

FREDERIC HAND

By JULIA CROWE

FREDERIC Hand first fell in love with the guitar at the age of six, after his mother took him to see a Segovia concert at Town Hall in New York City. When he asked for a guitar for his seventh birthday, he was offered a ukulele instead. Three years later, he finally received a three-quarter-sized Tatay, which he still owns. His musical career now spans over 30 years and includes: forming a band that performs jazz interpretations of Baroque melodies; being a sought-after composer for film, television and the stage; earning a Grammy nomination; serving as the official guitarist for the Metropolitan Opera in New York. And all this is in addition to teaching at the guitar departments of both Mannes College of Music and the State University of New York's Purchase College.

Hand studied with Manuel Gayol, Albert Valdes-Blain and Leonid Bolotine as a student at Mannes College of Music in New York before winning a Fulbright scholarship to study overseas with Julian Bream. Under Bream's watchful eye, Hand studied works by Bach, Weiss, Ravel, Dowland, Besard, Berkeley and Britten, as well as playing his own arrangements of songs by the Beatles.

'It was a dream of mine, from the time I was 15, to study with Julian Bream,' Hand told me. 'He captivated my imagination more than any other guitarist. In a sense, I had already been studying with him for years through his recordings. When I received the Fulbright [scholarship], it was a dream come true. As for the actual lessons, Julian was incredibly generous.

'The sessions went on for hours and ended only when I had exhausted all of the music I had prepared. He almost never addressed technique, other than to say that a particular passage needed to be cleaner or smoother. He left it up to me to figure out how to do that. His interest and passion was strictly musical. He loved to talk about the architecture of a composition and shaping phrases and whole pieces into a cohesive interpretation. Listening to him play was incredibly inspiring and one couldn't help but up their own playing level, as if by osmosis. Just the sound that he was able to coax out of the guitar had such a profound effect on my own sound. I can never thank him enough for what he gave me.'

Hand explained in detail how this experience complimented his college studies: 'At Mannes, in addition to studying one's specialty, there is a great emphasis on theory, ear training, dictation and Schenkerian analysis. Developing these tools and intellectual understanding laid a great foundation for working with a master musician like Bream, whose teaching was more intuitive. He helped me to deepen my connection to music and



most important, to actualise it in performance.

'The year that I spent with Bream had a very freeing effect on me. I had previously been so enamored with his musicianship that I mimicked many of his musical gestures. I even started to speak with a British accent that, considering that I grew up in Brooklyn, was quite a stretch. By the time I got to study in England - I had previously taken a masterclass with Bream in Canada - my musical interests were already shifting from the traditional classical guitar repertoire to composition and jazz. I began to realise that I needed to find my own voice and explore wherever that journey would lead.'

Hand found that distinct voice upon returning from England and recording an album called *Double Exposure*, half solo classical guitar and half with a jazz ensemble. It inspired him to start Jazzantiqua, a band that fused medieval and renaissance music and jazz improvisation.

'I had been playing regularly with two early music groups, the Waverly Consort and Calliope. I was usually given a short score from which to improvise my part. Most of the time, I provided the harmonic and rhythmic underpinning. When needed I improvised single line melodies or played melodic fills. I was fulfilling exactly the same function as a jazz guitarist or pianist would today. The only difference was the musical language. The composer in me had an urge to take these ancient melodies and set them in a more modern language. I heard the lute, vihuela, harp-

sichord and recorders being integrated with saxophone, flute, synthesizer, acoustic piano, double bass and percussion,' Hand said.

He added: 'I love to improvise and in the music of the Renaissance and Baroque, one has the opportunity to do so. That is also why I love jazz. When I'm improvising - that's how all of my compositions originate - I feel the most deeply connected to the muse, like I'm just a vehicle through which music flows. Aside from that aspect, I have a strong aesthetic connection to early music. I don't know why, perhaps I was a lute player in a previous life.

'There is a great joy in spontaneously creating music born from one's imagination. It is a liberating experience that classical musicians benefit greatly from, even if they are not interested in jazz. And it is not necessary to limit improvisation to jazz, as it is an integral part of many world music traditions. Cultivating the ability to improvise can lead to greater creativity in interpreting music, even when every note is prescribed. Conversely, jazz musicians often benefit greatly from studying the classical repertoire.

