

LETTER FROM NEW YORK

By JULIA CROWE

LUTHIER MUSIC CORP., situated a few doors away from the Birdland Jazz Club and five minutes from Times Square, is considered a New York institution among the city's classical guitarists as a destination devoted to everything classical and flamenco under one roof. The shop, which has existed at this current location for thirteen years, carries an array of classical and flamenco guitars, a generous selection of sheet music, instruction books, strings and accessories in addition to boasting: (1) one of the most extensive collections of classical and flamenco CDs in the city and (2) its own branded Luthier Music Corp. strings, endorsed by several top classical and flamenco performing artists.

Tony Acosta, the President of Luthier Music Corp., took over the string business from Juan Orozco, Sr. Its Luthier Music label strings are made in the basement of the shop and come in six types: medium tension (white silver), three types of medium-to-hard tension (white silver, dark silver and bronze) and two types of hard tension strings (white silver and dark silver).

Acosta came to the states to play semi-pro soccer thirty years ago for the Colombian team, Quindio, and quickly found himself recruited to play on the airlines soccer league by Lufthansa, where he became a tariff analyst developing the contacts that would later serve him well in the guitar and music merchandising market. His love for the guitar has been lifelong due his father, who performed professionally in a Latin American trio, named Santa Fe, which performed routinely on their local radio station.

'When I was six years old, I'd asked my father if he could take down a guitar hanging on our wall so I could play it. But he didn't want me to follow in his footsteps with the guitar professionally because it's a hard life. I saw myself how he did not come home sometimes until 3am. I came to the States when I was fifteen years old and started studying guitar with Gregorio Ayala. When I returned home again five years or so later, I asked my father again if he might take down that guitar from the wall for me. "You're still interested in playing the guitar?" He seemed surprised. I sat down just as before, but this time I played a Carulli etude for him, and the tears rolled down his face. That whole week he followed me around the house asking me to playing it again and again because he said he had never heard anything that beautiful before. My father used to play with a thumb pick, too, so me using my fingers was completely different from how he was used to playing.'



Outside of shop.

Acosta first started his shop in Corona, Queens but eventually moved it to the city in 1992 after net-leasing the building where the store is currently housed on 44th street, between 7th and 8th Avenues right in the heart of New York's Theatre District. His upstairs tenant does animation for the children's television network, Nickleodeon. In wintertime the store's windows are fogged by the ample number of chugging humidifiers, set about the shop in steaming bouquets and visitors will find Acosta's assistant, Rebecca, waiting to greet them as she winds packets of strings at the front counter.

Luthier Music used to offer private guitar instruction in a room toward the back but this has been phased out due to the need for additional space, as the basement is already used for manufacturing and guitar repairs conducted by



Inside of shop.

Heribertos Rios. Acosta describes the neighbourhood as having undergone a Renaissance after the Times Square renovations which took place in '93 and '94. 'Walt Disney put up a large shop nearby and both 9th Avenue and 10th Avenue have been renovated by about 70% with new shops and restaurants in the time since I've been here.'

While big places like Tower Records are closing down, Acosta openly acknowledges the challenges that constantly face anyone in the music and music retail business, especially in a town like New York. 'Selling classical guitars is really only 35% of my business as I am constantly thinking how to diversify and innovate,' he says. 'To be an entrepreneur, first you must believe in yourself and go with your intuition.'

In addition to manufacturing his own strings, Acosta produces fine quality Luthier Music label classical guitars made in Spain, ranging from student guitars to higher end models and he says that the John Price guitars are the shop's best sellers. Not content with being a one-man classical and flamenco guitar department store, Acosta has also invented a best-selling cloth nail file which retails for approximately £4.99. Washable and reuseable, this fine grade cloth file comes in a pocket-sized plastic packet with an accompanying double-faced file.

Acosta also has a patent pending on a unique strap for the classical guitar, which Scott Tenant of the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet is currently using. The black nylon and velcro strap was originally made for entertainers to allow them to stand and play their guitar but it has been very well-received by classical players. The strap, which retails for £17, is the answer for those who fall into a faint at the remote thought of installing a screw end pin to the bottom of their guitar, which of course pretty much describes most classical guitarists. The Luthier Music Corp. strap accomplishes this through the use of two sturdy hooks sheathed in thick soft velvet-like fabric which hook onto either side of the sound-hole and fully (and safely) supports the guitar against the body of the player without requiring the use of a footstool. It also makes it possible to play classical guitar while standing upright.

Luthier Music produces CDs on its own label, featuring performances by renowned Argentinian guitarist Jorge Morel. One of these albums, Morel's *Suite Del Sur*, was considered for a Grammy nomination in 2006. Luthier



Tony Acosta.

Music has issued a total of 6 CDs by Morel, including a duo CD of Morel performing with Ricardo Iznaola, who teaches at the University of Denver in Colorado.

'We expect to be releasing two new CDs by Jorge Morel with his original music. One of these will be of Latin jazz,' Acosta says. When asked if he has plans to produce CDs by any artists in addition to Morel, Acosta says that he and Cuban guitarist Rene Izquierdo, who studied at Yale with Benjamin Verdery, are considering working together. 'Not only is he a great player but he also has superb musical material which we are looking forward to producing.' Izquierdo is currently a professor in the guitar department at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

Interestingly, Acosta points out that in recent years, he has seen increased sales of flamenco CDs in proportion to classical guitar CDs. 'It used to be exactly the opposite,' he says. 'I would have to credit Paco de Lucia for this trend. Due to his influence, flamenco has spread worldwide as a modern phenomenon, especially due to modernization like flamenco as a form of fusion.'

Acosta also mentions the time guitarist George Benson dropped by the shop to purchase two classical guitars, including a Price, and one flamenco. 'He played here in the shop for myself and Jorge Morel, trying out the guitars. He plays amazingly intricate music primarily with his right hand thumb. Morel said, "You know what, George? I honestly think you don't need those other fingers!"'

For more information visit:
<http://www.luthiermusic.com>