

Half a century before the guitar became a pop culture symbol for rebellion, hedonism, and glamorously dangerous lifestyles, the world of art music had already produced the first — and the most important — guitar hero of the 20th century. His name was Andrés Segovia — a Spanish visionary from Andalusia who made the guitar an indelible part of modern culture by taking it from the parlor and the obscurity of small aficionado circles onto the concert stage.

When Segovia began his career in 1912, the repertoire played by classical guitarists was limited and the instrument's social and cultural status — ambiguous. But thanks to Segovia's vision and ambition, already by the 1920s the guitar was living a revived, enriched life, still untouched by the corporate show biz sloganizing and mythmaking. It would be 30 or so years before rock'n'roll would even emerge as a genre and another 15 before it would start sending forth its own guitar pioneers and virtuosos.

Segovia owed his success not only to the music he commissioned from composers of his day or to arrangements for guitar he made of masterworks of the past. Much of what made him such a persuasive champion for the guitar came down to his individual qualities: his technical virtuosity, aesthetic intuition, driving ambition, and scrupulous sincerity. This, as well as his conviction that a larger and a fuller life for the guitar was impossible without educating a new generation of players, made him not only a guitar hero, but a transformative cultural force of his time.

Some of Segovia's disciples were prodigiously gifted and went on to open new dimensions for the guitar. But it was Michael Lorimer — an American guitarist — whom the Maestro said he appreciated the most of all, referring to him as “one of the most talented young guitarists of these times”.

Growing up in the Los Angeles area in the 1950s, Lorimer began studying classical guitar when he was 10 and when he was 16 he was introduced to Segovia by one of Segovia's students. Segovia invited Lorimer to study at Segovia's master class in Italy, and for the next 24 years, to quote Lorimer himself, “I got together with Segovia whenever I could until the Maestro's death in 1987.”

Having spent 7 years studying with Segovia from 1963 to 1970, already by mid-Sixties Lorimer became increasingly aware of the guitar's scope and potential, as well as the fact that it existed in several parallel worlds, some of which rarely came in contact with each other.

This led to his friendship with the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen whose class for composers at the University of California, Davis, Lorimer attended in 1966-1967, as well as with Pulitzer prize winning American composer

William Bolcom who have both — among other composers Lorimer would later collaborate with — dedicated their works to him.

Not just a performer, but a cultural explorer able to see connections between different genres and periods of music, Lorimer didn't limit himself with classical and contemporary repertoire. In the early Seventies he became one of the first persons to start performing the Baroque guitar music on the Baroque guitar — not the classical guitar as was customary at the time.

“The Baroque guitar pieces sounded right to my ears for the first time,” Lorimer was explaining in his 1983 interview with the *Guitar Review* magazine. “My strums and ornaments had a new crispness and clarity, as well as tenderness. The sound of scales and chords had delicacy that complimented the softness that pervades Baroque art.”

In the early Seventies he commissioned a Baroque guitar from the Dutch luthier Nic van der Waals who copied a guitar built in Paris in 1682 for one of the daughters of Louis XIV. Researching and adopting 17th and 18th century techniques for playing the instrument (which is different from the classical guitar not only in size and shape, but also in tunings and the number of strings) helped Lorimer convey the authentic spirit of the Baroque guitar music to modern-day audiences.

Lorimer's interest in the early music led him to a discovery of a unique collection of the early 18th century Spanish dance music — *Saldívar Codex No. 4* — which he managed to uncover in Mexico after years of research and enquiries. He published it in facsimile with detailed notes and analysis after recognising it as a companion volume to the *Passacalles y Obras* (1732) compiled by the great Spanish Baroque guitarist Santiago de Murcia.

Moreover, for several decades Lorimer has been publishing his own arrangements of classical and Baroque music — as well as running a special series on new guitar music — under The Michael Lorimer Edition imprint.

Having toured extensively the world over and taught masterclasses at North American universities and conservatoires throughout his career, Lorimer, regrettably, has had less time for studio work. His debut 1984 album *Remembranza* (Windham Hill / Dancing Cat Records), was an homage to Segovia and included three of Segovia's own compositions as well as music by guitar luminaries Francisco Tárrega, Isaac Albéniz, Heitor Villa-Lobos, as well as Lorimer's own arrangements of J.S. Bach.

“When Segovia's playing has shown me paths for transcending my limits and for reaching more feeling in my playing,” Lorimer wrote in his 1976 article for the *Guitar Player* magazine, “It has never been the result of slavishly following techniques, phrasings, fingerings, articulations, tonal shadings, and so on,

because that sort of study misses the point completely. In studying the art works of others, it is not permitted to copy, only to steal — that is, you may take the essential whole, but you may not imitate.”

Following this approach, on *Remembranza* Lorimer becomes not only an intermediary between the composer and the listener (or between the past and the present) but also brings out the essence of each piece through timbre, dynamics, and accents to reveal his own meanings and connections. Being respectful of previous performers of the traditional guitar repertoire, he also captures it for himself — a task where knowledge of history is not enough, and which calls for reinterpretation of the material through self-discovery. The result is a feeling that the music Lorimer performs is a breathing entity, a living and an urgent challenge, and that he — while supporting the tradition — is making sure it survives into the future.

Lorimer’s complicated relationship with the record industry and the recording process in general was partly explained in his 1990 interview with Chip Stern in *Musician* magazine where he recalled a “curious sort of ‘We are going to make you a household word’ experience with a major label” which he walked away from when he was young. “It reinforced my antique notions about recordings,” he explained. “Real music is when you play for me and I play for you. Recordings are no substitute for that.”

Ten years after the *Musician* interview Lorimer released one more record titled *Zamba! — Music of the Americas* on a label called TigerTunes created by Dr. Anne Young to raise money for medical research. *Zamba!* featured music by Heitor Villa-Lobos of Brazil, Leo Brouwer of Cuba and Agustín Barrios of Paraguay, as well as three pieces by North American composers (all friends of Lorimer) William Bolcom, William Albright, and William Neil.

A very different record from Lorimer’s debut, this release presented the breadth of stylistic, historical and cultural ground Lorimer can cover, as well as his expanded emotional latitude. His love for Americana is conveyed in his thoughtfully poetic arrangements of Bolcom’s and Albright’s ragtime pieces where he comes through at his most comprehensive as a musician, and where his playing is at its emotionally most complex, reaching for deeper hues in both light and shadows. The guitar music of South and North America is a system of coordinates which he sets to explore contrasts, transformations, and parallels not only between South American and North American guitar music, but also within his own inner continuum.

The atmosphere of study in progress, the spirit of discovery, re-discovery and active search — is what sets this album apart from recordings of many other performers brought up in the classical tradition. But then again, Lorimer has never defined himself by one tradition or one genre. “The classical guitar scene has never particularly interested me,” he told *Musician* magazine in 1990. “Music

is what interests me.” As with all great American musicians, music to Lorimer is a living language to be challenged and to be challenged by, the ultimate vehicle for self-knowledge.

Guitars Magazine got a chance to meet Michael Lorimer on August 23, 2011 at his New York apartment for a two-and-a-half-hour interview. Opening the doors of his home to a popular music magazine — as well as the doors into a world which so far remains unfamiliar to the majority of our readers was — we thought — a generous and a telling gesture in tune with Lorimer’s open attitude to different genres of guitar music.

