

“Find God in Daily Work”

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Classical Guitarist & Author

“To My Divine Wife Belén and our 8 children”



My wife Belén and I, Punta del Este, Uruguay 2014

The life of classical guitarist Renato Bellucci, his teaching, life experience, Catholic faith, and an introduction to the classical guitar technique.

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1. VOCATION

An always more urgent call from within has been moving me towards the completion of this book. I say “completion” because I realize that a part of my book had already been written. I have been writing it in short essays where I’d tell my students about my life and the way in which God has been manifesting in me since I first embraced a musical instrument in 1968 at the age of eight. It was through a mandolin that was a gift from my grandfather Ettore.

Nonno Ettore is the man responsible for discovering my musical talent and made me aware of it by putting an old Neapolitan mandolin in my hands. It was the same mandolin that he used in his youth to serenade grandma, *nonna Maria*.

Tradition is much more than just a word, it possesses great power and it is passed from generation to generation in somewhat *ceremonial ways*. Tradition is where our experiences come together with the experiences of our ancestors. Tradition is essentially good and it can be summarized as “*advice passed on from one generation to the next*”. Tradition is compatible with all the other values in our lives and, finally, tradition can be changed, altered and can be adapted to the present. When grandpa put that mandolin

in my hands, the process I describe above was set in motion and many reactions were triggered throughout my being. The mandolin become *my favorite toy instantly*. It started diverting time from my other habitual pastimes and I knew that I was on a new path and that this new path urged me to walk it even though I did not have a clue on how exactly it would play out.

Talents are like diamonds. They are not found on the surface of the earth but require digging and perseverance to be found in large numbers and sizes. Just like with diamonds, it is often the presence of other minerals on the surface that gives away the presence of diamonds further down beneath the surface. Grandpa saw *something* that inspired him to make me this gift; he must have felt an urge to pass on this tradition into my life. This was the *seed* that started my vocation, the mission and the way our Lord would lead me to come always closer to Him.

I understand this process very well now that I have been a guitar teacher for most of my life and I can begin to look at “*the picture of my life*” from a distance and, through a veil, I begin to glimpse at “the whole picture”, the meaning of my life.

When someone tells me that their son or daughter cannot stay put for very long, that they are hyperactive, that

they are constantly doing things with their hands and get bored easily I immediately see the familiar symptoms that usually accompany a vocation for the arts in general and music instrument performance in particular. These “symptoms” are to me the equivalent of the minerals I mentioned earlier that we find on the surface and point us to the precious diamonds deep within the earth. The precious diamonds represent our God given talents.

I firmly believe that it is a parent’s great responsibility and mission to help their children discover the *gems* that they carry within. Parents should be on the lookout for even the faintest manifestation of these treasures.

2. AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

It is my intention to take you through my life in steps, shedding light on those experiences that I see as *crucial crossroads* because they altered the course of my life in a profound manner and because I know that you can learn and benefit a lot from them.

Besides all the professional or technical advice I have to share as a classical guitar player and teacher, I would be hiding the greatest manifestation of God’s will for me if

I did not tell you this brief story.

I was literally enlightened in Madrid in 1984. I met José, a tenor who sung with a local choir. He was a happy fellow and seemed to have no trouble accepting that music was his profession and that all he had to do was his very best. He had no vain dreams; all he focused on was the next performance at a small town Church somewhere in Spain.

I was in Spain studying with Andres Segovia, and José and I had become friends through a mutual friend, Pedro Lombardia, whom I met on a plane while traveling from Napoli to Madrid.

José and I would talk for hours at a time and I could tell from his words that he was at peace. One memorable Sunday he invited me to attend Holy Mass near Plaza Mayor at an old Baroque Church, on one of those Madrid streets that seem to be suspended in time: *St Michael Archangel Basilica*.

It had been a long time since I had last attended Mass, but I could never say no to José because he earned my complete trust through a deep friendship. He even told me that a great Spanish organist played Bach there on Sunday's Service. How could I possibly say no? We arrived ten minutes early and we could hear those

majestic chords echoing through the narrow streets three blocks from the main entrance to the Basilica.



Saint Michael Archangel Basilica, Madrid

You can only imagine what it was like entering what seemed the “ultimate cathedral”, my nostrils filled with candle and my sight and ears totally ecstatic. I was still daydreaming around when José got on his knees and put his hands together. I was beginning to understand what no words could have explained better.

St Francis of Assisi once said, “*Preach the Gospel and, if absolutely necessary, talk*”.

I would have liked to imitate José but all I could imitate was his posture, not his intimacy with the Almighty. I wanted to ask him so many questions but it would have been a sacrilege to interrupt him at that point. I turned around and saw the pipes of this 17th century organ and an unforgettable Toccata coming out of them. I felt simply great. A priest was confessing at the far right end of the Church and he must have seen my mixture of indescribable wondering. He made a gesture with his hand like saying “the confessional is available”. I walked the twenty steps towards the confessional and a thousand things must have gone through my mind. I knelt and told the Priest, “Father I have not confessed in over five years, I came with a friend, I am a classical guitarist... I am from Paraguay... but I’m Italian...” I had just finished muttering these words when he interrupted me saying, “Do you practice many hours a day?” I answered “... yes Father I do”, he said these words which would forever change the course of my life:

“Offer every hour of your practice to God and you will be giving glory to God, sanctify your profession because that is what God calls you to do”.

A long confession followed, and the greatest peace filled my soul. I was finally reconciled with God and the peace that comes with it is the greatest treasure a human being

can attain in this life. Today, more than 30 years after, I still go back to those words and hold on to them, and they comfort me more and more with each passing day.

3. S.D.G. *Soli Deo Gloria*

These 3 letters separated by a dot have been an inspiration throughout most of my adult life. I was first introduced to them when I asked my confessor what he recommended I do in order to avoid vanity and pride from growing into a barrier between God and I and he told me the story of a great Spanish bullfighter. When he was cheered by the crowd and was carried on people's shoulders throughout the arena at the end of a "corrida" he lifted his eyes to Heaven and said in his heart "Soli Deo Gloria", *To God all the glory*.

A short time after while reading a Bach Biography I ran across the 3 letters again. I learned that Bach wrote the 3 initials S.D.G. either at the end or at the beginning of his work. I was 22 years old. My insatiable pursue of mastering the classical guitar with the great Spanish Masters Andres Segovia and Narciso Yepes was only shadowed by an equally insatiable thirst for a deeper meaning to life. By then, it had become clear to me that as soon as "*an apparently unattainable goal*" in life was

reached, it was immediately replaced by *a new apparently unattainable goal* that needed to be accomplished with at least the same urgency as the previous one.

My heart knew that *there had to be more to life* than a continuous pursue of dissatisfactions. I was totally convinced and became a believer when I read St. Augustine immortal saying:

“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

A series of providential coincidences *orchestrated* by God himself took me by the hand and I was revived to my faith. Although I come from a Catholic cradle, my faith had become dormant. But it all changed in the early 1980s. I understood the infinite meaning behind the 3 letters that Bach and the Spanish torero used to dedicate their work to God: S.D.G. Soli Deo Gloria. *All the Glory to God*. This is what inspired the title of the book “Find God in Daily Work”. I must find God in my Profession and I have to do my work to the best of my possibilities so as to be able to offer it to Him and write a sincere S.D.G. at the end of each day.

But of course! I was discovering the secret to a heart full of joy and a life full of meaning! What else could a

human heart desire beyond having lived with and for God himself? There remained nothing to be desired! From that day on I learned that the endless hours of practice were never in vain. To this day, I never know when will it be that I will face the next live audience or if I will ever give another concert but I do know for sure that when I embrace my guitar for practice today, in the silence of my studio, in the morning or evening hours, I will swiftly look at the Crucifix on my practice table and tell Him: “*This Concert is for you*”. I know that all the Saints, Angels, The Virgin Mary and the Blessed Trinity are all attending this “*private*” concert and my heart needs no more. This has been the driving force allowing me to persevere with the classical guitar throughout all these years.

4. MY GUITAR HISTORY

During my 42 years as a guitarist, I’ve had the chance of studying with and meeting some of the best known guitarists of all times. After the vocational encounter with music thanks to my grandpa’s legacy at the age of 8 in Southern Italy my parents saw it necessary that I have a more “playable” instrument because the Mandolin my grandpa gave me triggered the vocation

but was not really an instrument that I could learn how to play proficiently. Besides, it needed major restoration. Therefore, a short time after they gave me my first classical guitar. With the guitar soon came my first guitar teacher. My parents always valued the importance of a good teacher. Vincenzo Calsolaro was my first guitar teacher. He had been residing in Bari, Puglia, for a few decades but was originally from Calabria. His daughter Linda has been the head of the Guitar Department of the Bari Conservatory for many years.

Vincenzo was a very demanding teacher. When my mother and I went to his house to meet him and see if he would take me as his pupil, he passed me a wide music sheet with all the notes that can be played on the guitar. 44 notes spanning from the low E on string 6 to the high B on string 1 at the 19th fret.

I had to learn by memory the names of the 44 notes and recognize them immediately in a test that he would give me the next day. This was the only requirement he had in store if I wanted to become his pupil. I remember leaving his home in tears. Not only did he not even let me play a single note on the guitar but he gave me what I considered an impossible task for an 8 years old boy to be accomplished in less than 24 hours. My mother

injected in me the necessary confidence and said “Do not worry Renato, we’ll make it!”

We started jotting down the notes on music staff sheets and made all types of exercises for hours and hours. We picked up the next day after school and I felt that I was ready to face **the first great challenge** in what was already shaping my future professional career.

We arrived at Vincenzo’s home with time to spare and he soon started jotting notes on a clean sheet of music and I would give him the name note for the symbol in a fraction of a second. He did this for a minute or so and as I answered correctly to the last one of the notes he says “**Bravo Renato. You are my student!**”. The achievement was monumental. I was discovering for the first time that when I worked hard I could achieve very demanding tasks and that with the help and inspiration of my loved ones there was nothing that I could not achieve in my life. I would need this reassurance many times over in the years to come.

Today, 15,000 Kilometers to the South in Asuncion, Paraguay, I am celebrating my 45th anniversary as a guitarist. Paraguay, a beautiful country I have first visited in 1974 when my parents came to visit an uncle that lived in Brazil: Uncle Renato. Paraguay had a deep impact in all the members of my family and although we

never thought we would live here forever, 39 years have passed and it sure does not look like I am going anywhere. My parents have gone back to Italy in 2006. They came back a few years after and remained in Asunción until our Eternal Father called them to His presence a few years ago. I decided to remain in Paraguay and as long as Providence permits, I intend to stay here for good. Still, I am old enough to have learned that “for good” is one of those clichés that often miss the target.

5. ANDRES SEGOVIA

Andres Segovia played the guitar well into his nineties, but it is also true that the amount of strings squeaking produced by the friction of his fingers against the strings was becoming almost unbearable as his age increased and his energy died out. When a guitar player twists the torso and anchors the left elbow against the waist like Segovia did, the amount of strength needed to play can be enormous.

When you hear some of Christopher Parkening’s recordings for instance you can hear moans of pain here and there. Today’s guitar technique standards require more perfection and the use of so-called “recording

strings” should be avoided altogether because they sound sloppy at best. A good set of worn-out strings is better.

Talent can make up for a lot of defects, but I have known quite a few guitarists who had to abandon their careers due to serious injuries that originated in a faulty sitting position. That is why it is crucial that you acquire a **good guitar technique** from the very start.

For most of the XX century, the guitar was to be played like Segovia did. Nobody asked too much back then, because a word of admiration from the Spanish Master opened many doors, a word of dislike had the power of ending or seriously jeopardizing a whole musical career. But the *dictatorship years* are finally over. Be brave and always ask your teacher “Why?” “You will understand later” is a bad answer.

Players like Narciso Yepes, Agustin Barrios Mangoré and Abel Carlevaro who tried to introduce new ideas both in instrument design and technique, were dismissed a priori.

Perfection, being the ultimate unattainable goal, makes it understandable that concessions have to be made. But a whole generation of players was stuck on the same variation: To play with the outer part of the nails and

twist the body around the guitar like a snake. Some of these players have changed somewhat throughout the years. They “sold us” the illusion and lie that speed was all that mattered and have “embossed” this idea in every guitar player of my generation and the contemporary guitar scene has inherited this monstrosity.

When their years were coming to an end, players like Segovia started sounding wiser and more philosophical: *“You are the general of your fingers and not vice versa”* -Andres Segovia to Marcelo Kayath in his last masterclass at USC, Los Angeles 1986-.

Competitions are the Cathedrals to this horror and you will always find one old timer or two behind the organization. There are a zillion better ways to build a career, therefore, take my advice and avoid competitions if at all possible. A competition won, guarantees nothing. The few bucks evaporate fast and the concert tour is over even before it starts. It is believed that several thousands “major guitar competitions” winners are still out there struggling to make a living. Many had to abandon the career altogether.

Abel Carlevaro on the other hand, knew exactly what he was doing with guitar technique and that is what he wanted his students to learn: Carlevaro was aware that a faulty “sitting position” or a defective “playing

position” will cause undesirable results to unfold that will trigger health or career problems in the short, medium or long run.

Music is for life, it is a calling, and it is not like saying “Well, if I can’t make it as a musician, I can always do something else”. I sincerely think that it is always a healthy approach to dedicate our lives to more than just one thing especially since we live in a world as rich and changing as the one we live in, but we will always need our music to feel plentiful and there is only one way to do music: to do it well.

