

LETTER FROM NEW YORK (VIA CHICAGO)

By JULIA CROWE

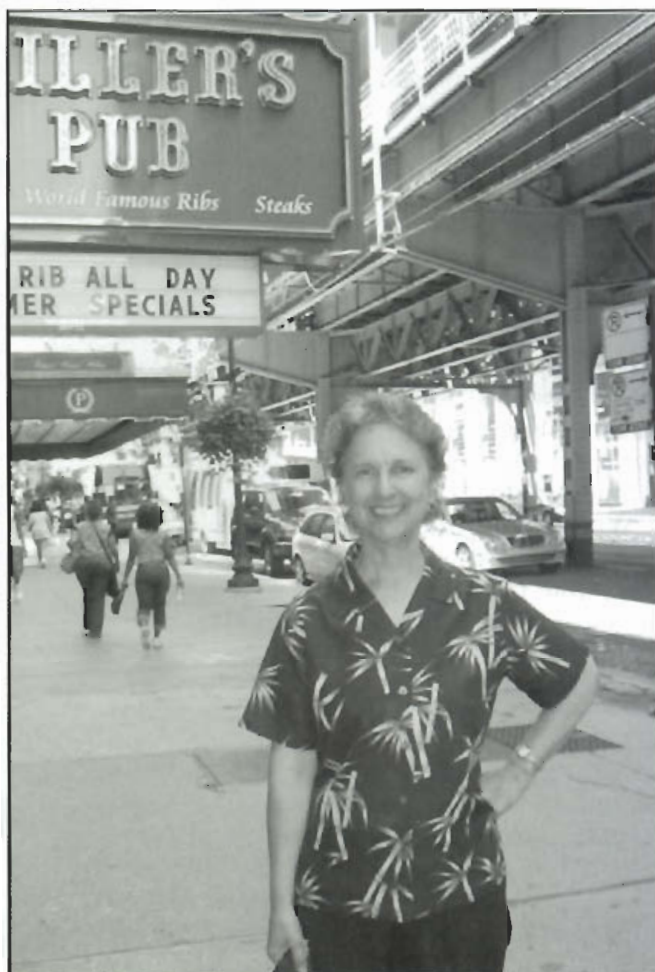
SOMETIMES YOU just have to hightail it out of New York and go home to Chicago. That is, what's left of it since the last visit. The Marshall Field's department store is now a Macy's. Chicago's oldest and most venerable German pub, The Berghoff, folded this summer. And the old Checkerboard Lounge and Biddy Mulligans are long gone, though Magic Slim had once played the gallant, giving me a lift and his life's story on a ride home (with my date dead drunk in the back seat) and Screamin' Jay Hawkins made his introduction by swirling his cape, setting off a halo of flash paper and lurching toward me with a madman's gleam in his eye, *I put a spell on you...this lives on in the memory.*

Some things don't ever change: my old neighbourhood in east Rogers Park still makes the police blotter with gangland style shootings. Giordano's still churns out deep dish pizza. The Biograph Theatre of Dillinger's legendary demise still stands and so does Capone's Green Mill Cocktail Lounge, where classical/jazz guitarist Fared Haque performs regularly. Unfortunately, Haque was unavailable for an interview due to being caught up in a household move.

Pamela Kimmel who teaches full time in the guitar department at Roosevelt along with Paul Henry and Denis Azabagic tells me they currently have twelve graduate students and three undergraduate students. Kimmel studied with Jack Cecchini from '66-72 in Chicago, with Manuel Lopez Ramos in Mexico and with Oscar Ghiglia. Students at Roosevelt tend to favour the music of Bach, Dycens, Brouwer and Assad and Kimmel has noticed that more students have been leaning toward using free stroke and less rest stroke in recent years. She has also observed students are currently using less vibrato and less tone colour.

'One question I'd like to ask is, where are the women in classical guitar? I had two women students in the 80s but that's it.' Kimmel has a theory about this. 'Unless girls start playing guitar at a young age, they tend not to come in at all through other avenues like rock and jazz guitar where male students are more likely to crossover from such genres.' She is currently working on a grant with the aim of bringing classical guitar teachers out into the public schools.

