

JORGE MOREL'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

By JULIA CROWE



Left to right: Gene Bertocini, Rene Izquierdo, Jorge Morel and Tony Acosta.

A DOZEN close friends of Jorge Morel gathered Sunday, May 8, 2011 at Meson Sevilla, a Spanish tapas bar and restaurant in Hell's Kitchen, for a memorable celebration of the Argentinian guitarist and composer's 80th birthday. Tony Acosta, the owner of Luthier Music, hosted the event and distributed souvenir keepsakes of miniature classical guitars to commemorate the event. Morel's daughter Francesca had flown in from Orlando, Florida with her boyfriend to attend.

Morel's career spans over 40 years as a performer, arranger, composer and recording artist. He arrived in New York in 1961 to play on the same billing as the Kingston Trio at Carnegie Hall in front of 3,000 people, for whom he had performed *American Fantasy*, *Mosaico Espanol* and *La Misionera*. Morel soon became a regular performer at The Village Gate and the Five Spot Café, where he starred alongside jazz legends like Max Roach, Sten Kenton and Herbie Mann before he furthered his reputation at concert halls for his dazzling arrangements of Gershwin and songs

from the Broadway hit, *West Side Story*. Morel signed with Columbia Artists in 1970 through the recommendation of his lifelong, good friend, fingerstyle guitarist Chet Atkins. Most recently, Morel performed his premier of *Suite Del Sur*, a concerto for guitar and orchestra, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under the direction of Zubin Mehta.

Guitarist Rene Izquierdo, who flew in from Milwaukee, serenaded Morel in a duo with Ana Bermudez on cello. Jazz guitarist Gene Bertocini had been joined in a jam with Michele Ramo on violin and Thiago de Mello on percussion graciously provided in the form of water glasses, an iron pot and wooden stick provided by the restaurant owner. Morel's 13 year old student Jonathan Bodian, a name you will hear more of in the future as a fine performer, played Morel's Gershwin medley, *American Fantasy*, followed by Morel's arrangement of *I Got Rhythm* and an arrangement of Dave Brubeck's *Take Five*. To close the evening, jazz singer Heidi Hepler sang *Tenderly*, accompanied by Michele Ramo on guitar.