Fortunately, the silent and persistent work of several very inspired Masters has opened new doors for our instrument thus allowing it to enter the “classical” status just over 100 years ago. Carlevaro’s technique has been discussed over and over and most times, I realize that it is mostly misunderstood.

In his book he introduces his technique as “*A testimony of an experience lived over the years*”. He describes himself perfectly when he says “*Going through life as my own apprentice and teacher*”. These 2 words in sequence, apprentice and teacher, speak of *someone* very much in contact with the higher offerings of human life. I think that with these two words Abel Carlevaro is describing the true master that he was. As an old Eastern

adagio goes: *“The teacher and the taught make the teaching”*. Carlevaro concludes saying *“I learned with my students”*.

Carlevaro’s words contrasted enormously with the knowledge previously passed on to me by other teachers. For instance, I can still recall one of my teachers giving me these instructions when it came to the position of the elbow with regards to the body: *“Pretend you are holding a book between your elbow and your waist”*. I almost became a librarian thanks to that advice! -Not that I have anything against librarians, I just did not dream with the life-.

One truth must be stressed: **Andres Segovia was the greatest guitar figure that ever lived**. The beauty of sound and the immense color palette that he was able to produce was staggering and has never been equaled by anyone anywhere with the exception perhaps of Abel Carlevaro who developed the “cinco-toques” (five plucking styles or touches) for the right hand. Segovia had to *pave* the way for our instrument, which was mostly unknown to the great public at the beginning of the 20th Century. Andres Segovia “pushed” many young players’ careers that attended his famous Santiago de Compostela, Spain and Siena, Italy masterclasses. Few musicians, not to say no one before

or since Segovia, has had such a profound impact on their instruments as Andres Segovia did in the classical guitar world.

When Andres Segovia asked me to pull out my guitar and play *something* for him, my hands were cold and moist. The maestro took his chance to give me a little advice;

“Before you start playing, try doing what I do before concerts. If your hands are cold, take your time to warm them up. I once asked for a thermos with hot water before playing in a New York winter concert and warmed my hands with it for almost ten minutes. The public had to wait ten more minutes for a much better performance.”

That was a very good piece of advice that I applied several times in my career.

It is difficult to put into words all the feelings, sensations and impressions that such a colossal moment means in a young guitarist’s life. I was 22, fresh out of Conservatory with my first major guitar competition won and a whole life in front of me. Andres Segovia was to me the most important figure on the face of the Earth.

I remember getting out of the elevator with my guitar case. I walked the last few steps to access the attic of this

mid size and few stories building where Segovia had his Madrid apartment on one floor and his studio that was a “bohemian looking attic” located right under the roof of the building. I heard the locks to the huge metal door open. As the door started opening my heartbeat started accelerating with anticipation. Finally the figure of the greatest and oldest guitarist alive started appearing before my eyes. Segovia made a welcoming gesture as he was saying “*Adelante Renato*” to make me welcome.

I did not know whether to make a reverie, kiss his hand or simply shake hands as I ultimately did. I wanted to pinch myself at every step because at that point I was not sure whether I was dreaming or not. I walked towards the heart of the studio feeling as though I was walking or floating in mid-air. “*So, this is what the Studio of a Master looks like?*” was one of the thousand thoughts crossing my mind. Several guitar cases were visible on the right wall and Segovia’s practice setup took a good portion of the room.

Everything he used to practice seemed to be big: a big music stand, a big cushioned footstool and of course, a huge chair. Everything was made of wood and seemed to be part of a set. A portrait was hanging over his head and another huge portrait was hanging by the main door. Segovia was the subject of both portraits of course!

Several pictures were scattered here and there and he was photographed with several people. I could recognize quite a few celebrities in some of the pictures: Picasso, the King of Spain... A beautiful pencil drawing portraying two hands resting one on top of the other caught my attention. It was a very beautiful drawing. Music scores were simply all over the place. I could describe his studio as “disorderly ordered”.

Andres Segovia always practiced in his bathrobe and it was his favorite piece of clothing. A small TV set was sitting on a medium size cabinet by the main window of the studio.

That was all the observing I could do because a few seconds later, after he closed the door behind him, Segovia approached me again inviting me to sit down. He asked me a few questions about my background and studies. I told him that I had been listening to the Bach Bourrée and Double in B minor that he recorded in the early 60s and that I simply loved it. As a reply he asked me “Do you play it?” I said “Yes I do” and he replied “Play it for me”.

I was speechless and I sincerely did not know if I was going to be able to move a single finger. I was about to play for the master, my childhood Idol! I took a deep breath and started playing. The atmosphere was magic

and I never thought the human brain could deal with so many things simultaneously: my hands were moving swiftly around the guitar, my imagination was running at over a thousand miles an hour, the overwhelming feeling of achievement ran through my veins and of course, my brain was also working hard at keeping me alive. My soul was filled with joy and I knew that I was living one of the greatest moments in my life. Today, 35 years later, I still consider this to be one of the greatest blessings in my life. I thank my Paraguayan guitar teacher Sila Godoy for having generated this unique opportunity.

I played the last chord of the Bourrée and after a few seconds of silence Segovia extended his right hand and shook mine in a “Good job” kind of way. He was certainly not the kind of master to be impressed very easily and neither was it my objective to impress him. He proceeded to explain some of the passages in the Bourrée and how he went about transcribing pieces. He made a point saying that he would transcribe only if the piece was going to shine as bright or brighter than on the original instrument.

Bach had originally written the piece for the violin but his music fitted many instruments to perfection because of the way and style in which the German genius

composed. Bach's music is often referred to as "absolute music" emphasizing the universality and flexibility of his music that is not bound to an instrument in particular but is engineered in a way that it can adapt to any musical instrument. As a matter of fact, Bach himself transcribed his own music in order to play it on different instruments.



Renato Bellucci with Andres Segovia, Madrid, 1984

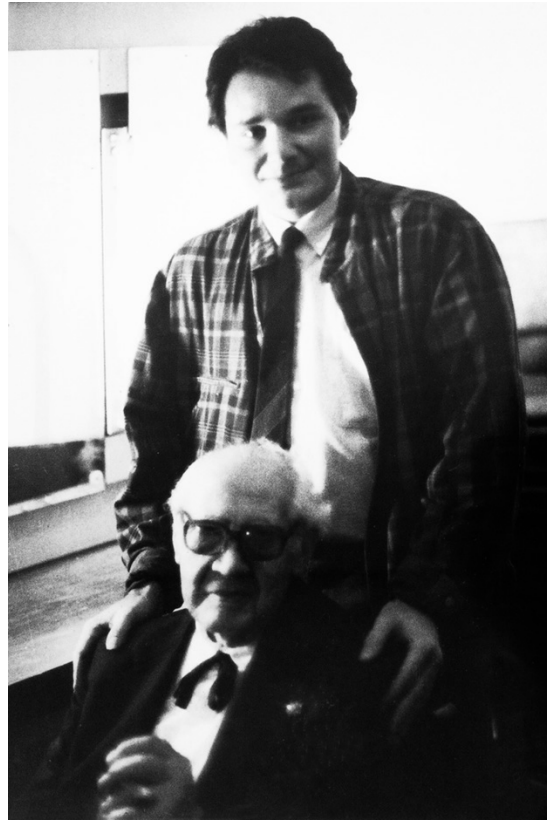
Everything Segovia explained was accompanied by very wide gestures of his arm and hands. His words were paused and he spoke in a soft, gentle voice and I absorbed each one of them as if the words were coming out the mouth of a prophet. A colossal page in my life's story was being written and I knew that nothing would remain the same after that and I was right.

The Segovia Masterclass at USC in 1986 was the last time I saw Segovia and it was the place to be especially since Andres Segovia was well in his 90s and we all new that such opportunities as the one we were being offered at Troy were going to be more and more scarce with each passing year.

Everyone seemed to be there. Christopher Parkening was blending and sharing moments and signing autographs with a truly bright and honest JN 3:16 beneath his signature with every young player with the greatness and simplicity that has always characterized him, Michael Lorimer, Marcelo Kayath, Lily Afshar, Mary Akerman.

I remember Marcelo Kayath listening to Kazuhito Yamashita's perform *Pictures at an Exhibition* in his Walkman. Suddenly, he removed the earphones and told me and the other guitarists in the dorms common area: "Unbelievable!! Yamashita is playing tremolo using the little finger alone!" Coming from one of the most impressive player of the 80s, the comment was definitely worth looking into. Remember that Yamashita had just ripped the guitar world in Toronto with his terrific interpretation of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Kayath had just won the Toronto and the Radio France guitar competition in the same

year, which was considered to be an impossible feat to pull off.



Posing with Andres Segovia at USC.

It was the last time I saw Maestro Segovia. He died a few months later due to pneumonia. His last words to me were “So, Renato, always in love with the guitar?” and I exchanged a glimpse with the maestro as he was getting in the car.

My greatest advice for my students and friends is to have, live and die for a dream. Simply make sure it is the “right” dream. Great maestros are looking for great strive on their students’ part. No great teacher is far

enough for a real pupil. In the next chapter I will tell the story of how I met Maestro Narciso Yepes. It will illustrate what I just mentioned to perfection. The story is charged with supernatural manifestations and it marked my life in ways that it is really hard to put into words. My conversion to Jesus and a revival of my dormant Catholic faith were in part due to the story you are about to read in the next chapter.

6. NARCISO YEPES

The first great maestro I had the chance of studying with when I lived in Spain in late 1983 was Narciso Yepes. Yepes was a small size man but a great human being. I had to travel well over 50 kilometers to his Las Rozas home to meet him. He was an innovator. For starters, he used a custom made 10-string guitar. Narciso Yepes had a PhD in Musicology and he made it one of his life missions to transcribe antique music in general for the classical guitar. He soon realized that he could only achieve the goal if he had “more strings” on his guitar to count on in order to preserve and deliver the original intentions of the composers intact. Lute music in particular adapts to the 10-string guitar majestically and Yepes transcribed a lot of Lute music throughout the

60s, 70s and 80s. Thanks to Narciso Yepes I discovered the beauty and grandeur of *antique music* and I realized that it fits the classical guitar to perfection. It is a marriage made in Heaven. I can listen and play *antique music* for hours at a time. On Yepes' 10-string guitars the pieces acquired an "extra dimension" that simply keeps you in awe.

As soon as I arrived in Spain and knowing that several days had to pass before I could meet with Andres Segovia I needed to make a dent and needed to make things happen. At the age of 20 and thanks to a double LP from Deutsche Grammophon that was a gift from my uncle Renato, I heard the playing of Narciso Yepes for the first time and what I heard was the most beautiful guitar music my ears had ever heard. To this day, not a single recording I owned since has surpassed this epic double LP.

Yepes interpreted the music with the deepest feeling and musical knowledge imaginable. He broke all my preconceived ideas about the possibilities of the guitar as a solo instrument. He taught me about artistry in general and the life of an artist. He was in many ways the first musician that showed me that it was possible to have a life full of the most normal thing while aiming at creating the purest form of art music on the guitar. Here

was a man who had a beautiful home near Madrid, a lovely wife and children. He had his share of the Cross to carry, (Yepes' son Juan de la Cruz died in 1986 at age 18) yes, he also taught me how to carry the Cross with grace. The Cross is the one thing we all have *for sure*. We only differ in the way we see it and in the way we carry it. Yepes always had a smile for me. We met in person in 4 occasions.

But I must absolutely tell you the amazing story of how I got to meet him because even to this day when I think about it I still get goose bumps. It was one of the greatest achievements I ever pulled off in my entire life and God's intervention and hand at work was clear. Here it goes.

When I arrived in Spain after winning the Agustin Barrios Mangoré competition in 1982, I arrived with the hope and promise by one of my teachers in Paraguay that he would help me meet the great Andres Segovia. Sila's agenda included Andres Segovia but I had my own agenda and that included Narciso Yepes because I felt that his playing resonated much deeper with me. I loved his stile, sound and clarity. Plus, I knew that I had a better shot at meeting Yepes because he was much younger than the 93-year-old Segovia and I could aim at seeing him more often and regularly.

These were of course all suppositions; the truth of the matter is that I had no idea. I arrived in Madrid and I stayed at a downtown hotel for over a week. I spent most of the time practicing in my room and I was waiting for my guitar teacher -Sila Godoy- to arrive in Madrid and introduce me to Andres Segovia in person. But neither he nor I had the certainty that Segovia was going to greet us. Sila Godoy was a very good friend of Andres Segovia and he was convinced that he could get a hold of Andres Segovia and introduce me to him. He relied on his life long friendship with the Spanish master and I believed him.

But the days were swiftly passing by and Sila Godoy was nowhere to be seen. I grew anxious and impatient real fast and I felt that I had “to do something urgent” in order to justify the huge effort that being on my own in Spain meant. And it all happened “one magic evening”. It was late and I was watching TV. Spanish television always ended its broadcast with a concert of some kind and that day it was the turn of none other but Narciso Yepes. Could it have happened at a better more providential moment? I perceived it as a signal from Heaven and it was.

I said to myself: “I must meet Narciso Yepes!” I jumped off the bed, got a hold of the yellow pages and looked

under Yepes until I found only one **Yepes Narciso**. I jotted down the address and went to sleep knowing that the next day I was going to be “on a mission”.

