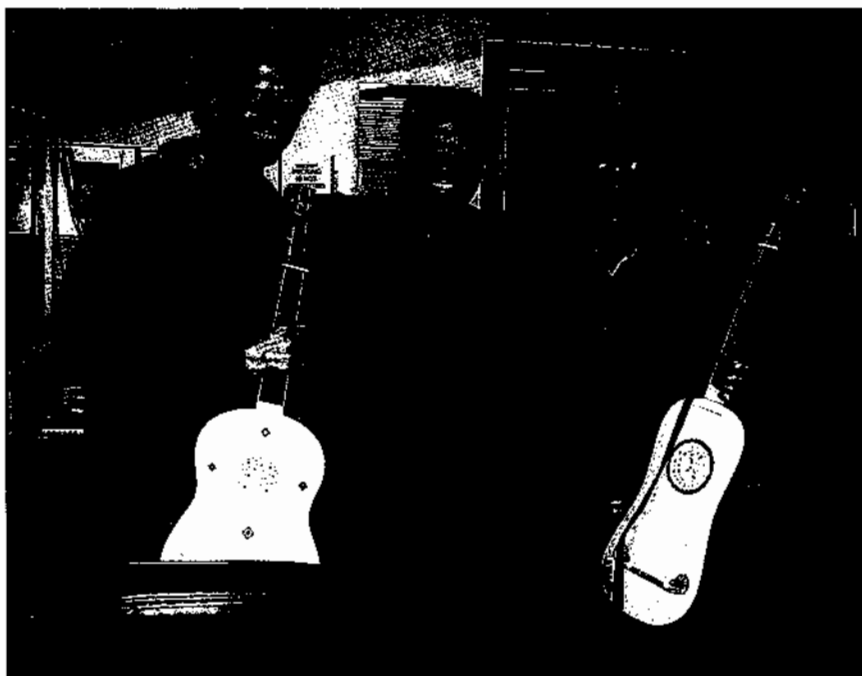


# NEW YORK GUITAR MARATHON

By JULIA CROWE

THIS YEAR'S overwhelming New York Guitar Festival, produced by David Spelman, featured more guitars in a blue winter landscape than a Picasso painting, including an all-classical Guitar Marathon held at the 92nd Street Y's Kaufman Concert Hall. The sold-out six-hour event aimed to deliver an aural history of '450 Years of the Spanish Guitar,' starting with Hopkinson Smith on the Renaissance vihuela and ending with works by Celedonio Romero, performed by Pepe Romero. Host and radio announcer John Schaefer was able to smoothly transition the performers through their brief sets while enlightening the audience on the history of Spanish guitar through quick onstage interviews with each artist. The marathon also premiered three new works written by young composer/guitarists, specifically commissioned for the festival. Throughout the programme performers announced their pieces from the stage, rendering much of the audience and short-nailed press corps clueless.

Smith's delicate vihuela interpretations of Luis Milan, Luys de Narváez and Mudarra, though clear from the first rows on the main floor, could have been amplified better to suit the vast size of the hall. Paul O'Dette fared slightly better with his flamenco-like strumming on baroque guitar with works by Gaspar Sanz and Santiago. Gyan Riley, the son of minimalist composer Terry Riley, took the stage with a slightly rumpled, collegiate look with a tie and sneakers and per-



Hopkinson Smith, Pepe Romero and Paul O'Dette.

formed three movements of his piece *Progression of the Ancestors*, which employed exotic string bends. Later, he returned to perform three of his original works, including one named for his pet bearded iguana, *Food for the Bearded*. Bill Kanengiser resumed the Spanish portion of the programme with Sor's famous *Grand Solo*, delivered with warmth and finesse. To the delight of the audience, he announced a surprise duet with Pepe Romero of Isaac Albeniz's *Intermezzo*.



Pepe Romero.



Paul O'Dette.

PHOTO: DAVID SPELMAN

Amidst all the cedar soundboards, Jason Vieaux's spruce-top guitar managed to stand out enough to catch the ears of a violinist, who confided during intermission that he'd stuck his head in from the lobby upon hearing the first few plucks of its distinctive sound. Vieaux performed a well-received rendition of Sor's *Variations on a Theme* from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, as well as *Solea* by Julián Arcas.

