

# 2006 NEW YORK GUITAR SEMINAR AT MANNES

By JULIA CROWE

THE 6th New York Guitar Seminar at Mannes, 'Guitarists of the Big Apple' (July 5-9, 2006), turned out to be the most well-attended event since the programme's inception, with a record number of seventy-five participants and auditors participating in five days of masterclasses and lectures taught by twenty-five faculty members. Performing guest artists for the sold-out evening faculty concerts included: Benjamin Verdery, David Leisner, Dennis Koster, David Starobin, Dominic Frasca, Frederic Hand, Jorge Morel, the Newman & Oltman Guitar Duo, along with a special performance from award-winning Mannes graduates, Meliset Abreu and Giacomo La Vita. Masterclass instructors and lecturers included Sharon Isbin, Kevin Gallagher, David Leisner, Dennis Koster, Arthur Kampela, Mark Delpriora, Frederic Hand, Michael Newman, Laura Oltman, Ben Verdery, Dominic Frasca, Jorge Caballero, David Starobin, Jorge Morel and Harris Becker.

From 9:00 AM to 10:00 PM, participants had their days packed with various 90-minute long classes, lectures and ensemble rehearsals, and six daily masterclasses. Those who wished to defy laws of physics and be in two places or more at once (myself included) felt a bit self-conscious about disrupting and distracting mainly by trying not to disrupt and distract—scurrying crouched-over in search of a spare seat or else practising one's stealth and safe-cracking skills upon a doorknob whilst perambulating in and out of classrooms. Fortunately, the atmosphere at Mannes was imbued with a jubilant summer spirit and accepting of the general hubbub. Because six masterclasses running simultaneously within two hour and thirty minute stretch did pose a challenge when it



David Leisner masterclass.



Dennis Koster masterclass.



David Starobin masterclass.

came to sitting in on any one of them for the length they deserved, what is written here is a smörgåsbord of notes and quotes from classes attended.

Sharon Isbin instructed a student to consider arpeggiation of chords as an embellishment. 'Two-note chords should be plucked together and not arpeggiated because it messes with the rhythm.' Isbin, like many other instructors during the week, urged students to 'direct and shape notes in phrasing rather than play a flat string of notes. Look for the phrasing arc.'

1993 GFA winner Kevin Gallagher, a former student of Isbin's, advocated in his class that students ought to listen to Baroque recordings of different instruments in order to learn the style. 'Not to imply necessarily that these are better musicians than guitarists but the reason is to learn the form.' He also urged students to apply harmonic analysis to their guitar. 'It does you no good to be theoretical if you don't know how to play it on the instrument. Listen to good

players and score their rhythms. Rubenstein, for example, often bends phrases. Try to find ways to listen to how rhythm is handled. Most people think of rhythm as a metronome but it is more a specific inflection tied into interpretation.'

Brazilian guitarist and composer Arthur Kampela is a colour advocate, recommending use of the guitar's tonal palette to pull out different lines within pieces and using these sound qualities as shading. Michael Lorimer instructed his students to test their footstools and chair prior to giving a concert. 'When you walk out onstage, this is the magic moment of presentation when you have one hundred percent of everyone's attention and you do not want it to become lost in fiddling with tuning your guitar or adjusting your footstool. You should be able to come out, greet your audience and then play.'

Minimalist guitarist Dominic Frasca, whose collection of press monikers includes 'the anti-Yngwie' and 'David Lee Roth for Eggheads,' suggested performers should memorize their pieces. 'Because it looks awkward not to, as if you didn't care to make the time. You'd never go to a Led Zeppelin concert and see them pull out music stands and sheet music to play *Black Dog*. Remember, it's only a performance. You're not under a microscope as much as you think.'

David Leisner instructed his students they must pay attention to both right and left-hand details and technique details, giving a thorough physical overview on how flexing creates muscle tension. He recommends an ideal, relaxed right hand placement that has the knuckle positioned directly over the string. 'The finger will deliver a pendulum motion when it strikes the string.'

Jorge Cabellero, the first guitarist and youngest musician to win the Walter Naumberg International Competition, says, 'We tend to work with fingers that are stronger and ignore the weaker ones. Think of the four fingers on left hand as being equal.' And when it comes to addressing stage nerves, he advises, 'It's all in the breathing. Open your mouth and take in air.' When addressing the same topic of stage nerves, Frederic Hand recommends that players ought to take a slightly more exaggerated approach toward whatever particular passage is being played because muscle memory will kick in. 'Performing is something you need to learn to do routinely,' he says.

