

Letter from New York

By JULIA CROWE

'GUITAR OF THE AMERICAS' themed this year's 9th New York Guitar Seminar at Mannes with a five-day-long full schedule of activities. These included masterclasses, guest lectures, ensemble rehearsals, open performance opportunities, young-artist masterclasses and evening faculty concerts, all culminating in a final participants concert. The summer guitar programme at Mannes caps its number of attendees at 50 in order to maintain quality and equal access to at least two masterclasses for each student. Another facet of what makes this seminar beloved among those who attend is that no audition is required in order to participate. This allows for students of varying ability to gain a valuable guitar lesson while at the same time allowing auditors to observe the teaching strength, range, and capability of the instructors.

This year instructors included Fábio Zanon, Eduardo Fernández, Joao Luiz and Douglas Lora of the Brasil Guitar Duo, Benjamin Verdery, Michael Lorimer, Pablo Cohen, Rene Izquierdo, Arthur Kampela and seminar Artistic Directors Michael Newman & Laura Oltman. *Bon mots* culled from these various classes include Eduardo Fernández's advice to train the ear with a range dynamics by playing as loudly as possible and then as softly as possible before resuming a piece so that a new discernment of dynamics can be kept in mind. Fernández's quote, 'Villa-Lobos without vibrato is like a hamburger without ketchup,' became the oft-repeated, hallway catchphrase of the day. He also advised a student that it is best to have reason for how one is playing based on what is delineated in the sheet music, not by what has been absorbed from recordings of a piece.

Rene Izquierdo, who heads the guitar department at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, wisely took the last rites approach, asking a student what they specifically hoped to achieve within the limited time of the masterclass rather than attempting to remedy all that had gone wrong. The time was used to focus on the art of relaxation, posture and balance when performing, all designed to enhance blood flow and reduce nerves.

Pablo Cohen urged a student to play rest stroke on Tarrega's *Adelita* in order to bring out the melody and create body within the phrasing: 'We often tend to think guitar playing is all about the left hand.' Michael Lorimer told a student: 'Fernando Sor tended to avoid use of the 'a' finger. You never have to worry about playing too softly upon the guitar.' Laura Oltman pointed out how various pieces tend to rise and fall in popularity, expressing surprise at hearing a student perform Tansman's *Danza Pomposa*, which she recalled had been played a lot by guitar students during the 1970s.



Ben Verdery, masterclass.

The first day's afternoon lecture by Michael Lorimer looked at 'Guitar in Mexico,' focusing on the music of Santiago de Murcia (1673 -1739) and contemporary composer Ernesto Garcia de León, who teaches guitar and composition at the Music School of the National Fine Arts Institute in Mexico City. Lorimer performed Santiago de Murcia's "*Villanos*" from the *Salvidar Codex No 4*, upon baroque guitar. Although de Murcia had been the official guitarist to Queen Maria Luisa Gabriela de Savoy, the first wife of the first Bourbon king of Spain, this Codex had been discovered in Mexico and is presumed to have been brought there at a later date since there is no proof that de Murcia had actually traveled to Mexico. Lorimer also performed several works by Ernesto Garcia de León and explained how the composer wrote his *20 Studies* as a musical attempt to rehabilitate his left hand technique after sustaining an injury that had been serious enough to put him in hospital. Lorimer also played sample recordings, the first, a fandango written by Antonio Garcia de León; *El Chuchumbé*, performed by Grupo Mono Blanco with guitars, clog dancing, and a donkey jaw played percussively with a stick running over its teeth xylophone-style. For the second sample recording, Lorimer played the Paul Bollenback jazz ensemble's

rendering of Ernesto Garcia de León's *The Desert*, from his *20 Studies*, as an example of how adaptive León's music was across genres.

The Newman & Oltman Guitar Duo opened the first of the evening seminar concerts with a programme containing Leo Brouwer's *Micro Piezas* and a show-stopping Brouwer arrangement of Lennon and McCartney's *Fool on the Hill*. Making the point that Latin American composers do not have to be confined to their own musical traditions, the duo performed Roberta Sierra's *Three Hungarian Tributes*: homage to the styles of Bartok, Liszt and Ligeti. They also performed Brazilian composer Luiz Simas' *Chorinho des Comadres* before launching into a quintet with the addition of guitarist Pablo Cohen, flautist Clare Hoffman and bandoneón player Daniel Binelli to perform an arrangement of Binelli's pulsing, cascading, lurching über-tango, *Metropolis*.

For the second half of the programme, Cohen and Binelli brought the tango to life like a pair of renegade graffiti artists awaking a New York neighbourhood to a bold burst of colour with their rendition of Piazzolla's *Milonga del angel* and *Bordel 1900*. They traded solo performances with each other as well, pairing again on *Three Brazilian Pieces*: Gnattali's *Estudio #1*, Gismonti's *Agua e vinho* and Pascoal's *São Jorge*. Cohen performed two tangos by Horacio Salgán, *Grillito* and *Don Agustin Bardi*. Binelli performed his *Paris desde aquí (Vals)* and *Recuerdo de bohemia*, tapping the ends of his bandoneón and flicking his fingers over its buttons for percussive effect as the entire apparatus crawled across his lap like an oversized, pneumatic caterpillar.