The next morning, I was in my tie and suit before 7. Dressing well later proved to be a very good idea. I remembered a quote that said, “**You only have one chance of making a good first impression**”. Therefore, being the stakes so high, and knowing that the mission was monumental I left nothing to chance. I had my guitar in one hand and the address to Yepes’ house in the other. I walked to a cab and asked the driver to take me there.

As we were getting there I started thinking about what I was going to tell Yepes. The man was surely not expecting me and I was fantasizing with all types of scenarios in my mind. But I had to stay focused and optimistic. After all it was my parents who had always inculcated in me that “A man ought to be courageous because luck walks with the brave” I reinforced my beliefs and when we arrived at the building I noticed that it was way too early. I later learned that Madrid does not really wake up until 10 AM and it was only 8 in the morning.

Well, I got off the cab and looked at the names of the people that lived in the building written on the building

intercom system that stood by the main entrance to the lobby. “Yepes Narciso” was one of the names displayed. My excitement was building up. I felt like I was getting so close to the fulfillment of my dream. As I was waiting anxiously for the right time to ring the intercom, a man walked out of the building and it was the janitor. I approached him and asked him if “Narciso Yepes **the guitarist**” lived there and he replied, “No, it is Narciso Yepes **the doctor**”. Boy! Was my dream shuttered in a second or what?! I got myself composed once again and walked somewhat disappointed towards Teatro Real.

Suddenly my eye’s attention was caught by a shiny brass plaque that said: “Sociedad Guitarrística Española” *Spanish Guitar Society*. Hmm, interesting. I entered the building and a very gentle lady welcomed me, I suppose that my slick outfit definitely helped give a good first impression. She asked me how she could be of service and I told her that I was looking for the address of Narciso Yepes in Madrid but could not find it anywhere and she said: “Narciso Yepes does not live in Madrid, he lives in Las Rozas, a small town 50 kilometers or so from downtown Madrid”. I said, “Really?” She replied, “Yes, I have his address here”. She pulled out an address card from an old wood box and copied the address and phone number on a piece of paper and handed it out to me. **I held to that piece of paper with dear life.** I

thanked her and walked out.

I approached a cab driver and asked him “How can I get to Las Rozas?” The man replied, “There is a shuttle service that leaves for Las Rozas every 30 minutes. You can board it there” and he pointed to a small bus stop sign across the street.

My only doubt was “Should I call Yepes or should I just go?” Once again a voice echoed in my mind. I firmly believe now that it was the Holy Spirit and I heard “Just go!”

The small shuttle bus arrived in Las Rozas in about 90 minutes. It was close to noon when I arrived and the bus dropped me right at the main gate of the address I had with me. It was a condominium type of residential area. As I approached the guard at the gate he anticipated me and said, “Adelante! Come in, Maestro Yepes is waiting for you”. I did not know if I heard correctly but I sure did not waste time asking for clarifications and walked swiftly towards the beautiful stone house that he pointed me to. The house was surrounded by a marvelous Sierra-like topography, which is typical of the Northwestern area around Madrid.

A mid-aged lady whom I believed was his wife, opened the door and welcomed me in saying “Mi marido le está

esperando” –My Husband is waiting for you-. It was the second time I was told that Yepes was waiting for me in less than a minute and I had to come clean. I told her “Madam, I do not think the Maestro is waiting for me, I am an Italian guitarist and I always dreamed of meeting and playing for your husband”. She was caught off guard but smiled very politely. She told me to come in and said “He is traveling to Sicily this evening and we were expecting the arrival of the new guitar that he will take with him for the tour. I thought you were the man from Ramirez Guitars with the new guitar. Please sit down, I will tell my husband that you are here”.

I could not believe it. It was a supernatural moment. I felt so good. Mrs. Yepes sure made me feel welcome. As I was looking at the beautiful interior of the house with amazing vistas on the Sierra, and my heart was beating faster and faster with each passing moment. Suddenly I see Maestro Yepes walking towards me with a somewhat surprised look on his face. He shook my hand and, as he did, I immediately introduced myself and told him that I was sorry for having shown up unannounced and, as I was trying to excuse myself, he interrupted me saying, “You did the right thing. If you had called me on the phone I would have surely come up with an excuse. You coming in person tells me that you **really** want to meet with me”.

These words confirmed that it was the Holy Spirit or my guardian Angel I heard saying, “Just go!”

A few moments later Yepes invited me to enter his studio. Oh my God! Is this a dream? Have I died and gone to Heaven? The place was beautiful. A huge cabinet full of scores covered a wall to the right of the main entrance to the studio. Pictures frames were all around. Yepes opened a cabinet to get one of his 10-string guitars out and he put it on a guitar stand. I could not wait to hear that beautiful guitar in person. As we were moving around the studio Yepes asked in a tone of humor, “So, nowadays young players go around the world to meet with the maestros?” I smiled and replied, “Well, I definitely am”. He invited me to sit down and said, “What will you play for me?” I told him, “I will play Agustin Barrios *Una Limosna por el Amor de Dios*”. He nodded with his head. I started playing and as soon as the notes started coming out my heart started filling with joy and accomplishment. It felt as though my heart was going to explode. I finished playing and Yepes tells me: “Your tremolo is very smooth and crystalline, I seldom like a piece the first time I hear it. Let me see if I have the music sheet in my collection. I’d like to play the piece in Italy next month”.

These words, coming from the one guitarist who renders

tremolo at its best were definitely a gigantic boost to my ego. I was stunned. I realized that Yepes had never heard the piece. It was the Paraguayan composer's last composition and is commonly known as "The last song". You must remember that Agustin Barrios had been "discovered" only 7 years earlier by Australian guitarist John Williams who had recently recorded an LP titled "From the jungles of Paraguay". It was an all-Barrios LP and it would soon become the recording responsible for putting Barrios at the center of the classical guitar world. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the early 1980s Barrios' complete body of work was not yet well known by the vast majority of players in both Europe and the US.

Yepes proceeded to tell me that he had a very busy concert schedule but he wanted to help me nevertheless and he gave me a date in April when he knew he could give me another lesson. He then told me a few things about guitar sound and how I could improve it and make it more "malleable". He grabbed his 10-string guitar and showed me first hand his approach to attacking the strings and how he used the plant-play approach where the tip of the finger makes contact with the string a fraction of a second prior to the full attack of the fingernail. He insisted that fingering a piece of guitar music is the first and most important decision that the

guitarist ought to make and that it must be done very carefully. **I made these words my own** and I apply them to this day. I asked Yepes if I could take a picture while playing for him and he consented.



Playing for Narciso Yepes in Las Rozas. 1984

After coffee Yepes accompanied me to the door with his wife. He said “I’ll see you in April”. I remember walking out of the condominium and when I was finally at a safe distance from the house I lifted my arms to Heaven and shouted, “YES!” I have only been this happy again when I met my beautiful wife Belén six years later.

7. BACH

It has taken me the best part of 7 years to complete the monumental task of making the online masterclass of the *Chaconne* available to my students through my website Mangore.com. The online masterclass consists of 110 thoroughly fingered staves, 110 HD videos showing the mechanics involved in playing each one of the staves, and the corresponding musical and technical explanations. When I decided to work the Chaconne online I was not contemplating the gigantic enterprise I was about to embark on. Today I am happy I was not aware because I am sure that if I had known exactly what I was getting myself into in January 2007 I would have most likely abandoned the idea. I uploaded the last staff and video in October 2014.

If Bach had been a contemporary musician, it is very likely that we would have heard his name pronounced at one of those red-carpet Hollywood encounters: “*And the Oscar to the All-time Greatest composer goes to: Johan Sebastian Bach!*”

Bach is the real reason I decided to remain an interpreter and not feel the urge to become a composer. I had to be at least partly responsible to keep his work alive. Bach

is a gift of God to humanity and I am convinced that he is a Saint. In Bach's work we find the highest and most precious virtues of a human being: Faith, work, love of God and passion illuminated by the greatest genius. Bach knew exactly where he was coming from and he knew exactly where he wanted to go: Heaven.

I was recently hearing a lecture and I came to find out that Bach's music is responsible for the conversion of many agnostics and atheists. In the words of one of these converts: "*When you discover Bach's St. Matthew's Passion you come to the conclusion that there must be a God*". The most lovable thing about Bach is that if an Oscar had really been handed out to him he would have certainly replaced the plaque's inscription with one saying D.O.G. -*Deo Omnis Gloria, To God Alone the Glory*.

It took 49 years and the effort of 12 countries and 23 Royal patrons to gather and publish the complete corpus of Bach's surviving works. Those of us who admire Bach and his work the most find in his work perfect unity and balance of emotions. Bach's work can and should be admired for its unmatched beauty and emotional power alone. Still, careful study reveals the use of complex, formal, technical means and structures from which Bach brings forth that height of human

feelings in a way that reveals the workings of one of the supreme intellects of all time.

I feel blessed for belonging to the same profession as Bach. A small pocket book maestro Abel Carlevaro landed to me triggered my greatest admiration for the man. It was to become the first book I read in one day. It was Bach's life seen through his wife's diary. It was her diary actually. *That moment when you were struck by the greatness of a normal life mixed with the greatest musical genius humanity had ever known or would ever know since.*

The book was a life changer for me, unforgettable. In the diary, I discovered the greatness of a normal life, its eternal meaning when every task is performed facing God and offering it to Him whether it was the washing of dishes in the kitchen or the composition of the music for the next Solemn Mass. The daily anecdotes told by Anna Magdalena simply make you a part of the man's life. He was a man! He was happy, at times sad, and even desperate. He had faith and a big passion for music. He got angry and at times he was afraid... he smoked the pipe and actually wrote poems to it. Anna survived Johann ten years and died in a poorhouse. She never regretted her life with him. Johann never fancied to be the greatest. He was simply one more Bach to become a

musician. 7 generations of Bachs had already included 50 cantors, organists and town musicians, so many Bachs had been musicians that in the region the name was synonymous with musician. Bach wanted to do his job “as well as he knew how”. What a beautiful sentence! **“As well as he knew how”**. These words struck me like a vision. “To do my work to the best of my possibilities” is all that I am called to do in order to be like the man I admired the most. **This is what I needed to do in order to become a Saint!**

Brahms’ music is beautiful but I think that his greatest life achievement was to revive the figure of Bach for all the future generations. He was quoted saying: “The two greatest events of my lifetime are the founding of the German Empire and the completion of the Bach publications”. We know what happened to the first, but the second is definitely the one Empire where the sun never sets upon.

8. THE CHACONNE

The Chaconne is probably one of humanity’s highest musical accomplishments. The Well Tempered Clavier works also belong to this period along with the Inventions. The Chaconne is a special type of

continuous theme and variations where a somewhat short subject (normally 4 measures) is relentlessly repeated and varied. The total sixty variations are built on a descending ground bass: D, C#, Bb, A. It is a slow dance in simple triple meter -**Bach's used triple time almost obsessively, as a reminder of his love for the Holy Trinity**-, often in a minor key. It uses the rhythm of a Saraband (an antique Spanish dance).

All of Bach's Divine genius and musical mastery are found in the Chaconne and "*no other composer has ever composed a masterpiece of similar proportion*". It is only logic to venture in saying that no other composer will ever equal it. "It is a triumph of spirit over matter".

The main theme occurs at the very beginning in the first four measures, and recurs (in the form of a subject) every four measures throughout the composition. Due to the harmonic rhythm, the tempo must be fairly slow. "Segovia's transcription and performance is superb, with the guitar allowing for a deep bass, one octave lower than written, so that the music is enhanced in its majesty". The performer needs to be aware of the transformations of the basic four-note subject -D, C#, Bb, A-. Not only does the subject repeat almost relentlessly, but Bach restated and transformed it in many versions, in sixteenth and eighth notes, and the

performer should be aware that these segments divide the music into basic statements. This approach also helps the performer learn the piece since it allows for many “micro-pieces” to be played one after the other.

The Chaconne was also the piece that allowed me to work closely with Abel Carlevaro, one of the greatest guitar teachers of all time. As you will read further on, you will see how Narciso Yepes, Bach and Abel Carlevaro all converged in my life and contributed enormously in shaping my Christian vocation. I had the privilege of sharing several fingering possibilities to perform the piece with the help of the great Uruguayan maestro Abel Carlevaro. I worked the Chaconne in D minor with Carlevaro in Montevideo in the mid 1980s. The piece can adapt to any player and the music allows for many fingering possibilities. You will learn that Carlevaro’s approach to fingering, as opposed to Segovia’s, was open for “discussion” and Carlevaro would always say: “Whatever works best for you”.

“The Chaconne clearly represents that humans have an incredible capacity for elaboration and variation. Anyone who can speak on a topic for fifteen minutes without running out of ideas and without repeating himself will understand what an epic human landmark the Chaconne is. Its “topic”, is the D, C#, Bb, A chord

progression. Bach Creates upon this for nearly fifteen minutes without repeating himself and without losing our attention!

The Chaconne is a technical piece illustrating not only the ingenuity and perfection of tools -violin, piano, guitar, orchestra-, but the capacity of the human body to use them in skillful ways. This work is the most demanding piece of music created for a solo instrument. It requires high levels of musicianship as well as technical mastery of the instrument.

The Chaconne explores the full range of human emotions. Bach gets under our skins and into our hearts. “The Chaconne is the most wonderful, unfathomable pieces of music. On one staff Bach writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings”. Johannes Brahms said: “If I imagined that I could have created, even conceived a piece like the Chaconne, I am quite certain that the excess of excitement and earth shattering experience would have driven me out of my mind”.