While going over Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Etude No. 7*, Benjamin Verdery tells a student, 'Don't make an etude sound like an etude. Make it sound like a story. You've got to be telling me something. Whatever the cost, you must be making music.'

Laura Oltman received a good laugh in her class when explaining fingering details to a student:



Festival bag.

'Ponce did work with Segovia on fingerings for pieces. Fingering is never an absolute, except in the case of Tárrega. I would look twice before thinking about changing fingerings in Tárrega. It's not like you're ever going to play for Segovia, though. Segovia's dead—he's never going to see what you've done!'

Michael Newman advised students, 'Don't be too anxious to get to the next line or phrase or page in a piece of music. Practise slowly and you will realize you have all the time in the world to play smoothly.'

Like many other instructors, Jorge Morel worked on very specific passagework with students before taking a moment to impart advice from life experience. 'As a composer, you do not know what it is you can do as a young artist. All my pieces came originally from the piano. They were written for the piano. I thought if I was to learn them, I would have to study the piano but no! I wanted to play this music on the guitar. I worried that I was going to sacrifice some of the beauty of the music in translation to the guitar but I learned in practice you do not have to sacrifice anything. You do have to learn what notes to take out of a piece in order to adapt it. And at all times you have to feel you are playing for the guitar.'



Jorge Morel and Thiago de Mello.



David Starobin told his class, 'There is nothing wrong about playing a guitar that's in tune.'

While taking a breather out in the second floor hall, I found local guitar dealer Larry Rawdon listening to Peter Argondizza, the head of the guitar department at the University of Strathclyde, trying out a Dale Perry guitar. Rawdon wears a surgical mask to protect himself due to his recent lung transplant. 'It's hard to look like I am smiling in photos but I am because I am so glad to be here!'

Another guitar dealer, Pedro Baez-Tello, displayed a beautiful flamenca blanca guitar and a cedar guitar made in Argentina by Carlos Salmone. When guitarists Jorge Caballero and Rene Izquierdo took them each for a spin, the hallway clogged with listeners waiting to fill the main concert hall for Dennis Koster's Flamenco Techniques for Classical Guitar.

Koster told the story of how proud he was to be a guitarist when he saw that the *New York Times* had given honor to Segovia's passing by placing his obituary on its front page. For him, it personally meant validation of the art to see the bold headline, 'His Crusade Elevated the Guitar.' Then Koster read on a bit further, to the paragraph where Segovia had been quoted as saying it had been his life's primary goal to 'redeem my guitar from the flamenco.'

'While Segovia created derision for flamenco but I feel that all classical guitarists need to know first what flamenco is—its harmonies, its rhythms and the delight to be found in its techniques. Flamenco is not in conflict with classical guitar but expands its vocabulary.'

Koster explained that flamenco derives from the word Flemish, the catch-all term for the Northern Europeans and soldiers who arrived as tourists in Spain. The term Flemish soon became equated with loud, rude and boorish behaviour. 'Guitarists saw these tourists as a source of income so the music played for them took on the description for their music. The golden age of flamenco occurred when the Christians and Muslims got along well—until Queen Isabella & Ferdinand of Spain insisted everyone convert to Catholicism. Flamenco then became the equivalent of the blues.'

Koster demonstrated several flamenco rhythms, including the *soleares*, *alegrías*, *bulerías* and *siguerías*. He described the index finger as 'the spinal column' of Spanish rhythm. To describe the *carioca*, Koster compared its rhythm or *compas* to the opening line of Leonard Bernstein's *I Want to Be in America*. Similarly, Koster gave a quick overview of *apoyando*, the use of the thumb. 'If you'll watch Pepe Romero, every bass note he plays is a rest stroke while Manuel Barrueco plays his bass notes as a free stroke.'

The first evening concert featured the Newman & Oltman Duo performing *No Feathers On This*



Eric Hill and Fred Hand masterclass.

*Frog* by Dusan Bogdanovic; *Vespergang*, *Mazurka*, *Barcarole* and *Tarantella* by Johann Kaspar Mertz and a New York premiere of *Three Hungarian Tributes: à Bartók; à Liszt and à Ligeti* by Roberto Sierra. Sierra's homage to his former teacher, Ligeti, conveyed an intriguing swirl of motion with chunky, strummed chords.