As any newcomer into the world of art music, this writer felt overwhelmed by the sheer breadth of the subject and by the scope of Lorimer’s interests and accomplishments. Lorimer, however, has already had experience in introducing popular music audiences to his field, having written a widely-admired monthly column on classical guitar for *Guitar Player* magazine between 1976 and 1983.

Neither is Lorimer new to addressing a Russian-speaking audience. After all, he was the first American guitarist to tour the Soviet Union back in the Seventies. Two successful tours of the USSR in 1975 and in 1977 introduced Soviet concert-goers to the wide expanse of the traditional guitar repertoire as well as to contemporary American music. It therefore seemed natural to start our conversation with questions about Lorimer’s memories of his visits to the USSR.

Alissa Ordabai: Was it a major culture shock for you to tour in the Soviet Union in the Seventies?

Michael Lorimer: Not really, because I had played many places before that. But the first tour I did in the Soviet Union was certainly impressive to me. In 1975, I played in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Tbilisi, and several other western cities. The concerts were successful and the Soviet concert bureau Gosconcert asked me to return for a big tour in 1977. On the second tour, I played in nearly all the capitals of nearly all the Soviet republics. I really saw a lot of the USSR.

AO: In terms of repertoire, was it tailor-made for the Soviet Union?

ML: On the first tour, I played programs that audiences might have expected from a disciple of Andrés Segovia. On the second tour, I played quite a different program. First, I began my concerts on the 17th century guitar which to the modern guitar is like what the harpsichord is to the piano. I was one of the very first performers in the 20th century to perform concerts on that early guitar, an instrument which had not been played since the 18th century. In the 70s, a London critic said, “If Michael Lorimer is not the best Baroque guitarist in the world at present the competition has still to present itself.”

AO: That’s a brilliant quote.

ML: To give you idea of how little-played the Baroque guitar was at the time of my tours of the USSR, I had recently performed at the University of California in Los Angeles where three of the most important scholars of Baroque guitar music were in residence: One was Richard Hudson, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on dance forms that originated in Baroque guitar music and subsequently wrote most of the articles in the Grove's dictionary on Baroque dance forms. If you look up Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and so forth, Hudson wrote those articles. Another was Hudson's student Richard Pinnell who wrote his doctoral thesis on Francisco Corbetta the greatest guitarist of the 17th century. The third was Robert Stevenson, a great scholar, and author of many papers on Spanish music in the new world.

At UCLA, these experts came backstage to see me (I had never met them before) and said, "You know, we have been writing about the Baroque guitar for years, but this is actually the first time we have ever seen somebody perform on it." This would be like having studied Beethoven and written papers on his pianos sonatas, but never having seen a pianist.

AO: So they relied solely on written music?

ML: Exactly. They based their research on written music and had never seen anyone play the Baroque guitar. Anyway, in the Soviet Union, I started my concerts with the Baroque guitar, and then I switched to the classical guitar on which I played some traditional classics. To end my concert, I played *Seasons*, a contemporary piece recently written for me by the American composer William Bolcom who later won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for music. In Moscow, it seemed the audience didn't want to warmly applaud Bolcom's strange-to-their-ears music, but at the same time they wanted me to play encores. I walked off stage to tepid applause, then there was silence—and then the audience started clapping enthusiastically.

Two months before, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra played in the Soviet Union and they played also a piece of Bolcom's called *Commedia*. Instead of seating the orchestra in the traditional way, *Commedia* has three ensembles in three different areas of the stage. When the Russian audience saw the unusual array, it made them nervous even before they had heard one note of the music. I think they thought, "Uh-oh, how are we supposed to react to this?" (*Laughter*).

Anyway, *Seasons* is a beautiful piece which depicts the seasonal cycle in Michigan. Today, it doesn't seem at all edgy or weird. For example, it starts off with the sound of the wind, which you make by whistling like the wind while rubbing your fingertips on the windings of the bass strings. Anybody can understand that, right? But at that time in the Soviet Union, to hear a guitar piece start with a sound like that was bizarre.

I think the Russian audience was hoping I'd play traditional repertoire like I did on my first USSR tour. Also, I like to talk to my audience, not only in America, but in all countries, including the Soviet Union. Gosconcert said, "OK, fine, just write out what you want to say..."

AO: "... And we'll get the approval from..."

ML: Exactly. What I wrote had to be approved. At each of my recitals, Gosconcert had an actor or an actress who would address the audience, "Citizens, Maestro Lorimer wants to say a few words about the music we are about to hear..." After a few concerts, I noticed the audience was not laughing or reacting to jokes in my text and I wondered about the translation. In Ashgabad, the capital of Turkmenistan, I said to the young woman from Gosconcert who was traveling with me, "After breakfast, why don't we go over the text of what the actor is saying?" All day—from about 9 AM to 5 PM—we reviewed the text and we discovered it was completely wrong—it was as if when I said "black" the text said "white".

At the end of the day, I said, "OK, so for the next concerts we're going to use the revised text, right? She said, "Oh, no-no, we can't do that. We have to go with the approved text." I said, "But that text is completely wrong." She said, "No, no, we have to go with the approved text." I said, "Your job is to translate for me, right? We need to go NOW to the Central Telephone Office and call Gosconcert." In those days, you couldn't just pick up the telephone; you had to go to the Central Telephone Office to make such a call. And I said, "When we call Moscow, you don't have to advocate for me or anything, please just translate what I have to say. Otherwise, I am not sure we can continue my concerts or not." I didn't say I would not play, I just said I was *wondering* about it. (*Laughter*). So we went to the Central Telephone Office and called the head of Gosconcert. My translator was...

AO: Petrified?

ML: Petrified. She'd never talked to the head of Gosconcert. I said, "I am Michael Lorimer, the American guitarist." — "Oh, yes, nice to meet you, Mr. Lorimer." I said, "At each of my concerts an actor is reading to the audience a text I prepared. I have just reviewed it with my translator and it turns out that it is..."

AO: Inaccurate?

ML: Yes, inaccurate, not so well translated. I said, "So we have made an accurate translation which I'd like to use that for the future concerts, because, of course, we don't want to use an inaccurate text." He said, "Yes, of course, by all means, go ahead and use it." My translator was stunned that such a change could be made so easily. Her parents were prominent party members I think,

and in any case she had been brought up to expect that rules were rules, everything had to be done by the book, no matter what. She and I had discussions and experiences that for her were eye-openers. For example, we were stuck in Alma-Ata one week...

AO: Your passports were left in another city, weren't they? Was that intentional?

ML: No, I don't know, I don't think so... (*Smiles*). Anyway, one day she came to me and said, "Mr. Lorimer, I never see you at meal times—not at lunch, not at dinner. Are you eating?" I said, "Yes, I am eating. Let me show you something." As we walked down a corridor lined with wooden walls, I pushed on what looked like a solid wall and—poof!—it opened into a private dining room! (*Laughter*).

AO: No-o-o! This is like a James Bond film!

ML: Yes, there was a fabulous dining room apparently for communist party VIPs. In the usual restaurant, if you asked for just about anything, they'd say "zakryto" (*Laughter*). There was a big menu, but only in theory, whereas in the VIP room they always had everything. The waitress in the fancy dining room took one look at the Gosconcert girl and said, "Citizen, you don't belong here! You eat in the other restaurant." Immediately, the Gosconcert girl said, "Yes, yes, Mr. Lorimer, I think it's just the same if we eat in the other place." (*Laughter*).

