

# 19TH KOBLENZ INTERNATIONAL GUITAR FESTIVAL & ACADEMY 2011

A Report by THÉRÈSE WASSILY SABA

**P**FINGSTEN or the feast of Pentecost determines the date of the annual festival in Koblenz; thus, the 19th Koblenz International Guitar Festival & Academy was held from 6–13 June 2011. The warm atmosphere of the city was enhanced by the Bundesgartenschau 2011 – the German Garden Show, which Koblenz was hosting this year; the city and its gardens were adorned with beautiful flowers wherever we went. A special pavilion was constructed among the trees in the gardens of the historic Saint Castor church. In the very cosy atmosphere of the large ‘tree-house’, we enjoyed a performance of excerpts from Shakespeare by the British actor, Nigel Boyle alongside the works of Dowland, played and sung by Russell Poyner. Professor Ingeborg Henzler, the President of the University of Applied Sciences Koblenz, spoke of the importance of the arts in all our lives; something not to be forgotten, particularly in this time of economic crisis, where the arts are suffering under crippling financial cuts.

As has become the annual custom, on the Sunday before the start of the festival, a golf tournament is held at Jakobsberg Golf Course to raise money for the ‘NGO David y María Russell’ charity, which builds water wells. Usually the weather is good and we have a day of sunshine, however, this year after a few hours, there was a deluge of rain, such has not been experienced before. Most of us made it back to safe cover but some had to be rescued, as much of the lowlands of the golf course had turned into ponds. Later in the afternoon, a recital was held in the chapel of Jakobsberg, where the Spanish guitarist, Rafael Aguirre, who won First Prize in the Koblenz International Guitar Competition ‘Hubert Käppel’ in 2010 gave an inspiring concert to the



Nigel Boyle and Russell Poyner in the Pavilion der Handwerkskammer.

PHOTOS: THÉRÈSE WASSILY SABA

audience, who were all a little wet, despite the coverage of huge golf umbrellas. The loud noise of the rain, did not disturb Rafael Aguirre’s concentration and he gave a very musical performance with absolutely impressive technique, which we could observe from a close distance: his right hand fingers were remarkably agile and accurate as he played the Scarlatti *Sonata K.141*, and he played the transcription of Schumann’s *Kinderszenen* op. 15 with great sensitivity and beautiful tonal contrasts. Later in the week, Rafael Aguirre gave an equally impressive, full recital and launched his CD recording of these works, which also included a transcription of *Partita BWV 825* by J. S. Bach, recorded with KSG Exaudio recordings.

Pavel Steidl is always a popular performer and in his evening recital, which opened the festival, he played with the violinist Gabriela Demeterova. Pavel Steidl has a particularly distinctive style when he performs and fortunately Demeterova seemed to have a similarly vibrant musical approach, so the result was magical.

Together they performed the *Sonata* by Vaclav Vodicka (1715–1774), the *Sonata di Centone No. 1* by Paganini, Three Capricchio by Jana Obrovská and *Sonata ‘River Berunka* by Carlo Domeniconi. As well as these works for duo, they each played solos. For the Vodicka and also the *Passacaglia* for violin solo by Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644–1704) Demeterova used the same violin but changed to a baroque bow. This brought a pleasing change in tone quality.

David Russell’s recital was a pleasure to listen to both for the quality of his interpretation and the choice of repertoire. He played *The Woods so Wild* by Byrd, a beautifully ornamented *Suite No. 7* by Handel, *Sinfonias* by J. S. Bach and a selection of pieces from his latest Albéniz



Pavel Steidl and violinist Gabriela Demeterova.

recording. Manuel Barrueco gave a performance in trio this year with his students, the Beijing Guitar Duo of Meng Su and Yameng Wang. Although I did enjoy hearing the Beijing Guitar Duo, the tone quality which they produce does not compare with the exquisite sound which Manuel Barrueco produces when he plays. They gave the European première of *The Enchanted Island* written for them by Sérgio Assad. As a duo, the Beijing Duo gave the première of *Eight Memories in Watercolor* by the Chinese composer Tan Dun, which was arranged for guitar duo by Manuel Barrueco. Manuel Barrueco gave the European première of *Sonata* written for him by Roberto Sierra. It is in the final movement where the Caribbean flavour builds to a great climax. The programme was very well received by the audience and they gave a standing ovation at the end.

Another concert which was given a standing ovation by the whole audience was that of the Italian guitar duo of Lorenzo Micheli and Matteo Mela, a recital in honour of the Presti-Lagoya duo, whose international career was ended prematurely by the sudden death of Ida Presti in 1967. They played pieces arranged by or dedicated to the Presti-Lagoya such as, *Clair de Lune* by Debussy, a selection of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Preludes and Fugues, Op. 199* and his *Fuga elegiac to the memory of Ida Presti*. Both Lorenzo Micheli and Matteo Mela are very sensitive players. Throughout their performance you could hear the closeness of their playing and what was most remarkable was that Matteo Mela mostly has his eyes closed as he plays; yet they are together on every beat.

