

LETTER FROM NEW YORK

By JULIA CROWE

GUITARIST STEVE Aron performed a concert at The Monkey this past winter as part of the New York Guitar Festival. Aron, who is Professor of Music and Chairman of Guitar Studies at the University of Akron and founder of the classical guitar studies programme at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, was the coordinator of this past year's Guitar Foundation of America Convention.

His concert programme included *Sonatina in A* by Torroba, three *Lieder Ohne Worte* by Mendelssohn (arranged by Aron), *Cancion y Danza No. 1* by Antonio Ruiz-Pipo, *Three Preludes* by Louis Richmond and six *Mazurkas* by Frederic Chopin (arranged by Aron).

Aron believes in expanding the guitar repertoire by 'raiding music from other instruments' and then arranging them for his beautiful 1995 spruce-top Antonio Raya Pardo guitar with Brazilian rosewood sides.

'When it comes to arranging music, I have to be able to imagine it, look at the score and find the key,' he says. 'With Chopin, I use intervals of thirds, a low G and D string or the 5th string dropped to G. If the range of the melody fits the guitar, I write everything and pare it down from there. Also, what is interesting is that piano music includes phrasing marks but guitar music never does.'

Aron's excellent arrangements of *Six Mazurkas* by Frederic Chopin have been released as a book by Mel Bay with an accompanying CD.

'I worked on the arrangements for about three years,' Aron says. 'I played all-Chopin concerts for a while to road-test them first. And while I did not perform every one of them in concert, I did play most of them before recording and editing the book.'

The book has an enormous amount of detail for a guitar score, as it includes all the original indications from the piano score, except pedaling. Therefore, extraordinary attention had to be paid to the exact placement of phrasing lines, staccato dots, dynamics, expression words, etc. Of course, the pieces are carefully fingered too, and I was dedicated to seeing that the fingerings were not only clear and avoided redundancies - like putting an 'O' by a low E—and that fingerings were accurately and clearly placed in the score. It took a



Steve Aron.

while to get it all correct, but the result, I feel, was worth the effort.'

Aron is presently road testing his Mendelssohn arrangements before eventually publishing. 'I need to play them in concerts for a while, first, to make sure they all work as intended.'

A 1983 GFA winner himself, Aron also has the distinction of having served as the coordinator for two Guitar Foundation of America Conventions, both in 1988 and in 2005.

'I have produced numerous events, including several large festivals, several competitions, summer workshops and individual guest artist concerts/masterclasses for 25 years but nothing is like the GFA,' Aron says. 'Something about managing a continuous stream of lectures, classes,

competitions, concerts, after-hours events and the trade show for six days makes it unique. It is the most difficult thing I've ever done, bar none.'

'But it was incredible fun and everything worked as planned. The playing was fantastic, the competitions were successful, the lectures were well-attended, the trade show received lots of foot-traffic. Everyone seemed happy and there was even dancing at the after-hours events, which I had to lead! I would say the most memorable thing on the schedule was the Niibori Ensemble from Japan. Everyone needs to see this group because it is without peer. All I can say is: when I last produced the GFA, I must have been younger. It's hard to picture doing it now without the internet and cell phones!'

Now fully rested, Aron is looking forward to a new season of concerts... and the GFA in 2006 - but this time, as a performer.

'I recently played some new, gorgeous arrangements I had made of some of the Canteloube *Songs of the Auvergne* for soprano, flute, oboe, guitar and cello on a local Ohio Chamber Series. Next month I'm giving a series of concerts of new arrangements of Latin American music for flute, guitar, double bass and percussion. It includes *salsas, joropos, tangos, choros, maxixes* and *waltzes* from seven countries. It also contains very little familiar guitar music on it. And it is great fun! This spring I will be preparing music on a new Michael Thames 13-string guitar, for use next season, including at the next GFA convention in Columbus, Georgia.'