On the last day of the tour, at lunch in a restaurant in Moscow, the girl from Gosconcert asked the waiter for a certain cigarette she liked to smoke. He said, "Zakryto", and she said, "No, I just saw that man over there get some. Go back to the kitchen and see if they don't have the cigarette I asked for." Sure enough, the waiter went and returned with the cigarettes. She lit one, took a puff, and said to me, "You see, Mr. Lorimer, I have learned a few things from you." (*Laughter*).

AO: Do you tour these days?

ML: Not so much. I am playing, studying, and I am very active. But I don't have a manager anymore and I do zero to promote myself. Basically, the only people who invite me are the people who want to hear me play. I don't beat the bushes at all because I'm always busy anyway. I used to tour so much that in one year, if you added all my days at home, it would be six weeks. Now I give a concert just now and then. At some time I may go back to touring a lot. But for now I am happy with what I'm doing.

AO: What about master classes?

ML: Yes, I give master classes and I teach privately. Actually, right now, a lot of my New York students are not classical guitarists, they are professional guitarists in jazz, blues, and so forth. One blues player came to study with me and then his

buddies noticed, “Wow, you’re sounding great, what are you doing?” — “I’m studying with Michael Lorimer.” So they started studying with me too. These guitarists come to me not to study jazz or blues but to study guitar playing. They are very good musicians. One of them—the superb jazz guitarist Paul Bollenback—plays in Russia. Just last month, Paul played in Moscow and in Leningrad.

AO: It’s funny how American popular styles like jazz and rock music have always had a wealth of musical knowledge to borrow from classical guitar players, whereas it never quite happened the other way around too much. Like in technique, for example, there were huge advances in technique in the Seventies and the Eighties — things like tapping, and sweep, and innovations introduced by players like Van Halen, and Yngwie Malmsteen. But it really just went one way, which is peculiar, don’t you think?

ML: Michael Hedges, do you know him? He was a wonderful acoustic guitarist, a creative composer and player. Michael studied classical guitar too, so he combined the techniques of both guitars in his music. You can read about Michael in Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Hedges

The left hand alone technique you refer to — tapping — is a variation on the slurring technique used for *centuries* by fretboard players, both guitarists and lutenists. For example, in today’s classical hit parade there’s a beautiful piece called *Koyunbaba* written in 1985 by the Italian guitarist Carlo Domeniconi. The English guitarist John Williams has played it all over the world, and *many* young players play this piece too, as you can hear if you search on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/results?search=Search&resnum=0&oi=spell&search_query=Koyunbaba&spell=1&suggested_categories=10&sa=Xf

Left-hand alone playing is featured in *Koyunbaba* as is an alternate tuning or *scordatura* — that is, a tuning other than the usual EADGBE. Alternate tunings have been used often by guitarists such as Jimi Hendrix and Van Halen and bands like Nirvana, Black Sabbath and Sonic Youth. In the music of Michael Hedges, Alex de Grassi, and other Windham Hill guitarists, the alternate tuning sometimes seems like almost like half the piece itself. Is the *scordatura* new to classical guitar? No, it has existed for centuries. For example, 300 years ago, the French guitarist François Champion (1680–1748) wrote pieces using eight different guitar tunings.

While some of the techniques and “innovations” of jazz and rock players have been in the vocabulary of classical guitarists for centuries, you’re right, some of the rock and jazz techniques are new — especially those involving sustain, distortion, whammy bars, and other procedures based on amplification, a 20th century invention. My own interest in amplification as a compositional device is one reason I sought out the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen. In 1965, Stockhausen wrote an incredible piece called *Mikrophonie 1* for amplified

tam-tam See http://www.stockhausen.org/mikrophonie_1.html I tried unsuccessfully to get Stockhausen to write such a piece for guitar. I still think a stupendous guitar piece could be written using the techniques of *Mikrophonie 1*.

Younger generations of classical guitarists brought up on rock and jazz have brought that vocabulary into the classical guitar world. For example, the American guitarist/composer Benjamin Verdery plays classical guitar version of Jimi Hendrix's *Purple Haze*; the French guitarist/composer Roland Dyens draws a lot on pop music. The distinction between classical guitar and other styles is evaporating as the years pass.

The same thing can be said for classical music in general. In the 50s and 60s, classical composers explored serialism, extending the 12-tone ideas of the Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg to other parameters — rhythms, dynamics, tone colors, shapes of phrases, and so forth. This was epitomized in the music of composers such as Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen and others of the Darmstadt School.

In the 70s, composers moved away from that and there was a big U-turn back to tonality. Even so, composers of my age and older continued to have an uneasy relationship not only with popular music but even with what idiom they'd use to write their own music.

Meanwhile, younger composers became increasingly comfortable with using whatever musical language seemed most effective — a sort of "end-of-ideology". This has caused a big change in how people hear music. Forty years ago, an uninitiated listener's honest opinion of a concert of contemporary classical orchestral music would be, "I really don't know; I really don't understand what's going on here." Now, all sorts of wild things can be going on in such a concert and everyone seems completely at home. Whether an average listener likes it or not like it, he or she is not saying, "Hey, what's going on?" People seem to understand the language now.

Perhaps movies have helped open people's ears. If you go to a horror movie and hear something noisy and non-melodic — Kh-h-h-r-r-r Kh-r-r-wob-dop! Ban-n-n-g-g-g! — nobody goes, "I don't get this. I don't understand those sounds." They are relaxed with what they're hearing, like, "Yes, of course, this fits." Right?

An excellent Mexican composer named Ernesto García de León wrote some guitar duets which demonstrate this. He wrote this one that looks like regular music (*shows the score*), no problem at all, but he also wrote this one (*shows notation that looks intriguingly graphic and volatile*).

AO: Wow!

ML: This looks pretty wild on the page but actually it's not. In fact, one time when Ernesto was on tour, his duet partner came to him backstage before a concert and said, "We've got a problem today. Look out there and tell me what you see." Ernesto looked and he saw that the whole audience was children, the oldest one was maybe 13. Ernesto said, "No problem. We'll start with this piece." (*the one with wild notation*). "They'll understand it immediately."

AO: Because at that age they haven't developed any clichéd perceptions yet.

ML: Yeah. Ernesto and his partner walked onstage and started making noises on the guitars, whistling, clapping, and going "Bang! Whoop!" And — just as Ernesto predicted — the kids were eating out of their hands by the end of the piece. The kids loved it. (*Laughter*) What's interesting is that if you showed this score to most classical guitarists, they'd probably say, "This is the last thing we should play for kids. We have to play something really simple and obvious."

AO: To make it accessible.

ML: Yes. But Ernesto was right. You see, Ernesto grew up in a tiny town in a jungle in the state of Veracruz. He heard jungle sounds all his life. Ernesto is not a fan of the avante garde but nevertheless a contemporary music ensemble commissioned him for a guitar duet. Ernesto thought, "OK, actually this is going to be easy to do — I'll just write about the jungle. Filtering through the chaos of jungle sounds there will be distant *rumbas* and *sones* (typical music of Veracruz)." Once that idea came to Ernesto, he says the piece wrote itself at once.

AO: We've just talked about shifts in composition over the past 30 years. But in terms of *arranging* classical music for the guitar, would you say there have been any major changes over that time?

