

PFINGSTSEMINAR KOBLENZ 2005

A Report by THÉRÈSE WASSILY SABA

THE INTERNATIONAL Pflingstseminar in Koblenz, Germany held its 13th festival and competition this year with some of the guitar's finest performers including Pepe Romero, Manuel Barrueco, David Russell, Hubert Käppel, Aniello Desiderio, Marcin Dylla and Philip Catherine, as well as Gordon Crosskey and Dr. Stephen Goss.

The Director, Georg Schmitz, is always looking to introduce ground-breaking events into the festival, and this year proved to be as successful as in the past: the guitarists playing in Manuel Barrueco's masterclass, dedicated to the *Concierto de Aranjuez* by Joaquín Rodrigo, had the great privilege of being accompanied by the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, conducted by Rasmus Baumann. It was a rare and special event to have an orchestra just for a masterclass. Only four students were chosen to play: Tristan Angenendt, Alexander Kravtsov, Samuel Klemke and Andrew Robinson. Each focused on one movement of the concerto and both Manuel Barrueco and the conductor Rasmus Baumann advised the students on how to work with an orchestra as well as giving technical advice for the Aranjuez concerto, which is such an important part of every professional guitarist's repertoire. The Leader of the orchestra, Ernst Triner, also contributed to the discussion. They discussed such issues as the differences in the amount of time allocated for rehearsals in Europe and the United States, and the difference between conducting styles (whether the conductor conducts on the beat or ahead of the beat). It was illuminating for both the participants and the audience in the Görreshaus, a beautiful and historic concert hall venue in the centre of Koblenz, which is actually the home of the orchestra. As a mark of the success of this event, the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie will be involved in the next Koblenz Guitar Festival in 2006.

The Rodrigo masterclass was followed by the British guitarist Russell Poyner playing a fine performance of the full *Concierto de Aranjuez* with the orchestra; this was part of his final examination for his post-graduate diploma from the Guitar Academy of the Koblenz Musikschule.

The opening event of the Pflingstseminar was the launch of a new recording by Hubert Käppel called *Memorias* of contemporary guitar works by Brouwer, Ginastera, Henze, Hunt and Schmitz. Hubert Käppel gave a short recital of some of the works from the recording in the Rathaussaal. Alfons Moritz, the Ministerial Advisor for Music in the Ministry for Science, Further Training, Research and Culture in the Rhineland-Palatinate, who are strong supporters of the Festival, gave a warm speech on the significance of promoting contemporary music.



PHOTO: THÉRÈSE WASSILY SABA

Manuel Barrueco masterclass with Tristan Angenendt.

Manuel Barrueco gave an evening recital of concertos with the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie conducted by Rasmus Baumann. He began with the Vivaldi concerto RV93, elegantly accompanied by strings and the harpsichord played by Rasmus Baumann. Two very special contemporary works for guitar and orchestra were also performed: *Folias* (2002) by the Puerto Rican composer Roberto Sierra and *Fratres* by the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt. Naturally the La Folia theme is a part of Sierra's *Folias* which is a mix of Spanish, Latin and contemporary music. *Fratres*, which was arranged by Manuel Barrueco with Arvo Pärt for guitar, string orchestra and percussion, begins with the guitar solo, playing ostinato-like arpeggios (this part has been added to the original *Fratres* version) before being joined by the strings, and builds into a richly textured, romantic sound. *Fratres* was written for chamber ensemble by Arvo Pärt in 1977, however, since then, it has been arranged and rearranged many times and by many musicians. It seems only right that there should be a guitar arrangement of the work too. The programme also included a wonderful performance of Mozart's Symphony in A, KV201 and the dramatic *La Oración del Torero* (The Bullfighter's Prayer) for chamber orchestra by Joaquín Turina. Interestingly, Turina's work, which dates from 1925, was first written for a lute quartet, actually for the Aguilar family who were a family of lutenists. They performed the work on their tour of Europe and the Americas. Turina arranged it for string quartet and then later still for chamber orchestra.

David Russell's recital was as inspiring as ever. The repertoire choice was refreshingly different, such as the eight-movement baroque *Suite* by J. S. Luc, which he played with the capo on the second

fret. The *Introduction et Polonaise* by Coste was played with a strong stylistic sense and a light dance-like interpretation. The four pieces by Regino Sainz de la Maza included a very exciting performance of his *Rondeña*. There were two works by Sergio Assad: the sentimental *Eli's Portrait* which he wrote for Eli Kassner's 80th birthday, and his lusciously romantic *Valseana*. Apart from his superb playing David Russell seemed to be surrounded by a glowing aura (possibly the result of having just won a well-deserved Grammy Award).

