

**15th West Dean International Classical Guitar Festival**

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**2006 Nürtingen  
International Guitar  
Festival**



**David  
Russell**

**Xuefei Yang**

**Letter from New York**

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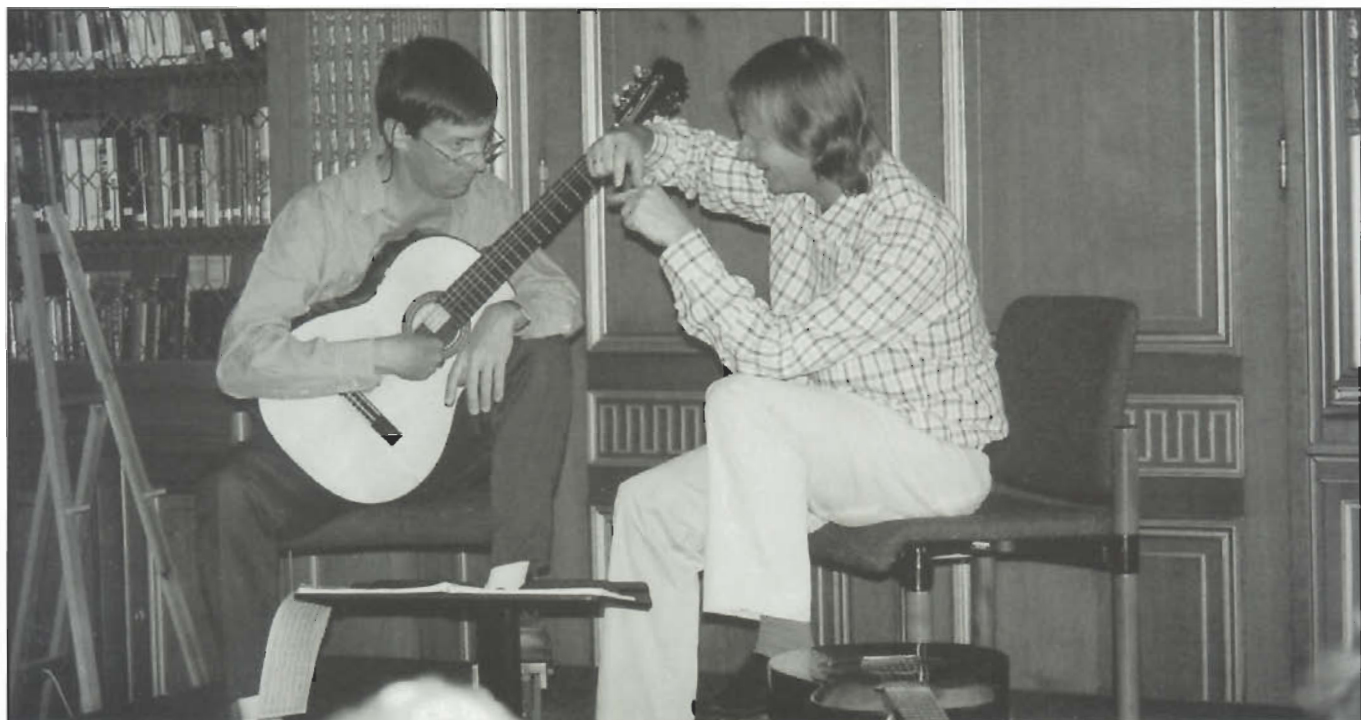
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# 15th INTERNATIONAL CLASSICAL GUITAR FESTIVAL AT WEST DEAN

## 12th – 18th August 2006

By JULIA CROWE



*David Russell Master Class.*

PHOTOS: MAURICE J. SUMMERFIELD - UNLESS OTHERWISE SHOWN

AFTER A ten-hour trip from New York to the south of England thick with terror alert airlines security pat-downs (10th August's shock and surprise for international passengers had transmuted twenty-four hours later to a mixture of defiance, confident odds-making and drugged nihilism) I was happy to discover that Chichester cabbies are no different from those in Manhattan when it comes to assessing and commenting on one's place of arrival, in this case West Dean College. 'I wouldn't mind having a garden like this, myself. What do you think?'

The best description of the estate that comes to mind is to picture a Masterpiece Theatre house with the Huntington Gardens of San Marino, California with a front lawn entirely overrun by sheep. This year's 15th Annual International Classical Guitar Festival, presented by Director John Mills, featured guest performers and tutors including David Russell, Maximo Diego Pujol, Catherine Liolios, David Caswell (filling in at the last second for Karin Schaupp), the Aquarelle Guitar Quartet, Joseph Urshalmi, Gerald Garcia and Andrew Gough.