ML: Yes, indeed! When Segovia was a boy — which was in 1890s — there was a famous guitarist in Spain called Francisco Tárrega who was practically a cult figure. The classical guitar world revolved around Tárrega and, even to this day, Tárrega has a strong influence.

Segovia was *not* able to study with Tárrega and when Tárrega died, Segovia regretted not having been able to meet Tárrega or even hear him play. That's why I play two pieces by Tárrega on my 1984 album *Remembranza* — a tribute to Segovia. Long story short, Segovia began his career playing recitals in the manner of Tárrega and all guitarists at that time — in small rooms for aficionados who were specialists, like members of a local fern society or stamp collectors. (*Laughter*)

The best student of Tárrega was a Catalan named Miguel Llobet who played arrangements Tárrega had made of piano music by the Catalan composer Isaac

Albéniz. I include that also on *Remembranza*. When Segovia heard the Albéniz, he was hungry for such substantial pieces. His feeling was, "YES! This is exactly what I need!" Llobet graciously invited Segovia to Barcelona and shared his scores with Segovia, for which Segovia was always grateful.

In Barcelona, Segovia saw the Palau de la Música Catalana, an extremely beautiful auditorium where artists like the pianist Arthur Rubinstein and the violinist Jascha Heifetz were playing. Segovia said, "Why couldn't a guitarist play there too? Why couldn't I?" and the reaction was like, "A guitar in the Palau? Are you kidding?" And Segovia said, "No, no, I'm sure we can do it." Segovia got into the hall one day and had a friend to walk around while Segovia played. As Segovia expected, the friend could hear Segovia everywhere. So Segovia rented the hall and presented a guitar concert.

Before the concert, people said, "There is a guy who is going to play a GUITAR concert in the Palau. Can you imagine that? (*Laughter*) This I've got to see!"

But then Segovia played really well and the reaction changed to, "Wow, I came to see someone *attempt* to play the guitar in the Palau, and it was actually the best concert I've heard all year!" Immediately the public wanted another recital, and then another one, and then another one. I think Segovia played nine times that season in the Palau.

Segovia next thought was, "If I can do it here, why can't I do it in Paris, why can't I do it in London?" The fact that you and I are sitting here today talking is directly related to that vision of Segovia. Starting with the Palau, Segovia really put the guitar on the world's important concert stages. At the same time, recordings made it possible for people to hear the guitar in their homes, and that made them want to see the guitar played live in person. Segovia's ambition was central to this rise in the guitar's popularity.

So you were asking about arrangements. When the pianist Arthur Rubinstein performed, he played lengthy, highly developed repertoire like Beethoven's '*Waldstein*' Sonata whereas all Segovia had was charming miniatures like Tárrega's *Capricho Arabe*, the piece that begins my recording *Remembranza*. *Capricho Arabe* is very nice, but it's less than four minutes long. Segovia wanted bigger pieces. So Segovia commissioned composers who weren't guitarists to write guitar sonatas, variations, fantasias and other large-scale pieces and, at the same time, Segovia arranged bigger pieces for guitar.

Today we know that in the early 19th century — in the era of Beethoven and Schubert — guitarists *were* writing sonatas and large pieces, but nearly all of that music wasn't available to Segovia. You could find 19th century scores only in museums or with music collectors but Segovia didn't know that. What is more, while the 19th century guitarists were skilled and wrote beautiful music, they were not Beethovens and Schuberts. So in addition to commissioning new music,

Segovia started to make arrangements of large pieces. The biggest of all was the last movement of Bach's *Partita in D minor* for solo violin — a 13-minute-long set of variations called *Chaconne*. When Segovia arranged Bach's *Chaconne* it became sort of an Everest of guitar pieces.

This "translating" of music to the guitar has been continued by other guitarists, myself included. In the 70s, for example, I arranged and published all 6 of Bach's suites for solo cello. I was the first to do that. Since then, guitar arrangements of Bach's music for solo cello and solo violin have become mainstays of guitar repertoire. The extraordinary Japanese guitarist Kazuhito Yamashita arranged huge pieces like Mussorgsky's *Pictures at the Exhibition* and Dvorak's *New World Symphony* — the whole symphony on the guitar. On YouTube you can see videos from the 80s of Yamashita himself playing these pieces and also recent videos of the extraordinary Peruvian guitarist Jorge Caballero playing them, for example: <http://youtu.be/wa8Ghy1Pz2k>).

Another "big" piece that has been recently arranged for guitar is Alban Berg's *Sonata, Op. 1*. Jorge Caballero loved that piano piece and he's recently made an exquisite arrangement for guitar. I imagine that when jazz players hear this they'll say, "Wow, listen to those harmonies!"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKFktMpTPtQ>

Leo Brouwer is a Cuban who since the 70s has contributed much to the guitar — as a player, a composer, an arranger, a conductor, a teacher, an organizer and participant in guitar festivals worldwide, and as an inspiration to generations of young players. I was going to mention Leo when you asked me about my program in the Soviet Union.

Leo was a star in the communist world, as an artist, composer, guitar player — everything. In the 70s, Leo went to the Soviet Union playing a program in which he paired something old with something new. For example, a 16th century piece and an analogous contemporary piece — two pieces separated by centuries which, in Leo's mind, were similar. Leo's whole program was pairs like that. After Leo played in Moscow and in Leningrad, Gosconcert asked, "Do you think you could change your program? We were hoping that you were going to play a more traditional program. We don't know if our audience is ready for this." Leo said, "No, I don't think so. This program is what I planned." Gosconcert's reply was, "OK. That's it. You have to go back to Cuba." (*Laughter*)

AO: Really?

ML: Yeah. (*Laughter*). Gosconcert cancelled the rest of the tour and Leo went back to Cuba. Leo has always been very creative; he was a composer even when he was a teenager. When the Cuban revolution occurred, much of the guitar music in print became unavailable to Cubans, for young guitar players

especially. Leo said, "We can't get guitar music from outside? OK, we'll just write our own."

Leo contributed pieces he'd already written and he started writing *many* more guitar pieces, music now played by guitarists all over the world. Leo also went to various countries like Mexico where young guitarists like Ernesto García de León got to know him. In Mexico in the 70s, for example, the general view of the guitar was Segovia, period. But along came Leo, a young guy from a communist country who played Segovia's repertoire, but who also played cutting edge, wild new pieces and actually wrote his own music. By his example and by his words, Leo's message to young players was, "Why don't you do the same as me? Why don't you write your own music?"

Leo has been a very, very strong influence in getting a whole generation of players to compose new music for the guitar." I talk about that in the Uruguayan guitarist Eduardo Fernández's interview of me in the Italian guitar magazine // *Fronimo*.

Eduardo is not only knowledgeable about the guitar, he is actually one of the best players in South America. Not just a good player, but one of the very best. See: http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=eduardo+fernandez+guitar&aq=1&oq=eduardo+Fern

Eduardo's not so impressed with the recent compositional efforts of guitarists other than Leo. As you can see in the interview, Eduardo asks my opinion, and then he turns the tape recorder off and says something like, "Well, that was a nice way of saying it Michael, but for the most part I don't go for this music at all."

Eduardo might say if you want to play classical guitar, and play it really well, you have to have instruction and you have to study extremely hard to excel. You can't just say, "Oh, I'm more-or-less self-taught" or "I like to play things my way."