This gigantic piece is arguably the greatest set of variations for any instrument ever written. The Chaconne has been transcribed to virtually every instrument capable of retaining its rich harmony. The only other variations that come even close to its

perfection are Bach's *Goldberg variations* –The Canadian Pianist Glenn Gould renders this masterpiece fully on the piano. - Had Bach only written these two pieces, he would still be considered the greatest composer who ever lived. The Chaconne is often performed separate to the other dances in the Partita. It builds up to a climax with the epicenter being the middle section in the comparative key of D major.

The Chaconne as been performed and recorded by numerous musicians, **Leopold Stokowski's** orchestral arrangement is perhaps Bach's dream come true. Being I one of the few musicians who ever recorded the piece on guitar, is no doubt my dream come true.

9. ABEL CARLEVARO

Abel Carlevaro is without any doubt the one Maestro that influenced my playing and my musicianship the deepest. As I continued growing as a guitar player and musician I felt that the place I lived in at the time – Paraguay-, had reached its plateau regarding what it had to offer to a 22-year-old guitarist.

I started looking at Spain where the big names of classical guitar lived, or so I thought. All it took was the words of encouragement of a dear teacher of mine, Sila

Godoy: *“Renato, go to Spain, Andres Segovia lives there. He will help you to grow from now on”*. Plus, he added these words which made a deep impact on me: *“The man is almost 100, If you could at least get a picture next to his coffin, you will never regret it”*. I must admit that those words made an impact and were to say the least a little over the top. I immediately translated them into a more convincing and charitable quote, one that sounded more like: *“Set your mind to something and put your whole self to work and do not stop until you attain the goal”*.

Well, I made it to Spain, and got more than a funeral picture with the Spanish maestro. I have a hobby that has been with me since my teens, photography. I took my camera along with the guitar literally everywhere. Therefore, I was able to immortalize each one of the amazing encounters that life had in store for me with the greatest guitar masters the world has ever known.

Still, after one whole year in Madrid, I collected mostly lots of pictures with the great names of the classical guitar and many, many words of encouragement. Being close to these great figures allowed me to see much wider horizons and reassured me in my guitar player vocation and it is by all means something I recommend to all my students that they do all that is in their power

to be able to meet and know the great teachers of their times.

But I was stalled once again because these great teachers were so involved in their concert careers that it was impossible for me to receive enough lessons and the necessary follow-up in order to acquire new skills and improve in both technique and musicianship. Plus, many of them were outstanding performers but not always good teachers.

By then I was playing sporadic concerts in Europe and I realized that having those “big names” written in my curriculum was in great part the main reason I could draw a large enough crowd to the recitals. But sporadic lessons with these masters did not make me feel any more secure than I was before, especially when it came to guitar technique. I needed solid guidance.

After *knocking* on so many doors, my prayers were finally heard.

José Tomás whom I had traveled to Alicante in Southern Spain to meet in person, told me: “*Listen, you come all the way from South America looking for a teacher. Haven’t you considered going to Montevideo, Uruguay? Abel Carlevaro lives and teaches there*”.

I had heard the name Carlevaro before but coming from

the lips of one greatly admired Spanish master it acquired a whole new prestige to my ears. I trusted Tomás because he was a good and sincere human being. Plus, he was responsible for making David Russell the guitarist that he still is, therefore his opinion mattered a lot to me. I told myself: “Alicante is nice, Tomás is cool, but Montevideo is only 1,000 miles from home. I’ll go to Asuncion for Christmas and on the way I will stop by to meet Carlevaro”. This was 1985 and Abel Carlevaro’s name was beginning to sound in small circles outside Uruguay, mainly due to the fact that his students were winning all the major and most prestigious guitar competitions. I told myself, “What have I got to lose?”

Well, was I totally astonished or what? When I finally arrived in Montevideo, I called Carlevaro, introduced myself and made an appointment for the next day at his home on Avenida 18 de Julio. Carlevaro and I finally met and as soon as the hand shaking and presentation were through, Carlevaro told me: “Play something for me”, I did. I played Bach Prelude BWV 999. As I finished playing Carlevaro said: “Good Job! Still I see that at times you felt insecure with the right hand didn’t you?”... “I’m sure that your lower back must hurt after a few hours playing, doesn’t it?”... “Don’t you wish your playing could feel more natural and wouldn’t it be

nice if you could make all those strings squeaks disappear?”

I was amazed! He could tell all that about my playing after only hearing me play for two minutes!

After Christmas, I moved to Montevideo where for the first time I felt like my career had gained some traction. Carlevaro taught me to *think guitar* and opened a series of unsuspected musical horizons that I set my eyes on and continue to inspire me with each passing day. He was the first teacher I ever had who asked me “What do you *dream* you could play?” When I said “**The Chaconne**”, he said “**Ok!**” His answer caught me completely off guard. That same day I purchased the music and had it in front of me and I was literally “touching” my dream piece for the first time in 23 years.

I am telling this story because I know that many colleagues must feel like their playing is stalled or that they are making no progress. In a profession such as guitar playing, your teacher must be someone who inspires you constantly and you must be willing to take the necessary steps to *unlock* your playing. *If your teacher makes you believe in you, you will be a great player no matter what “name tag” the teacher carries.*

With the exception of my first guitar teacher and the

ones I would study with in conservatory I never stayed with the same guitar teacher for more than a year or so. The one thing I did, once I was old enough to decide on my own, was to ensure that the teacher I had was the best teacher available. I took extreme steps to make the teachers available and often traveled long distances. “Showing up” at the teacher doorstep unexpected with my guitar worked for me in more than one occasion. When you are willing to go that far, you are sending a much more powerful message than you think. Good teachers will see more than your playing abilities. They will assess your drive and motivation without which a musical career would be simply impossible.

Let me deepen in the great figure that Abel Carlevaro represents for the world of the classical guitar. Before I do, let me remind you that Andres Segovia lived in Montevideo for ten years and it was during those years that Carlevaro got to know and study with the great Andalusian master.

Maestro Abel Carlevaro was an innovator in many ways. I always say that Carlevaro would have been a great interpreter no matter what instrument he had chosen. He thought me to think for myself and, being his technique the result of many years of inner searching, he would not deprive me the same “*privilege*”. He told me

during one of our lessons “*Don’t do anything I tell you to do unless your brain agrees*”. After only a few months with the maestro, I ordered the famous Contreras-Carlevaro guitar. I only gave her up when I started building my own concert guitars.

Who is Abel Carlevaro? In a letter to Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco from the late 50’s Andres Segovia writes: “... *Three of the guitarists contending for first prize in Geneva are among my best students: the Spaniard Narciso Yepes, the Venezuelan Alirio Diaz, and the Uruguayan Abel Carlevaro.*”

Longitudinal, transversal and mixed presentations, lever and pivot are only a few of the many terms introduced in the guitar technique lexicon by the Uruguayan Maestro Abel Carlevaro in his revolutionary book on technique *Escuela de la guitarra* -School of guitar-. I can still remember the articles that appeared in the specialized guitar magazines in the mid 1980s, when the English version of the book hit the US guitar scene. Some depicted the book as “*illuminating*”; others described it, as “*unorthodox*” one thing is certain, nobody was indifferent to it.

Getting to know Montevideo and the Uruguayan musical scene is very important when one tries to understand how and why a musician of Carlevaro’s

stature approached guitar playing in such a scientific and universal way.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, Uruguay was often referred to as “*The Switzerland of South America*”. A solid economy, plus a strong imperial English hand, left their mark in many of Uruguay’s customs and way of life. Top European immigrants at the turn of the 19th Century gave Montevideo and Uruguay in general, a character that was simply non-existent in neighboring Argentina or Brazil. The illiteracy level in Uruguay is almost zero. That says a lot, especially when it is often generalized that all of South America is considered sparsely literate at best.

From 1933 until around 1950, the River Plate region underwent a period of prosperity unknown in the Southern hemisphere outside Australia. It was during this golden era that Andrés Segovia arrived in Montevideo. When Segovia started to teach Carlevaro, the Uruguayan guitarist was already an outstanding guitar player. While European artists in general were suffering the consequences of a war-tormented Europe, South America was offering the ideal surroundings for growth, expansion and prosperity.

The guitar world saw Agustin Barrios Mangoré and Abel Carlevaro shaping the instrument and its

repertoire, and composers like Villa-Lobos and Ponce were adding to the immense palette of talents that were giving a great and much needed push to the guitar repertoire. Consequently, Segovia joined in and spent ten very prolific years in Uruguay. Only the River Plate flirtation with military dictatorships could reverse this golden era. The region is still paying dearly for this sin.

Besides the fertile South American guitar scene in which Carlevaro was growing as a musician, the other key factor that contributed to his future greatness was his unique reaction to the general stagnation of guitar technique and guitar construction that had been prevalent for many years. You see, the world musical scene was still “adjusting” for having witnessed the inducement of the guitar in the elite classical music scene thanks to Andres Segovia. The classical guitar had to be played like Segovia did. Tomás’ eight-strings guitar, Yepes’ ten-string guitar and Carlevaro’s *two guitars in one* had to wait.

No other guitar player before or after Segovia has ever been world famous. Segovia’s character and personality had a lot to do with this. Therefore, it is fair to say that after Segovia’s huge accomplishment to establish the guitar as a “respected” classical instrument, the next great goal to be achieved was to make the world

understand that Segovia's was above all else a personal interpretative style; one that dominated the guitar scene for almost a century. There were many questions left unanswered though, and voices that had been shut for many decades were finally beginning to be heard. That explains why many guitarists chose to go to Montevideo and work with Carlevaro.

After Manuel Contreras showed me 20 guitars in his Madrid Studio and seeing that I was not particularly enthusiastic about any of them, he told me: "Wait a minute". He headed towards the staircase that led to the underground workshop and came back with this strange looking guitar and told me "Try this". I started playing up and down the fingerboard and the sound on this instrument was simply beautiful and different. I was hooked. I asked him: "*What is this?*" and he replied, "*It is a guitar designed by the Uruguayan guitarist Abel Carlevaro. I am building this one for him. Carlevaro is genial*".



(Image Above), Renato Bellucci Playing Contreras/Carlevaro guitar in Paraguay

I custom ordered one and the next thing I wanted was to meet Carlevaro.

The way this guitar was built can be resumed like this: “Imagine building a guitar inside another guitar. You keep the inner guitar suspended by means of small wood *bridges* that create a gap, a space of air between one instrument and the other”. The vibrating instrument -the

inner one- is free to vibrate fully because it is not being dumped by the body”.

Top scientists at the Medical University of Lübeck, and the Parma University Neuroscience Department are studying *Empathetic nerve cells* also known as *mirror neurons* closely. Top scientists at these scientific centers have proven that the same cells of the brain are stimulated when we see movement, when we think of the movement and when we emulate the movement.

Carlevaro’s famous quote: “*I’d rather think for 5 hours and work for one than vice-versa*” acquires more validity than ever in light of these discoveries. His whole school is based on allowing the mind to process every movement on the fingerboard in the brain before the actual movement is executed.

Carlevaro stressed that guitar players could rely on more than a set of muscles to achieve a given task and that it was the artist’s responsibility to use the most apt set of muscles for any given job. This is the theory behind the concept of “*fijación*” a concept that considers the annulation of certain larger or smaller muscle groups, in order to achieve specific types of sounds and movements. Carlevaro did not leave anything to chance. If he could think of something that he wanted to achieve on the guitar, it was just a matter of time before he found

a way to accomplish it.

One of the greatest days in guitar history is the day Carlevaro found the way to eliminate left hand squeaking on the guitar caused by the left hand fingers on the fret board; a phenomenon that way too often is ignored by guitarists, with little care for the anti-aesthetic and disturbing reaction it can produce on the listener. When other instrumentalists hear us, they usually wonder how we can stand ourselves with all that “noise” that, certainly, is not part of the music.

The reason is simple: many guitar players decide to ignore string noise altogether. Their brain learns to not hear them... *-selective hearing-*. There is no other explanation. Simply imagine this line of thought: “I play the C softly, then I squeak over the fifth string and play the E”. Impossible! Consequently, the following is how many guitarists really think: “I play the C softly, then **I ignore the ugly squeak** over the fifth string and play the E”.

“How can I eliminate these noises?” I asked Carlevaro...” and he replied: *“First tell me, how do you produce them? Because you do them so nicely that I suppose you must have practiced them for hours!”*

The worst part about not being able to eliminate left

hand noises was that I did not even know how I produced them in the first place; therefore, finding a way to eliminate them was actually two problems in one. He made me look into my left hand movements in slow motion and then would ask: “*What would you have to do in order to eliminate that squeak?*” I would look again at my left hand in slow motion and before I knew it I had the answer or at least part of it. He would then proceed to guide me through the rest. That was Carlevaro’s teaching. Think, think and think again. The outcome was obvious: **you would be making your own technique one musical passage after the other.**

Regarding pieces, he emphasized that you learn technique through the repertory and not the other way around. In other words, you choose the pieces according to your personal musical taste. When a given challenge appears; **you make your own exercise. Guitar Technique becomes a creative process.**

Every single technical difficulty was thought over and over and, from the brain, the answers would come and translate into movements on the fret board. One would be terribly disappointed to think that Carlevaro had answers to technical problems or that he would get into technical jargon. He actually had questions and more questions to pose and, in the process, the answer simply

stood out.

