



# The Berkshire Guitar Society

www.berkshireguitar.freemove.co.uk



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## March meeting

Our orchestra session on 13th March was notable for being the first under a new baton since Jeremy Allison retired as our musical director, on this occasion our efforts were in the capable hands of Gary Jordan.

What is more we have also acquired some new music, which turned out to be a mixed blessing. We started with Benoit Massicotte's arrangement for 6 guitars of Brahms's Hungarian Dance No 5. Unfortunately this required Richard Butters to grapple with a capo as he tried to simulate an alto guitar, a struggle which was doomed to failure as poor Richard eventually ran out of frets. However we heard enough to recognise the potential of the music, and no doubt in due course the obstacle of the alto guitar part will be overcome and we will return to this piece.

We were then able to turn to Ian Gammie's Los Palmeros, a highly promising piece of which we have not heard the last.

Congratulations to Gary on his debut!

After an interval we heard a number of solos. Richard Butters started with 2 Lauro pieces, Anna Christina and Nelly, followed by myself with the 6th of Roland Dyens recently published volume of "20 Lettres". We then heard Alan du Feu with a short Celtic piece "Si Beag Si More", and Gary brought proceedings to a close with two of Lauro's Venezuelan Waltzes.

## BGS news

### NEXT MEETINGS

The April meeting is on Sunday 10th at the usual time and place (7.30 pm, South Hill Park) and is an ensemble session.

I am going to be out of action for a few weeks from late April so there won't be a May newsletter. This therefore seems a good time to put in a plug for the May meeting, which will be on Sunday May 8th and is an opportunity to play some prepared duets, in addition to preparation for our visit to the Reading Spanish Circle on May 27th.

For those of you that don't know it, the Spanish Circle meet at the Adult Education Centre, School Lane, Caversham (School Lane is immediately on the right having turned into Gosbrook Road from Church Street). We meet at 7.00 pm for 7.30.

All being well, normal newsletter service will resume with the June edition.

## Other News

### GUILDFORD INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL

I was able to attend two of the events at the Guildford festival's first guitar day, the lunchtime concert by Xue Fei (pronounced Shoe Fay, or something like that) Yang and the evening performance by the Hand Dupre duo.

Xue Fei's reputation as an "awesome" performer has spread far and wide and it was with considerable interest therefore that I turned up at the University of Surrey on Saturday 12th March.

Xue Fei warmed up with Tarrega's The Carnival of Venice, followed by 3 pieces from Raise the Red Lantern. The latter were written for Xue Fei in 2003/04 by Stephen Goss (of whom more below) and were inspired by 3 films arising from the re-awakening of Chinese cinema following the Cultural Revolution. Brouwer's El Decameron Negro came next, then Castelnuovo-Tedesco's Capriccio Diabolico, with Turina's Sonata Opus 61 to close.

I thoroughly enjoyed Xue Fei's recital, and can totally understand her reputation as a performer, but somehow for me the event fell somewhat flat. This may have been due to the venue - a somewhat bland room which I believe normally acts as a recording studio accommodating on this occasion an audience of 200+, with what felt like a "dead" acoustic. I couldn't help comparing with our recent Amanda Cooke recital which shared the Brouwer and Turina pieces, and which benefited from the more attractive surroundings and acoustics of the SHP Recital Room.

Not having heard any "Chinese" guitar music before I found the pieces from Raise the Red Lantern and Xue Fei's encore which she had transcribed herself fascinating. I recently came across a link to an interview with Xue Fei on BBC Woman's Hour (I said I came across the link, I don't spend my time listening to Woman's Hour!) in which Xue Fei says that because much Chinese music is played on plucked instruments it often transcribes well to the guitar. For the full interview go to

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/2005\\_03\\_thu\\_02.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/2005_03_thu_02.shtml)

If you do get a chance to see Xue Fei in action, I'd definitely suggest you take it up as I suspect any problems with this recital arose either from the venue or me (quite possible!).

See also Web Site of the Month below for more on Xue Fei.