Other highlights among the lectures included Rene Izquierdo's 'Guitar in Cuba' with his performances of Brouwer's *Zapateo* and *Drume Negrita*. Izquierdo, a graduate of Yale, explained how the 1800s *contra danza*, a salon dance, parlayed into the *chachacha*, the *mambo* and *salsa*. His debut CD, soon to be released by Luthier Music Corporation, will feature Cuban music for the guitar. Izquierdo's wife, Elina Chekan, performed *El Decameron Negro* beautifully. To close, Izquierdo was joined by cellist Ana Ruth Bermúdez and, his cousin, violinist Yan Izquierdo to play a gorgeous piece by Afro-Cuban composer José White, *Bella Cubana*. What no one in the audience would have known by their playing is that this couple had been awake throughout the morning hours on the day of their performance frantically tending to a flooded septic tank at the residence where they were staying as guests.

Fábio Zanon performed Villa-Lobos' *Etudes no. 4, no. 8, no. 10* and *Choros no.1*, followed by Edino Krieger's dazzling *Ritmata*, which Zanon suggested was a pun, 'to kill the rhythm.' He closed the first half of his programme with Francisco Mignone's *Four Etudes* and, after a brief intermission, performed a set of nine Latin-American pieces in tribute to the seminar's theme, beginning with Eduardo Fabini's *Triste*



Pedro Baez.

no. 1, Agustín Barrios' *Danza Paraguaya*, Ariel Ramírez' *Ballada para Martín Fierro*, María Luisa Anido's *Aire Norteño*, Rodrigo Riera's *Prelúdio Criollo*, Rafael Miguel Lopez' *Así Yo Te Soñé*, Gentil Montaña's *Porro*, from the *2nd Suite Colombiana*, Manuel Ponce's *Estrellita* and Paulo Bellinati's *Emboscada*. His playing was nuanced, powerful and polished.

Pedro Baez, a native of Argentina, presented an afternoon lecture and demonstration of 'Guitar in the Pampas,' demonstrating an enthralling range of sounds, textures and techniques on the guitar not often heard outside the cowboy/gauche folkloric tradition. Highlights included the swampy bass work toward the end of Abel Fleury's *Cifra*, and again in Pedro Herrera's *El Pastor y sus Llamas*. An arrangement of *La Cuartelera* by Eduardo Falú proved unusual for its lingering treble vibrato. Juan Falú's *Chacarera Utata* conveyed the whimsy of its inspiration: a little lizard. Baez's arrangement of Ramon Navarro's *Chayita del Vidalero* evoked the South American cowboy range across six strings.

The third evening concert featured Eduardo Fernández, who performed Bach's *Suite BWV 995* followed by Giuliani's *Rossiniana No. 4, op. 122*. These could easily have been pieces to close a concert, but Fernández, showing no signs of fatigue, performed Mertz' *from "Bardenklänge," op. 13*, followed by Gentil Montaña's *Amanecer*, Agustín Barrios' *Caaxapá*, and Cacho Tirao's *Milonga de Don Taco* before closing with Alberto Ginastera's *Sonata, op. 47*. His performance was as staggeringly intense as the programme itself, earning a resounding set of standing ovations from the



Eduardo Fernandez, masterclass.



Elina Chekan and Rene Izquierdo.



Fabio Zanon.

packed house. Fernández seems rarely to acknowledge what his left hand is doing but for occasions when he appears to be reading directly from a hologram of sheet music floating before his eyes.

For the fourth day's afternoon demonstration, Duo Cantabile (guitarist Mariano Aguirre and his wife, soprano Lauri Aguirre) performed Enrique Granados' *Tonadillas*, Robert Cuckson's *Worlds of Wanwood* (written for the duo), Manuel Ponce's *Canciones Arcaicas*, Aaron Copland's *Folk Songs*, and a set of traditional *Canciones Populares Mexicanas*. Guitarist Nilko Andreas of the Tibaguí Trio of Colombia lead a masterclass for young artists, patiently assisting a bright young student with making slight but crucial adjustments to his left hand positioning in order to ease playing and prevent unnecessary tension.

The Tibaguí Trio, with Andreas on guitar, Sebastian Cruz on the *tiple* and Alejandro Flórez on the *bandola*, opened the final evening's concert with their selection of original works steeped in the Colombian folkloric tradition. Highlights included Cruz' colourful *Pajaro Nocturno*, with its string bending and trills.