When examining players wasting so much energy compensating for anatomically wrong postures, Carlevaro used to say:- “*They would play much better and for longer, with better, more natural postures*” and when you read that players like Christopher Parkening had to retire from the concert scene in 2014 due to back pain problems or the focal dystonia epidemic that has been hitting the guitar community for the past twenty years you start seeing the prophecy in Carlevaro’s words.

Carlevaro had taken the time to study the physics and anatomy involved in guitar playing. His technique is among the few that has gone that far. Talent can make up for a lot of defects, but unfortunately I have known quite a few guitarists who had to abandon their careers due to serious injuries that originated in a faulty sitting position or a faulty presentation of the hands and fingers over the strings. When you studied with Carlevaro, you discovered yourself, the only one who would play great for you.



Abel Carlevaro with Renato Bellucci, Montevideo 1985

10. GIVING CONCERTS

The first time I faced an audience was at Teatro Piccinni in Bari, Italy at the age of nine. As the time to get on stage approached *I felt as though I was going to faint*. Right there, seconds before getting on stage I witnessed a miracle happen in me. As I started walking the steps leading to the main stage I realized that all sorts of emotions and thoughts were bombarding my mind. I sat down and started playing in front of the packed house; I could not believe that I was actually being able to play

notwithstanding it all. I feared that my fingers would not obey any of the commands I was sending to them from my “hyper-agitated brain”. Part of me was in awe discovering this great capability that human beings have that allows us to overcome enormous challenges and amazingly adverse circumstances.

I was also discovering one of the greatest *monsters* out there: **a live audience and the subsequent *stage fright*.**

Notwithstanding it all I did good, I survived, I was able to *navigate* amidst all these amazing sensations and when it was all finished and the big applause and cheer from all around finally came pouring on me I knew that I was hooked for life.

Two weeks later, I played again at a talent show at the Jesuits School I attended, Di Cano Abbrescia. The way I felt was almost exactly the same way I felt at Teatro Piccinni and is the same way I feel today, 45 years after. What I have come to discover that changes with every concert is that you *anticipate* these emotions and feelings and you deal with them for hours if not days of anticipation and by doing so it does not *hit you* as suddenly and strongly at the very last minute.

The Presence of God helps me to keep everything in the correct light and perspective. God only wants the best

for His children and I know that He is a part of the audience. He cheers and supports me from within.

To this day, I close my eyes for just a few seconds before playing the first notes of a piece and tell him: “*Lord, this concert is for you*”.

Less than a year after playing at my school, I was asked to play a 3-pieces recital on board the Italian transatlantic cruise ship Cristoforo Colombo. It was during a family vacation that included crossing the Atlantic Ocean from Genova in Northern Italy to Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. The recital was organized by the Captain in order to celebrate the passing of the ship through the Equator later that evening.

A Flamenco guitar player that was staying two rooms from mine heard me practice in the mornings and decided to tell the organizer of the event about my playing skills. After playing this concert, I realized for the first time the awesome power that a musical instrument has over our fellow human beings.

The guitar and my interpretation as a ten-year-old boy, kept over 300 people of all ages in absolute silence and in awe. The girl I was platonically in love with finally had her eyes only for me (she can be seen in the picture below looking at me while I was playing). It felt so good

and at that moment I knew then that the guitar was to be a part of me forever. One hour of daily practice was simply nothing in return!



Renato Bellucci playing on the Italian cruise ship Cristoforo Colombo

Playing for someone else beside you, whether it is for one or one-hundred people is what I usually call the “*missionary*” part of guitar playing or any other instrument for that matter. Many things have been written about the public performance of music -anxiety

attacks, stage fright, cold hands, etc.- and I have gone through a few books dealing with these issues hoping to read something like: “In order to eliminate that *ugly* feeling from within yourself, you must do the following:” ... Take my word for it, you will never read these words anywhere and many of the people that claim to have a solution are either lying or do not know what they’re talking about. This does not mean that there are no techniques that will help you alleviate the symptoms of stage fright. Quite the opposite is true. But you will have to test many different techniques and, eventually, you will come up with one that gives you the best results.

Having played for many years, practiced constantly and having received the highest grades in college are by no means the indicators that you are fit to play concerts. Concert playing is a special vocation within the vocation. Playing flawlessly is not what it takes and having the guts neither. The whole issue has to be examined from a different angle. Start by asking yourself: “**Why do I want to play concerts?**” If the answer is any of the following:

1. “I played for many years and it is time for other people to see what I have been up to”
2. “I think people needs to know my interpretations

which are simply better than the ones by other players”

3. “I need to feel the energy flowing between the audience and me”

4. “I won all the major guitar competitions”

5. “I think that in a materialistic world playing music brings people closer to their spirit”

Then, remember that

1. Most hard workers are never in the spotlight. The best investment in your life will be to offer your many hours of practice to God.

2. What you think about your playing is just that, what you think.

3. There is no energy flow in concert giving but a lot of sweat and very patient people waiting for you to finally play Recuerdos de la Alhambra or some other classic.

4. The sure thing competitions give you, besides an over inflated ego, is a huge, ugly repertoire and the music scene is so lame lately, that people attending the concert will most likely be disappointed by your silly virtuosity. Music making is neither about doing finger acrobatics nor a matter of who plays a piece in less time.

5. Making music is about giving glory to God.

In the Bible the music profession is the only profession that survives this world and exists in Heaven. St Francis of Assisi tells in one of his diaries that during times of trial, an Angel that played the violin visited him. In St. Francis words: “*The Music I heard coming from the violin was of such beauty that if God did not keep me alive I would have died*” .

When you talk about being a *spiritual person*, please be very careful because the devil is also a very spiritual person. The key here is to develop the virtue of Religion. It will become the backbone of your spirituality and will help you grow into a better, more *reliable* son of God.

The countless traditions I mentioned at the very beginning of the book filled with the teachings and experiences of the ones who preceded us in history will help us walk this path confidently. This is the type of spirituality you want and need, one that you can make last throughout your life. You want to grow steadily one day after the other. Any other approach will relegate you to live on a spiritual rollercoaster. Everything you build will surely crumble like sand.

I agree with you that, unfortunately, there is a lot of showing off going on by players all over. The roots of this evil are often sponsored by major competitions that push players to give up musicianship and embrace circus

acts. Classical guitar magic is not about playing faster than the next guy but it is an idiom which common people love because it makes *art music* available to everyone. Yes, just about everyone I know owns a guitar, or knows someone who does.

The piano and the violin intimidate the common people; the guitar does not unless you aim at doing that on purpose. The show-off have made the road very hard for the rest of us. They may fool common people, but they sure don't fool me. I have attended so many guitar concerts where the audience looks around to "understand" whether they just attended a good guitar concert or not. They need "someone" to certify, maybe with the nod of their head, something, anything, because they simply understood nothing. They made it all the way to the concert hall, paid the ticket and got slammed in the face by the very artist! They waited and waited and they were never given the gift of hearing those somewhat *familiar tunes* like Romance, Cavatina or Asturias.

It is easy to hide behind unknown pieces. Guitarists think that everyone has heard enough of the classics! This is not true! If your reasoning has become so distorted that you truly believe that, it is, either because you are attending too many guitar festivals, or because

you think that everyone possesses an Andres Segovia or a John Williams recording. Not true either! The classical guitar repertoire needs true musicians that play the tunes that the common people love to hear. That is the real challenge!

When your reasons to play concerts start sounding more like: ...” *Everything else I tried does not make me happy nor puts food on my table*” or, “*there are simply not enough players in my town*”, or “*I want to be reminded that the humans can persevere silently for hundreds of hours in the pursuit of perfection*”. or “*Music brings happiness to the soul*”, then you will at least sound honest or have a clear idea of what concert giving is all about: It is a mission and what you have to discover is if it is indeed *your mission*.

Ultimately, all musicians will have to learn how to co-exist with the physical and psychological *sensations* that concert giving brings along and the million-dollar question: “*Why did I have to book myself for this concert in the first place?*” will always hound us in the hours or days prior to a scheduled concert. But this is the time to *mortify* your imagination and remind yourself that the reason you are doing it is because it is your God given mission.

Some musicians have a character and personality which

allows them to deal with the concert scene in a more “detached” fashion, others are masters at choosing the repertoire. If you are an anxious person, you can deliver but will probably suffer a lot. You see, artists in general, are romantic, soulful and sentimental people plus all the typical mixture of human feelings and emotions. **Emotion** comes from the Latin *emovere* “*move out, remove, agitate*”, a mixture of *ex-* “*out*” + *movers* “*to move*”. This explosive mixture is not exactly what you need when it comes to facing a crowd. But keep in mind that you have to *use* these emotions and make them work for you and not against you. Emotions shape your musicality. They make your style and unique musicianship. You must learn to know them thoroughly and discover that all emotions are essentially good and that the secret lies in learning how to *channel* them and to trigger them at the right time or simply not let them get the upper hand when they are not called in for. You must work at it and it must become a part of your daily practice.

Prayer will help you to know yourself deeply and thoroughly. Many Saints have written about the power of prayer and mortifying our imagination and memory. Jesus mentions the importance of prayer at least forty times in the Gospels and teaches us to intensify prayer before we face important trials. He did and if you read

the Gospels, you will discover that Jesus intensified prayer in the hours anteceding his most difficult moments like choosing the 12 apostles, face Satan in the Desert and before his Crucifixion. To us guitarists, giving concerts is one of the biggest trials we have to face in our life.

Scientific and psychological approaches to the concert situation, which is both a physical and intellectual activity, offer some good answers and it has been proven that the right amount of anxiety and *total* control is the ideal place to be for “optimum performance”. The term that describes this situation is called *hypomania* *hypo*=less than usual *mania* = strong desire for something. In other words, *controlled desire*. Being professionals gives us the know-how, while being intelligent gives us the right perspective.

Several tests have shown that good humor is a powerful trigger that helps balance these two factors. I often walk around the backstage wearing earphones and hear comedy. Humor is a great *moderator* and it helps produce endorphins that are always very welcome prior to a concert. It is for sure far better than playing scales like crazy in your dressing room.

Anger makes blood go to the hands and generates adrenaline, not good for performance.

Sadness and Fear make the blood go to the legs. They will drop your energy and in consequence you tend to freeze. Not good for performance either.

Joy gives you control because it helps release endorphins. It will augment readiness and enthusiasm for whatever task.

Love gives you the peace and contentment.

What I have discovered throughout the years is that there is a place, very deep within ourselves and, at the same time very much under our skin, where we are all great, unique performers. Daily practice and dedication are the foundations of our musicianship. From there we will draw most of our peace of mind. I'll take the word from the movie *Jerry Mc Guire*, the key is the Kwan – Flow-. A state where we reject any type of tension, a place where nothing really matters, where we are not ashamed of what we do because what we do is beautiful and, most importantly, glorify God. I am not into yoga or transcendental meditation, actually, I can say very little about these practices, which are not really a part of my upbringing or surroundings. Still, I do recognize that these practices can contribute positively in the mental and spiritual preparation for concerts. But the word Kwan delivers and I think that in the music world it comes in very handy. In my Catholic tradition, this is

achieved living in *The Presence of God*.

As we become worried or anxious, we tend to tense our muscles and *that is precisely what we have to avoid*. When a major run or a challenging phrase is coming up you have to breathe out and relax. As these *tricky* parts approach, what we really want is to “lose control” and not the opposite. If you make a mistake, do not tense-up, relax more and *let yourself go*. This needs to be practiced. During your practice sessions, constantly check on the levels of tension present in every part of the playing apparatus, do a “muscular check”. Whenever you detect tension, send the command “*relax!*” If you work on “relaxed practicing”, you will be learning to “perform relaxed”, tension free.

Tension is every performer’s worst enemy because it gets in the way of your playing but it can and must be overcome at all cost. Live performance must be “the ultimate relaxation state” and, although I know that this sounds impossible to you now, I also know for sure that this is the best place to be. *Energy flows where knots are not present*. Make sure that your muscles and your imagination do not create the *knots*.

I often look at John Williams’ videos and I am impressed at the total control that he has over his playing and emotions. He never seems to be making an effort;

he always keeps a “down-to-business” look. He is always in control.

Every time a concert is over, it is time to make an evaluation, an objective one at that. Whatever happened is ok as long as it makes you a better performer, a better human being and takes you one-step closer to God. I recall this beautiful quote by Saint Josemaria Escrivá de Balaguer: “*Lord, if you do not want my glory, why do I want it?*”

Performing live is a skill that needs us to deepen into two very important aspects of music making. One aspect is *physical* and the other is *psychological*. These can be very vague terms that poorly describe the challenges involved in the live performance of music.

The *physical aspect* can be better described as the technical facet of playing plus a literally physical growth of our muscles, bones and the tissues involved in playing. What this means, is that *we must allow for time to do its work*, and we will be wise if we accept the fact that a given technical difficulty will simply cease to exist given the right amount of time. When our left hand finger 4, say, will have grown that extra millimeter or two we need to reach that elusive note, we will have witnessed this phenomenon taking place. It is crucially important that you have a well organized practice

schedule. This is essential if you want to make your concert career a rewarding and a long one at that. I have dedicated the last 20 of years to develop my classical guitar website Mangore.com. I use it teach all the concepts that I mention in these pages thoroughly. It will make me very happy to receive your visit and that you drop me an email.

