



Colorado Springs Guitar Society Newsletter

December 2009

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The Next Meeting of the CSGS

The next meeting will be on **Monday December 14th**, at All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church, 730 North Tejon, starting at 7:30 PM. All attending guitarists may join in playing the "easy duets". We move forward one duet each month, and this time we will play "Easy Duets" 10 through 14; these duets can be downloaded for free off the Eythorsson website,

<http://www.eythorsson.com/music/2001.pdf>. Please pick and practice the parts you would like to play, and if possible please print and bring the sheet music. This will be a group activity at the start of the meeting; and please have your guitar tuned to standard pitch before the meeting begins. **In addition, this meeting will serve as a rehearsal for the Members Concert on the following Friday, and those that have already signed up to play at that concert are asked to perform their pieces at the meeting so we can assess the timing for the program.**

Colorado Springs Guitar Society 2009 Members Concert

The annual Colorado Springs Guitar Society Members Concert will be held Friday, December 18th, at All Souls Universalist Unitarian Church, 730 N. Tejon, starting at 7:30 PM. This concert will feature members of the society playing various solos and duets on the classical guitar, typically by composers such as Fernando Sor, Francesco Tarrega, Heitor Villa-Lobos, Isaac Albeniz, Johann Sebastian Bach, and others. Tickets are \$5, and may be purchased at the door before the concert.

CSGS Officers:

- **Mike Zimmerman**, President
 - **Jim Bosse**, Vice President
 - **Bruce Downs**, Secretary
 - **Greg Playle**, Webmaster
 - **Tom Stringer**, Newsletter Editor
- See the website for contact information

Last Month's Meeting

Last month's CSGS meeting was held Monday, November 9th, at ASUUC. It was a very special occasion: we were visited by three artists from across the water, Irish ballad singer Rod Corder, and the Gothenburg Combo from Sweden.

The latter duo, comprised of two young guitarists from Sweden, David Hansson and Thomas Hansy, were on tour throughout the US around the time of the meeting. They played with stunning precision, flawless technique, and great expression, and completely dazzled and delighted the meeting attendees. It is no surprise that they are the recipients of international ensemble awards; for example, in 2004 the Gothenburg Combo won the first prize and the audience's prize in "13eme Concours Internationale de Guitare en Duo" in Montelimar, France, the most prestigious competition for guitar duos. Let us hope that they will return here on their next tour! Details about the duo, along performance examples can be found at their website,

<http://www.gbgcombo.com/>

The performers and the pieces they played were (with guest artists in bold font):

- Group ensemble (Jerry Sabolik, Ashley Lutton, Betty Bowles, Jim Bosse, Ben Marchman, Jim Smith, Bert Bradford, Bruce Downs, Steve Brodhead, Greg Playle, Tom Stringer, and Mike Zimmerman, director): "easy duets", numbers 9 through 13, from the Eythorsson website.
- Ben Marchman: Study from the Opus 6, #6 (Fernando Sor)
- Bert Bradford: Study #12 in A major (Fernando Sor) and Vivace (Adam Falckenhagen, arr. Frederick Noad)
- **Rod Corder, guitar and voice: "The Eviction" (Gallagher)**
- Tom Stringer: Allemande and Double from Partita #1 for solo violin in B minor (J. S. Bach)
- Jim Bosse: "Angie" (Davey Graham) and "April Come She Will" (Paul Simon)
- **The Gothenburg Combo: "La Vida Breve" (Manuel DeFalla), the theme from the "Goldberg Variations" (J. S. Bach), "Golliwog's Cakewalk" (Claude Debussy), and "Unnggg" (by the Swedish composer Henrik Strindberg)** (Editor's note: One can see and hear them play this amazing last, rather avant garde, piece on youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9WfV4DtZ5I&feature=related>)

Music Quotes

"Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent." --*Victor Hugo*

"Music takes us out of the actual and whispers to us dim secrets that startle our wonder as to who we are, and for what, whence, and whereto." --*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

"Music is given to us with the sole purpose of establishing an order in things, including, and particularly, the coordination between man and time." --*Igor Stravinsky*

"Music is the effort we make to explain to ourselves how our brains work. We listen to Bach transfixed because this is listening to a human mind." --*Lewis Thomas*

Reminder that the New CSGS Website is Under Construction

As was announced in the last newsletter, Greg Playle has agreed to take over the duties of updating and modifying the CSGS Website. Greg will be available at the December meeting to meet attendees, and will be available during the breaks to hear more ideas for what people would like to see included on the site. As was also announced last month, Bruce Downs will stay on the society staff, as the CSGS Secretary, and will continue to help with disseminating the newsletter, various concert announcements, and other interim information of interest to the members and readers of the newsletter.

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Musicians wanted for Sunday Services at All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church

ASUUC occasionally requests classical guitar performers for their Sunday services. The agreement with ASUC is that the CSGS is allowed use of the church facilities for the monthly meetings in exchange for the CSGS providing music during their services. Solos, duets, or other musical combinations are welcome. Please contact Mike Zimmerman if you would like to volunteer to perform occasionally at ASUC services throughout the year.

Interview with Ricardo Iznaola

(Interviewed by Jim Bosse)

Ricardo Iznaola, one of our truly great guitarists, had his 60th birthday this year on February 21, 2009. This milestone coincides with the 40th anniversary of his professional debut in Madrid and the marking of 25 years at the helm of the Guitar Department at the University of Denver.

