

3rd Joaquín Rodrigo International Competition

CLASSICAL
GUITAR

October 2006

www.classicalguitarmagazine.com

A photograph of Julian Bream, an elderly man with a joyful expression, wearing a light-colored straw hat with a dark band and a striped blazer over a light blue shirt and tie. He is seated and playing a light-colored acoustic guitar. The background is a lush, green outdoor setting with pink flowers in the foreground.

Julian Bream

**National Portrait Gallery,
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LETTER FROM NEW YORK

By JULIA CROWE

THOUGH this column appears in October, it was written in August—and the first half of August in New York is often a slow, torpid handful of days that go against the natural inclination of the city's pace, leaving everyone feeling like an ancient flying insect trapped in amber. At this time of year, the average day can be calibrated entirely by scent since the air hangs in a thick suspension of humidity, including the fragrant molecules of dog urine and sweat in the subway, candied vanilla nuts wafting from sidewalk vendor carts and salted pretzels, which emit a rancid and burning odour by late afternoon. Little happens in the guitar scene. Most people are away and out of town and those who stay are slightly crazier than usual. For guitarists, this includes running errands and forgetting you've left a cut-up sock on your right forearm until a stranger asks how you broke your arm and where the rest of your cast is. By the month's end, the hive begins to stir, students return and various guitar concerts crop up again.

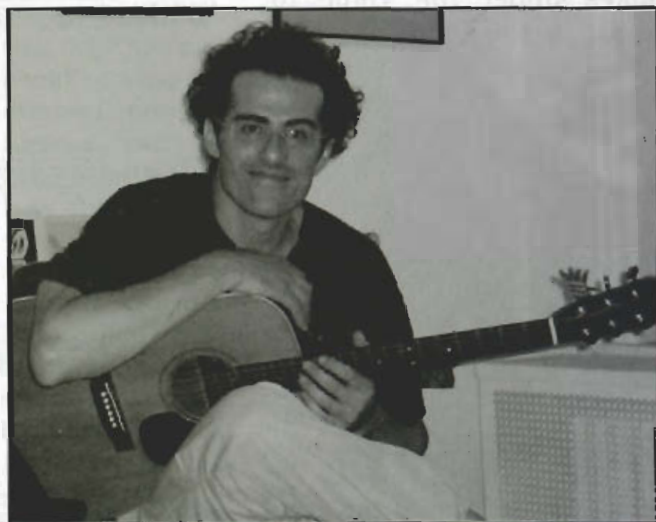
One new visiting guitarist this summer has been Pino Forastiere of Rome, whom I'd met this past July at Jorge Morel's flat in Queens during an informal sit down with guitarists Rene Izquierdo and Elina Chekan and Forastiere's girlfriend, Stefania Benigni. Forastiere was visiting the city between concerts for the Piedmont Classical Guitar Society in North Carolina and the Canadian Guitar Festival in Odessa. With the Spanish and Italian swapped back and forth at a furious pace, Forastiere answered back in excellent English, speaking for us all in that confused moment of being caught in the blitz of similar languages and having to switch gears: 'I don't understand.'

'Quella risposta era in italiano.'

'Ah, si.'

Raising our glasses to another toast, we switched to the universal language of music. Forastiere studied classical guitar at the Santa Cecilia Conservatory in Rome and graduated in 1992 with a recital on a 10-string classical guitar. He soon fell in thrall with the sound and technique of Michael Hedges and now plays his own compositions on a 6-string Martin D28 with two microphones inside to pick up both the high and low notes with a balance between frequencies when performing amplified.

Forastiere ended the summer drought of New York guitar performances with a recent concert where he performed amplified and standing with the use of a guitar strap. He is one of the most comfortable performers I have seen recently, at ease in a tee shirt and khakis and eyeglasses with no preamble, posturing or formality. He conveys his love for playing by his complete absorption in the moment, which can shift from intense and concentrated yet comfortable as the occasional smile creeps over his face in the middle of a piece.



Pino Forastiere.

A tiny red, white and blue handknit glove slipped over the 6th string E tuning peg waves on cheerfully as Forastiere applies unorthodox methods to playing the guitar. His pieces employ several different open tunings from one piece to the next and he approaches the guitar as a drum with strings, playing two-handed against the fret board like a wizard conjuring with a divining rod before adjusting to busy right-hand fingerwork that combines tapping and percussive effects against both the fret board and soundboard. The musical effect results in multi-tonal shadings built upon a minimalist structure that is both calming and tranquil with jazzy overtones amidst the slapping, strumming, harmonics and improvisatory feel.

His music speaks of a mood and textures and creates haloes of sound, as his compositions all have a driving rhythm woven with a light, airy gentleness that could easily (and mistakenly) be described as New Agey—however, Forastiere's layering of percussive techniques combined with unexpected turns in musical phrasing deliver more of an edge. There's a deceptive simplicity to his music that becomes evident as it draws a listener in further into the web.

Why the switch from classical guitar? Forastiere says it is because he feels 'steel strings offer more sonic possibilities.' He teaches privately in Rome, inviting students to stay for an entire day and partake of meals. He describes himself as a curious person, one who is always looking to explore and grow musically. Yet he applies his classical training and education when it comes to making his performances sound effortless, thanks to both hours of practice and the fact that he writes his compositions out entirely by hand.

His CDs include *Overcrossing* (Equipe), *Rag Tap Boom* (S3L Group) and the newest *Circolare* (TreLune Records).

For more information, log onto www.forastiere.it