Describing fullness may seem to be a semantic distortion, however, I must say that Pepe Romero's concert in the Rathausaal was fuller than full. This in itself, creates an atmosphere of excitement and expectation, and the audience was certainly not disappointed. Pepe Romero played all the repertoire that has drawn audiences to classical guitar in the 20th century: his own arrangement of *Danzas Españolas* by Gaspar Sanz, Villa-Lobos Preludes, *Gran Jota* and *Capricho Árabe* by Tárrega. It was a particularly good to hear works by the composers that he worked so closely with such as *Suite Castellana* by Torroba and the very special *Invocación y Danza* by Joaquín Rodrigo. During his masterclasses, we heard many invaluable anecdotes and the background to these works, as well as some excellent technical guidance.

Pepe Romero, David Russell and Manuel Barrueco commented that it was the first time that the three of them had been together in the same place and consequently spent a pleasant evening exchanging stories of their family and musical experiences.

The Canadian guitarist Dale Kavanagh gave an energetic recital of 20th-century works, including two lesser known works by Carlo Domeniconi: *Tryptichon - Calata, Intonazione* and *Ragtime* and the *Chaconne*, naturally inspired by the Chaconne from Bach's second Violin Partita. It was difficult to feel completely relaxed when listening to her arrangement of the second movement of the Villa-Lobos guitar concerto performed as a solo piece. I found myself mentally filling in the gaps left by the absent orchestra and I couldn't help but wonder how successful it would have been had I heard it without prior knowledge of the whole concerto. She played three of her own works: *Briny Ocean his Toss*, two Etudes, *Contemplation* and *Al la Fueco*. Dale Kavanagh has a very solid technique and an expressive style of playing which is very musically convincing.

One can always rely on Aniello Desiderio to play an emotionally charged concert. That is not to say that he is predictable. Not at all. I have heard him play concerts where he seemed to be constantly dissolving into super pianissimo, but at this concert, to my surprise, he moved more towards a passionate fortissimo. It did not, however, lack contrast, far from it, and Aniello later explained that it is an inherent part of his Neapolitan nature.



Manuel Barrueco, David Russell and Pepe Romero.

Tre Sonate by Scarlatti were played with understated delicate poise. The *Due Canzoni Lidie* by Nuccio d'Angelo, with their very distinctive soundscapes, were also well played. But it was here he unleashed his full expressive abilities: he built the piece into a fierce *agitato*, making strings resonate with such force that one might imagine him hammering piano strings. He ended with an energetic performance of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Capriccio Diabolico* - a homage to Paganini.

Alexander-Sergei Ramírez gave a recital of music from Latin America which included *Leyenda de España* and *Danza Paraguaya* by Barrios (from his celebrated DG recording), the Villa-Lobos Cadenza from the guitar concerto and a lovely four movement suite from the *Libro de Zifra*, discovered in Lima, dating from 1786. Ernesto Cordero's output of new repertoire is impressive. His *Tres Cantigas Negras* are attractive pieces and, as their title suggests, are based on African rhythms. The concert ended with the classic 20th-century work, *Sonata op.47* by Alberto Ginastera. Andreas von Wangenheim also played classic 20th-century repertoire, such as the *Nocturnal op.70* by Benjamin Britten. I enjoyed his transcription of *Suite No.6 for cello BWV 1012* by J.S. Bach which was beautifully ornamented. The transcription of Mozart's *Divertimento für drei Bassethörner KV 439 b No. 2* was also a successful venture. Andreas von Wangenheim played three of his own works: *Chorinho*, *Hommage à Satie* and *September 2nd*. These were light pieces in contrast to the bravura of Bach, Britten and Mozart.

Held in three rounds, the set works for the final round were one of JS Bach's Lute Suites, a transcription of one of his violin sonatas or partitas, the *Prelude, Fugue and Allegro*, or the *Chaconne* from BWV 1006. The prize for reaching the Second Round was to have a public masterclass with David Russell. These were held in Beethoven's mother's house, in Koblenz. David Russell worked meticulously with each student offering musical and technical advice.