Ricardo is all things to the guitar. He has captivated audiences in concert halls all over the world and is recognized by his peers as one of the greatest concert performers alive today. His performance career includes releasing 15 recordings, preserving his artistry for future generations. These recordings have received acclaim world wide.

He is a composer and arranger of music for the guitar. Perhaps his greatest accomplishment thus far is "Tiempo Muerto," a wonderful concerto for guitar and orchestra.

First and foremost, Ricardo is a teacher. From humble origins, he built a guitar program at the University of Denver that now stands as one of the most reputable in the world. He is the godfather of classical guitar instruction throughout Colorado. Almost every professional classical guitarist in Colorado is either a graduate of Ricardo's program at DU, a graduate of one of Ricardo's student's programs, or has studied with Ricardo privately or in his master classes. All of the Colleges and Universities in Colorado that have a significant number of guitar majors have a student of Iznaola as their instructor.

His teachings go beyond Colorado. Ricardo is also a writer. "Kitharologos, The Path to Virtuosity", Ricardo's textbook on guitar technique, "On Practicing" and "The Physiology of Guitar Playing" are standard texts for guitar instruction, used at colleges and universities everywhere.

If the merit of a teacher is to be measured by his students, many of Ricardo's students have competed well in international competitions, are acclaimed performers and teach at Colleges and Universities throughout the United States. Some have also settled in Europe. Even more impressive, the students of Ricardo's students also bear testament. One, Sam Cogburn, won first prize in guitar this year at the American String Teachers' annual solo competition, and another, Jason Olson, was recently appointed chair of the guitar department at the University of Northern Colorado.

All of us who consider ourselves students of Iznaola are aware of the depth of his artistry and his musical genius. More importantly, all students of Iznaola have a deep affection for his endearing personality and endless gratitude for the inspiration, encouragement, and guidance that he has given us.

It is a great honor for me to interview Maestro Iznaola on this occasion; to present a retrospective of his career. I know the answers to some of the questions I will ask Ricardo. I do so to

present a more complete biography, for those less familiar with him.



Jim Bosse interviewing Ricardo Iznaola

J.B. - *Hola Maestro. Let's begin with the question that begs to be asked at the beginning of all interviews. Where were you born and what influenced you to enter a career in music, the guitar in particular?*

R.I. – I was born in Havana, Cuba, from Cuban parents with Spanish ancestry. In my childhood, music was not an important presence. However, both my parents were performers, my father, an actor, and my mother a popular singer. They both relinquished their artistic careers relatively early, for various reasons. Nonetheless, I think they were extremely influential in my, eventually, choosing an artistic path as well.

J.B. - *Please tell us about your early musical education, and what brought you to ultimately study in Spain.*

R.I. – I don't think I can honestly talk about an early musical education because my musical beginnings were wonderfully chaotic and unorganized. Once I showed an interest in music - and at that time, music and the guitar were one and the same for me – my parents bought me a very humble guitar. We were living in Medellin, Colombia, after having left Cuba a short year before. We had befriended a local and quite well-known guitarist, who was the main inspiration for my fascination with the guitar. I remember him fondly; his name was Rufino Duque Naranjo. My parents left me totally free and unhindered to roam the world of music on my own and at my own pace, without formal instruction. My father had some notions of notes and chords on the guitar and he taught me all that he knew, at first. Then, I just looked for books, scores and recordings, and struggled to make sense of it all. This went on for about four or five years. Unbelievable!

Eventually – and we were now living in Caracas, Venezuela - if my memory of events serves me well, a friend of my dad, a

prominent popular musician, heard me play in one of the frequent gatherings my parents hosted at our house. I played one of the pieces I had, for better or worse, learned by ear from the recordings I had of Segovia and Alirio Diaz. I don't recall what the piece might have been, but, in any case, the friend suggested to my parents that perhaps a visit to the school of music was in order, to get an evaluation from Perez Diaz. He was the principal teacher in Venezuela, a disciple, like Alirio, Lauro, Riera and so many others, of the great Raul Borges.

So, my mother made an appointment and we went to see Manuel Enrique [Perez Diaz]. This was in February or March of 1964, so I was turning 15.

J.B. – Do you recall how this visit went?

R.I. – I do, indeed. I began to play my repertoire. I had learned Albeniz' Leyenda, Tarrega's Recuerdos, a couple of Llobet Catalan Folk Songs, Segovia's transcription of one of Mendelssohn's songs without words, and other short pieces by Sanz. All were taken from recordings. At one point, without saying a word, Perez Diaz left the room. I was quite taken aback, thinking things were not going well, and looked up in a panic to my mom. She, being a wise person, gestured me to keep playing and not to worry. A few minutes later, Perez Diaz came back, with a good number of faculty behind him. He had gone to the different studios to gather his colleagues to come hear this crazy boy. Very flattering but nerve-wrecking!

J.B. – What was the outcome of the audition?

