

LETTER FROM NEW YORK

By JULIA CROWE

Apologies to Frank Sullivan of the Algonquin Round Table for the riff on this month's column:

Q - Mr. Drapier, I understand you are the world's expert in the use of the classical guitar cliché, are you not?

A - [Laughs.] I believe the world's renowned and acclaimed classical guitar cliché expert is bit more apt, thank you. After all, I am at the vanguard of my field - with my appointments to various prestigious institutions and my impressive roster of students - I am always in active pursuit of spreading myself too thinly.

Q - So sorry, quite right. Could you tell me a bit about your background?

A - Yes, Julia. As a Cliché Expert (b. 1974), I have been honoured as the youngest recipient of many competition awards both in the United States and Europe, including the prized Estereotipo de Oro in 1997. And whilst I am currently recognized to be at the pinnacle of my career, I still insist on my prodigy status in all biographical mentions.

Q - Speaking of that, what advice would you have for guitarists when putting together their own professional biographies?

A - These days it takes many gruelling years before you can find a reviewer who is willing to acknowledge that your playing is truly virtuosic. And it will take many more years to get their adjective-starved pens to cough up a designation of *virtuoso*. So my recommendation is not to wait. Go to computer, pull up your press release and make sure the word *virtuoso* appears not more than two picas from every instance of your name.

Q - And one's playing? Should that be clichéd as well?

A - It's important for people to know that you've studied extensively, practised extensively and performed extensively. However, if you are in New York you must never admit to performing. In New York, guitarists explore, they innovate, they must scrape the cutting edge and be groundbreaking. *Guitarists should have no fear of entering new territory with a unique mixture of tour-de-force genius and unparalleled daring of the highest order.* That is, when they're not busy making waves.

Q - What then would you recommend?

A - Cover the gamut. The path of the guitar has been winding along for hundreds of years. Claim it all. It's especially impressive if you can do this in the space of one piece. For example, never play a piece from the Renaissance without promoting your own modern interpretation of it.

Likewise, all contemporary pieces, tonal or atonal, should be informed by the classical tradition.

Q - And if that fails?

A - One word - multimedia. Those in the know, know visual. Everyone else is bound to at least like the colourful, happy pancake shapes flashing on the screen behind you. If anyone questions it, reply it's all Metaphor. In the upper case sense, of course.

Q - Whom should one say they have studied with?

A - Interesting question, Julia. There was a time when there used to be only one viable answer: El Maestro. Since his passing, anyone who had at least a tangential relationship to Segovia is preferable. The latest, up-and-coming generation of guitarists needs to demonstrate their dedication to the art as well as take the opportunity to enhance their resume by tagging on as many masterclasses possible. For example, you can't go wrong by writing you've studied with Ben Verdery, Sharon Isbin, Pepe Romero, David Russell, Manuel Barrueco, Scott Tenant, David Leisner, David Starobin, William Kanengiser, Andrew York, Dusan Bogdanovic, Michael Newman, Laura Oltman, Michael Chapdelaine, Frederic Hand, Jorge Morel, Eliot Fisk, Michael Lorimer, Mark Delpriora, Gerald Garcia, John Mills, Pepe Romero, Juan Martin, Paco de Lucia, Carlos Barbosa-Lima, Maximo Diego Pujol, Roland Dyens, John Mills, Pavel Steidl, David Tanenbaum, Fabio Zanon, Christopher Parkening, Julian Bream, Sergio and all the Assads in your biography.

I know I am forgetting a few others here at the moment, forgive me. My point is, even if you're sitting in the back row of a masterclass, it still counts. You were there.

Q - What pieces would you recommend for school auditions and masterclasses?

A - Oh for the days when *Leyenda* and *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* would do the trick. But we've become much more sophisticated in recent years, and, of course, one's repertoire palette is inclined to shift every time John Williams puts out a new CD. If you dare to perform *Bach's Prelude, Fugue and Allegro*, remember, speed is of the essence. The first one to the finish line without a major technical error, wins. Offering other concrete examples here is difficult, however, because by definition a favourite piece is one you happen to recognize whilst a clichéd piece is one performed more than once at any given masterclass.

Q - Any hints when it comes to giving interviews?

A - When speaking with journalists, it's

important to realize they have neither the time nor the inclination to read other guitar articles unless they are short on material. So, it's best to have one story and stick to it. A good tale or performance can be repeated in a myriad of publications a myriad of times. This more than makes up for the average journalist's stunning lack of knowledge of adjectives and adverbs.

Q - Virtuositically speaking?

A - Exactly.

Q - What then, makes for the best writing in guitar?

A - Preferably articles written by your own graduate students.

Q - Any particular thoughts on women guitarists?

A - They grace the stage with their beauty and presence.

Q - What's the kindest thing anyone can write about a guitarist's performance?

A - That you don't play. That you *render*. You render pieces with stunning brilliance, elegance and refinement.

Q - The best kind of audience response?

A - Rousing, of course.

Q - Flamenco, in one word?

A - Fiery.

Q - It's been an honour speaking with you, Cliché Expert.

A - Why, thank you, Julia. The pleasure has been all mine.