The event started late Saturday afternoon with a welcome from West Dean's Music Course Director, Marcus Martin to greet the 70 participants and introduced them to this year's instructors and schedules, which included a relentless regimen of organic, locally grown meals.

Gerald Garcia lead and conducted a volunteer guitar orchestra ensemble in its first practice session on Piazzolla's *Adios Nonino*, a piece whose strains would be heard often enough in practice to become the theme song of the week.

'It's more effective to play very softly at the beginning of a piece when playing a crescendo,' Garcia advised the group. He was also quick to demonstrate his robin-like capacity to hear a worm rustling in the midst of 30 plucking guitars. 'You there – don't play open strings when closed is indicated.' The ensemble had performed a scale exercise earlier to become aware of the rests within the piece. 'It sounds not quite together but we're getting there! The trick is to begin together and end together.'

Garcia runs the National Youth Guitar Ensemble in Midlands sponsored by the EGTA for guitar students aged 13 through 18 years old. 'I have had commissions for the ensemble, which learns to play ten pieces after four days with at least six hours of ensemble practice a week.' One of these forthcoming new pieces is a Stephen Dodgson work for cello and guitar orchestra, expressly written for the Youth Guitar Ensemble.

Out in the hallway, before stepping into David Russell's masterclass, I noticed an old diving helmet replica, the Jules Verne grille-over-the-face kind that weighs about a thousand pounds as Salvador found out the hard way when he wore it



in 1936 for the First International Exhibition of Surrealism at the New Burlington Galleries. Dali had wanted to demonstrate to his audience that he was delving into the depths of the unconscious so he delivered his lecture from within the diving suit. When he started to faint, his audience applauded, thinking it was all part of the act. Edward James, Dali's patron (and the owner of West Dean) lunged to the rescue, using a billiard cue to pry off the helmet and resuscitate the artist. James, a poet, also happened to be the patron of many artists of the Surrealist movement, including Picasso, Rene Magritte and photographers May Ray and Cecil Beaton.

Russell's masterclass was held in the old library filled with Chinese Kangxi blue and white vases, floor-to-ceiling wooden Corinthian columns and gilt portraits of the James family looking on. 'When starting a passage, look for the middle,' Russell said. 'Don't make a big start because big starts result in a lack of power in the middle. Also, when you want to slow down, slow down the long notes.'

'Your playing has got to be better than just fine. Think of all the great players. Each are quite individual and learned to surpass correctness. You need to take your playing one step further and that is where your personality comes out. When I play, I want people to feel it was worth missing the football match. So I have to work to make it special. You have to learn to be coldheartedly musical first. Then you can be inventive.'

Nearly a mile away on the other side of the estate's Victorian gardens, Andrew Gough was instructing young guitar students how to prepare for graded exams. I trudged past the fields of sheep, with some marked in bright yellows and turquoise as if they'd served as target practice for a paintball fight, and meandered through the fantastical Eden of carefully tended apple, pear and plum trees and greenhouse vegetables all gleaming with ripe, jewel-like temptation after a brief light rain. Gough's class was inside the newly renovated barn where all the evening guitar concerts would be held this year instead of the old church.

'Pay attention to both the key signature and time signature, the tempo and mood of a piece for the sight-reading test,' Gough advised. 'You will have 30 minutes to make an impression. We can take our time with most pieces of sight-reading so look at the rhythm first and the notes second. Over exaggerate dynamics when you play. You might think you are making it clear but you need to show the examiner that you know. So before you start any piece, look at the most difficult passage to gauge a timbre. Do not dive into the music. Give yourself some time to settle in and count to five.'

One of Gough's little students skipped back to her seat with small butterfly stickers marking the V-VII-IX frets of her guitar. A few hours later, the barn filled to hear Catherine Liolios demonstrate

her delicate and sensitive playing with a late afternoon programme of Benjamin Britten's *Nocturnal*, John Dowland's *Fantaisie No. 7* and a selection of eight pieces from Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Platero y yo*. (All concert reviews can be revisited in the October 2006 issue of *Classical Guitar*.)

