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Eco Quartet

Dorothy de Goede

A close-up portrait of Adam Holzman, a man with glasses and a dark suit, looking thoughtfully at the camera. He is holding a classical guitar, with his hand resting on the strings. The background is dark and out of focus.

**Adam
Holzman**

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ADAM HOLZMAN

Interviewed by JULIA CROWE

ADAM HOLZMAN is as dedicated to his teaching as he is to his performing and recording career. Known for his Naxos recordings of Manuel Ponce (Vols. 1 and 2), Fernando Sor, Johann Kaspar Mertz and Antonio Lauro, he taught as an assistant professor for four years at the University of Southern Florida in Tampa before accepting a position at the University of Texas in Austin in 1989.

A virtual songwriter's paradise, Austin is considered as having one of the most thriving music scenes within the United States with more live performance venues than New York, Nashville or Los Angeles.

'I would describe Austin as a cross between the best of San Francisco and New Orleans with a little bit of cowboy thrown in,' Holzman says. 'The city definitely lives up to its name as 'The Live Music Capital of the World.' At times, while taking planes home, I have found myself sitting behind artists like Willie Nelson, Jimmie Vaughan, Kris Kristofferson and Eric Johnson. As for the University of Texas, it has a vibrant and creative music school which has supported me in creating a leading guitar programme.'

Holzman has about nineteen students in his guitar department and teaches studio class, ensemble and chamber music. 'With undergraduates, my focus is to have them develop solid and mature musical technique in addition to asking, "What do you want to be when you grow up? What direction would you like to go come five or ten years down the road?" My students have to have a plan.'

And proof of this bears out in the number of his successful former students: Dr. Andrew Zohn who is heading the 2006 GFA Convention; Dr. Matt Dunne who wrote the piece 'Gypsy Flower' recorded on LAGQ's Grammy winning album, *Guitar Heroes*; new music advocate, Dr. David Asbury; Austin Classical Guitar Society president, Dr. Matthew Hinsley; Tony Morris, the radio programme host of *Guitar Alive*; professional sound engineer, Dan Czernicki, and Dr. Steve Kostelnik, who won the Naxos prize at the GFA in St. Louis and recorded a Laureate Series record for Naxos. Holzman also points out one recent Masters of Music graduate, Isaac Bustos, who, along with many of his past students, has won numerous guitar competitions.

One of Holzman's former students, 28-year-old Bret Williams (a recent Masters graduate from The Mannes College of Music who is just beginning to launch his guitar career) offers this firsthand glimpse of Holzman's teaching style.

'He's direct. That is his trademark. Adam would stay focused the entire lesson and when



Adam Holzman.

he told stories, they always had a direct relationship with the matter in hand. Years later, I've realized this can be a rare trait in teachers. Adam was hard on everybody - as a form of tough love - but he was by no means as hard as the world is on us after graduating and pursuing the full time career of being a classical guitarist. The University of Texas is a big university with a big population and I found he was always there for his younger students.

'Holzman ascribes to both Volumes 1 and 2 of the Shearer method and sticks to the book. One of the things that is interesting about Adam as a teacher and performer is that he is strict with technique but manages to be the most musical player when he wants to. There's no doubt that he is right there in that moment, soaking up the music.

'The way he teaches musicality is twofold - by example and reference. You have to remember that musicality, to an 18 year old, is in most cases an abstract thought. Adam taught me to shape a phrase and give an example, whether by playing it himself or by listening to a recording. He is an expert at coming up with cousin pieces, like listening to Nigel North lute recordings for references on Bach cello suites, for example.'

Holzman began his own guitar studies with Albert Valdes Blain in New York and with Eliot Fisk and Oscar Ghiglia in Siena at the Academia Musicale de Chigiana and in Aspen

in '78, '80, '82 and '84. 'Ghighlia was a revelation,' he says. 'He taught me to look at music with the same flow as reading prose.'

Holzman also studied at Florida State University with his brother Bruce, reasoning that, 'His students were some of the most musical ones I had heard while studying in Aspen with Oscar in 1978. He was my first teacher, from 1968 to 1972 and again during my degree. Bruce is the greatest listener I have ever known and he helped form many aspects of my own learning and playing.'

'You have music in you my son.' – Segovia

'I completed two years of undergraduate work at Queens College and New York before transferring to Florida State, where I earned both my Bachelors and Masters of Music. In 1981, I studied with Segovia at the University of Southern California.' Holzman also won first place in the 1983 GFA Competition.

When asked about his experience performing for Segovia, Holzman says, 'My first opportunity to perform for Segovia was for a masterclass at USC and they requested tapes from potential students. I think they received about one hundred or so tapes and I was one of the lucky twelve finalists chosen. We each got to perform numerous times for Segovia and it was an amazing experience. The anticipation of getting to perform for him was both frightening and incredibly exciting. I remember that I had arrived in California from Tallahassee, Florida, and had to play for him the next morning. Segovia would make you sit on the stage while the other students played and it was quite scary knowing that you were just sitting there getting colder and colder as time went by. I think I was fifth of six players that morning - the twelve students were split into two groups of six players on alternating days. I had probably sat for close to two and half hours when he finally called my name to perform. I played the Joaquin Rodrigo's *Fandango* and he was very kind in his comments. I had also performed Albeniz, Bach and Scarlatti at other lessons. After the final class he put his hand to my face and said, 'You have music in you my son.' It was a wonderful series of classes and a great memory for a lifetime.'

