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Dear BCGS Members,

I hope you are enjoying the beauty of the New England autumn season! We are on the cusp of beginning a truly spectacular 2014-15 Artist Series. On October 17th the dazzling Ana Vidovic returns to the BCGS stage. Her impressive virtuosity and energy will be a perfect way to begin our series. Czech guitarist/composer Pavel Steidl will visit us for the very first time on November 14th. If you were one of the lucky ones who saw Roland Dyens this past spring, it’s enough for me to say that while Pavel’s style is very unique, he will similarly blow us away with his musicality, wit, and artistic point of view. 2015 begins with our flagship recital of the season with the legendary Sharon Isbin. Following a nationally televised documentary about her extraordinary career, tickets will be in very strong demand. Polish guitarist Marcin Dylla continues our spring concerts with an appearance on March 14th. He is by far one of the greatest guitarists of his generation, and both his artistry and technical wizardry have impressed audiences worldwide. Finally, our society will again host the New England Guitar Ensembles Festival. NEGEF is growing by leaps and bounds and we have the great honor of hosting Carlo Domeniconi, a giant among contemporary guitar composers. Renowned for his Turkish-inspired composition Koyunbaba, Carlo is composing a ten-minute guitar orchestra piece for us as well as performing a solo recital.

We encourage you to invite your family and friends to share these upcoming, beautiful musical events. Make an evening of it while enjoying the unique cultural and culinary delights of Boston!

Our quarterly newsletter continues to provide valuable content for our members. This issue features two wonderful perspectives on the Boston Guitar Orchestra’s trip to Spain as well as an account of the Young Guitarist’s Workshop at this summer’s Boston Guitar Fest. Oscar Azaret, luthier, takes a fascinating look at an indispensable, yet rarely talked about component on our guitars: the bridge. Together with photos, announcements and classifieds, we hope you find this newsletter a great resource for all things guitar!

Sincerely,

Daniel Acsadi
Director, BCGS
BGO Follows in Young Segovia’s Footsteps

By Adrienne Smith

For ten days in July, the Boston Guitar Orchestra made Madrid their home and performed to their hearts’ content. They played in a museum, a church, several cultural centers, and an architectural college. They gave a midnight impromptu performance in front of an ancient Egyptian temple. BGO director Scott Borg spontaneously played Albéniz on a subway train. They jumped on every opportunity to do what they love and what they came for.

No small wonder they found themselves on the very same stage where Andrés Segovia played his Madrid debut on May 6, 1913. The performance was at the Ateneo, built in 1884 to house the city’s bourgeoisie cultural life (the name “Ateneo” itself derives Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom). The auditorium’s Greek revival, gold inlay ceiling depicts twelve muses of art and intellect. Marie Curie, Einstein, and Mother Theresa all spoke underneath it.

By the evening of the Ateneo performance, the orchestra had performed and practiced daily, eaten numerous leisurely late-night dinners together, celebrated one birthday, and bonded over bullfights, torture museums and churros. They played on this stage of greats as one cohesive unit alive with the music and each other.

The Spanish audience enjoyed the orchestra’s Concerto in D for 4 Violins by Telemann, My Funny Valentine by Rodgers and Hart, Oriental from “12 Danzas Españolas” by Granados, Oblivion by Piazzolla, and La Cumparsita by Rodriguez. A quartet within the group played Ode to Stromness from “The Yellow Cake Review” by Peter Maxwell Davies, Cantabile by Edson Lopes, and Catarete, Danca Popular de Mina’s Gerais. Borg played Asturias and Cadiz by Albéniz.

Backstage, some healthy goofing around helped alleviate the pre-performance nerves. After all, it can be hard to follow in the footsteps of a legend.

In fact, Segovia was far from famous when he first played the Ateneo and even had a hard time securing his performance there. He was a self-taught young man from the provinces and his Granada debut was just three years before. Additionally, the guitar was considered fit for folk music, not concerts. Many who heard Segovia play urged him to take up the violin instead.