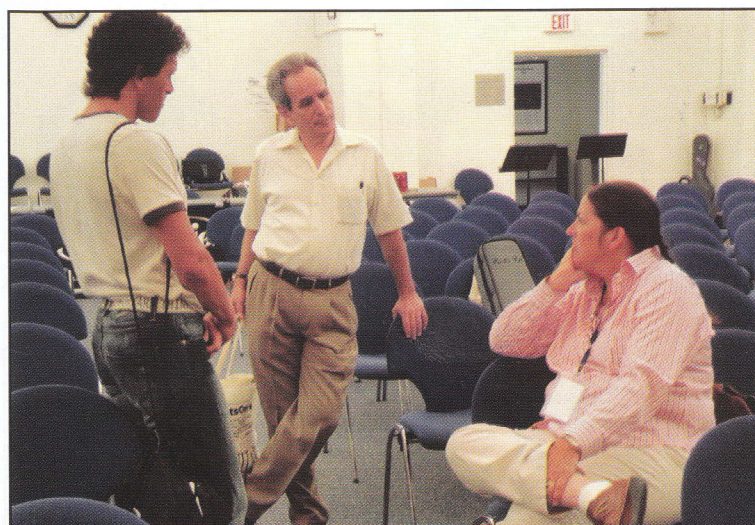
The Brasil Guitar Duo's concert, with guitarists Joao Louiz and Douglas Lora, could have been improved with announcements between items, as I was not alone among audience members to fall sway under a strange and soporific time warp, believing the concert to be half over before it was over, only to discover it was actually over before it was half over. This criticism has nothing to do with the superb quality of their playing so much as presentation where the audience is expected either to know all their pieces intimately, or to sit there clicking, like Madame Defarge, with a

stitch counter in order to keep track of what exactly is being performed.

The duo opened distinctly enough with a selection of *Four Preludes and Fugues* from *The*



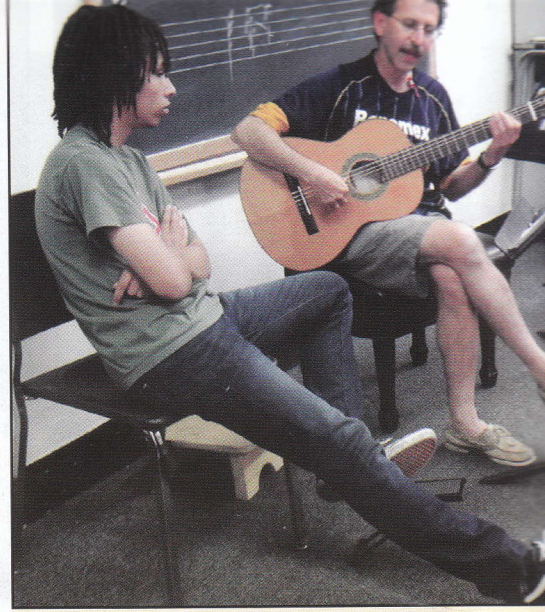
Pablo Cohen & Daniel Binelli.



Dean Joel Lester with Laura Oltman.



Rene Izquierdo, Michael Lorimer, Fabio Zanon and Jonathan (a superb student of Jorge Morel's).



Michael Newman masterclass.

Well-Tempered Guitars, op. 199 by Castelnuovo-Tedesco, followed by Douglas Lora's *Valsa* and *Postludio*. The warp and smear of musical horses spinning around the carousel kicked in somewhere

between Edu Lobo's *Valsa Brasileira* and *Zanzibar*, Egberto Gismonti's *Don Quixote* and *Sete Aneis*, Jacob do Bandolim's *Noites Cariocas* and Paulo Bellinati's *Bom Partido*, concluding with a *choros* for an encore.



Brasil Guitar Duo.

As you might guess, it is both a guitar glutton's feast and a marathon for two ears. Other lectures had included Dean Joel Lester's 'Baroque Performance Practice regarding Bach's Chaconne' from a violinist's vantage point, and a lecture-demonstration of 'Guitar & Violin in South America' by the Ars Duo, with violinist Gerardo Cilveti and guitarist José Miguel Coo.

Guitar Salon International had generously donated one of their Cordoba Custom Artist guitars, worth 2,800 USD, to be raffled off to one of the seminar participants. The winner turned out to be Jeffrey Rojo, a native of Mexico City now residing in Jefferson, Maine. The participants closed the seminar with a concert, triumphantly showcasing their ensemble work and rehearsals of the past two days.

Artistic Director Michael Newman received a handwritten note left behind by an Irish participant who had to leave early. The letter conveyed how this man enjoyed his first-ever visit to New York City, with gratitude expressed for the masterclasses and fantastic concerts. He confessed to debating the merits of pursuing music as a full time career: 'I had thought that I didn't have the ego to follow a career as a player, but after Eduardo Fernández's concert, I saw that one can just deliver the music—so brilliantly—and yet be personally still in the background.'

Next year's event marks the 10th anniversary of the New York Guitar Seminar at Mannes and will take place July 7–11, 2010, highlighting new music for guitar.



Douglas Lora, Fabio Zanon, Michael Newman.