Ben Verdery followed with his crowd-pleasing trio of Jimi Hendrix arrangements, *Easy Rider*, *Little Wing* and *Purple Haze*. His programme also included Mozart's *Adagio*, K. 540 and Verdery's own *Be Kind All the Time* for electrified classical guitar and digital delay. He has also pulled off the feat of arranging the entire *Blue Danube Waltz* by Joann Strauss for the guitar, proving Segovia's remark that the guitar can sound like an entire orchestra along with there being an entire orchestra inside Mr. Verdery, for that matter. A reception followed this first evening concert with a buffet of Hungarian and Viennese pastries in honour of Mertz's 200th birthday, Mozart's 200th birthday and Giuliani's 225th birthday.

In his 'Practise Effectiveness' class, Michael Newman recommended Barry Green and W. Timothy Gallwey's book, *The Inner Game of Music* for advice with freeing the mind of the conscious self for better musicianship and performance. Newman instructed students to not become judgmental about one's playing during practice and to train oneself not to get off track. He suggested a weekly review of arpeggios, chord progressions, slurring exercises, tremolo and a combination of both right hand and left hand exercises. Among his favourite textbooks for technique are Tennant's *Pumping Nylon* and the method books of Sagreras, Tarrega and Carcassi. Newman advised practicing slowly in order to develop speed and isolating small elements of a piece, even if it is only two notes, to 'analyze what is going on.'

Unfortunately, publicist and concert promoter David Spelman called in absent at last minute as a guest lecturer for the Career Development Workshop because he was required to hammer out an imminent deal to bring a guitar festival

to Australia. Guest speaker Larry Del Casale, a former Mannes graduate, spoke of the advantages of making a living in New York as a public school music teacher, including the city's recent cash incentives toward rent expenses given with the hope of replenishing its ranks of teachers. Del Casale pointed out that the job also brings health benefits and offers some stability—an important consideration given that making a living as a classical guitarist can be difficult, especially in terms of making timely car payments.

Paul Herzman, manager and buyer of classical music for the Virgin Megastores, told the audience that he'd left the idea of teaching behind to work in a retail music store, which had appealed to him because, 'I encountered coworkers there who knew more about music than I did.' Herzman feels that in the earlier days of recording, landing a recording contract used to convey a mark of artistic merit and distinction, similar to getting a book published. 'Now, anyone can record and this is both good and bad. It is good for music and bad for people like myself because I am selling CDs in store with limited space.' (An unfortunate footnote: Mr. Herzman lost his job of 22 years the very day after this lecture, along with all the buyers in the New York stores' rock, jazz and pop divisions. A computer programme will now be filling all store purchase orders instead.)

Ben Verdery contributed to the Career Development lecture, saying, 'A recording still does mean something. You know in the first four minutes if someone moves you with their playing or not. You can make your own record but will still have to know how to play and convey that you love it. Pieces pick you so don't pick them. Playing pieces is a bizarre relation-



Ben Verdery and junior student.

ship but it is still a relationship when you record.

'I'm from the 60s, when album art used to mean something. My fifteen year old daughter couldn't care less about album artwork—she just downloads.'

Verdery recommends that young artists put together a press kit with a photo, biography 'Keep masterclass lists less listy and more precise in order to show priority in influence' and to include a twenty minute long demo recording 'that you love—consult with a teacher.' He recommends performing at guitar societies, nursing homes and hospitals for the purpose of building one's comfort level onstage.

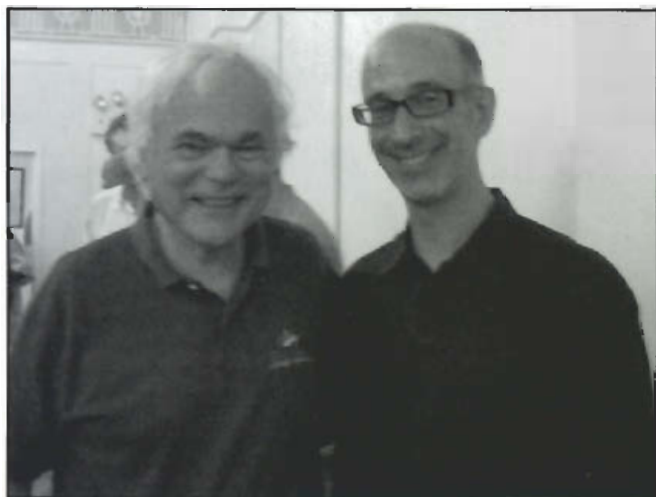
The second evening concert opened with David Leisner wishing Don Witter, Jr. and his wife Heidi a happy 19th wedding anniversary. (Witter, a sanctioned Musicians Under New York subway guitarist, is an ubiquitous and enthusiastic concert scenester, easily spotted with his notepad in hand.) Leisner's programme featured the New York premiere of Matiegka's *Sonata in B Minor, op. 31, no. 6*, which he will be recording in this autumn. He performed his *Nel Mezzo 'In the Middle'*, a dramatic piece inspired by working through a midlife crisis, followed by Mertz's *Sehnsucht* and a rousing *Tarantelle*. For an encore, he performed Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Etude #12*.

