

15TH INTERNATIONALES PFINGSTSEMINAR KOBLENZ GUITAR FESTIVAL

By THÉRÈSE WASSILY SABA



PHOTOS: THÉRÈSE WASSILY SABA

Mike McFadden, María Jesús and David Russell, Georg Schmitz.

THE KOBLENZ International Guitar Festival, Germany, which was held from 21–28 May 2007, celebrated its 15th anniversary this year and began in a rather unique way with a charity golf tournament.

This First Golf Charity Tournament was held at the Jakobsberg Golf Course, which is appropriately given the epithet 'golf in Paradise', as the golf course sits on top of hills leading down to the Rhine Valley. The golf pro at the course is internationally renowned Mike McFadden. The charity being supported this year was the 'NGO David Russell y María Jesús'. For those who don't already know, David Russell is not only a super guitarist but also has a very impressive golf handicap. In fact he has won so many prizes for his golf that he has a special glass cabinet to house them.

Of course, there are a number of excellent golfers in the guitar world. Guitarist golfers played in teams of four; I followed the team of: David Russell and Robert Brightmore with Jim and Janet D'Addario around the first nine holes. Interesting as it was, my hay fever had taken a firm hold and having sneezed my way continuously around the first nine holes, I thought I had better not risk making any further noise what with the tension

building the closer we came towards the 18th hole. For those who don't already play golf, there was a schnupperkurs (taster course) with Mike McFadden which was a lot of fun as well. The day was a great success and provided a relaxing start to a very full week of guitar events.

There is always a very impressive list of guest performers and artists at the Koblenz International Guitar Festival. Many of the top international guitarists regularly perform and give masterclasses, such as the Assad Brothers, Pepe Romero, Manuel Barrueco, David Russell and Flamenco guitarist Gerardo Núñez. This year was no exception and added to this already remarkable list were Konrad Ragossnig, Alvaro Pierri, Fabio Zanon, Jason Vieaux and as a special guest, the composer Roberto Sierra.

One of the highlights of the week was Manuel Barrueco performing with the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, conducted by Karsten Huschke. They gave the German première of *Danzas Concertantes* by Roberto Sierra, and the world première of the orchestral version of *Bay of Pigs* by Michael Daugherty on 25 May 2007. Daugherty's work was originally written for guitar and string quartet; this arrangement was for

guitar with string orchestra. In its three movements, *Havana Dreams*, *Waterfall* and *Anthem*, this 'elegy for Cuba, past and present', soon moves from a 'dream world' into one of overpowering chaos. The waterfall image is not of the water flowing down magically but of being caught at the bottom of the fall and being crushed by the water's great force. The third movement has a very primitive atmosphere, creating almost a rock guitar sound. *Danzas Concertantes* by Roberto Sierra was in complete contrast to the Daugherty in terms of orchestration because it was conceived as an orchestral work. It was a particularly strong work that had an incredible musical force; it made one appreciate how special it is to hear music performed in concert, as opposed to hearing a recording, particularly when the composer is so bold about creating a huge, exciting sound, which built up into super fortissimos; Sierra used a wide-ranging selection of percussion instruments as well as the orchestra with brass. His choice of orchestral instruments to accompany the guitar was expressive and distinctive, such as the use of the French horn with the guitar, or the guitar with claves and pizzicato strings. The solo part for the guitar was demanding but excellently performed by Manuel Barrueco.

David Russell gave a solo recital in the Rhein-Mosel-Halle, which included his transcription of *Partita in A minor BWV 1013* by J. S. Bach. In the Bach and in the *Elegy* and *Hungarian Fantasy* of J. K. Mertz we could really marvel at David Russell's technique and musicality. Not only was his speed and clarity of notes impressive but the full rich tone quality he produced on individual notes and the subtle variations in dynamic levels, made us all the more aware that we were listening to a Grammy Award winning artist.