There were also excellent solo recitals by given by Marcin Dylla with a picturesque performance of *In the Woods* by Toru Takemitsu; Aniello Desiderio gave us a new perspective on some familiar works by playing the Sonatas of Cimarosa and Scarlatti back-to-back; Ricardo Gallén played superbly on both modern and an early guitar, Marco Tamayo played some favourite pieces by Ponce and Tárrega and an excellent Sonata by Turina; and Fabio Zanon played the *Cromatica Pavana* and the *Galliard* to the *Cromatica Pavana* by Peter Philips with exquisite timbres and in Ponce's *Variation on 'La Folia d'España'* and *Fugue* he produced a dramatically huge sound with a well-measured vibrato throughout; Judicaël Perroy played an all-Bach programme of *Suite No. 2 for Lute* BWV 997, the *Prelude, Fugue* and *Allegro* BWV 998 and a transcription of *Partita No. 2* BWV 826 for keyboard – all handled with eloquence and depth of expression.

Throughout the week there were masterclasses given by David Russell and Manuel Barrueco – both in



**Goran Krivokapic, soloist with the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, conducted by Marc Niemann.**

Mutter-Beethoven-Haus – the house where Ludwig van Beethoven's mother, Maria Magdalene Keverich, lived – and, by Konrad Ragossnig, Lorenzo Micheli, Hubert Käppel, Aniello Desiderio, Fabio Zanon, Judicaël Perroy, Marco Tamayo and many other excellent players. A masterclass was held with the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, conducted by Marc Niemann. Some of the students performing were from the Koblenz International Guitar Academy, who played the full *Concierto de Aranjuez* by Joaquín Rodrigo as part of their Koblenz Guitar Academy soloist diploma examination. The teachers for the Junior Guitar Academy for young guitarists were Günter Schillings, Russell Poyner and Tobias Kassung. Tobias Kassung is also the producer of the KSG Exaudio recordings.



**Marcin Dylla and Cecilia Rodrigo.**

The concerts on the Friday and Saturday evening drew enormous crowds. The 'Friday Night for Guitar and Orchestra' concert was held in the castle, known as the Kurfürstliches Schloss, on the river Rhein in Koblenz, again surrounded by beautiful gardens. The Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, conducted by Marc Niemann, gave a very spirited performance of the *Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op. 56a* by Brahms and later a refined performance Mendelssohn's *Symphony No. 4 in A major, Op. 90*. The conductor was very animated and the orchestra followed his lively instructions. We were very fortunate to then hear a performance of Maurice Ohana's concerto for guitar and orchestra, *Trois Graphiques* with Goran Krivokapic as soloist. The work in three movements was inspired by flamenco, as we can see from the titles

of each movement: *Graphique de la Farruca et Cadences; Improvisation sur un graphique de la Siguiriya;* and *Graphique de la Buleria et Tiento*. Although the work was written for playing on the ten-string guitar, it was played very successfully by Goran Krivokapic on six-string guitar. On the same evening, Cecilia Rodrigo gave a short introductory talk to the performance of *Fantasia para un*



*Agustín León Ara, Cecilia Rodrigo and Zoran Dukic.*



*Marco Tamayo in concert.*



*Manuel Barrueco giving a masterclass.*



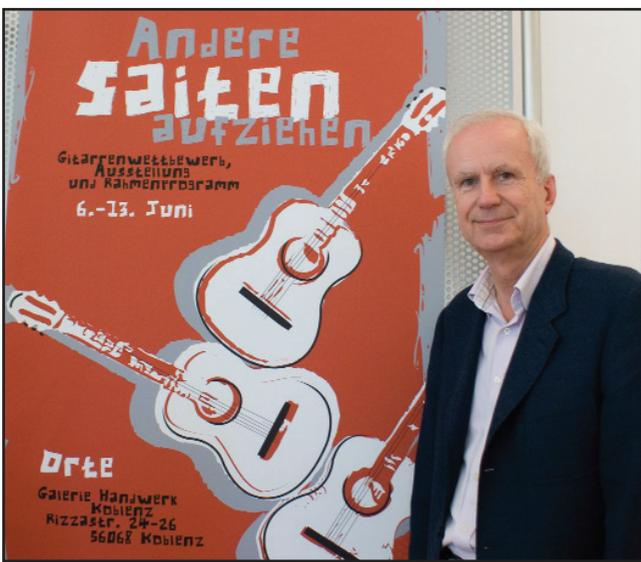
*Judicael Perroy giving a masterclass.*



*Lorenzo Micheli and Matteo Mela in concert.*



*Ricardo Gallén in concert.*



*Philippe Durand of Savarez Strings.*



*Manuel Barrueco and Beijing Guitar Duo in concert*



**The winners of the Koblenz International Guitar Competition 'Hubert Käppel' 2011, from left: Nigel Boyle the actor, Ian Watt (Third Prize), Hubert Käppel, Chia-Wei Lin (Second Prize), Thomas Offermann of D'Addario, David Dyakov (First Prize).**

*gentilhombre* by Rodrigo, with Zoran Dukic as soloist. Cecilia Rodrigo read from her mother's published memoirs called *Hand In Hand with Joaquin Rodrigo*.

