

# LETTER FROM NEW YORK

By JULIA CROWE



From left to right are: mandolinist Joseph Brent, guitarist Dan Lippel, ICE Executive Director Claire Chase, harpists Nuiko Wadden and Bridget Kibbey.

GUITARIST DAN Lippel recently performed in Manhattan with 'Ice Pluckies' a string ensemble of two harpists (Bridget Kibbey and Nuiko Wadden), mandolin (Joseph Brent) and classical guitar, operating under the umbrella of International Concert Ensemble (ICE). The programme featured works of Hans Werner Henze, Steve Reich, Mikel Kuehn, Goffredo Petrassi, Elliot Carter, Arvo Part, Pieter Snapper with the New York premiere of a work by Chicago composer Pablo Chin.

Lippel, who is a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, started working with ICE in January of 2005, appearing in a concert of works of Mario Davidovsky.

'Davidovsky is an Argentinian composer who lives in New York and is well known for, among other things, a series of works for electronics and live instruments called *Synchronisms*,' Lippel says. 'In 2004, I released a recording of contemporary guitar music that included Davidovsky's *Synchronisms #10* for guitar and electronics and when ICE was planning an event in Chicago celebrating his music, they asked if he knew anyone playing this piece. Davidovsky had heard my recording of the piece, and he recommended they get in touch with me.'

'After that concert, we have continued to work together on several different projects over the last three years, including several premieres of

chamber music pieces with guitar. We've had a chance to play at some exciting venues, including the Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center (playing contemporary music), Miller Theatre at Columbia, Northwestern University, and Cal Performances at UC Berkeley. Meanwhile, the group keeps performing in more casual venues like galleries and performance spaces in New York and Chicago.

Lippel is currently doing a residency with ICE at Columbia College in Chicago and will be performing a concert of Magnus Lindberg in Boston early this year. 'One of the exciting projects I have in the works is a recording on my own label, New Focus Recordings ([www.newfocusrecordings.com](http://www.newfocusrecordings.com)) of chamber music with guitar with ICE. It will be out in the spring of 2008 and will include a work by Davidovsky called *Festino* (guitar, viola, cello, and bass), as well as other chamber music with guitar written by Finnish composers Magnus Lindberg and Kaija Saariaho. The recording will also include a piece for electric guitar and ensemble by Japanese composer Dai Fujikura, and one for steel string guitar and ensemble by Chinese composer Du Yun.'

'In terms of balancing my work with ICE and other projects, I've always been interested in playing a lot of different styles,' Lippel says. 'I find they all bring something different to my musical life. I really like being involved with new works.'

expanding the repertoire and especially working in interesting chamber instrumentations. So I'm in ICE, as well as a new music quartet Flexible Music (guitar, piano, sax, and percussion - [www.flexiblemusic.org](http://www.flexiblemusic.org)) which does a lot of commissioning. I also work with composers on new solo pieces, continuing to do projects that are more traditional, or veer more towards the improvisatory.

I still play solo recitals. I made a solo Bach recording and found that playing the core repertoire reconnects me with some basic musical values. Projects such as this allow me to get back into the beauty of the guitar sound **again**. Unfortunately, a lot of times in new music - and especially in chamber music contexts with percussion or other loud instruments - the delicacy of the guitar sound can get lost.

The other important part for me of what I do is playing non-classical music. I'm a member of the New York-based Zvi Migdal Tango Ensemble and the indie-rock band Mice Parade. I've also been a jazz player as long as I've been playing classical music and try to keep that up when I can. Playing music that has more of a folk/popular element and includes improvisation really helps to ground me and reminds me that the things that reach listeners are often the most fundamental, like groove, spontaneity, singing melodies, and energy. So, when I can, I try to integrate these things into whatever music I play, even if it tends towards the complex.' (For more information, log onto [www.danlippel](http://www.danlippel) and [www.iceorg.org](http://www.iceorg.org)).

The 92nd Street Y's new Art of the Guitar programme, headed by Ben Verdery, presented the Canadian Guitar Quartet's New York debut. Verdery held a pre-concert lecture on the history and musical dimension of guitar quartets, providing a demonstration with Yale students Rupert Boyd, Simon Powis, David Veslocki and Chieko Hata. Boyd performed a selection from Albeniz's *Granados* from the *Valses Poéticas* and then the quartet played the same selection together to illustrate to the audience the musical depth and tonal richness that can be had with four guitars performing an arrangement of the same piece.

For their New York debut, the Canadian Guitar Quartet (guitarists Philip Candelaria, Denis Donegani, Patrick Roux and Louis Trépanier) performed a long and very diverse programme of works which ranged from original compositions to arrangements of folk songs, medleys and orchestral works.

The first half of the programme consisted of: Roux's 'En las calles de Buenos Aires' from *Les*



Ben Verdery and the demonstration quartet of Yale guitar students for his pre-concert lecture to the Canadian Guitar Quartet's concert at the 92nd Street Y.

*Scènes de Quartiers*, a raw and dramatic musical portrait of a harrowing taxi ride through downtown Buenos Aires; Louis Trépanier's dazzlingly clever arrangement of Camille Saint-Saëns' *Danse macabre*, Op. 40 and his original Andean-flavored composition, *Cuerda pa'rato*, a title that refers to Chilean version of the film *Ground Hog Day*; and a crisp rendition of Gioachino Rossini's Overture to *William Tell*.

The second half of the programme opened with a four-part original composition by quartet member, Patrick Roux, entitled *Concerto Épisodique*, a piece that reflects upon the ages and stages of human existence from birth to death and the concert closed with Trépanier's exuberant *Hoe-Down*, a medley of North American folk themes, encompassing references to barbershop quartets, marching bands, jazz concerts, blues, Warner Brother's *Looney Tunes* and *Merry Melodies* riffs and bluegrass. For this last piece, the quartet utilized slides and a Jew's harp. Note to New Yorkers: someone might consider commissioning Mr. Trépanier to write a piece called the *Everything Bagel* or *Garbage Pizza*. He would do a good job and probably make you change your mind about anchovies.

After this concert, the quartet expects to be taking a short break from performing in order to complete their new CD, *Portrait 2: Orchestral Music for Four Guitars*, featuring Patrick Doux's *Concerto Episodique*, Borodin's *Polovstian Dances*, Rossini's Overture to *William Tell*, Trépanier's tune *Hoe-Down*, and his arrangement of Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre*. Given their fantastic, spirited playing and sheer inventiveness, this is a CD worth anticipating.

(For further updates: [www.cgq.on.ca/](http://www.cgq.on.ca/)).