Minimalist guitarist/composer Dominic Frasca took to the stage barefoot, prompting a quip from emcee and radio host John Schaefer that perhaps the fees for new work commissions will be larger next time around so that artists might be able to afford footwear. Frasca uses his bare feet to manipulate various pedals and switches during the performance of his untitled new work, with the sound processing done entirely through an iMac computer. The piece, written for 10-string guitar, demonstrated his unique combination of plucking and tapping that builds rhythmically and melodically from a skeletal minimalist structure.

Pepe Romero closed the first half of the programme with his masterfully expressive performances of several classic Spanish pieces, including Malats's *Serenata Española* and Albeniz's *Asturias Leyenda* and Tárrega's *Capriccio Arabe*. Martha Masters began the second set with another transcription of the Malats which had a more pronounced bass while also conveying the rolling flow of the piece.

Bryce Dessner contrasted this with a new work entitled *Memorial*. Accompanied by viola player



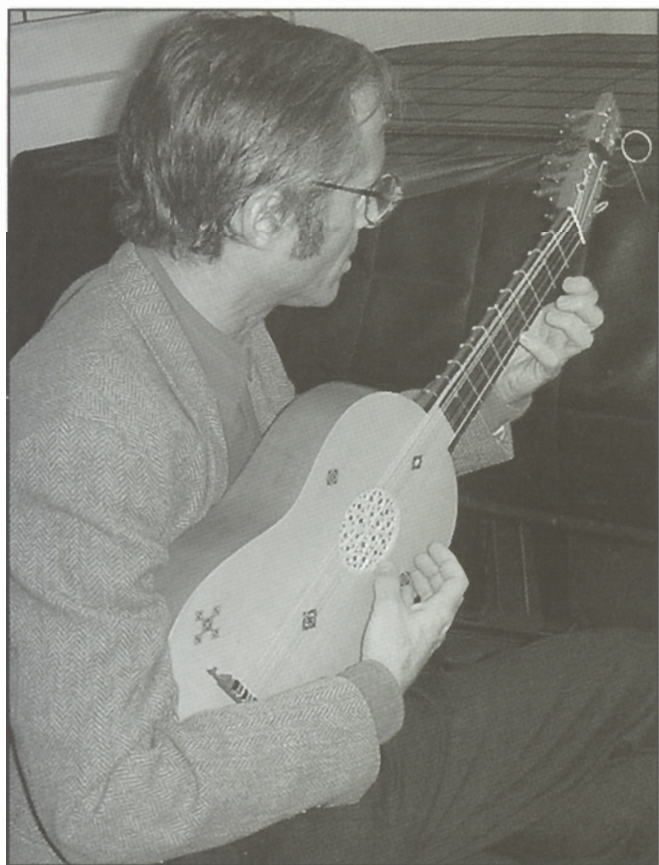
Pepe Romero with Eliot Fisk.

Padma Newsome and percussionist David Cossin, the piece was well-balanced and the viola's deep sustain, combined with shimmering moments of chimes, gongs and gourds, never overwhelmed the guitar. Overheard swooning and murmurs from the press corps indicated that the piece would be perfect as a movie score.

Eliot Fisk resuscitated the Spanish portion of the programme by dividing audiences neatly between those on edge and those at the edge of their seats with his performance of Albeniz's *Torre Bermeja*, Halffter's *Habañera* and a bit of breakneck Pagannini. Ana Vidovic took to the stage in a long-skirted, red halter dress (earning an unusual pre-concert standing ovation from one row) before performing Torroba's *Sonatina in A*. She created a clear and powerful sound with technical finesse, no small feat for any person with small hands. Her *Asturias Leyenda* was as lovely, if played at a slightly more microwave speed compared to the conventional oven.

Pepe Romero, as co-director of the event, closed with a flamenco tribute to Sabicas and Nino de Ric, offering rousing examples of all that is redolent of Spain within the language of the Seguería, Faruca, Alegrías and Bulería. He was then joined by Linda Boyd on flute for two beautiful Spanish-inflected works written by his father, Celedonio Romero.

The next New York Guitar Festival Guitar Marathon will take place in January 2008 featuring Sergio and Odair Assad performing a commissioned work written by Egberto Gismonti. This event will reflect an entirely Brazilian theme. For more details, log onto [www.newyorkguitarfestival.org](http://www.newyorkguitarfestival.org)



Hopkinson Smith.