R.I. - In short, although the term was quite advanced, they accepted me in the school. I began, for the first time, classes in theory and solfeggio, and guitar lessons. I loved my lessons with Perez Diaz; he was a very well-informed, intellectually curious and sensitive teacher. He cared profoundly about his students, so we all made progress. Theory and solfeggio...that was another story! I hated them with a passion! So, by the time final exams came (in the summer), I decided not to take the exams in theory and solfeggio. This immediately disqualified me to take the exams in guitar, so I just disappeared.

J.B. – Could you elaborate?

R.I. – I mean, I dropped out of school, and did not go back the following fall or, in fact, for two years, until 1966.

J.B. – So what did you do then?

R.I. – I went back to be self-taught, although by now my music reading, and even my approach to the guitar had been refined somewhat by the few months of instruction I had taken.

J.B. – What made you decide to go back to school?

R.I. – Essentially, shame I suppose, but also a new maturity brought about by an immensely important experience. In the summer of 1966, the Universidad Central organized the first

annual three-month-long course offered by Alirio Diaz. When I had read the announcement earlier that year, it was like an impossible dream. Alirio was my idol, even more than Segovia, and the opportunity to study with him was opening up...but, I thought, not for me. Admission into the course was by audition, in front of a panel made up of the Venezuelan guitar luminaries: Alirio, Lauro, Rodrigo Riera, Perez Diaz, plus the music critic Israel Peña. No way in heaven or earth I could cut it.

Despite my pessimism, once again my parents were there to imbue me with a sense of 'what if...'. They encouraged me to do the audition, with the unassailable argument that the only assured non-acceptance was if I did not audition.

So I did, and through the kindness of Perez Diaz, I am sure – the teacher I had so inelegantly abandoned – I made it!

The course was all I expected and more, and after having apologized profusely to Manuel Enrique, I asked him if I would be welcomed back at school. I was, and I finished my diploma program in two years, after having made peace with theory and solfeggio!

J.B. - At that time there were two master guitar teachers in Spain. You studied with the lesser known. Were there reasons you did not study with Segovia and what impact did this choice have on you and your career?

R.I. – An important question and one I have asked myself many times. I went to Regino Sainz de la Maza first and foremost because my teacher told me that this is what I should do. By this time, I had acquired a sufficient sense of guitar culture to be able to see the 'pecking order.' Indeed, Segovia reigned supreme, and Alirio was one of the elected few. Alirio, who had continued offering his summer courses, which I of course attended, recommended in no uncertain terms that I should go to study with José Tomás rather than with Regino. Tomás was another Segovia protégé who had become a very prominent presence in guitar teaching in Spain – he taught David Russell, among many others. Alirio's own memories of his experiences as a student of Regino were not entirely pleasant. I chose my teacher's recommendation instead.

This immediately put me on the outside of the guitar 'establishment,' something I did not realize at the time or, in fact, for many years. The immediate consequence was that, unfortunately, Alirio did not see me with the same good eyes he had prior to my move to Spain. Despite this, I still consider my experiences with him during the five summer courses I took in Caracas irreplaceable in my configuration as a performer and a musician, something for which I will be forever grateful.

As far as the career is concerned, I don't know if the outcome would have been much different. It is true that the Segovia circle had access to a tier of professional activity that the Sainz de la Maza circle did not have. It is also true that, after having won a few prizes in competitions, I began a modest touring career that was, I thought, going quite well for quite a few years... until I

began to reconsider my professional priorities. Perhaps we can talk about this later on. In essence, no, I don't think, in the long run, it has made much difference.

Learning from Regino was a very different experience than learning from Perez Diaz. Regino could not care less about your feelings. You had to prove to him you were worthy of his time, and he could be implacable in his criticisms. You either developed a thick skin or you left, as many of my friends did after a few months of instruction. I muscled through and, eventually, once I had 'proven myself', things changed radically and he became the most generous, inspiring and insightful teacher and musician.

J.B. - Please tell us about the guitar competitions you participated in during your formative years and about your professional debut forty years ago.

R.I. – I did eight competitions in all – performance competitions, aside from a few composition competitions I also have entered through the years. I was 'good enough' to win one of the three top prizes in all of them, which I consider an exceptional bit of luck, given the disparity in judging panels, repertoire requirements, etc, among them. For a while there, after having won the Tárrega, I was 'second best' in quite a few: the Alirio Diaz in Caracas in '75; Munich in '76; Madrid also '76; Granada – the last I did – '78. That's OK, because people that placed on top were, and are, colleagues I deeply admire: Eduardo Fernández, Sharon Isbin, Oscar Castro Balbi. Not too shabby...

The competition phase came, of course, after my first paid concert in Europe, for the Madrid Guitar Society, in May of '69. This concert I consider my official professional debut, although I had played publicly for many years prior to that. But that concert was like a validation of my efforts until that point, and I have great memories of the occasion.

J.B. - Reflecting back on your early years, do you believe that you were a child prodigy like Mozart and Saint-Saens in which all things musical came easily? Or, were your accomplishments the result of intensive study, long hours of disciplined practice guided by competent instruction?

R.I. – Child prodigy? Oh, God, no!! "Long hours of disciplined study?" Certainly not, either! Long hours, yes, disciplined, only partially. In fact, I'd say that my musical achievements, such as they are, have been more the result of the only merit I attribute to myself: an unquenchable curiosity, coupled with a certain capacity for very realistic, implacable self-evaluation. Let me just say, as point of illustration that these two factors have prompted – and allowed – me to substantially revamp my technical approach to guitar playing at least three times in my career...and that the process is ongoing. If my dear, old teachers saw me play now they probably would not recognize me any more as a disciple of their schools.

