

LETTER FROM NEW YORK

By JULIA CROWE

THE 7th Annual New York Guitar Seminar at Mannes was run by artistic directors Michael Newman and Laura Oltman. This year's theme was: 'Ensembles of the World.' Headlining artists for the evening faculty concerts included soloist Jorge Caballero, Denis Azabagic and Eugenia Moliner of the Cavatina Duo; Douglas Lora and João Luiz of the Brasil Guitar Duo; Dale Kavanagh and Thomas Kirchhoff of the Amadeus Guitar Duo, guitarist Oren Fader with the CYGNUS Ensemble; guitarists Adam Tully, David Nadal and Dan Lippel with singer Pulpo Peyeyra of the Zvi Migdal Tango trio, Brazilian guitarist Arthur Kampela and his band, the Newman & Oltman Guitar Duo with the Daedalus String Quartet and on the last evening, soloist Andrew York.

Dr. Ana Maria Rosado, who serves on faculty at the guitar department at New Jersey City University and also teaches guitar at Manhattan School of Music's Pre-College Division, gave a comprehensive class on Latin American Rhythms which included a demonstration of how South American and African rhythms should be viewed as additive rather than fixed. She was an entertaining speaker who delved into some of the more interesting historical aspects of rhythms, explaining how ship builders in Havana devised various rhythmic sequences to accompany their pounding wooden pegs into boards in order to make the time fly faster.

Denis Azabagic delivered a superb lecture on *Preparing for Auditions and Competitions* based upon his book, *On Competitions* (Mel Bay). Azabagic, who had won the GFA competition in '98 and has taken home some 24 prizes in international competitions between 1992 and 2000, remarked upon the differences and advantages of being musically educated versus musically gifted. (One can be musically gifted but still flounder under pressured situations like competitions). Why compete? In his case, Azabagic views competitions as great avenues for building one's career, especially, if like the GFA, they happen to provide exposure via a national tour.

Azabagic also recommended to take a nap the day of one's performance for the purpose of mentally eliminating distractions to help you focus on your own performance. He also advises



Paul Herzman playing his soloette guitar.

that it's best to refrain from the temptation of knowing who exactly is on the jury. 'What if you're playing their composition? Or what if you've had a lousy masterclass with them in the past?'

The seminar also hosted the U.S. premiere of the film screening, *Six Swords at the Crossroads* with a Q&A session hosted afterwards with its filmmaker and classical guitarist Brian Kavanagh and the film's starring guitarist, Benjamin Dwyer. The film focuses initially on 70-year-old Spanish classical guitar maker Joaquin Garcia and then delves deeper to examine the relevance and connection between the guitar making craft and the act of creating music and art. (For film clips, log onto: www.sixswords.com).

Afternoon alumni concerts featured guitarist Mariano Aguirre and soprano Lauri Shemaria of the Duo Cantabile performing repertoire of Giuliani, Purcell, Cuckson, Mozart and Cordero. The duo joked that they were actually a trio now, pending arrival of their daughter, who was kicking out a rhythm section *in utero*. 1 East Guitar followed their performance with their programme of works by composers Michael Praetorius, John Dowland, Bryan Johanson and Terry Champlin.

Each year course participants prepare a small group concert but unusually this year

the concert went particularly smoothly and cordially.

At one point, I discovered Paul Herzman sitting out in the hallway with his new Soloette travel guitar, which he allowed me to test run. It weighed approximately five pounds, light enough for Herzman to throw over his shoulder and pedal off to play on a bench for enjoyment at a nearby public park. If you have not seen a photo of one of these travel guitars, it looks like a normal classical guitar neck with 6 strings with a set of metal tubes outlining where the wooden body would be. These tubes dismantle from the guitar neck for traveling purposes but when installed, they cleverly mimic the dimensions of the guitar body and the player can plug in headphones to hear themselves play. It produces surprisingly good sound quality on an instrument which only takes a 9 volt battery. Ms. Sharon Isbin helped with the design of this guitar, originally created for an astronaut to take with him on a flight mission - and it makes for a great travel guitar and a silent one for all-hours, neighbour-complaint-proof practice.

Other hallway reconnoiters included Peter Argondizza of Strathclyde University's Guitar Department in Glasgow, who has recently released his first solo CD, *From the Hook to the Hill*, featuring repertoire of Ben Verdery, Francisco Tarrega, Fernando Sor, Heitor Villa-Lobos, Johann Bach, Dusan Bogdanovic, Mauro Giuliani and Scott Tennant's arrangement of McPeake's *Wild Mountain Thyme*.

And now for some quotes overheard during masterclasses: Dr. Ana Maria Rosado advised a student who was struggling through a challenging piece, 'As tempting as it is, don't enter the Olympics if you just started running yesterday.' Oren Fader, who teaches at the Manhattan School of Music, reminds students, 'It is easy these days to educate your ear by listening to a wide variety of music and tracks online, especially on iTunes or even on YouTube.' Arthur Kampela tells his students, 'You must always question the instrument or else it will betray you... Many of these older classical guitar pieces are screaming for life. Even if you were not of that time in which the piece was written, it's the life we bring to it that matters.' Laura Oltman, when asked if it is better to learn how to tune guitars by ear: 'Yeah, but... tuners are always a good thing.' Oltman also urges students to 'sway along to a melody because it will help you to breathe better and keep you from going off the rails, rhythmically.'

One instructor of younger children expressed out loud during his masterclass the realization that he ought to be playing more for his students for demonstration purposes, instead of always expecting them to play their music back to him. Newman advised him to, 'think immediately about what you're going to do on the guitar before you start playing. It's that first breath that counts.'

('Basically, what I spend most of my time doing,' this instructor said, 'is trying to keep my students from sticking gum into each other's hair.')

Andrew York advised his masterclass students to clap in order to internalize rhythms. 'Guitarists tend to play real guitar-y - resist the urge to thwack a note. And with hammer-ons, don't pluck the string hard but instead focus on the hammered-on note.'

Dale Kavanagh tells her students to, 'Think like painters and add broad primary colours of sound first, then sketch in the details after deciding where it is you want to go musically.'

Adam Tully of the Zvi Migdal Tango Group advises his masterclass students to record themselves playing. 'The tape recorder never lies. You'll always catch stuff this way, but at the same time it's important not to be too hard on yourself. Also, audiences will pick up on your energy during performance so if you make a mistake there is no need to project it by making a face.'

One evening, the participants lunged hungrily into a half dozen cakes set out with numbered candles '30' celebrating the number of years the Newman & Oltman Guitar Duo have been together. We hope to see that same number again, one day, marking their continuing years as Artistic Directors of the New York Guitar Seminar.



Michael Newman and Laura Oltman celebrating their 30th anniversary together as the Newman & Oltman Guitar Duo.