Ms. Kimmel also heads the Chicago Classical Guitar Society, which does not have monthly meetings. Instead, they hold evaluated recitals through teacher-only recommendation, no audition tapes. The Chicago Guitar Society was founded in 1964 by Jim Norris, Matanya Ophee, Jack Cecchini and John Mavreas with its base in



Pamela Kimmel.

downtown Chicago, Lincoln Park area and for the past thirteen years its activities have shifted northward to Evanston.

Kimmel is also actively involved in the Mid-America Guitar Ensemble Festival, an annual event that is hosted by a dozen universities on a rotational basis. Each year the current festival director decides upon and commissions one large ensemble piece to increase the repertoire for ensemble guitar. In the past the ensemble piece commissioning has been done by the director's selection rather than on an open call for works. When not teaching, Kimmel performs a programme of music by Gabriel Fauré, François Poulenc, Michel Blavet, Jacques Ibert, Maurice Ravel and Erik Marchelle as part of the Cecilia Duo with flautist Kaye Clements. Their album, *Sortilèges*, can be found on the Soleil Record label.

Denis Azabagic, who teaches both graduate and undergraduate students part time at Roosevelt, is currently working on a new CD with flautist Eugenia Molier called *Acrobats* on the Cedille label. The album features the complete flute and guitar duo works of David Leisner.

'I give my students the option to ask what pieces they like to play and if I think it is suitable repertoire, then they may go ahead with it. As a teacher, I find I am in the position of bringing the student into his or her own path.'

In March 2007, the Cavatina Duo will be performing a programme of Piazzolla, Clarice Assad, Alejandro Yague and Takemitsu in the Ravinia series, and Rising Stars. The duo recently performed at the Guitar Foundation of America convention in Columbus, Georgia, where Azabagic adjudicated the annual competition. He is also looking forward to playing the *Madrigal Concerto* by Rodrigo with Jason Vieaux and the Sacramento Metropolitan Orchestra this month.

'My hope is that our department at Roosevelt will become one of the strongest ones in the U.S.' At the time of this interview, Azabagic was on his way to see his colleague Goran Ivanovic perform at Millenium Park, a few weeks after Sharon Isbin performed the *Aranjuez Concierto* with the Grant Park Orchestra, lead by Christoph Campesini.

Anne Waller heads the guitar department at Northwestern University and her husband Mark Crawford, runs the guitar department at DePaul University. They both spend their summers teaching guitar at an accredited music camp, tailored for five year olds through high school aged students. The camp is called the National High School Music Institute (NHSMI) and is held at Northwestern University. Of the 110 music students, eleven of these are guitar students and Ms. Waller arranges for university students to serve as practice partners for the campers for one hour every day.

The students come from seven states, as far away as California and New York. The programme serves to introduce students to the idea of pursuing a music degree at Northwestern University. Waller and Maxwell, who have been teaching at the camp for the past twenty years, have noticed the technical level among students has risen considerably in that time. 'The other thing I've noticed is that in the 70s people played more Renaissance music on the classical guitar,' Waller says. 'Then that stopped, trumped by the lute resurgence.'

Northwestern University is also known for its Segovia concert series, which will feature Paul O'Dette, Pepe Romero and Oscar Ghiglia in the upcoming 13th season. Waller and Maxwell perform as a duo in the series every other year. 'Much of our support for the event comes from the local classical station, WFMT and our local NPR station. We've cultivated an audience that comes more from chamber music and not guitarists, mainly because our funding is based on ticket sales and not grants.'

Northwestern University has an undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programme in guitar and forty percent of their guitar majors pursue a double degree out of career practicality. Mark Maxwell points out that the guitar programmes



Mark Maxwell and Anne Waller.

between DePaul and Northwestern are entirely different. DePaul, for one, has a jazz guitar programme and it has been their observation that the students who apply to one school rarely apply to the other. What they do promote is an ensemble of guitarists between the two schools for an annual concert held in February and the ensembles consist of duos, trios and guitar quartets. The Maxwell & Waller Duo's recent CD *Grand Potpourri* offers Giuliani and Mertz duos on Terz guitars as part of the Music from Northwestern recordings.

Norman Ruiz, who teaches guitar at the music department at Columbia College in Chicago, tells me the school offers a BA in instrumental performance. 'Columbia is unique for its emphasis on jazz,' Ruiz says. 'The 21-member Chicago Jazz Ensemble is a professional ensemble-in-residence at Columbia, ranging from established stars with national reputations and acclaimed Columbia College Chicago faculty, to the city's brightest young talents. As a classical guitar teacher at Columbia I get jazz students who are lured to the guitar because of its technical demands. For the most part, they convert to classical and stick with it for four years.'