'In some of my own compositions, I leave open the possibility for improvisation. It is not so unusual these days to find classical guitarists who have some background in improvisation. Even so, in the future I plan to include some sort of "written out" improvisation for those who need help in that area.'

Frederic Hand's many works for film, stage and television, including arranging and performing the theme of Vivaldi's *Concerto in C Major for Mandolin* for the movie *Kramer v Kramer* and winning an Emmy for writing the score to the daytime soap opera, *Guiding Light*. He has composed scores for *Sesame Street*, *As the World Turns* and *Another World*. He has performed on Broadway with Maximillian Schell in John Osborne's *A Patriot for Me* and also in *The Three Musketeers*.

'My teacher in college was Leonid Bolotine, a master violinist and musician (guitar was his second instrument). Leonid worked in many facets of the music scene in New York and he recommended me for concerts, theatrical productions, recording sessions, and jobs with ballet and opera orchestras,' Hand explained.

'At that time there were very few classical guitarists with reading skills or with experience following a conductor. Those areas were not part of a guitarists training. Unfortunately, they were not part of mine either. But I didn't let that stop me, even though I had plenty of anxious moments.

'One job led to another as I met more musicians working in various fields of music. I found the variety of musical circumstances to be very challenging and interesting. It gave me the opportunity to work with many other disciplines and art forms. My first job was to play in a summer production of *Romeo and Juliet* in New York's Central Park. They needed a lutenist and the fact that I

neither played nor owned a lute did not prevent me from accepting the job. I learned real fast.

'As for composing for television and film, I got my start when I was asked to record some classical guitar repertoire for episodes of *As The World Turns* that were shot in Spain. The music was used as underscoring for scenes with Meg Ryan and the producers asked me to play the music of Albéniz, Granados and Tárrega. But often within a piece changes occur in both mood and tempo and that don't work well for underscoring.

'As I reached a beautiful section of the very first piece, the recording was stopped and I was asked to improvise for several minutes on just a few measures. Pretty soon I had gained the producer's trust, and we abandoned the traditional repertoire altogether. I composed the rest of the music on the spot and we proceeded to record for two days. After that, I became one of the production company's regular composers.'

When asked how the decision came about to go with Vivaldi and Purcell's music for *Kramer v Kramer*, which is set in 1970s New York, Hand said: 'The film makers wanted to capture the flavor of the streets of New York by having street musicians in one scene. I received a call to arrange and record an excerpt from a Vivaldi mandolin concerto. A few days later, we filmed a scene in front of Tiffany's in Manhattan. I had no idea what movie was being shot or who was in it.

'As the mandolinist and I played along with the tape that we had previously recorded, I could see in the distance Dustin Hoffman being filmed as he walked up Fifth Avenue. They shot ten takes of that scene and later on I was told that after hearing the Vivaldi over and over, Hoffman suggested that it be used as the theme music. The piece became known as the theme from *Kramer v Kramer*. Once that decision was made, the idea of using an original score was abandoned in favor of all Baroque music. The Vivaldi arrangement and performance led to a recording contract with CBS to record *Baroque and On The Street*.

In 1986, Frederic Hand was appointed the official guitarist and lutenist for the Metropolitan Opera. Surprisingly, a number of operas feature the guitar. At the Met, Hand has appeared in productions of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff*, Berg's *Wozzeck*, Stravinsky's *Le Rossignol*, Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini*, Halévy's *La Juive*, Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles*, Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*, Massenet's *Don Quichotte*, and Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*. Hand has also played the lute in Zandonai's *Francesca da Rimini* in addition to playing the Turkish saz in Franz Léhar's *The Merry Widow*.

Hand feels that the guitar's sound is easily incorporated onstage and not lost between the singers or the pit musicians. He said: 'The Metropolitan Opera House has extraordinary acoustics. Often the guitar is not amplified, which is amazing when you consider that the hall seats about 4,000 people. At other times, very

discreet amplification is used from the pit. When I play onstage, it's usually not amplified. In one production a wireless remote pickup was used for the lute.