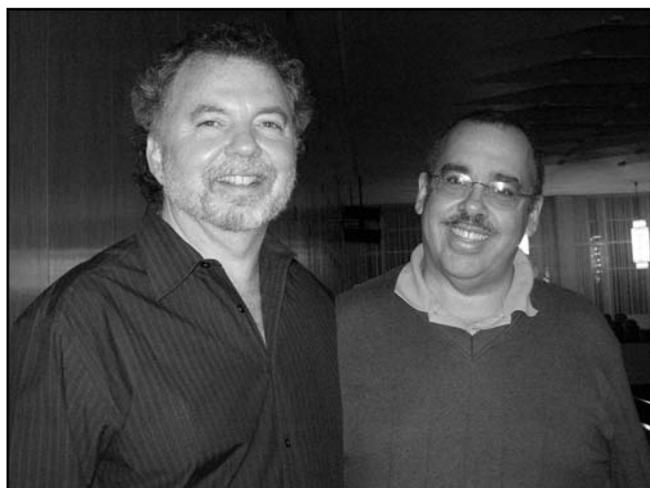
The list of outstanding internationally renowned performers at the festival is long. The



David Russell, Jim and Janet D'Addario, Robert Brightmore.

Assad Brothers' concert included an unforgettablely lyrical and sensual performance of *A Lenda do Caboclo* and *Alma Brasileira* by Heitor Villa-Lobos. There were concerts each evening, as well as some matinee recitals: Alvaro Pierri gave the opening recital and it was very easy to disappear into the timeless space that he created when he played Ponce's *Sonata No.3*; it was completely absorbing and the second movement was beautifully lyrical. Hubert Käppel gave a wonderful performance of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Platero y Yo* with the German actor Konrad Krauss, however to my disappointment, I felt continuously torn between my desire to listen to the guitar part and my attraction to the actor's performance; I found it difficult to absorb both at the same time and moved from one to the other throughout. Pepe Romero joked that he received such an enthusiastic ovation from the audience as he arrived on stage, that he almost felt that his work was done already. In fact, even the heavens seemed to applaud during his fine performance of Bach's *Partita No. 2*, which was accompanied by a huge thunderstorm. Aniello Desiderio gave a recital full of the extremes of emotion and interpretation with the audience screaming in appreciation as if they were at a pop concert. In complete contrast to this was the recital of Jason Vieaux, played with complete emotional calm.

Those that reached the second and final rounds of the International Koblenz Guitar Competition 'Hubert Käppel', were offered masterclasses with performers such as Manuel Barrueco, David Russell, Pepe Romero, Alvaro Pierri and the Assad Brothers, which is an



Manuel Barrueco and Roberto Sierra.



Françoise-Emmanuelle Denis, Pirai Vaca, Manuel Barrueco, Asgerdur Sigurdardottir, Odair Assad.



Guitar maker, Alkis Efthimiadis.



Odair Assad gives masterclass to Magdalena Kaltcheva.



Guitar makers: Marek Ludwig Schygulla, Jost von Huene, Florian Vorreiter.



Gabriel Bianco, winner of the International Koblenz Guitar Competition 'Hubert Käppel' 2007 is congratulated by Alfred Eickholt.



Guitar makers, Georg Gose and his son Robert.



Konrad Ragossnig, Alfred Eickholt, Georg Schmitz.



Gerardo Núñez gives masterclass.

invaluable prize for these students aiming to pursue professional careers.

David Russell spoke of the importance of knowing one's limits on the concert platform: 'You must learn what happens when you play a concert and don't take your playing to the edge of your risk level. If the risk is too great, then you will only make it one fifth of the time, so as a professional you have to work at 90 per cent.' And for those who are concerned about the speed of their fingers, he made the invaluable comment that: 'Pure speed is not more exciting, it's just faster.'

Alvaro Pierri was particularly good in discussing rhythm and pulse and when presented with baroque music provided his students with a long list of books to read on the baroque style, which included: *The Flute Method* by Johann Joachim Quantz, C.P.E. Bach's treatise *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, the introduction to the interpretation of baroque music by Jean-Claude Veilhan, and books by Thurston Dart, Arnold Dolmetsch, Nikolaus Harnoncourt and *Bach's Ornaments* by Walter Emery. Manuel Barrueco advised: 'You should look closely at the composer's indications; if you rely too much on your own ideas, then you start to make every piece sound the same.' He went on to define the possible areas for interpretation available to the performer: the placement of the note in relation to the beat, dynamics, articulation, colour and vibrato.