J.B. - Let's talk now about the performance aspect of your multi-faceted career. What do you consider your most successful and most memorable concerts?

R.I. – As far as memorability, it's always the last one you do. About success, this depends entirely on audience or critic response and is not always related to how you remember the event. In fact, I have had the experience of re-reading glowing reviews of apparently very successful concerts of which I have no recollection whatsoever! A very strange sensation, as if one was reading about someone else's concert.

Negative reviews, however, I never forget. My London debut at Wigmore Hall in 1976, for instance, was quite successful from an audience point of view, but a couple of critics did not like all that they heard. The Times reviewer at that time, a fellow by the name of Max Harrison, I think, described the performance as "average" and left at intermission. Jack Duarte, who became a friend and, surprisingly, one of my strongest advocates later on, wrote a stinging commentary concerning my performance of a Bach lute suite. He did, however, call the second half of the program – the part Harrison missed! - "brilliant." But so it goes, at the end of the day it doesn't matter much, although it does hurt at the moment. I recommend to all young concert artists to read the most devastating debunking of the critical profession ever written, *Criticism* by Hans Keller, in which he establishes once and for all the phoniness of this pseudo-profession. A wonderful, witty and wise book.

More objectively, there are a few marked occasions that have remained in my memory archives very clearly. My premiere of the José Sonata in Madrid, in 1981, is one of those. The Madrid premiere of the Remacha Concerto, with the Radio-Television Orchestra under Theo Alcántara, another. The premiere of my own concerto, Tiempo Muerto, with the Cheyenne Symphony and Stephen Alltop. And a few others...

J.B. - It has always amazed me that you could find time for a concert career. During the five years that I taught guitar at colleges here in Colorado, the enormous time demands prevented me from even thinking about it. No doubt you would have performed more, if you had not chosen to be first and foremost, an educator. How did you manage this Herculean feat and do you have regrets concerning the limits that the teaching career must have imposed upon your concert career?

R.I. – I am very grateful to Life because I have had a privileged professional trajectory that combines, in what I consider very balanced proportions, all my interests and passions, my 'curiosities': performance, teaching, theoretical pedagogy, composition,

Of course, when you begin your career as a performer, with a relative measure of success, your main goal, the dream, is the life of the international touring virtuoso, modeled in all our young minds by the mythical figures of the Romantic era, Paganini, Liszt, and the giants of our own, from Kreisler to Bernstein, Horowitz, Segovia, Casals, etc. Nowadays, the situation is slightly different, and the number of virtuosos that live exclusively from their touring is diminished, with most of the prominent artists

sooner or later finding a niche in academia. This is particularly so of the guitar world, where, due to the nature of the market, opportunities for big-time engagements are much more reduced than for other instrumentalists and singers.

Now, in my case, a confluence of various factors contributed to my change of priorities, pretty early on. After a few years of somewhat intense touring, I found myself curiously lacking in enthusiasm and, frankly, bored. I began to resent the gradually increasing discomfort of international travel, the repetitive experience of playing for a couple dozen times, the same or similar programs, the demands of keeping the mask of a socially acceptable persona for long periods of time, etc. At some point, every performing artist comes to the same juncture: is the applause, the success, the admiration and, if lucky, the money, more important than the negative side? If the answer is an unequivocal 'YES!', then you're, temperamentally, a touring artist. If not, find another way to develop your artistic potential. This is what I, gradually, discovered in myself. Mind you, I never really broke through to the first-echelon of the performing arts hierarchy, so I am talking from a perspective that is, perhaps, more similar to the actual experience of most start-up artists. Things might have been different if my performing career had developed quicker in terms of the relative import of the engagements. Perhaps I did not give it enough time, and I certainly did not put much of my own or other people's resources into the career – something that needs to happen if you want to hit the 'big time' in a quick time. Perhaps I was not good enough. In any case, after some years of what could objectively be judged as modestly successful touring, I was not entirely a 'happy camper'. This was the first factor.

The second was my ever-present vocation as a composer. From the very beginning of my musical adventure I tried to 'write' music - of course, this was not literally true, since when I began I did not know any musical notation! When I went to study with Sainz de la Maza in Madrid, I enrolled at the conservatory to follow the composition sequence. I trained well in the craft of composition, and pursued it, if not with continuous fidelity, certainly with consistency and growing ambition. When I finally decided to try some of my works in public performance - the first ones were my Variations on a Theme of Antonio Lauro and, later on, my Concert Etudes - they were well received by audiences and critics. This stimulated my desire to do more. For this, you need time. Intense touring does not leave much time for this.

Thirdly, my increasing interest in pedagogy, both in practical application through teaching but, even more so, its theoretical aspects. These I call pre-technical elements - psychological and physio-mechanical factors: practicing approaches, the relation among foundational, applied and artistic technical training methods, the interactivity of teaching methods with new technologies, etc. This makes of actual teaching, a lab to observe, test and elucidate approaches, theories, procedures, apart from its main practical concern with student advancement. This, however, needs to be complemented with research, writing, lecturing, etc. Again, something has to give, time-wise.