The Koblenz Guitar Festival organised a Tango Night in the fortress, which overlooks the city on the river Rhein. Again the walk through the gardens to the fortress brought great pleasure and the number of people in the audience was really surprising. As you looked back from the stage, they were people crowded along the walls; wherever it was possible for the audience to stand, you could see people over 2,500 of them. The first half of the show was the Quartetto Furioso, made up of the Desiderio brothers: Aniello Desiderio on the guitar, Gennaro Desiderio on violin, Nino Desiderio on piano and

Salvatore Minale, who is not a member of their family, on percussion. They played *The Four Seasons* by Vivaldi and *The Four Seasons* by Piazzolla, both in a more modified version. The sound resonated throughout fortress and the audience were completely silent except when the time came for applause! In the second half, we had the Romulo Larrea Tango Ensemble with Romulo Larrea on bandoneón and his daughter, the singer Veronica Larc. They were wonderful and the dancers had so many changes of costume, each one more impressive than the previous. I think they would have danced all night and certainly the audience did not want to go home, but the deadline of the last transport from the



**Students of the Koblenz Junior Guitar Academy.**



**Festival Director Georg Schmitz with David Russell.**

fortress, was the only thing that finally brought the show to an end.

The international jury of the Koblenz International Guitar Competition 'Hubert Käppel' 2011, was headed by Uni.-Prof. Konrad Ragossnig, and included Hubert Käppel, Agustín León Ara, Alfred Eickholt, Graham Wade, Sonja Prunnbauer, Tadashi Sasaki, John Dearman, Alexander Ramirez, Robert Brightmore, Costas Cotsiolis, Lucio Matarazzo, Ansgar Krause, Gerhard Reichenbach, Gunter Schillings, Volker Hoh, Tobias Kassung, and myself, Thérèse Wassily Saba. The competition winners were: First Prize: David Dyakov (Bulgaria); Second Prize: Chia-Wei Lin (Taiwan); and Third Prize: Ian Watt (United Kingdom). The Croatian guitarist, Srdjan Bulat won the prize for the Best Performance of a work by Joaquín Rodrigo. Following the Prizegiving ceremony a special concert of the works of Joaquín Rodrigo was given by the violinist Agustín León Ara, for whom the Sonata Pimpante for violin and piano was written, pianist Sheila Arnold and guitarist Alexander-Sergei Ramírez.

The lecture series included: Dr Andreas Michel Andino who spoke of the artistic and philosophical meaning of the word 'Romantic', the actor Nigel Boyle gave a workshop on 'Speaking on Stage', Graham Wade spoke about 'Joaquín Rodrigo: a Life in Music', Hubert Käppel gave an outline of his newly published technique book called *The Technique of the Modern Concert Guitar*, Prof. Rolf Straver and Alvaro Mendizabal spoke about 'The Worldwide Classical Guitar Market: Challenges and Opportunities', and Günter Forsteneichner and Prof. Dr Michael Schmitz gave a lecture/discussion called 'Under Pressure – Coping with Stress Situations'.

There were many guitar makers exhibiting their instruments at the 'Andere Saiten aufziehen' exhibition, held at the Galerie Handwerk, which is directed by Cornelia Schmitz-Groll, including Michael Wichmann, Georg and Robert Gose, Gert Petersen, Antonius Müller, Armin and Mario Gropp, Stephan Schlemper, Norbert Giebel, Jens Towet, Christian Stoll, Thomas Fredholm of Sweden and Christina Ramirez of the Ramirez dynasty in Madrid. Michael Macmeeken had his Chanterelle shop there, which was well visited. Other special visitors at the festival were Philippe Durand of Savarez Strings who spoke to me of their new 'Tomatito' range of flamenco guitar strings and Thomas Offermann of D'Addario Strings.

One of the most difficult aspects of writing this report is trying to squeeze all the details of this remarkable festival into a short article; I think it is



**Public masterclass for guitar and orchestra with Hubert Käppel. Concierto de Aranjuez by Joaquin Rodrigo performed with the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, conducted by Marc Niemann.**



**Quartetto Furioso performing at the Ehrenbreitstein Fortress.**



**Romulo Larrea Tango Ensemble at the Ehrenbreitstein Fortress.**

impossible. The number of students attending the festival and participating in the competition was very high as usual. There were some familiar faces and also some fresh new young performers who were excited by all they heard and saw, and said they would be returning. We are all looking forward to another excellent festival next year, which will be the 20th, from 21–28 May 2012 at the Kurfürstliches Schloss, organised, as always, by Festival Director, Georg Schmitz, with the assistance of a dedicated and loyal team of Koblenz citizens, all working on a completely voluntary basis.

[www.koblenzguitarfestival.de](http://www.koblenzguitarfestival.de)