The Prize for being a Finalist was to have a public masterclass with Pepe Romero. The six finalists

were: Tristan Angenendt, Agnes Condamin, Vladimir Gorbach, Samuel Klemke, Pavel Kukhta and Pascal Sticklies. There was so much invaluable advice given to the students in all of the masterclasses. Pepe Romero, in particular, focused on developing the technique of self-expression as well as the digital facility. He said to one student, 'We need to spend time each day practising technique. It should be aimed at feeling the guitar with all of your senses. I want you to play the first chord and then feel the chord all the way from your head to your toes. Make it a sensual experience.' The theme of experiencing the music with all of one's senses continued for the interpretation of colours during a masterclass on Giuliani's *Variations on a Theme by Handel*: 'Think of the sounds like flavours. What is the difference between orange juice, lemon juice and apple juice? Just because you play the right note, it is not the end of it. You must have the texture and it must evoke something inside you.'

Masterclasses were also given by Gordon Crosskey, Hubert Käppel, Aniello Desiderio, Dale Kavanagh, Alexander Ramirez, Stephen Goss, Piraí Vaca, Andreas von Wangenheim, Alfred Eickholt, Volker Höh and George Vassilev. Stephen Goss gave a lecture entitled *Idiom versus Imagination* and presented an interesting discussion on contemporary guitar compositions, analysing works such as: Henze's *Royal Winter Music* and *Drei Tentos, Nocturnal op.70* by Britten and *Sonata op.47* by Ginastera. Stephen Goss spoke of the difficulty in writing for the guitar and said: 'The only instrument more difficult to write for than the guitar, is the bandoneón.' I imagine he speaks from bitter experience! In 2003 he wrote *Tango: The White Queen* for violin, bandoneón, guitar, piano and double bass.

The First Prize in the International Koblenz Guitar Competition 'Hubert Käppel' 2005 was awarded to Vladimir Gorbach; he received a Michael Wichmann guitar, valued at 5,000 Euros, a cash prize of 1,000 Euros and a recital in the concert series of the Koblenz Guitar Academy. There was no Second Prize awarded but the Third Prize was given to the French guitarist Agnes Condamin. The prize-giving ceremony was given the full treatment with the Trumpet Quartet from the Koblenz Music School performing at the beginning and at the end of the ceremony in the Rathaus. The 12 jury members were Hubert Käppel, Gordon Crosskey, Alfred Eickholt, Dr. Stephen Goss, Volker Höh, Dr. Klaus Heinen, Jörg Gauchel, Günter Schillings, Asgerdur Sigurdardottir, Piraí Vaca, Vana Vougiouka, and head of the jury, myself, Thérèse Wassily Saba.

The jazz guitarists Philip Catherine and Frank Haunschild made a good team not only in their on-stage performance at the Jazz Café in Koblenz but also in their teaching. I was pleased to be given copies of their latest recordings: *Meeting*



Prize winners Agnes Condamin and Vladimir Gorbach.

Colours by Philip Catherine with trumpeter, Bert Joris, and the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, and *Listen to This* by Frank Haunschild and John Stowell. These veteran performers, with the melodic creativity of Philip Catherine and the solid experience of Frank Haunschild, have so much to offer young students and are nothing short of generous musicians both on stage and off.

There were a number of guitar makers with their instruments on display: Gert Petersen, Stefan Schlemper brought in his guitars and his renowned amplification system, Georg Gose, Armin and Mario Gropp and of course, Michael Wichmann. Chanterelle with Michael Macmeeken set up a shop at the Musikschule with a wide range of scores and recordings.

The Festival attracted considerable interest from the German media, and this year the Festival was featured twice on the television: David Russell's masterclass was filmed and a full 30-minute programme was made for German television about the Festival.

The 14th IPS Koblenz Guitar Festival will be from 29 May-5 June 2006 with the Assad Brothers, Manuel Barrueco, David Russell, Costas Cotsiolis, Hubert Käppel, Aniello Desiderio, Paul Galbraith, Pavel Steidl, Stephen Goss, the Flamenco guitarist Gerardo Núñez, among others, and the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie. There will be an international solo guitar competition as well with no age limit on entry. The First Prize is 3,000 Euros, a Michael Wichmann guitar worth 5,000 Euros and a recital in the concert series of the Guitar Academy of Koblenz. The Second Prize is 2,000 Euros and Third Prize is 1,000 Euros. The competition will be in three rounds and there is a free choice programme for each of the rounds. Contact: Director - Georg Schmitz, Musikschule der Stadt Koblenz, Hoewelstraße 6, 56073 Koblenz, Germany. Tel. +49 170 311 5446. e-mail: info@koblenzguitarfestival.de website: www.pfingstseminar.de