So, by the late '70's it was pretty evident to me that what I *really* wanted was an academic position that would allow me to pursue all these interests within a solid frame of stability, since my wife Victoria and I already had two boys, but with enough flexibility to leave me time to actually develop all of these in tandem. A position at an American university became the new ideal, and we moved to the States in 1980. The University of Denver opened the tenured position in 1983, and here we are, 25 years later!

The three years we lived in Minnesota (one in the lovely town of Winona, and two in St. Paul) were very hard but, at the same time, wonderful. We made extraordinary friendships that remain close to this day.

Denver has become the definitive home. The University has distinguished me with their most important awards; the University Lecturer Award and the John Evans Distinguished Professorship, and has named a student scholarship in my honor, through the gracious generosity of my good friends, the Shamos family. I could not have asked for a better match than DU, or a more supportive environment.

J.B. - *Let's now talk about your recordings. Please tell us a little about your favorite recordings.*

R.I. – I had the good fortune to start recording pretty early in my career, with a Venezuelan company, Promus, now quite defunct. They issued, in relatively quick succession, about six or seven LP's, mainly of Venezuelan and Latin American music. The first of those, issued by them under the label 'America,' included the first recording ever of the Sonata by Antonio Lauro, together with works by Castelnuovo, Ponce, Villa-Lobos and Sainz de la Maza. This happened in 1970 (I was a sweet 21!). I still like that version of the Sonata, although it's very different from what I do now. I am currently producing a double CD of Venezuelan music and I will include both the new recording I made three years ago, and the 1970 version. Very interesting!

Of the early LP's for Promus, my favorite by far is the one I dedicated to Ponce in his centennial year, which includes the Variations and Fugue on Folia and the Sonata Mexicana.

After moving to the States, I did not record for a few years. Promus was changing hands and it was no longer a positive association. I had done a couple of recordings with other companies in Spain, but these were one-of-a-kind projects, without continuity. While living in Minnesota a local company approached me to do a recording of the repertoire I had been rediscovering and promoting in concert. This repertoire was by the so-called composers from the Spanish Generation of 1927, and, in fact, we produced and edited a complete master. This included the José Sonata, as well as works by a good number of other contemporaries. Unfortunately, the company went through some troubles and the LP – these were still the pre-CD years! - never saw the light of day. The José Sonata had to wait another six or seven years to be recorded, but, eventually, it happened in 1988. By that time, a couple of friends and my wife Victoria

convinced me to start a small partnership through which I could produce and distribute my recordings and publications, and that's how IGW - Iznola Guitar Works - was born. The first issue was *The Dream of Icarus* (1989), which included the world-premiere recording of the José Sonata and my transcriptions of de Falla, Debussy, Ravel, and Mompou. The reception, from both critics and colleagues, was stunning. Since then, IGW has issued three more CD's by me, and a couple by my distinguished ex-students.

One of the recordings most endearing to me, though, was the one I did a few years ago with my dear friend, the great guitarist/composer Jorge Morel, *Two to Tango*. This was released by Luthier Music Corporation, in New York. We had enormous fun doing this project.

J.B. - *I just read a very complimentary review in Soundboard about a CD recorded by your student, Troy King. Did you have anything to do with this fine recording?*

R.I. - Yes, we decided to invite a couple of young artists associated with me to do their debut recording with IGW. Troy did a splendid recording (*Musique de Salon – Classical Guitar Music for a New Belle Epoque*), as did Jeff LaQuatra (*Twilight – Guitar Music at the End of the Century*). Both have had rave reviews. We are planning to do something as well with my brilliant protégé and colleague, Jonathan Leathwood, in the near future.

J.B. - *It is truly amazing that you have found time outside of your academic obligations for a concert and recording career. Even more amazing, you arrange and compose music for the guitar. How on earth did you find time to create a concerto for guitar and orchestra?*

R.I. - The concerto, titled *Tiempo Muerto*, came about as the result of a Sabbatical leave I took in 1996. First, I did a very long series of performances, lectures and master classes during my two-quarter leave. This was, by far, the biggest tour I have done, although I did take a couple of breaks; there were close to sixty engagements total. I then spent the latter part of the summer drafting the concerto, which is based on an earlier guitar solo work, *Monólogo II*. It was my first orchestral work since my student days – all of those were discarded a long time ago! - And it was an exhilarating experience.

J.B. - *I had the pleasure to be at the world premier of your wonderful concerto. Please tell us about this work and perhaps, about your ten studies for solo guitar.*

R.I. - Yes, the premiere with the Cheyenne Symphony conducted by Stephen Alltop. As you might recall, it is full of Afro-Cuban associations, and uses as part of its materials a very stylized, even distorted, rendition of a famous Cuban tune, *El Son de la Loma*, written by the great Cuban *sonero* Miguel Matamoros. Both *Monólogo* and *Tiempo Muerto* are, of course, the result of my nostalgia for roots I lost, for the first time, when my family left Cuba, but through a purposefully distorted lens, reflecting the fact

that I left before I really had absorbed much of what it is to be Cuban. It's more nostalgia by association with the *real* nostalgia experienced by my parents and those of their generation and, as such, the work becomes symbolic rather than autobiographical. I think it is this elusive, depersonalized quality that has made *Tiempo Muerto* resonate with listeners from very distant cultural backgrounds from the Cuban, but who have also felt the tribulations of the absence of place, either voluntary or, worse, forced. It's dedicated to my sons, Ricardo and Victor, who've also been uprooted – they both were born in Madrid – because of their father's itinerant tendencies!