I missed the afternoon sessions but returned to UniS for the evening performance by the Hand Dupre duo who played arrangements (mostly by Richard Hand) of 3 of Grieg's Lyric Pieces, 2 pieces by Debussy, Granados' Spanish Dance No 2 and Albeniz Recuerdos de Viaje, on either side of 10 pieces from Stephen Goss's The Raw and The Cooked.

The arrangements of the classical pieces I thought worked extremely well, and I thought the whole audience greatly enjoyed the changes of tempo and sound and the degree of co-ordination displayed by the duo in the Goss pieces. Throughout, the duo played with great delicacy and the previously mentioned acoustics didn't seem to detract from this performance so much.

It will have been noted that Stephen Goss as a composer featured quite highly in the afternoon's entertainment - perhaps not surprisingly, as he is lecturer in composition at Surrey University and has written a number of pieces in addition to those performed by Xue Fei and the Hand-Dupre duo. In general I'm not a fan of much modern music, but these Goss pieces certainly went well not only on my ear but with the rest of the afternoon's audience as well.

JOHN WILLIAMS, READING, WEDNESDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

My thanks to George MacDonald for the following.

Few people would doubt that John Williams has been one of the most important guitarists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. He has recorded some staggering performances that few if any guitarists could dare to match, so for many people, myself included, this was a great opportunity to see the man himself in the flesh. Admittedly he only had a part to play in the evening's performance, which was headlined by the English Chamber Orchestra, directed by Stephanie Gonley, but I, and the several other BGS members who also went along, looked forward to seeing him with eagerness.

However, for me at least, his performance was somewhat disappointing. There is no doubt that his technical ability shone through very clearly, and he turned out an almost faultless performance; it was quite incredible to see him performing the Rodrigo Concerto de Aranjuez, he made it look so easy, it was like a stroll in the park. And that for me was part of the problem; the Rodrigo Concerto is quite a passionate piece and I didn't see any passion.

As I write this I am not sure whether it was the absence of visual emotion that made it seem like a very average performance, or whether it really was an average performance. I am such a fan of John Williams I am inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt. Also, I tend to think that he pulled his punches slightly so that he didn't stand out too much from the orchestra (I suggest that he should turn down the amplification next time, and work harder). Whatever the reasons it was less entertaining than I had expected.

The other piece he played was the Giuliani Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra (No. 2 in A major Op. 36). I like this piece, and I enjoyed this more than the Rodrigo. Maybe my expectations had been lowered slightly, but I felt more relaxed about it and could enjoy the music more without worrying about John Williams's performance. Again his performance was faultless, and I was pleased to notice details such as him searching out the moisture on his forehead to moisten his nails and improve the sound.

The amplification of his guitar has to be mentioned; it didn't bother me too much, I could hear that it was a fantastic guitar, but I would also agree that one can hear a more natural and wholesome sound on any CD. The first time I saw John Williams was when I saw him at York University back in the 70's; he was quite dreadful then, but mainly because the acoustics were dead and he could not be heard, and he knew it, at least this time he could be heard very clearly. I think it is a question of greed: it is obvious that a guitar is not man enough to be heard in a large hall like the Hexagon, and the Hexagon is not intimate enough to really enjoy the music. Better to see a lesser performer in a smaller venue - I have seen some fantastic performances at South Hill Park.

Last but not least, the English Chamber Orchestra were excellent. According to the programme they played Rossini, Borodin and Mozart, but I wouldn't swear to it. They were visually much more interesting (except the percussionist who kept fiddling with his Timpani, unnecessarily I think). The sound they produced was really first class. At the end of the evening I was quite shocked to find that I enjoyed their performances on their own more than when John Williams was on stage. Perhaps that should not be a problem, but I doubt I would have paid so much had it not been for the man himself.

George

### Web site of the Month

For more on Xue Fei Yang, go to her web site and click on the "CD and Samples" link.

<http://www.xuefeiyang.com/xuefei.html>

Towards the bottom of the page there are a number of videos of Xue Fei. While the earlier ones are interesting for letting us see a 12 or 15 year old prodigy in action, the recent ones of her playing Villa Lobos, Ginastera and Rodrigo's Aranjuez are of good quality and worth watching.