Dennis Koster paid homage to the oud player George Mgrdichian with his *Oudspaña*, imitating the taksim in places. He also performed Samuel Zyman's *Sonata para Guitarra*, commissioned for him in 1988, followed



Michael Newman, Laura Oltman, Lawrence DeCasale Paul Herzman and Ben Verdery.





Gene Bertoncini and David Leisner.

by a dazzling evocation of flamenco dance footwork with his *Homenaje a Carmen Amaya*.

David Leisner presented his lecture on 'Right Hand Techniques Using Large Muscles', an approach he devised to successfully restore full playing ability in himself and countless others who have experienced *focal dystonia*. He explained how the larger muscles in the body should support the smaller muscles. 'Think of the elbow down on through the fingertips as one big lever and the hand as a big dead weight, attached to a dead-weight arm by the way of a stabilized wrist. 'Stabilized' means no deviation to the right or left and no flexion or extension.' He points out that the deep muscles in the middle of the armpit, where the *latissimus dorsi* meet the *teres minor*, is where each stroke should originate.

Leisner posed a demonstration, asking students to pull an index finger against a guitar string while placing a finger from their left hand beneath their armpit. 'If you find the correct place, you can feel the muscle move in the armpit. Then take away your left hand, pull and hold the string. Once you feel the tension of the string in the armpit, follow through on the large muscle movement and pluck, striking on the fingertip at the spot where the flesh and nail meet the string at the same moment.' He describes that the ideal way to play with the thumb is to 'let the arm fall into the strings, not pushing, but falling with gravity through the string. Once you feel this, you can return to pluck-



Rene Izquierdo and Jorge Caballer.

ing *i, m* and *a* with the same feeling of falling, but falling up, instead of down. It creates a loud and beautiful sound with little effort. Plucking chords in an *ima* configuration should have the same falling upward motion.'

Friday evening's concert featured David Starobin performing a set of Mauro Giuliani's works in honor of the composer's 225th birthday, including *Divertissement, Op. 106, No.1, Rondo, Op. 14, No. 5, Delightful Etude, Op 98, No.8, Allegretto, Op 51, No. 13, Delightful Etude, Op. 98, No. 4, Preludes, Op. 83, Nos. 6, 5, 4*. He was accompanied by a spectacular pianist, Inon

Barnatan, for *Rondo in A Major, Op 68, No. 1* and *Rondo in B Minor, Op. 68, No.2*. His programme concluded with *Variations on a March by Cherubini, Op 110*.

Dominic Frasca performed his own works, *Fixations part 4, Shattered Glass* and *Devotions*, along with his arrangement of Marc Mellits' *Lesty's Elegy* on one of his Franken-Humphrey guitars, a Humphrey guitar body modified with a mix of steel and nylon strings, each with its own pickup processed and filtered through a computer laptop.

Early Saturday evening, Manne's alumni Meliset Abreu and Giacomo LaVita each gave a recital. Abreu's programme included pieces by Leo Brouwer and Joaquin Rodrigo and La Vita performed a selection of works by Domenico Scarlatti, Miguel Llobet and Agustin Mangoré Barrios.

That same evening, Frederic Hand was joined

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by Jazzantiqua flautist Keith Underwood to perform Hand's *A Psalm of Thanksgiving for Flute and Guitar*, then solo for his *Waltz for Maurice Ravel* and the third movement of his *Trilogy*. David Leisner took the stage to perform Hand's guitar duo, *Journey*, originally written for the Greek guitar duo Evangelos and Liza. Hand's programme also included *The Water is Wide*, *Elegy for a King*, *A Dance for John Dowland* and a world premiere of his *Theme and Improvisation*.

Jorge Morel delighted the sold-out evening audience with a surprise percussive accompaniment with Thiago de Mello for his *Pampero*, followed by a solo performance of *Olga*, *Lullaby and Dance*, Gershwin's *Someone to Watch Over Me*; Cobian's *Los Mareados (Tango)*, Troilo's *La Trampera (Milonga)* and Bustamante's *Misionera*.