Columbia also offers a course called 'Master Guitar Study in Spain' a two week, 3 credit course which includes travel to Cordoba in July for the Festival de Guitarra, Cordoba to study with artists like Pepe Romero, Leo Brouwer, David Russell and Pavel Steidl. 'We also have classes for jazz students offered by artists like Pat Metheny, Jimi Hall and Stanley Jordan and we take side trips to Granada, usually for guitar shopping; to Sevilla, for my flamenco aficionados and then to Madrid and Toledo. We've also wandered into Cádiz and Segovia in the past.'

Ruiz has performed with the Chicago Symphony, the Illinois Philharmonic and performed this year in the Festival Internacional de Guitarra in Guadalajara Mexico. His most recent CD is *Andaluza* (Centaur). Ruiz also has the distinction of being the guitar representative for the

(www.sanmusicians.org), which he describes as an organization comprised of U.S.-based professional musicians, both performers and teachers, all from the Midwestern region.

Ruiz supervises the selection of repertoire for the prestigious Society of American Musicians Competition, whose guitar division has three levels of competition, Junior for students up to age 12, Senior for students between ages 12 and 17, and Young Artist for students up to age 24. Cash prizes are awarded along with performance opportunities and in the past, including a performance at the Chicago Classical Guitar Society.

No classical guitarist's visit to Chicago would be complete without dropping by Jim Sherry's shop on Michigan Avenue, www.guitarsofspain.com. Sherry was the 20-year-long publisher of *Guitarra Magazine*, who now has back issues from 1963 to 1985 posted online. Sherry, now in his 70s, still mans his shop at Orchestra Hall along with his original shop on 64th Street. He does not hesitate when it comes to slapping his acerbic South Side Chicagoan wit and bluntness flat out onto the table, like it or leave it.

'I made a bet with the CSO twenty years ago that I'd still be here and guess who won?'

Sherry didn't seem to remember me and I thought this could be a good thing. When I was 17 years old and looking for a Duke Ellington arrangement by Douglas Niedt, he had asked me to go sit and play it in his store window to help lure in a few customers.

Propped up on a store shelf is a board of black-and-white photographs showing a younger Sherry cleaning up a table with Segovia after a Chicago Guitar Society meeting. There are also photos of Presti & Lagoya, Chet Atkins, Jorge Morel, Michael Lorimer, Christopher Parkening, John Mavreas and Matanya Ophee.

Peering over my shoulder, he says, 'You should have seen Matanya. Back then he looked like a young, dashing Paul Newman and he was an Israeli fighter pilot. He told me about discovering a fabulous young guitarist, a Greek named John Mavroo. Well, I looked all over for this John Mavroo and even went so far as to ask a guitar maker on the South Side, who corrected my pronunciation and told me the man's last name was Mavreas. I found Mavreas working in a Mars candy factory. I don't know what he was doing there, maybe pressing almonds onto the top of Mars Bars. I said he ought to be playing and I coaxed him into giving a few concerts and he wound up becoming one of the founding members of the guitar society.'

Sherry has a way of making you lean in closer when he discusses politics and guitars in his soft, conspiratorial voice. 'Joe Kennedy, in his day, was a Leonardo Da Vinci, a sheer political genius...'

An hour, maybe two later, you will realize



Jim Sherry.

you cannot find this brand of incisive observation, cultural criticism or even a genuine love of the city, from a store manager at a big box guitar store out in Aurora. Surrounded by a collection of Santos Hernandez guitars in an office nook made of dark wood carved in spiral balustrades imported from Spain, Sherry says, 'Daley, Jr. is turning the city into Paris downtown here right before our very eyes. Have you seen the new Gehry bandshell or Millennium Park? It's not an accident that he's had the subway entrances modeled after Le Metro. It's part of his grand plan to recreate Chicago as Monmartre.

'You grew up here, right? Well, you do know then that people always mistakenly think that the moniker "The Windy City" refers to our weather. But they're wrong. Dead wrong.'

I'd have to agree.

'The term refers to our windy politicians.'



Gehry bandshell.