Sergio Assad was concerned about students putting too much pressure with the left hand thumb behind the neck and provided an exercise at the fifth position to train the hand to loosen up.

Pepe Romero was equally concerned about the long-term results of poor technique and gave detailed advice on the right hand movement of the fingers. For a student who was working on Rodrigo's *Fandango* from *Tres Piezas Españolas*, and had never seen a fandango danced, he recommended seeing the Carlos Saura film called *Goya en Bordeaux*, which includes a scene where the fandango is danced to the music of Boccherini's *Quintet No.4*. At the same time as these public masterclasses, there were many individual guitar classes being given by many of the guest performers throughout each day. These too were open to auditors and had much to offer.

The level of the players in the International Koblenz Guitar Competition 'Hubert Käppel' 2007 was impressive. In fact there were so many players in the first round that the jury were divided into two for the first round and then came together again in the second round and for the finals. The members of the jury were Konrad

Ragossnig, Stefano Aruta, Robert Brightmore, Liviu Georgescu, Stephen Goss, Alexander-Sergei Ramírez, Steve Thachuk, Joseph Urshalmi, and Jason Vieaux, with Alfred Eickholt as Head of the Jury. In the Final round Hubert Käppel and Festival Director, Georg Schmitz joined the jury.

The Finalists in the competition were: Magdalena Kaltcheva (Bulgaria), Irina Kulikova (Russia), Ionut Zamfirescu (Romania), Matt Palmer (USA), Marco Santor (Uruguay/Italy) and Gabriel Bianco (France). The First Prize was awarded to Gabriel Bianco (France) and Third Prize to Marco Santor (Uruguay/Italy). There was no Second Prize awarded. A special scholarship award was given to Magdalena Kaltcheva (Bulgaria) for one year's study at the Koblenz International Guitar Academy with Hubert Käppel.

The Koblenz International Guitar Academy holds its examination recitals during the Festival; this year two of the students gave their 'Prüfungsrecital': the Turkish guitarist Ozan Saritepe and the Russian guitarist Artyom Dervoed, both of whom have been studying with Aniello Desiderio at the Academy. The Koblenz International Guitar Academy now has over 30 students with about 15 students from around the world taking post-graduate studies there, and studying the guitar with either Hubert Käppel or Aniello Desiderio.

**"Pure speed
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- David Russell**

The Rhein-Mosel-Halle provided the space for this year's festival, with plenty of rooms for the public masterclasses, looking out onto the River Rhine. Michael Macmeeken had his shop there selling scores and recordings from his own Chanterelle Verlag as well as the publications of most publishers for guitar. There was a guitar-makers' exhibition throughout the week. The Greek guitar maker Alkis was there to show his fine guitars and also gave one of his concert instruments to the First Prize winner of the competition. The German guitar maker Michael Wichmann makes both classical and Flamenco guitars. He is constantly experimenting with guitar construction and has generously offered one of his concert instruments to a prize winner of the Koblenz competition for several years.

The three guitar makers Marek Ludwig Schygulla, Jost von Huene and Florian Vorreiter exhibited as a group. They had studied at University of Applied Sciences Markneukirchen in Germany where there is a special course for instrument making and each of them is very interested in developing new ideas in construction. Florian Vorreiter's guitar has a cutaway on the upper bout in a style of his own design; he has reduced the body size of the instrument only very slightly and has carved the cutaway carefully to allow comfortable access to the upper frets. Gert Petersen had a range of his guitars there as well Armin and Mario Gropp.

Georg Gose and his son Robert are local instrument makers from Vallender near Koblenz. Georg has been making instruments for 50 years. He originally worked for Klein, a Koblenz instrument maker, but then established his own workshop in 1974 where he makes a full range of plucked instruments including lutes and mandolins in various sizes following the style of Calace. Despite these many years of experience, Georg and Robert went to Spain two years ago to attend the summer guitar makers' course given by José Romanillos. They said they have learned so much from their time with José as the Spanish and German schools of guitar making are so different.