The night he performed, Segovia was close to broke and underfed. His suit hung off his body. But none of that mattered he had a fantastic guitar. Eager to get his hands on a quality instrument for his debut, Segovia played for the luthier Manuel Ramirez one day in his workshop. Ramirez gave Segovia the best guitar he had. He told Segovia, “Take it, kid. It’s yours. Make it flourish in your hands with your good work... Pay me back with something other than money.” And that Segovia did. He played that guitar for twenty-five years, putting the Ramirez family on the map of internationally known Spanish luthiers. The guitar now resides in the Met.

Segovia’s Ateneo program included works by Mendelssohn and Tárrega, and Bach pieces that he transcribed himself. There was no newspaper review of the concert - apparently the writer who covered the music section also covered bullfighting - but several letters from that time show what people thought. One of Tárrega’s students found the performance “tasteless” because Segovia played his own transcriptions and used his fingernails. Another concert goer thought Segovia “handled the strings with taste and dexterity,” and was “impressed by the wealth of possibilities offered by our popular instrument.”

Flash forward a century, and rather than talk about the possibilities of the guitar, we now enjoy its full potential. The orchestra played Toto’s Africa alongside Puccini’s Nessun Dorma. Borg played a piece using more sound effects than Tárrega’s student could have dreamed up in a million lifetimes (Koshkin’s The Prince’s Toys). And overseas, this passionate group of guitarists found audience after audience waiting to hear them do it all.
Young Guitarists’ Workshop a Hit at Boston GUITARFEST

By Will Riley

Combining youthful energy, high-quality instruction, large ensemble playing, and a mission to help a younger generation of classical guitarists build a vibrant community, the third annual Young Guitarists’ Workshop was by all accounts a rousing success. Held at New England Conservatory as part of Boston GuitarFest 2014, the workshop drew 22 enthusiastic guitarists between the ages of 6-16 for a marathon six-day total immersion into their instrument. During the workshop students explored techniques to improve their individual musicianship, and discovered new possibilities that could only be achieved through teamwork.

Many of this year’s first time participants had never played with other guitarists their own age. Adam Levin, one of the Co-Directors of YGW, said, “One of the primary things we want to address is young people having experiences playing together. To this end, we engage a like-minded community of guitarists their own age, and place them in different ensemble combinations. It was fantastic to see the connections that were made between the kids as they worked together at this year’s YGW.”

The participants seemed to think so too. When asked to describe something she didn’t expect to learn at the workshop, Kayla A., age 12, commented, “I didn’t anticipate I’d be as enchanted by the youth guitar ensemble as I really was. I learned how, during the ensemble, the music unfolds and connects to the different guitar sections and everyone is really dependent on the whole team for it to work well.”

Kayla also participated in a girl’s quartet, preparing and performing a set of American iconic pieces, designed to match the theme of this year’s Boston GuitarFest – “America Odyssey”. When asked about their favorite part of YGW, her quartet partner Terra J., age 12, said, “I got to know what it was like to play with other guitarists. I got better at sight reading. I learned more about how to watch the conductor, but my favorite part was playing the pieces with the quartet. It was easier to listen to the different parts because there were only a few other people. I liked how it sounded when we all played together.” Rose C., age 12, agreed: “I loved playing in the girl’s quartet. My part was simple and it sounded so pretty with the others. We were awesome.”

A major highlight of the week was the opportunity for all of the workshop participants to play together as an ensemble in world-renowned Jordan Hall at New England Conservatory. The work selected for this performance was Terry Riley’s “In C”. This composition, conducted by YGW Co-Director Devin Ulibarri, has a strong improvisational element, with rhythmic groups progressing in a spontaneous fashion. Sasha V., age 10, of Brookline, MA, noted, “I changed as a guitarist and musician by getting better at staying in the same beat, which you need to do if you are in an ensemble. Terry Riley’s “In C” helped with this a lot! I really loved this camp!”

Rose C. also commented on the Jordan Hall performance: “I learned that the same piece can actually come out sounding different every time it is played.” Her brother Roy, age 10, and (Continued on page 7)
The Elephant in the Room

By J. Oscar Azaret

The Bay Bridge, Bridge on the River Kwai, Bridge over Troubled Water – some people play Bridge. The guitar has a bridge, and at first glance its function appears to be simply a means of attaching the strings to the soundboard, but let’s look further for it belies a multiplicity of essential functions in the sound and playability of a guitar.