The Concert Etudes I have described elsewhere as my personal exploration of Romantic virtuosity on the guitar. They owe a lot to the aesthetics of the grand Romantic concert etude, pioneered by Chopin and Liszt, in which the technical challenge is always the result of a musical idea, but intimately connected with the physicality of the medium for which it's written. Additionally, they were my personal 'to-do' list, technically speaking, because each one deals with issues I was facing as a performer in those days (the '70's). As I said, I have undergone revisions to my technical approach no less than three times, and the period in question was one of them. I wrote them and took about four more years before I dared perform the whole set in public. I think the first full performance took place when I had already moved to Denver, in one of the first Guitar Week festivals, in the mid-80's. The last of the set of ten Etudes was completed in 1979!

J. B. - *Other works you are particularly proud of?*

R.I. - Well, after the death of Regino Sainz de la Maza, I wrote an 'in memoriam,' the eleventh etude, really a tone poem titled *Death of Icarus*. It is a 'study' in the sense that it trains a technical right-hand formula, not used before, that provides the textural foundation of the work. But it's much more than that...

Twenty years later, in 2002, I wrote a 'prequel' to *Icarus*, the *Sonata Daedalus*. It's a three-movement, 30-plus-minute *sonata* written for Jonathan Leathwood, in whose hands it has found its definitive interpreter. It's not a piece for the faint of heart, or hands, and explores the darker side of the Daedalic myth. It is meant to be performed ahead of *Death of Icarus*, which should appear, after a rather substantial pause, as if from the deepest recesses of the Labyrinth, opening a window to the possibility of light and life-enhancing exuberance. The myth of Icarus and Daedalus has been an important psycho-aesthetic thread in my creative efforts for many years. I read the myth as an allegory of failed parenthood – or failed pedagogy: they are one and the same. This is what happens when the young are given powerful tools, dangerous even, but no real training to use them: they crash and burn.

Lately, a number of significant works have been produced: a song cycle, *Corinna's Songbook*, for mezzo and piano; two violin and guitar duos, the rambunctious *Tríptico Criollo*, consisting of three Venezuelan dances, and the very recent *Beethovenspiel*, a potpourri on motives by Beethoven, commissioned by my good friend and director of the Bowdoin festival Lewis Kaplan; a cello

and guitar duo, also for Jonathan and his duo partner, Richard vonFoerster, the *Gran Guaguancó*; the *Danzas de la Abuela – Three Caribbean Dances*, for flute, cello and guitar, commissioned and dedicated to my good friends, flutist Jan Borland and guitarist John Dowdall from Red Cedar Chamber Music in Iowa, who have done splendid performances since they premiered it last year.

The list goes on... The last ten years have been very productive. I'll just mention two more: another orchestral score, written last year, this time for full symphonic forces without guitar, *In the Eyes a Silver Dagger*, based on Federico García Lorca's play *Blood Wedding*, which won a runner-up prize in the 2008 Realize Music Challenge Competition, and *La Locura Española*, a two-piano piece for the splendid *Quattro Mani* piano duo of my colleague Alice Rybak and Susan Grace.

J.B. - *Switching gears again, let's discuss your teaching career. In what condition was the guitar program at DU upon your arrival, and the status of education for guitar in general in this state, back in 1984?*

R.I. – When I arrived, we had about ten majors, three of which were graduates pursuing an MA, and the rest undergrads. The grads were all fine players and one of them, Alex Komodore, has become an important guitarist in the region, and heads the guitar program at Metropolitan State College in Denver.

But apart from one, I recommended all the other undergrads to drop the performance degree, which they did. They were not going to successfully complete the BM, so they either changed to BA or changed majors.

In the state at large, things were not good, and the standards of instruction were, frankly, dismal. We've come a long way.

J.B. - *What did you do to make the guitar program at DU what it is today?*

R.I. – Work very hard for many years and establish a rigorous policy of going for quality of students, rather than quantity. This was not easy, because the University of Denver was going through some terrible financial difficulties and, being a tuition-driven institution, needed good numbers. However, I was left alone and, in fact; encouraged to do what I thought was needed, and never felt the slightest pressure to compromise my standards. The first break-through came when the great Japanese guitarist Masakazu Ito came, in the late '80's, to pursue a MM with us. He was the first truly star-quality prospect we had in the program and his impact was tremendous. He's now a colleague, with Jonathan Leathwood – who came in the '90's to do an Artist Diploma, with similar impact – in the guitar faculty at Lamont, and pursues a thriving teaching and performing career.

Another important element, which I had already established as a condition of my accepting the position when it was offered, was the creation of a summer guitar festival, which my wife and I started in the summer of 1984, at the end of my first year at DU.

J.B. - *I attended most of the ten summer Guitar Weeks that you and your wife Victoria worked so hard to present. What role did this play in building the guitar program at DU?*

R.I. - This proved to be an immensely important visibility-enhancing initiative for our guitar program, throughout the ten years it lasted.