Composition is similar. You can't just say, "Oh, I like to write my own songs." There is HUGE difference between "writing my own songs" and actually being a fine composer. A composer has technique in the same way musical performers or athletes who are capable of extraordinary things have technique.

For example, if you said to a fine composer like William Bolcom, "Here are four notes, write a piece," he could do it because of his technique. Whereas a guy who "writes his own songs" would play the four notes and he would be done. (*Laughter*).

So I am sympathetic to what Eduardo is saying. For example, Eduardo plays the Argentinean composer Alberto Ginastera's guitar *Sonata*. In this masterpiece, Ginastera writes Argentinean tangos but in a way similar to how Pablo Picasso might paint a tree that doesn't look just like a tree — or a face in which you can

identify an eye, a nose and a mouth, but it does not look exactly like a person's face.

AO: At a different angle...

ML: Yes, an impression, where you see all at once, in one plane, views which in real life you would have to see one-at-a-time. Ginastera takes a tango, snips off a rhythm, writes it down, repeats it three times, turns it upside down and sidewise, and so forth until in the end you hear something that sounds like Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* but has the feel of and alludes to being a tango. When a guitarist/composer — someone who "writes his own songs" — comes along, it's a stretch for Eduardo to be interested in his music or even to think of the guitarist as a "composer" when for Eduardo "composer" means a musician with the knowledge, technique and talent of Ginastera.

AO: When people wrote music for you, how did the process work? Could you go back to them and say, "I'd like to introduce adjustments?"

ML: For sure. Not only did I go back to them, but they were begging me to do that. Because for Bolcom — for many of the composers who wrote for me — the guitar is a mysterious, scary instrument.

AO: Stockhausen didn't know much about the guitar before he met you, did he?

ML: No, nothing. Bolcom was the same. They have no problem writing huge, complex orchestral pieces, but the guitar — where do you start? First, I show composers what a guitar can do and then I get them over their fear: "Here are things that the guitar can do. You can do this. Here's how. Yes!" Then, when the composer has written something, I might come back and say, "OK, what you wrote sounds like this. But I think what you want sounds like THIS." And they always say, "That's right!" (*Laughter*).

AO: Would you have any arguments?

ML: No.

AO: No?

ML: No. Never. They can hear right away and say, "That's what I want." To give you an example, Bolcom wrote a tango for guitar and flute, and he asked me to edit the guitar part. On the piano, when you play tangos, you often play pickups by playing a fast three-, four-, or five note scale to make a sound like, "R-R-r-rum-pa-pum-pum, R-R-r-rum-pa-pum-pum." That's very idiomatic on piano, easy-to-play and sonorous. So that's what Bolcom wrote on the score, scales. But if you do something like that on the guitar... (*picks up the guitar*)... it sounds like this. (*demonstrates on the guitar*) That's not bad, but it doesn't have anywhere near

the potency, the grrrr, the “R-R-rum” of the sound on the piano. There's no way you can get that impact, no matter how good a guitarist you are. And you use up a lot of fingers just to make that unimpressive sound. I said to Bill, “What I think you really want is something that sounds like this” (*plays a strum*). As soon as he heard it, Bill said, “Absolutely, yes, *that's* what I want.”

On paper, a strum and a scale look completely different, but in terms of *effect* that piano scale sounds better on the guitar as a strum. The spirit of the gesture is what's important, not the notes.

Look at this guitar solo a composer sent me a week ago. She has a part which is like an invocation, here's the guitar giving the invocation, and then there is a melody which appears here. Look at the dynamics. Here: mezzo-forte. But on the guitar, no matter how hard you play, this register is weak. (*Picks up the guitar and plays three notes high up the fretboard*). And then she writes this (*plays a few notes on the basses*) which is supposed to be quiet, it's the accompaniment. I told her, “Those dynamics won't work,” and she said, “No problem, I'll just change the dynamics.”

But changing the dynamics would change the entire structure. So I said, “Actually, you should consider transposing all of the melody down, so instead of sounding like this (*plays a passage that starts high up the neck and ends on the lower part of the fretboard*) which is weak, it should sound like this (*plays the entire passage lower on the guitar neck*) where we really have a strong register on the guitar.”

I'm basically taking her two parts and reversing them, turning them upside down, but the result is the spirit and relationships of parts she originally wrote. And ultimately that's what a composer wants — the feeling of the music, the atmosphere. The notes are just the means of getting to the spirit. Considerably changing the notes she wrote, she'll get the atmosphere and spirit she wants; tweaking the notes she started out with, she will never achieve that.

AO: What else are you working at the moment apart from this score?

ML: Ernesto García de León and I have been working on two books for over a year, and we are a few of e-mails short of being able to send them to the printer. In addition, I have some books that are sold out which I want to reprint. One is the Puerto Rican composer Ernesto Cordero's beautiful *Caribbean Nocturnes*. For the original book, I wrote the notes in English, but I've always thought they should be in Spanish too. In the reprint, we will have both languages. Another project is a collection of studies by an American composer named John Lennon (his full name is John Anthony Lennon) who has written a lot of guitar music and, actually, he looks like John Lennon too, (*Laughter*)

AO: How bizarre!

ML: He does. *(Laughter)*. If you saw him, you might think, “Oh, this might be a cousin of Lennon’s.” John has written 6 books I’ve published, and we’re working on a new book. Then, of course, I’m always working on the guitar itself — to play it well.

AO: How do you maintain your technique? Does it still require everyday practice?

ML: I try to practice every day. When I don’t have a concert coming up, I have to admit that I get a little lazy or, let’s say, distracted. I spend all day working on one of my books, for example. But when I’m playing concerts, then I’m playing every day.

AO: Your Baroque guitar — does that require any practice?

ML: Yes, it does. Have you ever seen a Baroque guitar?

AO: I’ve seen some pictures online and they look fascinating.

ML: Here is a little flyer. *(Shows a flyer picturing Lorimer with a Baroque guitar)*.

AO: Is that a replica or an original instrument?

ML: Yes, it’s a copy of guitar originally built for one of the daughters of the French king Louis XIV. You can see guitars of princess’s in museums. In the Metropolitan Museum there are guitars actually made by Voboam who built the princess’s guitar.

The Metropolitan also has two important guitars of Segovia. When Segovia first performed in Madrid he wanted to play an excellent guitar but he was poor so he asked Manuel Ramirez, owner of Madrid’s best guitar store, if he could *rent* a guitar. When Ramirez heard Segovia trying out guitars, Ramirez said, “Rent a guitar? Because you play as you do, I will give you a guitar.” Segovia essentially started his career on that guitar which you can now see in the Metropolitan Museum. *(A Manuel Ramirez workshop guitar, 1912 — GM)*

Later the German builder Hermann Hauser made a guitar that Segovia said was the best he ever played. It’s the guitar you hear on many of Segovia’s greatest recordings. That guitar is now in the Metropolitan Museum too.

Here is a picture of me 44 years ago in Spain. This town is just east of where Segovia lived. Segovia lived right over that hill. This man is the son of the Hauser who built Segovia’s guitar. His name is Hermann too and he was also a famous builder. If you own one of his guitars, now it’s worth about forty thousand dollars. The girl in my arms is Hauser’s daughter, the older sister of Hermann 3, who is

today's Hauser. Hermann 3 was there with us in Spain too and was 10 years old. In my opinion, Hermann 3 is stupendous — he is unsurpassed by Hauser 1 or Hauser 2, perhaps he's the greatest of all Hausers.