Before making the trip, *Classical Guitar Magazine* editor Colin Cooper had informed me it might be a good idea to bring a torch because it can get very dark at night in the countryside. I'd already happen to have just the item, a purse-sized talismanic charm that works well for both agoraphobic darkness and Manhattan's claustrophobic kind, i.e., getting stuck underground in a New York subway where torches come in very handy when you're trying to avoid the electrified third rail. (This happened to me a couple years ago when I was attempting to travel uptown to visit Luthier Music.) I had made sure to pick up an extra set of torch batteries at JFK Airport at the last second and was glad for the warning because it helped our group avoid slipping around in clods of sheep dung when the foot race was on to reach the pub before closing time.

After David Russell's impeccably-played concert, which included a selection of pieces by Mauro Giuliani, Francisco Da Milano, Enrique Granados, Caspar Joseph Mertz, John Dowland, Hans Haug and Vicente Emilio Sojo, a participant sidled up to his wife Maria to ask if she ever notices him make a mistake. 'Yes, but at least he's in this profession. It's not like he's a bull-fighter.'

This year's guitar makers set up shop in the Oak Hall, including Earl Marsh, who explained that a type of spruce in one guitar I was admiring is also called bear claw or angel wings. Dutch guitar maker Bert Kwakkel let me scurry off to a corner to try out one of his guitars with a uniquely weighted neck as French guitar maker Dominic Field dropped by to listen and give it a try as well. The Classical Guitar Centre of Birmingham had a lovely selection of guitars and Barry Mason supplied a feast of strings, sheet music, CDs and video and other accessories from his London Spanish Guitar Centre shop. The words carved into the archway of the Oak Hall, *Nis Dominus Frustra*, do not translate in this case to *Without Guitar, Frustration*.

Guitar maker Paul Fischer delivered a lecture on the history of English guitar making, starting with Arnold Dolmetsch to the harpsichord maker Robert Goble and David Rubio. Fischer stated that the English guitar makers of today are informed mainly by the work of maker David Rubio, whom Fischer studied with. Rubio's genius, he explained, came with understanding the principles of physics and acoustics. 'I want to develop my own ideas, not just copy masters guitars. Guitar makers are more artists innovators and makers of beautiful objects - the guitar is not a *tool*.' He displayed three unique guitar samples.



PHOTO: JULIA CROWE

Bert Kwaakel and Earl Marsh at the Open Day.



Marcus Martin welcomes the 2006 students.



PHOTO: JULIA CROWE

Aquarelle Guitar Quartet - post concert.



Joseph Urshalmi ensemble class.



Paul Fischer lecture.



Maximo Duego Pujol ensemble class.



PHOTO: JULIA CROWE

Catherine Liolios and Dominique Field.



Section of the Open Day dealer display.



one flamenco-style made of cypress quality wood for the soundboard of guitar, a guitar made of bird's eye maple with a cedar top, and a guitar made of Brazilian King wood, which he described as being, 'as hard and brittle as Brazilian rosewood, which can crack.'

Joseph Urshalmi's class provided an overview of concepts featured in his book, *Conscious Approach to Guitar Technique* (Chantarelle), including detailed ways on how to improve one's guitar playing technique through analysis of one's posture, dynamic relaxation, holding the instrument and being aware of the shape of one's hands when playing. Urshalmi urges teachers not to inundate their young students with too much information too fast. 'We guitar teachers are so generous. We offer so much information at once that it tends to overwhelm the student. We must look at teaching musicians the same as preparing an athlete, focusing first on the correct use of the body.'

Later that afternoon Urshalmi treated everyone to an impromptu performance of Bach after Gerald Garcia & Alison Bendy's fun set of duets. (Bendy is the publisher of Holley Music, known for its remarkably unbor-ing, deviously clever and visually appealing young guitar student series, *The Guitarist's Way*. It makes Carulli studies for beginners go down like cotton candy rather than obligatory peas and carrots.)

Maximo Diego Pujol presented a lecture on the History of the Tango, pointing out its interesting connection to the English country dance - as a poor English-to-Spanish translation first presented as *contra danza*. He explained that it was this country dance music that mixed with black music when it was brought to Central America. The other possible derivation of the term tango, he explained, could be from the word *tambo*, or the rhythm of milking cows. Pujol played some recorded music by the Argentine composer Almiro Manzi and the Troilo Orchestra and then performed his own arrangement of Manzi's tango on the guitar.

Pujol pointed out the irony that tango music used to be the music of the working poor, co-opted by the young people at the time, and now tango is music for the concert halls. He played the 'Summer' excerpt from Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* from Piazzolla's first LP dated 1962-1963. With electric guitar and polytonality, the bass in Em and middle in E diminished, it had a tangy rhythm. Later on, in the old dining room, Pujol's class gathered around him, thrilled to witness his last minute rewriting of their ensemble piece in a room as Sir James Peachey's portrait looked on with approval, the same Lord Peachey whose name I'd spotted

buried out back beneath the churchyard's slanting tombstones.