We started very modestly, inviting only one or two guests, the first was Gilbert Biberian, and ended with a bang, in 1994, when we had over twenty guest artists come and perform, lecture and offer master classes.

It helped me create a network of professional contacts from which many good things emerged; for recruiting, for my personal career, for the exchange of pedagogical ideas, for the promotion of new works, and for gradually developing an awareness and appreciation for the guitar in the region. Denver is a great guitar town now, in no small measure due to these efforts and the increasingly more ambitious activities of the Denver Classical Guitar Society, which has grown in direct proportion to the success of the guitar in Denver and Colorado. This is not limited to Denver, however, as you well know, being as you are an officer of the Colorado Springs Guitar Society, another very active guitar venture.

J.B. - *After the ten Guitar Weeks were completed, there was one very successful summer session at Breckenridge, which I also attended. I was hopeful that it would become an annual event but that was not to be. You ended up settling in at Bowdoin in Maine for your summer instruction location. How did this come to be?*

R.I. – Yes, Victoria and I looked at each other in our hotel room after the final farewell reception at the end of the tenth guitar week and decided, right there and then, that that was it. That the festival had grown too big and complex for our available time and resources and that we were at the peak of our success, so it was a good moment to bring it to a close.

So, my time was freer for other summer activities. Breckenridge, the lovely ski resort town, had a summer festival going, with two orchestras in residence, and their general manager at the time approached me to start a marginal guitar course within the festival, for one week, associated with my guest appearance with one of the orchestras. They did something similar for vocalists and one or two other instrumental areas, like piano. We did this for two years, but then administrative changes occurred (the manager left the festival) and the board decided to stop their incipient efforts at incorporating a pedagogical component to their main mission of being primarily an orchestral camp. The two years, though, were very enjoyable and productive.

A few years went by, which I spent doing the usual guest-artist appearances at other guitar summer festivals. I am very grateful to my colleagues at places like the National Guitar Workshop in Connecticut, Steve Robinson's Stetson Festival, in Florida, Gilbert

Biberian and Gerald Garcia's Festival in England, Paul Croft's Northumberland Festival also in England, and so many more, for filling my summers during that period with warm collegiality and high artistic spirits.

Then, in 2000, Lewis Kaplan, director of the Bowdoin International Music Festival in Brunswick, Maine, called Victoria – as you know, she's my agent as well – to invite me to do the guitar instruction, and some performing, at his festival, in 2001.

This was a great opportunity, because it opened the door for me to engage in an aspect of guitar teaching and performance that I always found lacking in guitar festivals, including my own Guitar Week, namely chamber music. Bowdoin is primarily a chamber music festival, attracting over two hundred top-notch students from most of the elite music programs around the world, and a faculty of very prominent artists to match. This year is my ninth year there and, again, I could not have asked for a more supportive, welcoming atmosphere for myself and the guitar

J.B. - *For you and your wife Victoria, I can think of no better example of "Behind every successful man there is a woman." Tell us about how Victoria has been an integral part of your careers.*

R.I. – The question would need a book-size answer to do it justice! Victoria and I met when we were both students in the Madrid Royal Conservatory. She's a trained musician and taught theory and elementary piano for a while, before she decided to explore the business side of music, becoming an artist agent with her own company, Brandys Artists Management, for quite a number of years.

This came about when, after moving to America, we were trying to establish a name for me as a concert artist, while we were looking for a position. At the time I had, in theory, three agents in different countries, Spain, England and Venezuela. In the late '70's and for a little while, I also had New York representation with a small agency, which did not produce any results, so we parted ways amicably.

My agents were producing limited engagements, and Victoria began, informally, to help me get more engagements in the States, realizing that, as far as self-promotion and go-to-it-ness, I am semi-moronic. She began to produce more results than my agents! So, after she felt comfortable with her English skills (she came with no knowledge of the language) and acquired some necessary business and accounting skills, she went full steam and created her agency. She kept this agency until the Lamont School of Music at DU hired her to become their Director of Public Relations, a position she has had now for eight years. Since then, she disbanded her agency, but keeps her manager role in IGW, which now acts as my artistic representative for engagements. I no longer work with other agents.

But, of course, this is the more insignificant part of our story. She has been the stalwart pillar in our family's growth and progress, the beautiful, ever-present mother and wife, the wise advisor, the

strong one in moments of distress, and the inspiration for the artist.

Without her, I would be a beach bum somewhere in the Antilles.

J.B. - *As you know, in my non-musical career, I am an optometrist. The clinician/scientist side of my brain demands logic and detailed explanation for me to grasp technical concepts concerning guitar performance. I believe that is why your guidance has been paramount in my endeavor to play guitar. Your profound understanding of human anatomy and technique for guitar performance are beautifully detailed and logically organized in your textbooks, "Kitharologus" as well as your "On Practicing" and "The Physiology of Guitar Playing". Tell us how these books came to be.*

R.I. – "Kitharologus" came about from my desire to gather an organized, systematized catalogue of training materials, which I consider foundational - that is, more designed with a gymnastic than an artistic goal in mind - but devoid of any 'pedagogical ideology'. Any teacher, no matter what 'school' he or she belongs to, could use it profitably in the studio. The success of the book seems to indicate that this has been achieved, since it is used as a required text in numerous guitar programs, here and abroad, that have very little in common from a more general pedagogical standpoint.