It has been said that when the Spanish luthiers want to make a reproduction of a famous instrument, they start with the bridge then build the guitar around it. Why is this? The answer is quite lengthy and multifaceted, but let’s at least scratch the surface a bit here. Let’s look at the second function of the bridge – it transfers the vibrational energy of the string to the soundboard. The bridge is the gateway, the passage, the herald, the ambassador which cleverly and purposely presents the energy the player has set in motion to a complex system which will then take this energy and transform it into sound. A guitar is a transducer – that is; it takes one form of energy – a vibrating string – and creates a new form of energy – sound, which of course are traveling changes in air pressure – waves if you like, not unlike those at the beach. The bridge is the first actor in this transformation, and as such its match to the rest of the system – soundboard, air cavity, back & sides – to a large degree determines the success of this transformation. In engineering, the term impedance matching is used here. In social terms we can think that if the herald or ambassador carrying the message is poorly matched to the recipient … Well, we get nowhere.

So what does all this mean in physical terms? The bridge is by far the heaviest, stiffest, and largest footprint brace on the soundboard’s lower bout. Lots of attention is paid to different soundboard bracing systems, but then, there’s the elephant in the room. It’s big because it has to be, after all, we want the 6 strings nicely spaced apart, and the strings are pulling with about 90 pounds of combined force. Remember when you were a 90 lb. child swinging on a rope …. What if that rope were the six strings attached to a 2.5mm plate of light spruce with a few thin spruce sticks glued to it – amazing isn’t it? But the bridge is also big because we want the vibrational energy to be quickly coupled to the full span of the soundboard so we can efficiently start it on its function of generating sound. A 3 inch bridge will in fact span the desired string spacing and provide sufficient glue surface for the string tension, but it falls short in delivering string energy to the outer braces and the periphery of the soundboard. The speed of sound in a material is proportional to the stiffness of that material. The bridge is made from very stiff wood and oriented such that its longitudinal grain runs across the soundboard. Wood is much stiffer longitudinally, than transversally; hence we can think of the bridge as a fast delivery service to get the string energy to the entire plate and its bracing system.

Everything in the construction of a guitar is about achieving a “golden mean.” Note that here we use the article “a” instead of “the.” The evolution of the classical guitar – say, since Torres – has led to optimal bridge sizes in the range of 7 1/4” long and 1 1/8” wide, but there is significant variation here. Greg Smallman’s lattice braced guitars use a significantly shorter bridge; even more so Graham Caldersmith guitars – another Australian luthier. Richard Schneider Kasha style guitars have asymmetrical curved bridges, and very asymmetrical curved bracing. The Fleta bridge is somewhat short and wide while the Romanillos somewhat long and narrow. Other builders round-off selected edges of the rectangular bridge. Beyond these obvious “footprint” design considerations, there are other more subtle but equally important ones - density of the wood, total weight, stiffness, vibrational damping, height dimensions, varying wing profiles - John Gilbert pioneered a concave wing profile as contrasted to the traditional convex “tubular” profile. Since the bridge is the critical gateway for the string energy into the soundboard, all of these parameters significantly affect the sound and should be selected in concert with the total design.

There are many other critical aspects of the bridge design which deal with achieving the desired action and string torque on the soundboard. These not only affect the sound, but also the feel and playability. Significant differences exist here as we move from a truly concert classical guitar to say a Flamenco accompaniment guitar. String height above the soundboard, string back angle from bridge to tie block, method of string fastening, saddle slot design – all these must be considered if proper playability is to be achieved, and they also must be in concert with other major design considerations such as neck/body angle, and fingerboard profiling.

Indeed this little bridge thing we never much talk about is in fact … well, the elephant in the room.

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BCGS Performance Parties
at the homes of Don Hague and Donna Ricci

Don Hague's Home

Donna Ricci and Scott Ouelette

Fiel Sahir, Jon Kim, and Don Hague

Lin Hymel

BGO Members

Michael Bester

Jeff Wyman

Mike Tomases

Oscar Azaret

Bill and Joanne Harriman

Steve Rapson

Azaret Maker's Label
a three-time YGW participant, said, “I was really excited to play “In C” in Jordan Hall because that is a special treat to play there.”