One of the more interesting formalities at West Dean are its regular fire alarm drills. The entire place is rigged to detect the slightest whiff of smoke and if someone should forget the no-smoking dictum, it means we're all out on the front lawn in our pyjamas. During one mid-afternoon dash outdoors to escape the clanging bells, someone's lunch had been interrupted, as evidenced by a plate of half-eaten chops with peas resting on top of the marble table in the front hall.

Andrew Gough led an ensemble class for adult beginners in the Music Room, instructing them on the basics of rhythm reading, recalling an earlier protest from a Canadian student. 'What's with this crochet, quaver and semiquaver business? It's called a *quarter note*, *eighth note* and *sixteenth*.' Looking up at the gigantic portrait of Edith Sitwell on the wall, participant Tony Reide points and informs me they're trying to play their best for her.

The portrait is of an older Dame Sitwell, no longer looking like her younger Modigliani self

topped off with a fantastically-designed *chapeau*. In this portrait, she's practically glowering. A good friend of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, this is also the woman who once said, 'I wish the government would put a tax on pianos for the incompetent.' And 'My personal hobbies are reading, listening to music and silence.' Possibly a more valid reason for her looking ticked off is that she is being painted by the object of her lifelong unrequited love, the Russian painter Pavel Tchelitchew some 20 years after they'd first met. As I slip out the door to catch the next event, I hear Tony call out, 'We'll get it right for you next time.' I am not certain if he is addressing this to myself or to the Sitwell portrait.

During one rare free moment, I'd sprawled out on a Victorian couch with pea green silk cut velvet upholstery and barley twist legs and admired the clever person who put down Aztec-themed carpet in the Oak Hall, in reference to the fantastical Gaudi-like structure *Las Pozas* constructed by West Dean's owner deep in the jungles of Mexico. I watched two participants set up a music stand nearby and try out original music arrangements that they pursue as a hobby. All week long, people had been asking me, 'Well, what do you think? How does this programme compare to guitar festivals in the States?' And it hit me in this instant how refreshing it was to see people participate simply for the love of music. What was completely absent here was the 800-pound gorilla known as competition.

I would like to make clear this is not a sweeping generalisation about guitar festivals in the

**"My personal hobbies are reading, listening to music and silence."**

**- Dame Edith Sitwell**

U.S. I've attended a number of them now to be able to recognize the antsy teenager (male or female) - who is all too eager to seize the stage and tear into Bach's *Prelude, Fugue and Allegro* at intergalactic space travel speeds and sit back afterward, periscoping their neck around for approval from those who feed the beast by saying 'Whoa! Did you hear that? I mean, how fast and clean was that? What monster talent! I cannot wait to hear them play again when they're 25 years old.' While typing away here, another lasting image I'm forever stuck with is the priceless expression on William Kanengiser's face at one guitar festival as musical disaster unfolded in one corner where two talents huddled and laid waste to Asturias' *Leyenda* like Indie 500 racecar drivers scraping the wall and sparking hubcaps. Guitar instruction these days has made some great technical advances but not yet when it comes to playing from the heart.

The atmosphere here is completely relaxed. Catherine Liolios treated a few to a casual, quiet performance of a few of the additional pieces to *Platero y yo* in the pub after hours. A burst of applause breaks out in the pub when David Caswell enters on the heels of his last-minute concert filling in for Karin Schaupp. 'All the world's a bar!' Caswell had given an informed and joyful performance of Latin American music. Caswell's father had worked as a sailor and brought home a huge record collection of South American music which had captured Caswell's imagination as a child.

At another table I played a game of musical dominoes one night in the pub, matching scrimshaw rhythm notations with participants, Fiona Bubbers, Pam Fereday, Heike Fiehland and Ian Lines. David Preston, who teaches a guitar class of two hundred students, imparted some helpful advice on helping me wrangle the class of ten rambunctious third-graders I teach back in New York. Diana Green escorted me on a hike to Edward James' gravesite so I could say thank you. Especially for keeping Starbucks from setting up shop in the Old Library.

