



The Berkshire Guitar Society

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Newsletter No 118

June 2003

CONTENTS

May meeting

BGS News

Other news

Web site of the month

And Finally

**** Next meeting Sunday 8th June ****

Ensemble evening

May meeting

The Society's meeting on Sunday May 11th was intended as a rehearsal of music to be played at the Spanish Circle later in the month and it certainly fulfilled that function as well as providing much entertainment along the way.

However as the main event of the month was the Spanish Circle on Friday 23rd that's what I'll concentrate on.

This was the first time I had attended this event and for me coming from Woking the evening got off to a good start when I actually managed for the first time to successfully navigate myself through Reading to Caversham on the other side of the river without taking any wrong turnings - I did that on the way back. Never mind.

The Adult Education Centre provided a basic but welcoming environment including a room that could be used for practice, which was immediately put to good use as we rehearsed our ensemble piece, the Chorinho provided (and part arranged) by George MacDonald. Having joined the audience, the Chorinho was our first piece of the evening, and having distributed ourselves round the room (itself no mean task, considering the paraphernalia of footstools and music stands that us classical guitarists carry around with us, never mind our need to be comfortably seated) the benefits of our practice were apparent as the piece went off very well. (I do believe that our host read the wrong introduction in Spanish to this piece, but it takes more than that to put us off).

I then played Torija from Moreno-Torroba's "Castles of Spain", a piece that belongs to collaboration with Segovia at a time when the latter was trying to elevate the profile of the Spanish guitar.

George MacDonald followed with a piece by the famous Spanish poet Federico Lorca, El Cafe de Chinitas. Now by this time it was unlikely that anyone had already fallen asleep, but if so they were certainly stirred from their slumbers by the opening chords to James' flamenco piece "Alegrías por Rosa". June took the stage next and was one of a number of brave souls who provided their own introduction in Spanish, in June's case to 3 pieces by Peter Nuttall, "Lazy Afternoon", "Stomp" and "Night Piece".

Tim Parke (after another introduction in Spanish) played Granados "Danza Española No 5" and Villa Lobos "Choros No 1", two

pieces from the repertoire that were appreciated by all present. Gary then warmed up with Tarrega's Mazurka before playing a Paraguayan piece, "Carnavalito" by Zaldívar, arranged by Jorge Morel, which with its highly evocative Andean rhythms provided an excellent close to the first half of the evening.

After a short interval Steve Tucker resumed the entertainment with "Garrotin", a flamenco dance by Turina. We then had a total change of mood with a blues by Charlie Byrd which as Steve pointed out eminently qualified for the evening by virtue of its title - "Spanish Guitar Blues". Steve's 13 year old son Chris who holds Grade 5 then played us Lauro's "La Gatica".

Richard Butters then took the stage along with Gary to provide us with a number of traditional Spanish Folk songs (Villancico, Bolero de Valldemosa, Fandango, Por un Beso and Joropo). That is, after another introduction in Spanish which seemed to be appreciated by the audience - I for one didn't have a clue what Richard was talking about.

Last, but certainly not least, came Andy Scott, who preceded his performance with an impressive sounding introduction in Spanish before playing us several flamenco pieces.

Now I don't doubt that at least some of us understood what Andy was saying but for the benefit of anyone other than me who had no idea, Andy has kindly provided a summary of his intro which I reproduce here:

"Flamenco is made up of many styles known as Palos. Each palo has its own particular feeling and characteristics. The Palos that I played were Soleares, Bulerías and Sevillanas.

Soleares is one of the more serious Palos (the more profound Palos are known collectively as cante jondo - profound song) and is full of dark emotions such as sadness, loneliness and love lost. It does however have an element of hope as well, so it is not quite the same feeling of total desperation found in for instance seguidillas.

Bulerías, known as the 'fin de fiesta' since it is often played at the end of a performance, has a powerful driving rhythm

which is much faster than that of Soleares. It is much lighter in emotion (belonging to the group cante chico - the less serious Palos), and has a festive feel to it, often playful or even cheeky. However it is very powerful and compelling, and to me it will always be the king of flamenco.