The next thing you ought to do is to **choose your repertoire wisely**. Believe it or not, most players do not choose their repertoire well and in turn the audience is often bored to death wondering why did they bother in the first place. The music you choose must be beautiful. Music was designed by God to show one of his attributes: **beauty**. Unfortunately, not all music is beautiful. It is wise that you ask your parents, spouse or friends “*Do you think I should play this piece?*” Believe me, had some guitar players done this more often, they would still be guitar players. The other essential point to be taken into consideration is: make sure that the music you intend to play is within your reach when it comes to the level of difficulty. Many players use this test to decide on a piece: “If I can’t play the piece 3 times in a row without mistakes, **I will not** play it in concert” It works!

We have to learn to accept the fact that we all fear the

possibility of a bad concert. In reality the worst that can happen is that you do not play up to your expectations. You will never be stuck in the middle of a piece by tomatoes and lettuce that the audience throws at you. You will never see your colleagues nodding “No good, no good, I want my money back” or “Thanks God I didn’t have to pay for this!” This is the working of your imagination and as I said earlier, you must learn to keep your imagination under control; *mortification of the memory* is what we Catholics call it. It works!

The way you exercise this virtue is like this: When thoughts or remembrances of past or future events that *appear* in you mind want to *steal* your peace and joy and get you agitated, ignore them, let them *bark* like dogs but do not engage with them. These thoughts have leashes, long leashes maybe but if you do not get close enough they will not bite you. You can do this. Do not think that thoughts cannot be stopped or that they always have to win over your will. **If a thought helps you to get closer to God, use it. Otherwise, get rid of it.**

I have felt and will surely keep feeling these feared monsters attacking me every time I decide to play for people. What really changes with every passing year is my attitude towards these sensations. They must work for you and not against you.

Typically, musicians prefer the intimacy of their studios rather than the coldness of stage. Yes, stage is cold no matter how cozy we try to make it. It is here that we have to start examining a series of factors that will surely put things in perspective and help us see the whole thing in its real light.

I will tell you what I do when I practice and prepare for a concert: I am always in “concert mode” during my practice.

My faith in Jesus has thought me that I always have an audience no matter how lonely I may feel in my studio. This audience is composed of Angels, Saints and God himself. Having said that, and, admitting that faith takes more work and dedication than guitar playing, it is easy to understand that when I go on stage I have: Angels, Saints, God himself plus a few human beings very much like me helping me to fulfill my mission in life.

Mistakes on stage: I see as nothing compared to mistakes *behind and beyond* the stage. It helps me to recall, “*If these people were allowed to hear my Confessions, they would certainly not clap their hands!*” I recommend you consider these issues very carefully. Consider your smallness, offer the applause to God: Soli Deo Gloria S.D.G.

Remember this universal guitar quote: *There is always more than one possible fingering to play a musical phrase and, at times, many more than one.*

When I started working on Bach's Chaconne with Maestro Carlevaro in 1986 (I was 24), he made it clear to me that I was probably going to feel as though I was not physically or emotionally fit to play certain passages yet. Ten years passed before I could record the work. We worked out alternative fingerings, moved a few notes here and there, and in the process, he took the time to show me his own fingerings from different times in his life. He made me buy 3 original copies of Segovia's arrangement of the Chaconne and told me I would need them when the markings on top of the markings would make your attempt at reading the notes practically impossible.



Above you can see Carlevaro's pencil markings on my copy of the score of the Chaconne

He was right, so right. The score must be a graphic representation of what you do with the fingers on the instrument. You must write and draw everything on the score and erase anything that is wrong or useless.

Composers that do not play the guitar work alongside a guitarist during the composition process to show the composer the technical difficulties, the sound capabilities and range of the instrument so as to create the best possible piece of music. Carlevaro worked with Vila-Lobos on the 5 Preludes in order to make them *more real for the guitar*. Vila-Lobos was not in close contact with Andres Segovia to whom he dedicated the pieces, and the exchange of ideas was made mostly through mail. Carlevaro's fingering of Vila-Lobos Preludes is a *must have*. He re-examined each single bar with me to help me figure out how to adapt his concepts to my hands, and in the process, Carlevaro helped me create **my technique**. This is Abel Carlevaro Technique in a nutshell: **To help the student discover his unique guitar technique.**

11. ANXIETY

Guitarists feel close in terms of the instrument we share, but can be very distant when it comes to our body size, the length of our arms and fingers, muscular flexibility and stamina, nail shape and thickness, character and personality, Interior life and, subsequently, Presence of God. Since art is the sum of thousands of small parts bonded together, we must understand that these physical, mental and spiritual properties are the cement, which keep the parts together. Therefore, we better be extremely patient. Know yourself very thoroughly. You must remember that you are body, mind and soul. You cannot neglect your soul or your body and mind will falter.

I foresee a time when guitarists will be so specialized in their repertoire that all they will only play a handful of pieces. What generates the tremendous amount of anxiety we see all around and often within ourselves is mostly due to the restless times we live in. Notwithstanding the innumerable gadgets we invent to keep track of time and become more efficient and productive, what we see as the end result is that we in fact have always less time and are able to achieve less and less. The few things that would really do us good like prayer or time with the family have completely

disappeared in many people's lives. Anxiety is well described as "*Being here but wanting to be somewhere else*". It is like a non-synchronized part of our being and definitely one of the most deterring emotions that a human being can withstand.

This is so true that during one of the introits of the Catholic Mass we pray "*Free us Lord from all anxiety*".

Bach seldom heard his masterpieces as well played in his lifetime as they are played today. Actually, some of his masterworks were never performed during his lifetime or they were performed on one occasion and then they'd be forgotten. Today we are living the era of the great performers. The degree of mastery that some contemporary players achieve on their instrument was simply thought to be unattainable. In Bach's time most performers were at best mediocre. Bach threw his wig at choir members on several occasions such was the degree of frustration he felt. We are always improving as performers and all that is asked of us is that we do our best and strive at perfection with all our being.

Anxiety was approached scientifically in the early 1960s, and some of the scientists believed it affected them positively while others believed the opposite. I believe that it is not the anxiety that influences the

performance but our response to it. Rollo May, a psychiatrist I admire, considered Anxiety to be good and said that we have to learn how to use it to our advantage and prevent it from causing harm in our lives.

The other thing that a professional musician will discover with experience is that anxiety can be anticipated. A good example to explain this phenomenon is the *first-time-skydiver* and the *professional skydiver*. The novice takes all his anxiety to the very moment prior to the dive, while the seasoned skydiver undergoes a longer anticipated anxiety that is evenly distributed in the hours or days prior to the jump itself.

I often look at a painting I have on my studio wall. I see its colors and shadows change as the light in the room changes according to the time of day. The way I feel also changes the way I perceive the picture. I use this comparison to understand music. Music is an idea we have in our mind and playing it is the equivalent of the light that makes it visible. We have grasped the composer's ideas on a musical score. What we are saying the minute walk on stage is: "Now, I will recreate this work of art". Yes, because what you are doing is recreating a masterpiece that was composed by a music genius who lived at a time that we can hardly

grasp with our imagination. No one would dare throw tomatoes at Van Gogh if he did not replicate his *Starry Night* exactly the way he did once. The same applies to us. Applause will be there for the idea, the effort and the moment; maybe, not certainly, for the flawlessness.

Here is a little practical advice for you regarding concerts:

1) Do not think for a second that the mistakes we make while practicing won't appear on stage. They will for sure. Make 100% sure that nothing is left to chance during practice.

2) Play pieces of music you really like and avoid competitions unless you go there to win and not to learn. Hector Berlioz once said "*Competitions are for horses, not for musicians*".

3) No one will notice a mistake unless you put a tag on it -like saying "*I am sorry*"-.

4) 99.9% of the people attending the concert are there to cheer you, make sure you are one of them.

5) If a pro is there, you are lucky. Most people will think you played flawlessly even though you know perfectly well that you did not. Even pros do not know if you made a mistake or not therefore, should a playing

mistake happen, let it pass and offer it to God.

6) Start the concert with pieces you know back and forth and can play with your eyes closed.

7) If for any reason you feel that the conditions are not appropriate, skip the piece altogether.

8) Do not play concerts with strings that are less than 3 days old.

9) It is perfectly ok to use your scores on stage just make sure you keep them low enough on the music stand so as not to cover your hands.

10) You are not there to impress anybody.

11) Rest a lot on the day of the concert.

12) When you are finally on stage, close your eyes and tell God that the concert is for him.

13) If a bad review is in store for you, just tell Him: “If you do not want my glory Lord, why do I want it?”

12. IMPORTANT GUITAR INSIGHTS

Common sense. The word says it all: common. That means that everyone has it. Use it! Guitar, education

and faith have been the constants throughout my life by which I could make a “balance” every now and then. I would know where I was standing concerning my personal growth.

The Classical guitar is a discipline, *discipline: 1. The ability to control your behavior and the way you work 2. A method designed to train your mind in order to control your behavior.* The guitar is *life in miniature*. In the constant pursuit of musical perfection, we put to work our whole self. The more we allow ourselves to do music for the wrong reasons, the more we are jeopardizing the path for those who do want to do music for the right reasons and the more likely it is that our work will not leave a path for future generations to follow.

In an email I received recently, a dear friend and a 30 plus year veteran guitar player wrote me about his impressions on a concert he attended in Texas. This is part of his mail: *“I am beginning to see what you are seeing in this world of guitar. The need for the public to hear recognizable music they can relate to is the way I want to go. The music they played was ‘over their (the public) heads ...very techie pieces... a bit of a show off...”*

In the Western world, success has become *something*

that has to be measured or that has to be at least *measurable*. What is worse is that we are made to believe that success in life can be predicted on the basis of such faulty instruments as IQ tests. The real reason that these monsters have been created in the first place is that humans in general have a God complex by which everyone and everything has to be *classified*.

Music and arts in general have always been the place, the refuge for free souls and creativity, and a place where people can get a taste for *less materialistic things*. Musical talent and creativity are not detected by these “*faulty tests*” because talent and creativity belong to a higher part of humans: **the soul**. This eternal *part* is being steadily suppressed and annulled by the 3 enemies that our Lord Jesus Christ warned us against: “The world, the flesh and the devil”.

For the past 30 years you must have heard the following two words associated almost as an inseparable unit: “music industry”. Now, being music: *the arrangement of sounds made by instruments or voices in a way that is pleasant or exciting* and industry: *the production of goods, especially in factories*, can anybody tell me by what sick formula the two words can be associated? One thing is sure, guitarists have been pushed to “industrialize” their playing more and more and the

pressures created by this insane mixture has pushed players to put out a huge amount of worthless and often ugly playing.

What you have as a consequence, are herds of guitarists being classified according to the amount of revenues that they provide to the industry. Composers on the other hand, or to be more accurate, on the other side of the *assembly line*, have started pouring out an enormous amount of *unpleasant compositions* that are being thrown at us in concert halls everywhere. Thus music that was intended to be beautiful in order to reflect God's beauty, -beauty is one of God's attributes along with goodness and truth-, is lost.

“They laughed when Andres Segovia sat down to play the guitar. The nerve of the man, bringing a flamenco instrument into the hallowed precincts of the concert hall. That stupid young fellow is making useless efforts to change the guitar. The guitar responds to the passionate exaltation of Andalusian folklore, but not to the precision, order and structure of classical music”.

Segovia was clearly not part of an industry, especially in 1910, and he did not change the guitar, actually he was hyper-conservative. The names of Narciso Yepes and Abel Carlevaro should stand out when referring to “change”. Segovia's talent actually created an enormous

amount of mysterious sounds that Andalusian folk players could not even dream of and when it came to precision and order, Segovia understood that the magic of music does not lie in precision but in artistry and what the piano and violin could not deliver the guitar could: an immense palette of colors, just “the right amount of notes” and, most of all, an instrument that everyone could relate to.

Following is part of an article in the New York Times:
By A. Kozinn:

- *“Guitarists tend to be **tinkerers**, both by nature and necessity. Their instrument, in its classic form, is comparatively soft spoken, even when played with full force, and its string layout and tuning make certain kinds of chord voicing and counterpoint more difficult to realize than on the more democratically constructed keyboard. Jazz and rock musicians have escaped the instrument’s limitations by amplifying it and inventing electronic devices to sustain, distort and color its sound in every way imaginable. Classical guitarists have been more conservative: some use discreet amplification systems, and some have added strings, usually to the bass range”.*

Now, isn’t that word perfectly chosen? **Tinkerers.**

It is almost impossible to predict the path that our music will trace for each one of us. If we keep our minds and our hearts open, we will probably hear the subtle and constant callings. Keeping an open mind also means to struggle to stay as free as possible from the many unnecessary complications that our excessively consumerist world drives us in thinking as indispensable. We need very little to be happy people and it is often preferable to have a little less than necessary than a lot more than necessary. “*Rich is the man who needs little*” is one of my favorite quotes.

Musical careers shape up with the years and with time we get the feeling that a veil or curtain is being lifted. The most rewarding stories usually embrace the *learning, performing* and *teaching* stages. These stages are very often so interlaced that it is difficult to tell when or where one starts and another one ends. These stages often walk simultaneously. One day, without even knowing exactly why, people call you *Maestro*. It is then, and only then that you really understand that there is no such thing as “the best guitar player” etc.

The aspiring guitarist facing the 21st century, will need a whole new set of tools or he will have to use the same tools in different ways in order to make it. We are often told that it is “*too hard for a solo career nowadays*”.

False! The honest advice is: Do something else besides guitar playing in order to make a living. Don't think for a minute that duets or quartets are in *great demand*. Real duets are usually the *natural product* of *natural circumstances*: husband & wife: Presti-La Goya, brothers: Assad brothers, father & sons: The Romeros.