In addition to the emphasis on classical guitar, workshop classes were taught in other aspects of guitar technique and musical life. Rockshop helped the kids improve their rock chops, intro to flamenco guitar showed them basic rhythmic patterns and strumming techniques, and Yoga/Flamenco dance had them physically relaxing and moving to improve their artistry. Then the kids would break up into small groups for guitar master classes with the faculty, before returning to sectionals and large ensemble practice.

The week went by very quickly for everyone, and culminated in the YGW Workshop Recital on Sunday. After a spirited introduction by guitar virtuoso Eliot Fisk, whose vision initially launched the Young Guitarists’ Workshop, the students gave a warmly-received performance of the ensemble repertoire they had prepared during the week, in addition to solo performances. “My favorite part of the workshop was the Sunday concert. I liked this the most because it was really fun to play in an ensemble with other kids”, said Sasha. When asked about how he might have changed as a guitarist or musician at the workshop, Steven L., age 11, said, “I think I changed as a guitarist by learning to play better in a whole group. Usually when I practice guitar at home I’m playing by myself. So playing with younger and older kids was a very fun and interesting experience because it was just so many different guitars playing together, it sounded very layered. When I wasn’t playing, the other parts were playing, so I had to listen carefully for my next part.”

The Young Guitarists’ Workshop Staff is planning to create smaller weekend sessions throughout the year to build on the momentum generated by this year’s workshop. In the meantime, the kids have all promised to practice, like Chloe A., age 10, who said, “I hope I can go to guitar fest next year. I will try to get better and keep playing.”

The positive environment this year’s YGW created can be summed up in the words of its youngest participant – Simon A., age 6, who remarked on the whole experience “I would say it wasn’t just amazing… it was totally amazing!”

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**Nessun Dorma (No One Sleeps)**

**The Boston Guitar Orchestra in Madrid**

*by Donna Ricci*

We are walking down a small cobble stone side street heading towards Chocolateria San Gines, an 1894 Spanish cafe and arguably the most famous in Madrid for churros con chocolate (a light Spanish donut dipped into an incredibly thick hot chocolate). It is a scorching hot July afternoon. We are several members of the Boston Guitar Orchestra, our conductor Scott Borg and a few family members of the musicians. We are being lead by a local, the Japanese cousin of the wife of one of our members. I love the contrast: hot chocolate in July; a Japanese woman leading us on a tour of this Spanish capital.

In the juxtaposition of contrasting concepts, in the range from pianissimo to fortissimo, we experience the rich musical composition that is life. In this city, the third largest metropolitan area in Europe after London and Paris, and the cultural center of Spain, we come to know ourselves as musicians, orchestra members and friends.

We were part of a month long festival called ChamberArt, celebrating various types of musical genres. Ten days were devoted to guitar, organized by Enric Madriguera, Professor of Music at the University of Texas. Dr. Madriguera, two other instructors affiliated with the university and four of their students were also present as another ensemble. Our accommodations were in the town of Barajas, a quaint, working class town, 20 minutes by train outside of downtown Madrid. It consists of the cultural center where we rehearsed, several excellent restaurants and one ice cream parlor that called to us after tapas on more than one occasion.

For 11 days we were together, with daily rehearsals and evening performances for many of those days. We played a variety of pieces (Toto’s Africa, Puccini’s Nessun Dorma, Roger and Hart’s My Funny Valentine, Piazzolla’s Oblivion) to name a few. In between we spent hours together touring the city, eating and drinking. We talked of music. We talked of life. Above all we laughed, and laughed and laughed. The enchantment of the city, the music and each other’s company created a well spring for personal and professional growth.

Grow we did; sleep we did not. Jet lag, late night dinners, early morning rehearsals and little awareness of the concept of siesta contributed to our having a greater awareness of the challenges of life as touring musicians. We plowed through the sleep deprived disorientation in pursuit of all that Madrid had to offer. And we discovered tapas. Night after night we explored these small dishes of such items as cuttle fish, ox tail, blood sausage and orejas (pig’s ears). Tapas brought us to that shared culinary experience as we passed around plate after plate of intriguing dishes. And that unity transcended food and took root in our music.