'In my first year at the Met, we went on tour with Zandonai's *Francesca da Rimini*. Initially, I was told to meet with the soundman before the performance in each new city in order to set the volume level on the wireless remote for the lute. But after the first performance, the soundman told me that it wasn't necessary to keep meeting. The tour proceeded just fine until we reached the last performance in Detroit.

'When I stepped out on stage and played my first few notes, I heard them bounce off the back wall of the auditorium at an unbelievable decibel level. I looked down and saw Maestro James Levine [the conductor] wildly motioning for me to play softly. But there was no volume control on the lute and even just barely touching the strings produced a massive sound. At the end of the act, I could hear the maestro screaming at the soundman: "What do you think this is, a [expletive deleted] Jimi Hendrix concert?" Later I was told that the lute had drowned out the entire orchestra, chorus and soloists of the Metropolitan Opera. After so many years of barely being audible, what a wonderful moment for a lutenist.'

Hand's composition *Prayer* for two guitars, featured on *The Mantis And The Moon* album recorded by John Williams and Timothy Kain, was nominated for a Grammy Award. Explaining his inspiration for the piece, he said: 'It just popped out one day, one of those rare occasions when it felt like the piece wrote itself. Stylistically, I found myself back in the Baroque, and feeling quite comfortable there. The piece is really an affectionate dedication to Bach. The title has no special significance other than when I was writing the piece I felt it had the quality of prayer. Subsequently, I arranged it for trumpet, flugel horn, guitar and string quartet and recorded it on my *Heart's Song* album.'

Hand makes a point of incorporating his experiences into his teaching, given his unusually wide range of musical endeavours. He said: 'At Mannes, I teach a course every semester that addresses a wide variety of skills including Renaissance improvisation and ornamentation, composing for the guitar, making arrangements from orchestral scores, Bach transcriptions, song accompaniment, pedagogy, guitar harmony and sight reading. I encourage students to be creative in their programming and to create new works by way of transcription, arrangement or composition. I stress performing in numerous ensembles as well as solo playing. It's very important for guitarists to become integrated into the larger musical community. In doing so, they can experience a deeper, richer world of music in which to cultivate their own voice and vision.'

In autumn 2004, Hand began performing in Luciano Pavarotti's 'Farewell Tour' and playing

concerts with flautist Paula Robison. He is currently preparing several new manuscripts for publication and recording, including a guitar duo, a group of solos and a revised edition of *A Psalm of Thanksgiving* for flute and guitar. He is also working with a colleague on a project to develop a device that will enable guitarists to play in numerous open string tunings without de-tuning the guitar. They are currently collaborating with a major music manufacturer on the project and hope to launch the invention next spring.

SELECTED RECORDINGS

Jazzantiqua originally on RCA, later re-released by both Music Masters 01612-65150-2 and the Musical Heritage Society MHS 416887Y.
Baroque And On The Street CBS MK36687
Solos Willow 1036
Heart's Song Music Masters CIJD 60205

Recordings with other artists:

Vivaldi Concerti & Other Works with Eliot Fisk, Music Masters 01612-67097-2
Some Towns and Cities with Benjamin Verdery, Newport Classic NPD 85519
Diversions Frederic Hand plays lute with Calliope, Summit DCD 112

Video and DVD

Seven Easy Pieces Homespun DVD-HND-22 and VD-HND-GT02.
Classical Guitar Technique and Musicianship DVD: DVD-HND-GT21.

Compositons

Five Studies G.Schirmer
Prayer (guitar duo) Mel Bay
Trilogy Theodore Presser
Late One Night Theodore Presser
Solos Mel Bay
Sephardic Songs for soprano, flute guitar and bass, Ludwin Music
Psalm of Thanksgiving for flute and guitar, Willow Music
Four Excursions for Flute and Guitar Willow Music
Three Songs for voice and guitar, Willow Music

Arrangements:

Baroque And On The Street (seven volumes) G.Schirmer
Mozart Serenade Theodore Presser