That's the line of Hauser. For classical guitars you'll see Hauser-style this and Hauser-style that. Hauser for guitars is like Stradivarius for violin.

This is a Hauser guitar made by the man in the picture. (*Shows a guitar*). You see these? (*Points to ripples in the top wood grain*). In German, they're called *haselfichte*. (See http://www.google.com/search?tbm=isch&hl=en&source=hp&biw=1280&bih=936&q=haselfichte&gbv=2&oq=haselfich&aq=0S&aqi=g-S1&aql=1&gs_sm=c&gs_upl=11481332110170901918101313101239193710.4.11510)

The Hausers have felt that wood with *haselfichte* is special. When Hauser 2 made this guitar, he thought that it was going to be his last. In the end, he made a few more — five or so — but when he built this one, he felt it was going to be his last, and it was for me. He took the very best wood from his father's stash of wood — part of the Hauser patrimony for generations — for this guitar. This is an extraordinary top. And then this — you see how the grains are tight on the guitar's entire back? (*Shows the back of the guitar*). This is Brazilian rosewood. When the grains are all together like that, it's called quarter-sawn. A piece of quarter-sawn Brazilian rosewood like that you cannot find for any amount of money. It just doesn't exist now.

AO: What about the top?

ML: It's spruce wood.

AO: Which year was this guitar made in?

ML: 1973. It's an extraordinary, beautiful guitar.

AO: Tell us about your Baroque guitar.

ML: My adventures with the Baroque guitar began in 1965 when I played on the American scholar, harpsichordist and conductor Alan Curtis's recording of Claudio Monteverdi's 17th century opera *Poppea*. This was the first recording ever of a complete Baroque opera played on original instruments. Before Curtis's recording, modern violins, modern singing techniques, and so forth had been used, sometimes even a piano instead of a harpsichord. For the recording, I played a large 17th century-style lute called *chitarrone* which, as the name implies, is a huge guitar — a guitar with an extra outrigger, a neck with 5 or 6 foot long bass strings. See http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&sugexp=kjrmc&cp=8&gs_id=u&xhr=t&q=c

hitarrone&safe=off&biw=1280&bih=936&gs_sm=&gs_upl=&bav=on.2.or.r_gc.r_p_w.,cf.osb&um=1&ie=UTF-8&tbm=isch&source=og&sa=N&tab=wi

The particular *chitarra* I played was the very first built in the 20th century and it was made especially for the recording. Alan Curtis's teacher, the great Dutch harpsichordist and conductor Gustav Leonhardt came over at that time too.

Hearing the sounds of the instruments and singing in *Poppea* and hearing Curtis and Leonhardt play the harpsichord planted a certain lilt and air in my ear for Baroque music. And when I played Baroque music on modern guitar, no matter what I did, I couldn't make it sound right. By the end of the 60s, I had given up on playing Baroque music on the modern guitar. But in 1970 I got a Baroque guitar and everything worked perfectly and I thought "OK. Now I understand! Obviously, playing this music on the Baroque guitar is the way to go!"

For several years, I played various copies of Baroque guitars, but the sound was never quite right — next to my modern guitars, the Baroque guitars sounded like toys. How could I ever play the modern and the early guitars in the same concert? I finally decided to choose one particular historical guitar and ask the best living builder Nico van der Waals to copy it precisely, 100%. I visited museums in Europe and the guitar I finally chose to copy was an instrument built by the greatest builder of the 17th century for a daughter of the French king Louis XIV who, incidentally, was an avid guitar player as was the English King Charles II. Imagine if Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin were not only fans of the guitar, but avid players who counted among their dearest friends the best guitar players of our time. The Kings Louis and Charles were guitarists, fans, and best friends with the best guitarists of their age. Anyway, I chose the princess's guitar because I thought, "She has a guitar built by the greatest guitar builder of the age. And she could afford anything. Why does she have such a *plain* guitar?"

My guess for the answer to that question was that the princess intended to *play* the guitar. Her guitar wasn't just an ornament, it was an instrument for a player. I figured, "This is a real player's guitar, let's copy it." And, indeed, the copy sounded *great*, every bit as good as any modern guitar, not at all like a toy.

My playing the Baroque guitar and the beautiful music and sound of that guitar made other guitarists think, "Wow, I'd like to do that too." Now it's not so uncommon to see people play Baroque guitar.

But today most Baroque guitarists are early music specialists who also play the renaissance lute, an instrument which is best played without fingernails. So most Baroque guitar recordings have been made by players who play without fingernails. Listeners naturally think the sound of these recordings made on "original" instruments is authentic, that's the real sound of the Baroque guitar. Actually there is no historical evidence whatsoever that the Baroque guitar was

ever played without fingernails. All historical engravings and paintings of Baroque guitarists show fingernails.

Now that I've had more than 40 years of experience playing Baroque guitar, I would have no problem playing its music on the modern guitar. That's thanks to understanding through the early guitar how the Baroque sound can be created on the modern guitar.

The Baroque guitar is important not only for its own sake but also because of the living fossils of that guitar still with us, still part of today's music.

For example, Ernesto García de León's brother Antonio is a famous *sonero*, a singer of popular music in Veracruz called *son*. One *son* known the world over, for example, is "La Bamba." On YouTube, you can see that Antonio is playing one of those Baroque guitars. <http://youtu.be/5cXy0IMtmlw> Antonio's guitar has 5 courses like the 17th century guitars and it has the 17th century tuning. If you strum across the strings from one side to the other you hear high notes, going to low notes, going back to high notes. It's the "my dog has fleas" tuning you hear on ukuleles, *charangos*, *cavaquinhos*, all of those instruments — little dinosaurs, living fossils of the early guitar. Language was the same. For example, in the 17th century Spanish was spoken in a certain way and then the pronunciation changed in Spain, so today's Spanish in Spain is not like 17th century Spanish. But in parts of South America, you can still hear the 17th century Spanish.

Another example — before Antonio starts singing, do you hear the word "Decimas"? Antonio is saying, "Now I am going to sing for you some Decimas." That's a poetic form from the 17th and 18th centuries. For example, here's a facsimile of an 18th century guitar book I have published. This page is in the handwriting of the composer, see what it says. (*Shows the book*).

AO: "Decimas"... Amazing.

ML: When I was recently in Veracruz, I went to dinner with some people, normal people, just a regular dinner. But when the meal finished, one woman — a regular society woman in a nice dress and all — announced, "And now I would like to recite some Decimas. And she did.

Wow, I thought. This is something that hasn't existed since the 18th century — only here.

It would be like going to a dinner in Texas or somewhere with normal people and having someone announce at the end of the meal, "And now I would like to recite some sonnets." and proceed to declaim poetry in the style of Shakespeare while everyone present sat around listening — as if reciting sonnets were normal behavior for the end of a dinner.

While I was in Veracruz, I went to the house of Antonio and Ernesto's sister. Her husband had one of those guitars Antonio plays hanging on the wall. I took the guitar down and started playing 17th century music from the court of Louis XIV. I could do that because the Veracruz guitar is identical to the Baroque guitar. The Mexicans were amazed, "Look at Michael play: a) He's a Gringo, a white guy, and he knows how to play our guitar?, and b) Michael knows how to play it like THAT? Wow!" (*Laughter*).