Plus, all the money *ensembles* make has to be split in 2, 3 or more parts. Then I ask: How many piano quartets do you know? Or how many violin quartets for that matter? Not to mention piano orchestras or violin orchestras. These are desperate approaches to desperate situations but in no way represent a viable solution.

Ever more increasingly so, from the 17th century on we have been fooled in thinking that science, the arts and religion cannot possibly walk hand in hand. *True science, true art* and *true religion* can only walk hand in hand. It is often said that God wrote two books: “**The Bible and Nature**”. It seems as though 300 years have finally thought us a lesson and we are slowly becoming saner. These 3 powerful motors of our culture are converging again in every walk of life and profession. *True art* and *true religion* go hand in hand. Music is the most spiritual thing humans can do. It comes second only to prayer.

The Japanese quote “*Getting up 8 times after falling 7*”

is the formula for success it is the perfect quote to apply in times like these. The guitar definitely deserves another shot at greatness and the simple fact that she survived the horrors of the past 40 years is a clear symptom that the guitar is a tough act to fade away and will probably be here forever.

13. THE CAREER OF A GUITARIST

One theory, which is very trendy nowadays, states that it takes ten thousand hours of *practice* -approximately ten years- to excel in any discipline. Yes, 10,000 hours. It is very likely that every great musician you admire had to go through this 10-year incubation period and you are no exception. Yes, Mozart was being tutored by his dad from a very early age, and composed his first great works at the age of 21. Mozart had already accumulated 18 years of patient work. Therefore, the myth that talent was the only ingredient in the Mozart success story is just that, a myth. He had a spark of talent that the right teachers (Mozart's father Leopold was his teacher) along with his surroundings and hard work sculpted the colossal figure we know today.

A very similar example of this type of growth is golfer Tiger Wood. His father Earl coached him from the

tender age of 4 months, had his first official golf lessons at 4 and by the time he was 21 he was wearing his first green jacket at the Augusta Golf Master. He too had accumulated 17 years of practice by the time he was 21.

Yes, no miracle stories dear friend, just the right circumstances, coaches and a lot of hard work. Beginning at a young age is always an advantage because parts of the brain that are assigned to coordination and muscular activity in general become active very soon and the brain is *wired* for these specific work early on.

Talent is really misleading because we think that the great achievers in life were “gifted”. False! The process goes something like this: A good teacher -good is the keyword- immediately spots **talent** and works more intensely with a given student and, subsequently, the student becomes motivated and the effects works like a multiplier, it feeds itself and growth on all fronts is faster. The wheel is turning and, a few thousand hours later, a great player will be born.

For the not-so-talented player, the end result can still be the same only he will have to work harder and will seldom have the road ahead paved. One thing is sure though: **Of all the ingredients necessary to make it to success, the most valuable one is a predisposition to**

hard work and perseverance. Talent is a bonus but talent alone will not suffice. I am sure that you have noticed by now how Oriental players in general are progressively and steadily becoming the best at several musical disciplines. It is not genetic. I assure you, all humans have the same number of chromosomes. It is embedded in culture and tradition. It comes from hundreds of years back. Orientals were always dealt a difficult hand and they had to work much harder in order to survive.

When my ancestors were planting and harvesting corn in Europe, the Chinese were doing the same with rice. Rice is much harder to plant, maintain and to harvest. My European ancestors could lay back and look at the stars much longer than their Chinese counterparts. As a result, Oriental players can practice much harder and for longer stretches of time and will have conquered the necessary patience to wait for the results. They developed skills that makes them enjoy the journey as much or even more than the destination.

14. DO I HAVE IT?

You must have asked yourself this question many times. My students' parents ask me this question as soon as the

first class is over. I know that parents want the best for their children, and I believe a teacher has to be a parent as well as a teacher. Eventually, we all want to make sure that we are doing what God *designed* us to do. We wonder if we are in the presence of the talent. Doing what we are designed to do is the only way we will really accomplish happiness and parents sincerely want us to be happy. Now, who are we asking the question to? Or, who do we think has the answer to the question?

Allow me give you an insight into some very important “*guitar matters*” that you have the right and obligation to know, matters which I’ve matured throughout my life experience and education. All these matters point in one direction: *Find out exactly what role you and your music will be “playing” and make sure you know yourself very well. The better you know yourself, the more likely it is that you will be happy and at peace.*

A word that encompasses this definition perfectly is *Vocation*.

I recently read this beautiful anecdote in a book I am reading about the life of St, Thomas Aquinas: A few days after finishing “The Summa Theologica” which is considered to be the greatest intellectual and theological achievement in history, a fellow monk over heard St Thomas of Aquinas. The monk was passing in front of

the chapel when Thomas was there and heard Jesus tell Thomas from the Cross: “*I am proud of your work. Ask me anything and I will give it to you*”. The Saint responded: “*To know me and to know you Lord*”. Oh yes! To know ourselves and to know God ought to occupy the main spots in our daily agenda. That is why prayer is so important. God knows us much better than we know ourselves and through prayer He will teach us who we are and what we’re capable of. Daily prayer and Holy Communion are the greatest assets in my life.

15. THE FACTS

I would not be writing this book and we would not know a classical guitar world if it were not for **Andres Segovia**. We are not just talking about “a” guitarist, we are talking about a man who lived the whole twentieth Century -Segovia died in 1987-, the one century that has seen more changes than any other century before or since. If you were born anywhere between 1893 and 1987, you can say with all certainty that you were a Segovia contemporary.

- For most of the 1990s, the classical guitar world was pretty much divided like this: those who dared to criticize the maestro, those who wanted the man

beatified -the step prior to becoming a Saint-, and those who *used* the name *Segovia* to get somewhere.

- I know Spaniards very well. For one thing, a good percentage of my blood is Spanish -My grandmother was *De Niquesa*-. Segovia was *Andalusian* and a *Spaniard*. That translates into incredibly *stubborn* and *poetic*. Then, of course, he was also a man.

- From age 7 to 15, the only guitarists I knew were: Andres Segovia and my teacher Vincenzo Calsolaro. The only guitarist my teacher Vincenzo seemed to know was Andres Segovia -at least that seemed to be the case; “*Segovia this, Segovia that...*”-.

- The only concert I attended was of course a Segovia concert! No need to say that by the time I was 17, my life’s goal was to meet the maestro! I did, 5 years later in Madrid. This was the heavyweight sentence in all my resumes: “*Renato studied with Andres Segovia!!*” After all, who knew Calsolaro -or Carlevaro for that matter- to even bother including them in the resume? How could you possibly dream to make it as a guitarist without Segovia’s approval?

Time and a great musicianship have made Segovia a really gigantic figure and it is under this light that I will continue writing. I met Andres Segovia in his nineties!

He was soft and gentle, and everything I can say concerning my personal experience with him is good. I certainly got the best from him: words of wisdom and a clear idea of what I did not want for a life. I am sincerely grateful. But there are many not so happy student-teacher anecdotes that almost never make it to the guitar magazines and are as real as the ones that do make it to the magazines or guitar books. It seems that most of my colleagues are still afraid that the maestro might hear them from “beyond” and disapprove. In *Graham Wade’s* book *Maestro Segovia*, you read the following anecdote on page 72.

A Mexican guitarist had been roundly rebuked by Segovia during a masterclass at Siena. The Maestro, in some exasperation, had remarked, “Your thumb makes a terrible sound on the strings. Why don’t you do something about it? Cut it off if you have to -perhaps you’ll grow another one”.

Now I often asked myself: “*Is this the Maestro I want to become?*” The “Mexican guitarist” had a name and a dream, which were probably shattered that day, beyond the amusement that it may cause to you or me when reading the anecdote. Remember that charity must always be the main motive justifying every single action. Saint Paul in Corinthians: “*If I don’t have love, I*

have nothing”-. Your students, those people that approach you, are souls that God puts in your way. Your mission is to soften, smoothen and illuminate their path towards perfection. If you forget this, you will not be doing much good and you will not leave the world a better place when you’re gone.

16. THE STRUGGLE

For the past two centuries the music profession has undergone some of its most dramatic changes. Musicians in turn, have had to cope with some almost inhuman situation, or to be more precise, non-musical situations both instrumentally and in their lifestyles in order to cope with these changes. There are some historical facts that have certainly played a key part in reshaping musical life. The always more diminished role of the Church and religious life in general in secular matters is definitely one of the most influential.

The one thing that has not changed is human **vanity**. Vanity, ego, moi etc., can in a way be used as survival instruments. But when these are untamed or out of control, then the result is a monster. This is so much true that I spent my first 18 years as a guitarist thinking that success or personal achievement and prestige were to be

measured according to the amount of “fame” or public recognition that the profession carried with it. What a horror! Following are some of the most important considerations to be made by the aspiring guitarist.

- If you want to be a famous guitarist, remember that there is no such thing as a “*school for famous guitarists*”. If you want to be famous, then you are probably in your teens or twenties at most. If you are in your thirties or forties I suggest you see a priest or psychiatrist.
- Remember that Segovia is dead and recording a CD with his mediocre compositions today will not give a “push” to your career.
- If you think John Williams is famous, then you ought to know that people attending his concerts often think that they will hear John T Williams, the film score composer.
- Segovia too will be forgotten and his name will only survive in guitar circles for as long as there will be guitar circles.

You might reconsider the whole matter in the light of what I wrote before, fame brings a whole package along with it and selling your soul to the devil will only get

you to hell. Where do you think the Hitlers and the Stalins and dictators in general go? Make sure you are not behaving like these monsters in the little world that God has assigned to you: **Your family**.

The *market* that makes famous musicians is exactly that: a market. Rap & rock music will probably make you famous but you will most likely end up in a rehab center if you are lucky or dead from an overdose. The key is to remember this: *What is born big is a monster; Virtue on the other hand, is the reassurance that what we are doing is pleasant to God.*

Virtue is moral excellence, goodness, and righteousness. It comes from the Latin *vir* 'man'

Every serious career demands years of dedication and the music profession ought to be exactly that: a profession made of countless hours of silent dedication offered to God.

Sudden stardom is a human being's doom, the monster. Think in terms of your parents, your, brothers and sisters, your friends, your classmates, your neighborhood or community, your country, small or big, and you will realize that you are already *famous* in that world, the only world that really matters because it is the world that God wants you to work in. Do not disappoint

these people because they are the only ones that really matter and they count on you because they see you as their hero and, if you ought to make it passed your town and country it will be thanks to them.

17. TOURING

Do you plan to be on tour for months at a time? Although the possibility of travel and the novelty that new places have to offer is undoubtedly very tempting it is also true that just as anything else we do in our lives, the novelty aspect is due to end much sooner than you think. Besides, with a concert coming up, you will not have much time left for excursions, sight seeing etc.

When we are single, it is definitely the best moment to live this stage in our career. If you live outside Europe, the US and Japan, you ought to consider the possibility of moving to these places because anywhere else, your chances of making a living playing concerts will dramatically decrease. Sponsors and agents prefer to have “handy” musicians in their portfolios and, living in some secluded island in the Pacific, is definitely not the place to be if you want to be found.

Agents: most times they will exploit you, for sure! If a relative or close friend manages your career you are

blessed, musicians and artists in general make poor businessmen. Having someone who knows and loves you to represent you will definitely boost your career.

With technology being where it is, you can make your own recordings and CDs with a small budget. You must absolutely get involved in recording your work because it will force you to polish your repertoire. Recordings are a testament of your work that will continue to be around long after you are gone. Produce a CD as soon as possible.

You do not need a 10,000 dollars microphone. Some great guitar recordings were made in bathrooms - because they often offer great acoustics- and using a 50 bucks mike. If you can afford the expensive technology, good for you, if you cannot, believe me, I still cannot tell the difference between a cheap 100 bucks mike and a super expensive 10-grand Neumann mike.

Aim at the “real people” around you because they love you and they will really help you. **If you cannot conquer the hearts of the people around you, forget about the possibility of conquering the hearts of unknowns.**

Do not compare the career of a guitarist with that of a violinist or a pianist. The only thing we share with them

is the fact that we do music. A career in piano or violin is designed to make music for huge audiences and their instruments have to be heard from a distance. The competition there is huge. Our piano and violin colleagues grow musically in a different way than we guitarists. The guitar has its roots in the common people, and trying to bring up its “status” is to go against its very nature.

If you look around you will notice that the guitar is fortunately going back to its roots: the small auditorium or room, pub, piano bar, the chamber environment. The only place where the guitar and the guitar player feel out of their “natural surroundings” is *the concert stage*.

Pianists and violinists have literally thousands of gorgeous pieces written by incredibly talented composers in unrepeatable human-historical times. They have Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms, Berlioz, Tchaikovsky, Liszt. Each one of these composers produced an immense and wonderful body of work. Who do we guitarists have? Sor, Tárrega, Mangoré, Ponce, Turin, Torroba. If we try to make up for the centuries lost, we are implementing the wrong approach. The sad part about this is that music schools around the world are missing this point completely. They think that the problem is the guitar repertoire. No,

the problem is the lack of personality and character of many guitarists.

Typically, the average 3rd year violin player sight-reads better than several guitarists put together. But he better! He has a million masterpieces to choose from and if he does not progress fast at sight-reading he will miss his life achievement! We guitarists want to play a handful of pieces in comparison. You do not need to be more than an average music reader to achieve that. Having said that I stress that it is essential that you become acquainted and use standard music notation and become steadily proficient with it. It takes no time and will become one of your greatest musical assets.