Sevillanas is not usually considered to be flamenco, but Andalusian folk music. It is often classified as cante a flamencado (song influenced by flamenco), but may also be classed as cante chico, depending on which classification is used. The song has a much more rigid structure than most other Palos. Four songs are played together, (they may be all the same or four different ones) each song having a brief rhythmic introduction, (to alert the dancers) followed by three verses. It is nearly always danced in pairs and is very beautiful to watch".

For the record, Andy played a Soleares, a Bolereas, and 4 Savillanas which went down really well with the audience.

A thoroughly entertaining evening, which was enjoyed by the our hosts as well as our own participants. Never mind the music, one of the most interesting points for me given the amount of Spanish spoken was the realisation that so many of our members must spend their Spanish holidays doing things other than lying on the beach drinking Rioja!

The only downside was the relatively small audience from the Spanish Circle, with only about a dozen or so attendees. However as we all know attendance at society meetings can vary and by the time those that came have pointed out what was missed, hopefully any future occasions will see a larger audience.

Thanks to all those participating and especially to George for his efforts with the Chorinho.

BGS News

NEXT MEETING

The next BGS meeting on Sunday June 8th (South Hill Park @ 7.30 pm) will be an ensemble evening, where we break down into groups of 3 or 4 to play pieces from the society's extensive library. These sessions are invariably good fun, so don't forget to come along - you just need to bring your guitar unless there is a solo piece you want to play - in which case, bring it along.

CALENDAR UPDATE

The presentation on guitar making that had to be re-arranged will now take place in July - so the diary for July now looks like this:

Sunday July 13th - 7.30 pm:

Guitar making presentation and members evening (no particular theme) to be held as normal at South Hill Park.

Sunday July 27th - 2.00 pm:

Summer barbeque to be held at James's & June's residence. Further details to be provided in the next newsletter.

Please make sure that your diary is up to date!

Web site of the month

You might have been practising your Spanish this month, unfortunately for this month's web site you are going to need some German. The good news is that you don't need much as you will see when you direct your browser at <http://mitglied.lycos.de/thomaskoenigs/>.

According to the website, Thomas Koenigs teaches in Germany and if you click on the downloads link on the homepage (helpfully subtitled "free downloads") you will find yourself at a list of files that includes Koenig's arrangements of many repertoire works by Albeniz, Bach, and Tarrega to pick a few of the available composers. This is as good a "classical" list as I've seen so far in my surfing the web for this spot in the newsletter. Clicking on the file hyperlink downloads a zip file which when you unzip ("Winzip" or equivalent software required) creates a pdf file which can be read with Adobe Acrobat. While I haven't tried to play any of these arrangements they do seem to be of a high quality and the site is well worth a look.

The home page also provides some links to excerpts from some of Koenig's CDs which make it clear (at least to my ear) that he is a player of some accomplishment.

Other news

To continue the month's Spanish theme, I know some of you are fans of Juan Martin and have his instructional books on flamenco guitar.

This month's Classical Guitar magazine carries a review of a new tutor by Juan Martin, which the CG reviewer highly recommends. The book is apparently a graded collection of pieces in a variety of flamenco styles and is accompanied by a CD and a video or DVD.

For anyone wishing to explore further, the title of the book is Solos Flamencos and it is published by Mel Bay.

And Finally

A guy walks into a pub and asks the publican if he will give him a free beer if he shows him something amazing. The publican agrees, so the guy pulls out a hamster from his jacket, who bursts into song and begins dancing.

"That is amazing!" says the publican, who gives the guy his free beer.

"If I show you something else amazing, will you give me another beer?" The publican can't fail to agree, so the guy produces a small piano and a frog to join the hamster, who plays the piano while the frog sings his heart out.

The publican duly gives the guy another beer.

A man in a sharp suit, who has been watching all this, offers to buy the frog for a large sum, which the guy agrees to.

"Are you mad?" asks the publican, "you could have made a fortune from that frog".

"Can you keep a secret?" asks the guy. "The hamster's a ventriloquist".