AO: Must have turned their entire concept of the world upside down.

ML: Yes, it was as if a Mongolian turned up in Mississippi or something...

AO: ... and played the blues?

ML: Right — just took the guitar down and not only played the blues, but like, "Wow, this guy is Robert Johnson the Second!" You know? (*Laughter*). "Not only is he good, but that's the best blues playing I've ever heard."

AO: For how long have you been playing? Since what age?

ML: Since I was 10. So that would be 55 years.

AO: What inspired you to pick up the guitar? Why the guitar?

ML: Why the guitar? The first instrument I wanted to play since I was 5 years old was the harp. I loved its sound.

AO: Where did you first see the harp?

ML: I heard a harp and I wanted to play harp. And it's curious — when I was in my 40s I learned that my great-grandfather had five sisters all of whom were harp players. (*Laughter*).

AO: Spooky!

ML: So that sound is probably in my genes. But I didn't play harp because I thought — and this is the type of kid I was — "OK, if I ask for a harp and then I don't like it, I am going hear for the rest of my life about the harp. 'We bought you a harp, we spent all this money, and you don't play the harp!'" (*Laughter*). So I didn't even ask. The next instrument that caught my ear was bluegrass banjo. Wow! I loved that.

AO: Do you play the banjo?

ML: No, I don't. But, actually, the banjo is another one of those fossils of the 17th century guitar. It's a 17th century guitar with wire strings on it and also the five strings. And it has the same high-low-high kind of tuning.

Then I heard the harpsichord on the radio. It was Bach and I thought it was heavenly. Once again, we did not have a harpsichord and I had never seen one. I had no concept of what a harpsichord even looked like.

Then, when I was 10, my father brought a guitar home. He was a lawyer but he was an amateur musician; he'd bring home a plastic flute one week and another instrument the next. He had lots of talent but no patience. When he brought the guitar home, I thought this was a new low in his musical Odyssey — "A guitar? Come on! Why does he want to play guitar?" (*Laughter*).

I associated the guitar with cowboy music, and I couldn't figure out how that fit with my father. He had enrolled in a class in classical guitar at a local high school and one Friday night he brought home an album of Segovia. (*Shows the "Andrés Segovia, guitar: Bach: Chaconne" Decca Records LP*). My father said, "This is by Andrés Segovia, the world's greatest guitarist."

On the LP, Segovia plays Bach. When I heard the music, I heard the harpsichord sounds, and I couldn't believe it was a guitar. I examined the album sleeve very carefully expecting it would reveal some trick of production such as overdubs. I couldn't imagine that one person playing one guitar could achieve that sound.

By Saturday morning I thought, "Well, OK, I should learn the guitar." So I took my father's chord books — probably not right, probably not at all connected with classical guitar, I thought. But then I figured, "At this point, any step I make is one step forward." I started by learning a simple chord progression. By Sunday afternoon, I had surpassed what my father had done in the previous 3 weeks. That terminated his guitar career: "In one weekend, my ten-year-old has outstripped what's taken me 3 weeks. OK! That's it, you take the guitar!" (*Laughter*).

That's how I started. In a nutshell, it was because I had this desire for the sound of the plucked string, then I heard Segovia and realized, "Oh, the guitar can do that." And we had a guitar right there.

AO: Did you have a clear musical goal or a musical ambition when you were growing up?

ML: I always wanted to play as well as I could. There were certain pieces that I wanted just for my love of the music itself, just a pure appreciation of its beauty. But, at the same time, I realized that I needed to challenge myself, so I also looked for pieces that would advance my playing skills. I always had those two things running side by side. And then, when I studied with Segovia, I actually

could hear how Segovia sounded up close. That had a tremendous impact on me. I had already attended his concerts and studied his recordings. One thing that was extremely important to me — I noticed that when Segovia played, the guitar sounded like a little orchestra. In other words, there were multiple levels. How do you do that on the guitar? When you play Bach, how do you make it sound like two or more instruments?

AO: The polyphonic thing.

ML: Yes. In a word, how do you do what's called *balance*. If you play a chord that has four notes, for example, they are all equal-sized black dots on a musical score, but they are not in truth equal. There should be a focus. And it is essential to choose the right focus and produce it on the guitar. That was a big goal for me for a long time. And then there is the issue of *legato*. That means smooth playing and it is not easy to do on the guitar. Today, there are a lot of talented players who can play a lot of notes. But they don't have anywhere near the coherence that Segovia had. To me, their playing is too often like a lot of fragments and shards of phrases rather than the one simple, clear, non-breaking line Segovia had.

AO: "Wall of sound" they would probably call it these days.

ML: I am not sure about that. About *legato*, Segovia said it this way: "The guitar is an instrument that naturally sounds like this." (*Makes a jagged sine wave pattern with his hand*). "...and our goal is to make it sound like this." (*Runs his hand in the air in gently undulating line*). About *balance*, Segovia said: "I am sitting here, you are sitting there, and the other students are sitting over there. You cannot be in all three places at the same time. In the same way, you must observe the various levels in the music."

So *how* do you do what Segovia was talking about? First, it has to do with your ear, what you *want* to hear, and then how you control the timbre and the levels on the instrument. Segovia was a master at that.

I've always been interested in a wide variety of repertoire. I loved old music, not only Bach, but before that. That eventually led to my playing the 17th century guitar. Then there is the traditional guitar repertoire from the time of Haydn and Mozart, what is called classical guitar music because the modern guitar, the 6-string guitar, was born during the years known as the classical period of music. Music written at that time and subsequently — all the repertoire that Segovia played — all of that interested me.

I love the masterpieces composed from the 1960s onward for the great English guitarist Julian Bream — for example, Benjamin Britten's *Nocturnal* and Hans Werner Henze's many guitar works. And, of course, I have devoted myself to the

music written for me by many American composers — Albright, Bassett, Bolcom, Curtis-Smith, Lennon, Major, Musgrave, Neil, and others.

The myriad forms in which nationalism flourished in music at the end of the 19th century has been important to my repertoire. In Spain, there was Albéniz, of course, whose music and whose inspiration to younger composers has been so important for the guitar. In the USA, we had ragtime. Scott Joplin, for example, is playing 2/4 European marches with African syncopation, isn't he? The gumbo of cultures manifest in ragtime is uniquely American, something that could only have been born in America. In Brazil, at exactly the same time, there was a similar creation — the Brazilian tango. Argentina, as everyone knows, had its own tango. In Mexico, there were the *canciones mexicanas*. In Venezuela, the *vals venezolano*. All this music is beautiful on the guitar.

AO: My last question is about Segovia. These days he is almost a mythical figure, and a lot of his students are reminiscing about how it was to be in his class. How challenging it was. Would you care to share HOW challenging it was to be his student? WAS it challenging? And if so, in what way?

ML: I would say it was challenging for me because I always wanted to play my best. We all did. If you were honest, you were also saying, “Well, this is not quite good enough.” I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to study with Segovia.

A lot of my thoughts and feelings about studying with Segovia I've expressed in my article "Segovia the Teacher" which Segovia's manager Sol Hurok asked me to write and which Segovia liked very much. When Segovia read it, he said that he was touched. Actually, there are YouTube videos of Segovia's master classes, including one of me taking a lesson with Segovia, where you can get a flavor of how it was. (YouTube link: http://youtu.be/bq_Hn7HUPoc).