"On Practicing" came out of an assignment I received from my director at Lamont, Joe Docksey, who asked me to say a few words about practicing to our entering students in our welcoming convocation at the beginning of the school year, some years back. The basic conceptual frame for the booklet was, in essence, designed in that short lecture, which, of course, I then expanded, but with a rigorous loyalty to the idea of clarity and conciseness.

Although its subtitle – "A manual for students of Guitar Performance" – seems to indicate a specialized viewpoint, it has been adopted as a text much more widely. For instance, at Lamont it is a required text in aural skills classes, and in many instrumental departments other than guitar

"The Physiology of Guitar Playing" is the product of a commission from the University of Reading in England, through my friend and colleague Michael Lewin, head of guitar at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He was put in charge of coordinating the curriculum for a course the University started a few years ago designed for private teachers. Michael honored me with the request to write an introductory text on the physical mechanism and its workings in guitar playing. He was aware of my interest, almost an obsession, with establishing a nomenclature, a vocabulary, by which the way I describe and discuss issues pertaining to technical training to my students is devoid of ambiguity or vagueness, and by my exploration of the physio-mechanics of the playing mechanism. This text was my first published, formal attempt to bring the language of science into the teaching studio. In my experience, once the student gets past the initial resistance to 'funny sounding' words, and grasps their exact meaning, communication becomes much clearer and

easier. It takes a while, though, as it has taken a while for the book to be more widely acknowledged, since, though quite basic and succinct, it is dense and not simple. But more and more teachers are beginning to incorporate it into their baggage of pedagogical resources. At Lamont, we do a unit on it during the Pedagogy and Repertoire sequence required of all undergraduate guitar majors.

J.B. - *You presented some very special concerts to celebrate this year marking your 60th birthday, 40 year anniversary of your debut concert and 25 years at DU. Tell us about them.*

R.I. – It was a way to explore repertoire areas that I love, in a bunched group of concerts, two during winter and two in the spring, which I did as a mini-series of fund-raising concerts to benefit the guitar and chamber music departments at Lamont. I began in January with a concert of my transcriptions of Bach, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Debussy, Ravel, Mompou and de Falla. Wonderful, demanding fun! The second, and most difficult for me, was Bach’s four lute suites. For years I had wanted to do this, but did not have the courage to do it, because my thinking about his music has been in continuing evolution since my early incursions in this repertoire were received with mixed results. Some of those criticisms I have come to accept as beneficial, and they have helped me rethink some of my first assumptions, but I also found that a lot of it came from an almost religious fervor favoring a certain stylistic, historicist approach, which I have always found artistically and temperamentally repugnant. Now, having nothing to lose, I felt ready to do a first incursion into this treasure cove, hopefully with many more to come. I learned a lot from the experience which, from a performance standpoint, I consider only partially successful. I did not achieve all I wanted to.

The third, perhaps the one most people considered most successful of the three solo concerts, was a Sonata-and-premieres concert, with the Manén Fantasia-Sonata, the Sonatas by José, Lauro and Ginastera, and two world-premieres of new works by Samuel Adler, the eminent American composer, and my Lamont colleague Chris Malloy, a brilliant young composer whose name will be quickly gaining wider visibility. I felt deeply honored by their works, written and dedicated to me. Sam wrote *Canto XIX*, the most recent of his long-standing series of solo instrumental works, and Chris, *A Moment of Colossal Abundance*, referring not to my girth, but to the mathematical concept of the ‘colossally abundant’ integers, of which 60 is one. Both are wonderful pieces that I’ll be performing frequently.

The last of the four concerts was a true festive occasion and an immense thrill for me both as performer and composer. We presented a program of my chamber music, performed by a “who’s who” of music-making in the region. Colleagues, prominent guest-artists from outside the school, ex-students, current students, in fact, twenty one performers, plus I, took part in the concert. The level of performance was formidable and everyone was at the top of their game.

But, more than that, the jubilant atmosphere, the audience response, the dedication of my friends to my music, all of it made it by far the most memorable, personally, of the four concerts.

J.B. - *At one of your last master classes at the 10th Guitar Week, you said “It’s getting harder each year to be Iznaola”. Is that still true?*

R.I. – Gosh, Jim, what a memory! Yes, I did feel that way at one point in my life. No more. I am enjoying all I do, and I am free of the disturbing feeling, which that statement represented, of living my life by permission, depending on what other people thought and how they evaluated my work. To quote a very famous phrase, “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn!” anymore about this, and, therefore, I have regained a freedom of spirit that has catapulted my creative energies to levels I never suspected I had.

J.B. - *One final question. What are your plans for the future?*

R.I. – Of course, there are always more ideas and projects than one can accommodate in a lifetime, so I don’t obsess about getting it all done by a deadline, except the obvious professional commitments to teaching, performing and composing.

I do long, though, for that golden moment when we will transit into the ‘coda’ of our lives. I speak of ‘we’ because I cannot conceive of an alternative without my friend and companion of 35 years. Devoted, yes, still to the creative pursuit, but also to the contemplative mode, realizing that this awe-inspiring world of ours is no longer, primarily, a stage for our actions, but a restful repository, for our enjoyment, of all that is beautiful and worthy of love.



Victoria and Ricardo Iznola