'The following year I was invited to play for him in New York at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was a very well-attended evening class that was also being filmed for PBS. I played Tedesco's *Capriccio Diabolico* and again, I found it to be a terrifying but wonderful experience. Segovia was always kind to me but never afraid to tell me what needed to be done better or differently.'

The Naxos recordings came about when Norbert Kraft contacted Holzman about performing and developing a series.

'For Sor: *Grandes Sonatas*, Pepe Romero granted me permission to play his arrangement of the *Fantasia*, which is the second revision ever of the first *Fantasia*. The 24 Preludes were the genesis of the first Ponce record and to those we added the other groups of separate shorter pieces of Ponce.'

'I had also played the Harpsichord Sonata at the 92nd St. Y for the Rose Augustine Concert Series. We decided on the Mertz because there were a lot of renderings but no complete *Bardenklänge*. The recordings for those first three Naxos CDs were completed in fourteen months.'

When asked how he went about preparation to do recording for such an extensive body of musical works, Holzman's response is, 'My approach to music is about being musical and not dogmatic. Give a piece or a guitar to three players and they're all going to play it differently. That's our job. What I learned from Eliot Fisk was to always try to find primary source materials. In the case of Sor, I studied the complete works edition compiled by Brian Jeffrey.'

This past summer he performed at the Corfu Festival in Greece, opening his programme with the third cello suite of Bach, followed by Scarlatti, Barrios, Sergio Assad's *Three Greek Letters* and Mark Cruz's *Triptych*.

'For Bach's third Cello Suite, I transposed it off the cello score and added bass notes,' Holzman says.

He was also the first person to perform Roland Dyens' music in North America. 'Dyens dubbed me his North American ambassador,' he says. (Holzman's CD, *Plays Assad / Bach / Byrds / Dyens / &* can be found on HRH Recordings, with a recording of Dyens' *Saudade No. 3* and Sergio Assad's *Aquarell*).

From 1992-1994 Mr. Holzman held the title of "Maestro Extraordinario" given by the Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon, Monterrey, Mexico, where he served as artist-in-residence and directed its guitar ensemble.

Holzman plays on a 2000 Humphrey Millenium guitar and he also owns a Luis Panormo guitar, made in London in 1832. He will be using this guitar on a new, forthcoming recording of Carcassi, Carulli and Zani di Ferranti pieces, among others.

'I would like to add that it would be hard to imagine any of my success at all without the support of my parents and family. It was my parents who supported me and attended every lesson I had until I was about 16! Their support and dedication has been endless.'

When asked for an anecdote on his former student, Eliot Fisk's first remark echoes this picture of the Holzman family:

'Adam exudes the same tremendous warmth that I remember from his parents when we were

all kids,' says Fisk. 'Once when we were all eating in some seafood restaurant in NYC, Adam's father leaned over and said, of his sons seated at the table with us, "They just gave you the ultimate insult!!! They said you could be one of us!"

'Being with Adam today is still just like that with his tremendous sense of humour, a delightful complement to his serious side. I think of Adam apart from his unquestioned guitaristic excellence. I think of him as a big and generous spirit. I think of him as someone who embodies and imparts the greater lesson of music... that it all comes from love and ends in love and that's all there is. I think that's part of why he is such a great teacher as well. I've been fortunate to inherit some of his former students at New England Conservatory, and they are always among the best prepared and most interesting and rewarding to teach.'

Adam Holzman - Discography

Lauro: *Venezuelan Waltzes for the Guitar* (Naxos), March 14, 2004

Johann Mertz: *Bardenklänge. (Bardic Sounds). Op. 13* (Naxos), April 16, 2002

Guitar Music, Vol. 2 (Naxos), June 22, 1999

Ponce: *Guitar Music, Vol. 1* (Naxos), July 28, 1998

Sor: *Morceau de Concert; Six Valses et un Galop; etc.* (Naxos), November 19, 1996

Sor: *Grandes Sonatas, Opp. 22 & 25* (Naxos), March 26, 1996

Plays Assad/Bach/Byrd/Dyens/& (HRH Records), September 1, 1994

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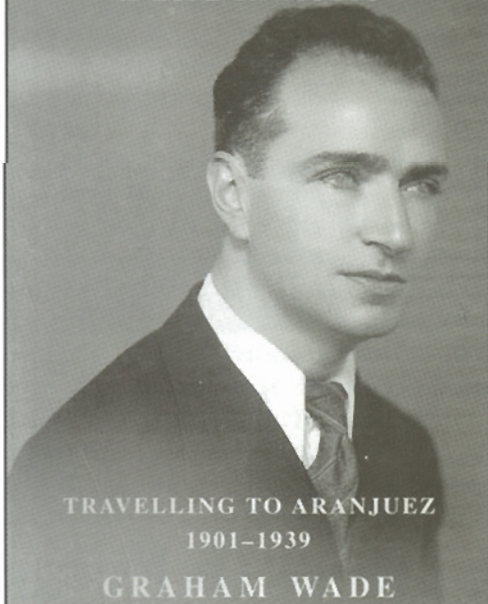
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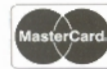
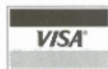
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