I can only apologise here for speaking more of some of the makers than others, but space limits me. However, what really impressed me as I spoke to each of these guitar makers, who came from quite different backgrounds and age groups, was that each of them, no matter what level of success they had already achieved as makers, were constantly striving to improve their instruments – for this guitarists can be very grateful.

After eight very full days of masterclasses, concerts and competition, I was surprised to be able to sit and really enjoy the final students' concert such as the level of performance. The final students' concert on the Monday evening, which had a large audience and very serious and good quality performances from the students, ended with a superb performance by Gabriel Bianco, this year's prize winner in the International Koblenz Guitar Competition 'Hubert Käppel'.

It was very interesting to have Professor Ingeborg Henzler, who is President of the University for Applied Sciences in Koblenz and who also teaches Music Management at the Danube University Krems give a lecture on 'Management and Marketing – Know-How for Musicians'; she was assisted by a colleague, Michael Taweel. The aim of her lecture was to encourage musicians to evaluate their skills and abilities in a more business-like fashion, so that by analysing their strengths and weakness, they could explore further their areas of potential. In a time where musicians at all stages of their careers – even the most established, award-winning performers – are choosing to do a lot more of their own marketing, having a working knowledge of marketing skills seems to be an essential part of a musician's training. It was a fascinating talk and inspired much debate from the audience.

The Flamenco guitarist, Gerardo Núñez performed in his trio at the famous jazz venue called Café Hahn. The following day he gave a masterclass where we could sit close up and watch his hands and ask many questions about his technique. He gave a general practical class where students 'warmed-up' with him and learned some of his daily technique-building exercises, and then individual masterclasses. He was really in the mood for teaching and being there with us;

he told us many stories of his childhood and early experiences as a performer; at the age of 13 he was already accompanying the top Flamenco singers of his time in festivals during the weekends, and then would have to return to being a schoolboy again on the Monday morning.

The 16th Koblenz International Guitar Festival & Academy will be held from 5–12 May 2008 and will feature Manuel Barrueco and the Cuarteto Latinoamericano, David Russell, Shin-ichi Fukuda and the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, who will give the world première of Leo Brouwer's latest guitar concerto called *Concerto de Requiem* written in homage to Takemitsu, LA Guitar Quartet, Hubert Käppel, Alvaro Pierri, Aniello Desiderio, Marcin Dylla, Zoran Dukic, Robert Brightmore, Pavel Steidl, Joscho Stephan Quartet, Dale Kavanagh, Alexander-Sergei Ramirez, among others, and also the Young Artists in Concert Series and the Koblenz International Guitar Competition 'Hubert Käppel' 2008 (held in three rounds with a free-choice programme in each, and no limits of age or nationality). The First Prize includes a 10-concert tour in Germany, a hand-made guitar by the Greek guitar maker Alkis and prize money. Contact the Director: Georg Schmitz, tel. +49 170 311 5446.

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**16th
Koblenz
International
Guitar
Festival
& Academy**

**May 5-12
2008**

- Manuel Barrueco (Cuba)
- David Russell (Great Britain)
- Alvaro Pierri (Uruguay)
- Pavel Steidl (Czech Republic)
- Aniello Desiderio (Italy)
- Zoran Dukic (Croatia)
- Marcin Dylla (Poland)
- Shin-ichi Fukuda (Japan)
- Dale Kavanagh (Canada)
- Hubert Käppel (Germany)
- Jason Vieaux (USA)
- Alexander S. Ramirez (Germany)
- Konrad Ragossnig (Austria)
- Steven Thachuk (Canada)
- Robert Brightmore (Great Britain)
- Los Angeles Guitar Quartet (USA)
- Joscho Stephan Quartet (Germany)
- Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie
- and others

**Koblenz International
Guitar Competition "Hubert Käppel" 2008**

Free Choice Programme. 1st Prize: 10 Concerts in Germany, Alkis Hand-made Guitar valued at 4000 euro + 3000 euro; 2nd Prize: 2000 euro; 3rd Prize: 1000 euro.

www.koblenzguitarfestival.de