We played six concerts. Our first concert was held at the Museo del Romanticismo, located in an 18th century palace in the...
heart of the city, housing Romanticism exhibits. We were nervous, no doubt. But then Scott Borg reminded us, “You guys have played at Jordan Hall. What’s there to worry about?” And it was true. We relaxed and enjoyed the experience of playing at this beautiful romantic museum.

We played our second concert at Iglesia de la Santa Cruz. I think it is fitting that the venue of a church was the locale for what some of us viewed as our decent into hell. We had never had to deal with the acoustics of a large cathedral. We could barely hear ourselves let alone each other. But as a testament of who we are and what we were becoming, post-concert tapas that night was a frank discussion of orchestral camaraderie and trust. As with all descents into hell, the rise to heaven is glorious. Our identity as a group was made stronger. We began looking at each other more and looking at the music less.

We played a concert at the cultural center in Barajas, the home of our rehearsals. The walls showcased an art exhibit of a provocative nature seldom seen in the States. This environment, as one of our members noted, was, “a bright and acoustically live performance space, with an eager audience nearby” and another stated that we felt “a grace, charm and ‘simpatico’ with the audience” in this space which made such a difference in the overall musical experience. The juxtaposition of listening to four of our members playing the quartet Cantabile by Edson Lopes while viewing this evocative art leant a uniquely surreal European flavor to the evening.

Interspersed between concerts were trips to Toledo, a walled city that dates back to 192 BCE. Hours of walking through cobbled stone streets and visiting churches, synagogues and mosques left us exhausted but awake with excitement. A side trip to an exhibition about 15th and 16th century torture instruments gave new insight into the nature of the inquisition. On a whim one evening we walked though several plazas (with a stop in one to view Venus through a high powered telescope) making our way to Temple de Debod, a second century Egyptian temple that was transported to Madrid in 1968 in an
effort to save its historical legacy. It is located in Parque del Oeste overlooking the royal castle. There, at midnight, we sat on a wall with a view of the fountain and played to the appreciation of couples enjoying a romantic evening.

Our final concert was held at Colegio oficial de Arquitectos, home of the professional architects of Madrid. This modern architectural structure served as a stark contrast to the more ornate architecture of the other18th and 19th century venues we had played in. And like the changes in architectural styles, we, as musician had changed, growing into the more seasoned group we were becoming. For days we had been working on looking at each other when we play, getting that sense of connection that comes from dedicated work and shared experiences. During this concert we gave our best performance, reflecting the unification we now experience as an ensemble.

It is a gift to be able to work under a conductor who puts expression of the passion of the music above the mechanics of the playing. Because of that, we strive for better mechanics knowing that our ultimate goal is not primarily to play all the notes correctly in the correct order but to say something musically and to be heard.

Once we were home, Scott wrote to us: “As a conductor, the biggest sense of joy was witnessing the transformation that occurred during the festival. You went from a group of people with all different backgrounds, to a collective of “musicians” with a combined goal, a combined vision. You transformed from individuals in a practice room, to an ensemble of guitar ambassadors, sharing in an experience that connected you all in unique, unusual, and unexpected ways.”

Eventually we slept. We found peace and relaxation in stolen moments of an idyllic siesta and the ease that comes from the end of a delightful evening of tapas and sangria and music making and camaraderie. Yet, in reality, no one slept through this trip. We all explored aspects of ourselves as musicians, as ensemble players and as travelers in search of an awakening that gives life such meaning. In Madrid, we found it.
Classifieds

Classifieds are $15 per issue of the BCGS newsletter for a 32-word ad, and $0.25 for each additional word. The fee includes posting on the BCGS webpage for three months. Email director@bostonguitar.org with inquiries. Please send checks to BCGS, P.O. Box 470665, Brookline, MA 02447, or pay online.

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BCGS Artist Series
Presents
Ana Vidovic
October 17, 2014

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