18. THE GUITAR

Antonio de Torres Jurado, the 19th-century Spanish carpenter, is the man often associated with the classical guitar modern form. Legend has it that he was inspired by the figure of a young lady in Seville Spain. Not precisely what I would call a *scientific approach* to guitar building. Torres' guitars were the first large body guitars especially when compared to the ones seen until his time. Larger guitar body translated into larger sound. His guitar design has been the model for guitar builders

for most of the past 100 years.

A living material makes the guitar, wood, and just like any living material, no two guitars are alike and unpredictability is a part of the equation.

To date, I have used over 45 different species of woods in the construction of my concert guitars. Each wood opens the doors to fascinating construction possibilities.

The motion of the strings acts like a pendulum and each string creates a very complex and unique pattern. Then, to add more complexity, each note creates its own very unique pattern within the pattern. Whenever an E, F or G is played on the 6th string, the guitar inflates like a balloon. The top and back of the guitar move closer and away from each other in terms of microns per second. The higher the notes and the strings we pluck, different parts of the soundboard and back vibrate. The braces underneath the soundboard, divide it so as to allow for different parts of the board to vibrate according to the string plucked.

Every luthier uses blueprints with all the measure of every single piece of wood that will be used in the construction of the guitar. Blueprints of some prestigious guitar models can be bought and it is just a matter of deciding which model to build. What you will

find out eventually is that they are all, practically speaking, identical. They are all based on the Torres model. Some have an extra strut, or a strut less. Some luthiers will make the struts longer or shorter... no matter what they do, the variations in sound that these changes generate are almost unperceivable to the profane human ear.

Keep in mind that a Stradivarius violin can barely be told apart from other violins even by an expert, let alone a 2,000 dollars guitar.

Torres Jurado, proved that the real important part of a guitar is the top and not the back and sides. He built a spruce top guitar using maché paper for the back and sides. The guitar proved to be a terrific instrument.

The top of the guitar is the most important part of the instrument. In custom guitar construction, choose the woods according to your aesthetical taste. The looks on a guitar can be quite inspiring at the time of performance and the differences in sound are practically speaking null no matter what tonewood you decide to use. Special artist builders are called in when it comes to some astonishing inlay work on the instrument.

Spruce, Redwood and Cedar Pine are the favorite wood for the top of the guitar. Builders look for trees that have

grown slowly, usually found on cold mountains and at great altitudes. The reason is that the density of the wood and the wood fibers will be higher the colder the environment and the scarcer the oxygen. Typically, Pines are the trees that grow at higher elevations. The builder can tell about the density of the wood by hitting it gently with his knuckles (this technique is referred to as tap-tone).

Specialized wood sellers will often do the selection for you. Luthiers can only make a few dozens guitars each year and this allows for little scientific experimenting. This will always make luthery remain more of a craft than a science.

It is known today that the wood used by Stradivarius for his violins built in the 1700-1720 span of time were built using woods that grew in what scientists call a *micro ice age* that hit Europe from the mid 1400s until the mid 1800s and made the trees grow much slower than normal.

Typically, vintage or antique guitars sound sloppy. They were not built like Stradivarius violins. They were the first attempts by amateur builders so, if you buy them, prepare yourself for the disappointment of your life. I only cherish old instruments that were played by great

guitarists because they represent the artist that they belonged to. I own an 1885 guitar that was owned by Agustin Barrios Mangoré and I get the chills every time I pick it up (image below).



I will share with you what I would do if I wanted to buy a guitar today. There are a few things you have to keep in mind: Where will I play my guitar most of the time? Will it be a concert hall, a club? Will it be a recording studio? Will I use a microphone and a PA?

Guitar builders should focus more on making the playing experience more pleasurable and solving the real problems associated with guitar performance, this is often referred to as playability. Playability will slowly become the main goal in guitar construction.

What are the features you should look for in a guitar? I think that the best way to go about it is the following:

Do not ask too much information about brand, wood, etc. When you order a concert guitar, specify if you like a heavy or light instrument. If you like heavier guitars like I do, you will prefer dense woods such as Cocobolo or African Blackwood. If you like lighter construction, then you will probably choose Maple or Cypress.

Buy new musical instruments because the instrument develops its sound according to the plucking style of the performer that owned it and, depending on who played the guitar before you, the instrument will have developed a very unique sound that will most likely remain unchanged.

If you are new at the guitar, then it is likely that you are not sure of what to look for and how a guitar should feel in your hands. If that is the case, allow the builder or your teacher to help you choose wisely.

If money is a deciding factor, wait. It will not be long before you can afford a more “unique” guitar.

Keep an open mind when it comes to choosing your guitar.

I have witnessed the following anecdote in 1986: Guitarist John Williams was about to give a concert for BBC in downtown London. It was a noon concert with live FM broadcast. Williams was going to play his Fleta. Suddenly, an “unknown” luthier approached him with a guitar in his hand and said in an Australian accent: “*Maestro Williams, I build guitars. I would like you to try mine*”. Williams reached out to grab the guitar and, while standing, played a couple of fast arpeggios on the guitar and said... “*Good. I will play it right now!*” Williams got on stage and played the concert with the Smallman guitar. He played Smallman until he retired in 2014.

19. LEARN THE SKILL

For the past 500 years, the musicians we admire, Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, etc., have demonstrated that ours is a profession where the odds are that we will have to know frustration, pain, misunderstanding and economical need. In a word: The Cross. If you still have some doubts, read the biography of the great composers you admire. When these musicians were given the right conditions and environment to simply make music, they considered themselves blessed. I truly understand that. I have learned to give thanks to God for having had the family support and the necessary faith to keep believing.

Since I started my classical guitar website Mangore.com in 1997, I did not know that people whom I never met before were going to be inspired and benefited by my work and life experience. Nowadays, I have students coming to Asuncion to study with me from all over the world. They stay for a week or two and learn. Their whole approach to guitar and to guitar playing in general changes for the better and I thank God for that. Mine is the story of a professional guitarist who loves what he does and wants his fellow colleagues to do the same. My work is always done face to God and I respond only to Him.

No matter how old or young you are, or what your

playing level is, I tell you: If you still hear that subtle *calling*, do not think for a minute that it is too late. For music it is never too late.

If you can take the economic burden away from your artistry, you are blessed. With the right technique and a well-settled practice schedule, you need 1 to 2 hours a day to be a top player. Yes, a professional. The important thing is to ensure that the quality of time you practice is the best.

A musician needs a certain surrounding in order to be productive. The life you will be leading when you are away from your guitar will have an impact on your playing. The time away from the guitar is just as important, and even more so, than the time spent practicing. You need to have *inner silence*, a very intimate *peace* that allows for true musicianship to blossom.

Our world is made of family, friends, work, and the more or less solved *issues* in our lives but mostly it will depend on how we live the Presence of God.

20. TALENT

Talent is one of those words that carry a heavy dose of depth & mysticism. Jesus told the *Parable of the talents*. In the parable, Jesus says that depending on how we used our talents we would either enter the Kingdom of Heaven or miss it altogether. What is beautiful about the Parable of the Talents is that Jesus describes 3 men with 1, 2 or more talents. It could easily pass unnoticed but in the parable **no one is left without at least one talent**.

By definition, a talent is a *special natural ability or skill*. What this means is that although our world may often make us think and act otherwise -for social, economical or educational reasons- our talents will always be latent waiting for the right time to knock on our front door.

The astonishing beauty and complexity that the human creation represents can make up for many years of dormant talent and experience. As we grow life provides the extra ingredients through education and experience in general. These ingredients are often missing when we are young. How we use our talent is also crucial; A talent put to work for the wrong reasons and at the wrong times can all too often be our very doom.

I see every day and my role in life as a guitar teacher has reinforced my beliefs over and over again.

21. GUITAR PLUS ANOTHER CAREER

The one thing I can affirm with all certainty is that the guitar is fully compatible with whatever other activity or activities we have to pursue in order to *make a living*.

I once took a friend of mine to Buenos Aires, Argentina to attend a series of masterclasses with maestro Abel Carlevaro at the San Martin cultural center. My friend who is an architect by profession has always had a passion for the guitar and I must stress that I was often surprised to see that his musical ear was developed beyond the norm. At the end of one of the masterclasses he asked me to introduce him to Carlevaro. I did and as the two were getting acquainted with each other, my friend says: “*Don’t get me wrong maestro I simply like the guitar but I am an architect...*” Carlevaro stopped him right there and with his right hand on my friend’s shoulder told him “*Good, it is always wise to have more than one profession. Plus, it would be great if you learned a second language. As for the guitar, feel free to contact me anytime*”. You can only imagine my friend’s astonishment.

We have all heard at one time or another *that in order to play a musical instrument you have to practice 8 hours*

a day. Carlevaro told me that after 2 hours with the guitar he had enough.

Family: Are you married? Do you have children? Do you live with your parents? Where do you live? These are key questions to be answered and that will have to take a major role in your career endeavors. I take as “default” that if you are married you want to stay married, if you have children you are blessed, if you live with your parents it is out of reciprocal need and, no matter where you live, there are always great advantages and great disadvantages.

The famous, misused phrase “*to sell one’s soul to the devil*” is a much easier misfortune to get caught into than often thought. One might think of it literally as a fellow signing a contract and pronouncing a formal statement. Let alone that I can barely imagine that anyone can be so naive to actually go ahead and do it, the truth is that the devil is not interested in the people that want to *sell their souls* because for one thing, they have already sold it by the time they decide to do so and because the souls that the devil is interested in are the souls of *the other folks*: those that want to stay as far from him as possible.

These are normal people like you and me that have a life and that are struggling against all the weird currents of the world in order to stay afloat. World currents have

been whispering for decades: *“Nah! You do not want to stick with this lady anymore; she is like an anchor to your foot. You deserve to be happier” ... “Kids? Nah! They are trouble!”*

Our family bonds must always be the most important assets in our lives and we will have to sacrifice everything that threatens to become a reason for separation. **Your spouse, your children, your parents are the most valuable treasures in your life and the world we live in is constantly posing threats against these sacred bonds.** The amount of suffering and destruction that divorce brings with it is monumental. Children are left with an eternal mark in their souls and their lives are simply shuttered. I think that it is in many ways more painful than death itself. It affects every aspect of the lives of the people involved in it and it must be avoided at all costs.

There is no crisis in a couple or a family that cannot be surpassed. Crisis in general generate the perfect circumstances to ask God to become very present in our lives in order to help us salvage what may appear at first as the unsalvageable. The Japanese word for crisis is the synonym for the word opportunity.

22. CLASSICAL GUITAR TIMELINE

When compared to the violin, the guitar is a newborn baby. The guitar and its playing technique are, practically speaking, still in their “embryo stage”.

With the right amount of faith in your teacher and in yourself, you must remove the following though from your brain:

“It is too late to try a new approach. I have invested 20 years in playing the way I do. Such and such famous player does it. I’ll stick to what I have”.

If for any reason, this phrase applies to you, you better rethink your whole approach to guitar playing because you can only fool yourself for so long and frustration passes a high bill on the soul.

The Equation: You practice constantly + you love what you do but you never feel *secure* when you play = **you ought to change or correct the way you play**. We are all humans and tend to stick to what we know and fear the *uncertain* or *unknown* but we must not stick to a guitar technique that will lead us nowhere. *Wise men know that when they realize that they are traveling the wrong road, the way to move forward is to stop and turn around.*

You must have total control over your guitar technique, and no matter what *brand name* your technique has, if it does not work for you, it is useless!

You were designed, “from before you were born” to play in a certain way. My technique does not have a *brand name*. It is the result of mixing several techniques throughout the years, just like a recipe, plus, finally, adding the one ingredient that had been always missing: **my very own**. Today I play using **Renato Bellucci Technique**. As the ingredients were being added, my playing got better. Still, a certain degree of frustration was, eventually, always around the corner. I will list the techniques I used throughout the years:

1. Segovia technique -both hands- 1969-1984 -high level of frustration-
2. Carlevaro technique -both hands- 1984-1987 -low level of frustration-
3. Jose Tomás technique -right hand, Carlevaro- left hand 1987- 1996 –I started to see the light-
4. All of the above + my technique from 1997 to the present day - Yes! I have to tell the world!

23. CONCLUSION

I firmly believe that my best investment in life has been the time I spent deepening my love to God. Knowing Him more and more with each passing day I got to know myself better and better. I also discovered that God would never allow us to be more generous than He is towards us. The seed that was planted in me at the age of eight has since grown into a tree.

The following verse alone summarizes the entire teaching of Jesus:

“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and everything else you need will be provided by Him” Mt 6:33.

How can I help you master the classical guitar being separated by probably thousands of miles and not knowing each other personally? In 1997, I designed my classical guitar website **mangore.com** to teach classical guitar to players all over the globe. Today, thousands of guitar players of all levels are enrolled and learn how to master the classical guitar with my help and guidance.

If you subscribe, you will be able to master the greatest guitar classics and innumerable exclusive guitar transcriptions that I have made throughout the years. I am always adding new pieces to the list. Over 4,000 HD

videos show technique involved in every music staff in detail. Many of my students have come to study with me in person and they stay for one or two weeks. I encourage you to mail me and consider the possibility of taking one of my intensive guitar courses in Paraguay. I will take your playing to the next level and you will finally build on a solid and personal guitar technique. Needless to say, it will be a great honor to know you in person. Please feel free to write to my email address renato@mangore.com for advice or to share your thoughts. God bless you always. S.D.G. *Soli Deo Gloria*

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