sides, brushes the open strings in sequence, drums the strings here and there, squeaks along the wound

strings, makes a dissonant chord on the fretboard and moves it up and down the neck ... Cappelli's next piece, by the late Giacinto Scelsi, played on a different guitar, struck me as belonging to that distinctive school of composition. But then Cappelli played Ginastera's *Sonata*, Op. 47, and it occurred to me that the “Esordio” belonged to the very same school of music, and Ginastera's “Finale,” which reduces the guitar from a polyphonic melody-and-harmony instrument to a crude percussion instrument, also complemented the entire concert conceptually.

Cappelli's next piece was *The Buzzing In My Head* by Anthony Coleman, with all the random dissonance tricks that were avant-garde in the '70s and now seem mostly retro. More interesting was Nick Didkovsky's *A Bright Moon Makes a Little Day Time*, in which Cappelli returned to the amplified guitar *d'amore*; the last movement featured a genuinely exciting toccata.

When the concert was over, I found myself wondering why I hadn't hated it; much of it is the antithesis of good guitar-playing in the traditional sense. But what I had seen was a *tour-de-force* of the guitar as a percussion instrument; in the course of the evening, a lot more strings had been tapped than had been plucked. And the guitar is, especially



Top row, from left:
Ida Sánchez Tello;
Nilko Andreas;
Lawrence Johnson;
Julia Crowe;
Below, from left:
Steve Mattingly,
Dale Kavanagh,
Tom Johnson,
Mark Maxwell,
Anne Waller, &
Bruce Holzman.

when amplified, at least as exciting as many of the percussion instruments out there (excepting of course pianos, xylophones, marimbas, *etc.*) And even Coleman's *Buzzing* demonstrated something about the guitar; the number and variety and colors of those dissonant sound-effects available on the guitar must exceed those on almost any other musical instrument—just try to transcribe that piece for flute! So here was another aspect of our instrument, skillfully and thought-provokingly demonstrated.

I had other engagements in New York that prevented me from attending the Saturday afternoon concert, a recital featuring "Francisco Roldán and Friends." Roldán is a Colombian-American guitarist and Mannes graduate whom I have heard several times before; he is an excellent musician, an exciting soloist and sensitive accompanist. The concert featured himself with pianist Alexander Wu, bassist Hilliard Greene, and percussionist Danny Mallon, heard earlier in the week with Mariner's Gate. Roldán and Wu played the Bach *Sonata*, BWV 1016; the remainder of the concert was new music, ending with Claude Bolling's *Concerto* for classical guitar, jazz piano, bass, and drums.

The Saturday evening concert featured the dedicatee of this year's seminar, Oscar Ghiglia. He played Bach's *Lute Suite*, BWV 995, Falla's *Homenaje*, and Ponce's *Sonatina meridional*, followed by several standing ovations; his encores included more Ponce and Turina's *Sevillana*. I have had the pleasure of hearing (and reviewing) Ghiglia many times over

Below left: Arthur Kampela watches as Gabriella, Adriana, and Martha Humphrey receive award in memory of Tom Humphrey; Below right: Michael Newman, Oscar Ghiglia, and Dale Kavanagh settling up at the restaurant (forty people around the table, and still those waiters won't give separate checks!).



the years. The experience is increasingly, for lack of a better word, Segovian. The tone colors and phrasing are simply splendid, and there is something majestic about the pulse of his slow movements. Surrounded by former students, some of whom had travelled halfway around the world to be with their beloved *maestro*, Ghiglia showed once again why he is one of the century's best and most influential guitarists.

The concert was followed by the "Oscar Fest Extravaganza," including a slide show of the performer over the years, with long-time friends and students chiming in with details on each slide.

On Sunday morning, the seminar's participants had a chance to demonstrate what they had learned in the previous week. Seventeen performers, including several duos, and the participant's concert, participated in a marathon recital; I recall, in particular, Janet Grohovac's Regondi, Travis Johnson's *Capricho árabe*, and Daniel Gaviria's *Sonata giocosa*.

The highlight of the concert was the world-premiere performance of composer Arthur Kampela's *La Meccanica segreta dei liuitai e loro inarrivabili chitarre* (*The Secret Mechanics of Luthiers and Their Impossible Guitars*), a work for guitar





Snapshots of a career from the Oscarfest slide show: Left column: Oscar Ghiglia with (from top) Sharon Isbin; Eliot Fisk; Laura Oltman & Michael Newman; Bruce Holzman & Lily Afshar; Center column: the young(er) Oscar Ghiglia; Elena Papandreou & Oscar Ghiglia; Right column, top: Elena & Oscar; at the Accademia chigiana in Siena (Alirio Díaz

is far left, Andrés Segovia far right, Ghiglia in the center); Group photo with Andrés Segovia, center, and Oscar Ghiglia in the back row.

orchestra dedicated to Michael Newman and Laura Oltman and the New York Guitar Seminar 2008, but in honor of the late New York luthier Thomas Humphrey, whose family was present for the occasion.

The composer/conductor, with Ida Sánchez Tello as assistant conductor, stood on a dais in the center of the hall, surrounded by the audience and then, in another concentric

circle, by the orchestra itself. The orchestra was divided into groups, and the group leaders—the principals—began the performance on the stage, then later joined their groups at various points around the room. Once again the guitar was primarily a sound-effect instrument, played with spoons, water bottles, plastic glasses, ping pong balls, various slide devices. The players also used flesh and nails to tap the guitar here and



Top left: (from left) Elena Papandreou, Michael Newman, Oscar Ghiglia, Laura Oltman, Martha & Adriana Humphrey; Top right: Arthur Kampela with his score; Lower left: Michael Newman, Laura Oltman, & Oscar Ghiglia; Bottom right: Oscar & Elena.



there or to scratch the strings. The effect was hypnotic as the complex sounds surrounded the listeners and washed over them in waves. Allan Kozinn, writing in the *New York Times* on July 1, 2008, described it as:

... a work commissioned by the seminar as a tribute to Thomas Humphrey, an imaginative luthier whose unusual designs increased the volume and projection of the guitar, and who died in April. ... The score's climax was a harplike wash of gently plucked tones. Mr. Humphrey probably would have loved it.

After a touching award presentation—accepted by Martha Humphrey, who was joined by daughters Gabriella and Adriana—the Eighth New York Guitar Seminar at Mannes came to an end.

Next year's [ninth] seminar is already being planned. It will be held on July 8–12, 2009; and the theme will be “New York/New World: Guitar in the Americas” and will feature performers and faculty from throughout the Americas in concerts, master classes, workshops, and special events. For further information and forthcoming announcements, visit the website at www.mannes.edu/guitar. —Richard M. Long

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