Basically, the attitude of many of the students was that Segovia was simply a genius, the sound he had nobody can ever get, that's just him. But my attitude was, “Why? Segovia has fingers and he plays the guitar. Unless there is something special about his guitar or something that I don't know, why can't I learn to play like that?”

In one class, I asked Segovia, “Would you play my guitar?” And at that point, everyone cringed, the other students were like, “Oh my, Michael didn't ask *that*, did he?” (*Laughter*). But Segovia said, “OK.” and took my guitar and played it. I got to hear Segovia playing my guitar. It's a scientific thing, you know. I thought, “OK, what's the difference? How can I do that?” That was an important lesson for me. (*Laughter*).

The challenge for me was that I knew that my opportunity, my time with Segovia, was limited. I always did what I could to make the most of the time. For example,

students would come to class and Segovia would go, "No, play it this way, finger it here." He would spend a lot of time showing them fingerings.

I thought, "Total waste of time!" You can listen to Segovia's record and get the fingerings. For example, if you listen, the first string sounds different from the second string, and the second string sounds different from the third. If you listen, you can hear exactly how Segovia is putting his fingers on the strings. Any guitarist can *still* do that. In that way, through Segovia's recordings, any reader of *Guitars Magazine* can have personal one-on-one lessons with Segovia.

So I used to copy all his fingerings off his records, so when I showed up Segovia never had to show me fingerings: "That's done." Basically, I did everything I could beforehand so that I could maximize my moments with Segovia and we could really dig into the music.

In 1967, Segovia invited me to study with him in Granada for the whole summer. There were no other students and that was the only time Segovia invited a student to do that. That summer I got to hear Segovia practice.

AO: Did he practice exercises?

ML: Sure, he did at times but when I heard him, he didn't. For example, he was working on a concerto one day, a concerto that I knew. He was getting ready — he had to play it in a few months. Many players play a little bit until they make a mistake or encounter a rough passage. Then they correct the mistake or repeat the passage until they get it right and continue.

Segovia didn't do that. If he made a mistake, he'd just keep right on playing. It was like watching someone swim laps in a pool. Segovia would get to the end of the pool, turn around and come back. As he returned, when he passed the same point he played it better. He kept going through the piece, always maintaining his power and buoyancy of rhythm. There was tremendous force and energy in his playing. He caught the concerto on the fly like that.

Segovia showed me exercises that he played, but mostly he practiced by making the pieces sound the way he wanted.

I've known a lot of guitarists in my life, as you might expect. But I've never known one — not one — who worked harder than Segovia.

Another thing almost unique about Segovia is this: if you get together with guitarists, there is usually a lot of shop talk: "I played at this festival." and "I'm making this recording," and so forth. Segovia? Not at all. He never talked shop. Instead he would talk about this or that piece of music by Manuel Ponce or other composers — but especially Ponce. Segovia loved Ponce above all the other composers who wrote pieces for him. Segovia was so focused on music, he

loved it so much. That's something I might not have known unless I had had the chance to spend so much time with him, not just in classes.

The essence of Segovia was in his work and in his concerts. His recordings were always a kind of an afterthought. Some artists concentrate on their latest record and then go out and play a tour. That's often done — record, then tour. But Segovia would play pieces for years first. When his record company would remind him, "You have to us make a record," it seems that Segovia would pull pieces he already knew out of his hat: "This would be a nice combination." And it was!

So I don't think Segovia concentrated on his recordings the way he focused on his concerts. I think the pianist Arthur Rubinstein was a bit like that too. To actually hear Arthur Rubinstein live was stunning. And if you listen to his recordings, you'll have to say they're excellent, but not quite as "Wow, this is spectacular." as his concerts were.

AO: Do you think it's conceivable that somebody somewhere has a bootleg recording of Segovia live that we've never heard?

ML: Yes, for sure. Especially in countries like Italy where they record things all the time. I've seen some live recordings of concerts that have appeared since Segovia's death, and I am interested in them because I'm interested in everything that he did. But I haven't heard one recording that was a revelation. If you find a bootleg Segovia recording, it will have pieces that are on his albums. You won't be surprised.

It's different, say, from pop music. If you get a bootleg recording of Bob Dylan playing in one city, he might play the same song in the next city in a very different way: "Wow, I'm really glad we got this bootleg because this performance is *completely* different."

You won't find that with Segovia. He worked on things very much knowing exactly what he wanted.

In a way, the range for fooling around is a lot less in classical music. This sometimes leads people who don't play classical music to think that playing classical music must be boring: You play the same notes every time. How interesting can that be? (*Laughter*). Whereas a jazz player is improvising every time, it's completely different and fresh.

Actually, the reality is not that way at all. If Segovia were here and played a piece and then immediately played it again, he would play it differently. And if he played it again, it would be different again. Every daisy looks the same, right? Boring! Not really. Every daisy is unique and exquisite.

AO: Someone once said that it's like saying that all Oriental people look the same.

ML: Yes, exactly. And, actually, the fact that we play the same notes is nothing. It would be like saying, "Segovia plays that piece, and here is a guy who can play the same piece in the same amount of time, just as loud, so isn't it the same?" (*Laughter*). He plays it in 4 minutes and 16 seconds, same as Segovia. It's the same.

Really? NOT the same at all. Not even close.

So what's the difference? If two players both play the same piece in the same time, on the same guitar, with the same notes, why is one so different from the other? That's what performance of classical music is about. It's not the notes, it's how you put them together, the silences, the whole flow, how you capture the spirit, everything. And the differences between performances are not small, they're *huge* — as in being in different planetary systems.

Some jazz players who study with me start out with the idea that playing the same thing every time is not creative and must be incredibly dull. The more they learn what you can do with the guitar the more that view changes. Sometimes they really get hooked by the classical guitar and say, "I wish I had started on this from the beginning. Classical guitar is really all I want to play now."

It's the same with orchestras. If you hear two orchestras perform Beethoven's *5th Symphony*, for example, they're both going to be playing exactly the same notes. But the focus and the importance of levels I've talked about might be so crystal-clear and compelling with one orchestra, and just a blur with the other.

So, getting back to bootleg recordings, yes, it would be interesting to hear everything that Segovia did, of course. But there not going to be any revelations as in, say, Bob Dylan's *Basement Tapes*.

AO: Our readers will discover a completely different universe when this interview is published.

ML: That's great. When *Guitar Player* magazine invited me to contribute a monthly column, there were usually guys on the cover that I had never heard of. (*Laughter*). I don't live in that world, although some of those players I certainly respect. It was a challenge to write articles interesting for classical guitarists that would also be interesting to fans of, say, heavy metal. I decided to answer the kinds of questions people ask in classes or backstage after concerts. In the end I found a way to write articles everyone could read and get something out of. My monthly column was successful. In fact, people are still asking for those columns and using reprints for their teaching. The very first article was one I had written previously *Segovia the Teacher*. With that, I tipped my hat to my Maestro while

he was still alive and active. From there, I went on to talk about performance. How do you make the guitar speak well? How do you put together an interesting concert program? Stage fright — how do you deal with that? Stage fright is an issue everyone, not just guitarists, can relate to. While on tour, I saw my stage fright article posted under glass in the lobby of the University of Michigan School of Music — one of the best music schools in the USA. I wrote that item and all of my columns from the experience of having done it, not from theory, but from real experience.