The Aquarelle Quartet concert proved to be a pleasant surprise, creating a buzz among the audience afterward that they'd just possibly witnessed the 'Next Big Thing' making its arrival in classical guitar. Beside their obvious playing ability and uncanny unison, the quartet also had the remarkable composure not to inadvertently smack my head with their guitars when taking a bow, given that the front row seats were situated uncomfortably close to the edge of the stage that evening. 'What a refreshing concert,' one participant remarked buoyantly afterward, 'Not a single piece by Giuliani or Sor!' (For a full concert review, refer to the October issue of *Classical Guitar Magazine*.)

With the week's end drawing closer, the ensemble practice grew more intense in preparation for the final various guitar ensemble concerts.



John Mills introduces his 2006 Festival tutors.

Piazzolla's *Adios Nonino* filled the air for one last time. Solo performers were chosen to play by the order of a hat drawing with each name patiently called off by John Mills. When new Aquarelle quartet member Rory Russell announced he would like to play *Granada* by Albéniz, Tony Reide landed a good laugh from the room with his quick retort, 'So would I.'

Gaynor Sams and Frances Rideout performed Sor's *L'Encouragement* from the Bream and Williams recording, promising 'to play all the same notes they played but not necessarily in the same order.'

The ensemble concerts came to a close after Tony Reid set his crutches aside and rested against a chair to sing a rousing rendition of *Old Man River*, accompanied by Gerald Garcia on the grand piano. And dubbed by the audience as the 'Aquarium Quartet,' Gerald Garcia, Alison Bendy, Fiona Bubbers and Heike Fiehland performed Carlos Domeniconi's *Malamatina*, a piece named for the Greek wine, *retsina*, which requires its players to slug back wine and clink glasses every few measures.

John Mills tells me, 'Barry Mason was the Director for the first ten festivals, doing a magnificent job. It was Barry and David Russell's idea to start a major festival in the first place, with the plans for such an event being then discussed by David, Barry and myself at the Royal Academy of Music in late 1989. Next year's Festival by the way will be held between 18 - 24 August.'

'All we ask from students is the willingness to learn. I spend about nine months a year teaching works like the *Aranjuez Concierto* of Rodrigo, the Bach *Chaconne* etcetera, so sometimes it is nice to work with easier repertoire, and indeed I have discovered a number of pieces I had never heard of before in so doing. The idea of this programme is to have participants transition back into school year and take these new ideas with them into the next set of months.

'We're always looking for new ways to improve the programme,' he adds. 'For example, the private lessons have now become quite an important element in the Festival schedule in recent years.



Every line of the questionnaires people submit gets read. This is what helped us develop the technique and analysis workshops.

This programme has given us a chance to have an artist like Maximo Diego Pujol here and in recent years, the musicologist Jorge Cardoso, who is such a lovely guy. I think many people will be playing Pujol's music now. Joseph Urshalmi was also with us this year, a fine and respected teacher, and of course Gerald [Garcia] is Gerald - inspirational and with his own special brand of humour! With David Caswell on board, it's been a lot of fun to hear an Englishman play Latin-American music so well. I always try to bring in someone new here to give them a platform. This year it was Catherine Liolios, who is such a delicate player.' Mills' wife Cobie was also one of the private lesson instructors.

There are three important things I would like to add,' Mills says. 'First, with Andrew Gough, I can't praise highly enough what he has done with the Beginners' Programme. Also I am extremely grateful to Maurice Summerfield, as we could not operate a concert series like this without his help. His advice and tremendous support for us and the guitar is priceless. Then at West Dean itself, the year-round assistance of Marcus Martin and the staff keep things on line beautifully. People would not believe the mountains of paperwork that needs to be processed! We want participants

to enjoy a trouble and stress-free time with us each summer, so very hard work takes place administratively for virtually twelve months a year to enable this to happen.'

It would be impossible to close this article without mentioning the work of Jane Bulbeck, the onsite certified massage therapist who has her own spa room set up (No. 85) in the housemaid's wing. All week long I had observed the posters around the house touting her reasonably-priced 30 minutes and hourly sessions but I'd danced around the idea, thinking it seemed a bit oxymoronic to have a massage therapist in such a relaxing setting as this. If I relaxed any more I'd start looking like Dali's camembert-runny clocks from his *Persistence of Memory*. After seeing her working on the shoulders of a West Dean employee in the Oak Hall, I changed my mind. His face took on a relaxed smile and incandescent glow from Magritte's painting *The Pleasure Principle*.

It took her less than five minutes to discover the last bit of New York hiding out in a concentrated knot below my right shoulder blade. Applying a combination of shiatsu, deep tissue, lymph node drainage, sports and Swedish massage techniques, the knot dissolved with a whimper—mainly because it dawned on me the guitar programme was over and it was now time to go home.