On the last day of the seminar, an Antonio Lauriente concert guitar donated by Guitar Salon International was raffled off to Temple University student Francesco Barone of Philadelphia and copies of *Classical Guitar Magazine* issues were given to participants who had come in from the furthest distance, which included a participant from Russia, two participants from Brasil and one from Australia. The participants presented an ensemble concert that was free and open to the public and Ben Verdery lead a well-received masterclass for ten young artists, ranging from seven to twelve years old in age.

The 2007 New York Guitar Seminar at Mannes will take place early in July with the theme 'Ensembles of the World', featuring the Newman & Oltman Guitar Duo, the Zvi Migdal Tango Ensemble, the Arthur Kampela Band, the Cavatina Duo and the Amadeus Duo, among others.

My favourite overheard, post-lecture quote:

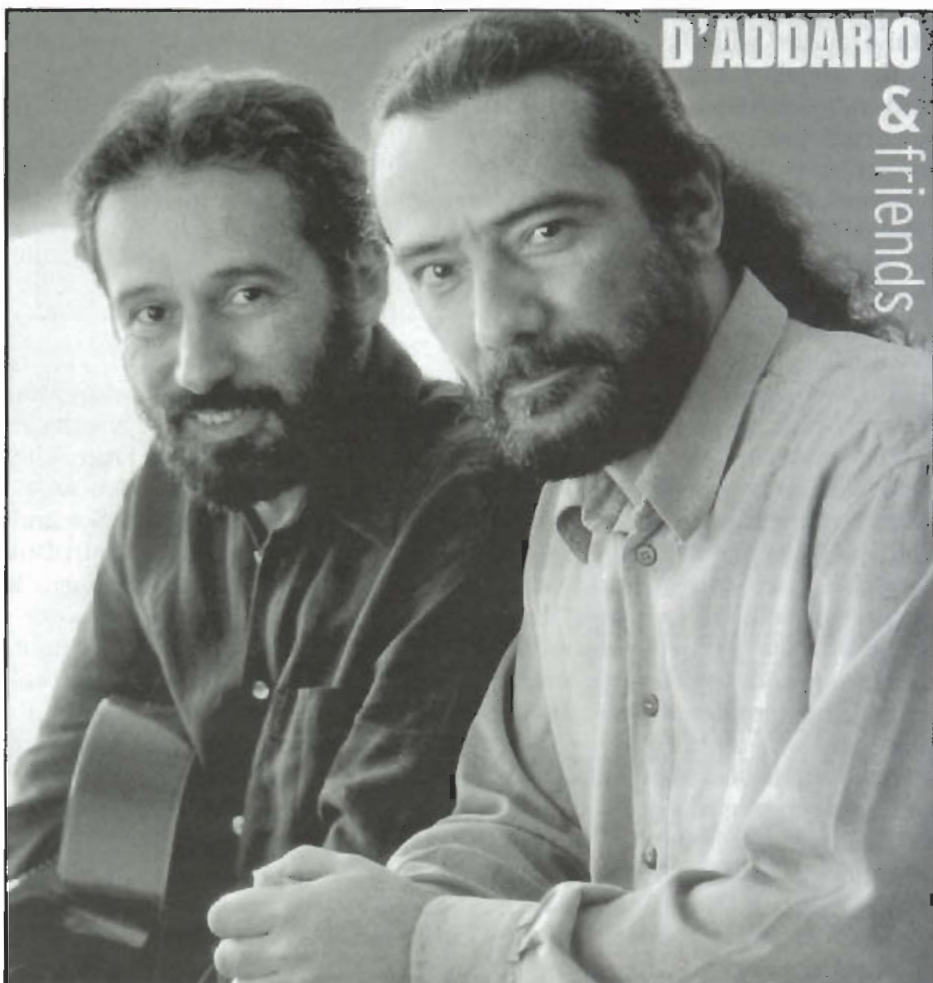
**Guitarist #1:** 'I haven't been performing much lately, mainly spending time enjoying my family. I'd love to get back to playing again some time soon.'

**Guitarist #2:** 'Of course you should.'

**Guitarist #1:** 'I'm afraid I've been out of it for a while, though. All that worrying about perfection onstage is what drove me to stop playing in the first place, now that I stop to think about it.'

**Guitarist #2:** 'This is why you hire someone to sit out in the audience to cough loudly during the really difficult parts—didn't you know this?'

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