

Letter from New York

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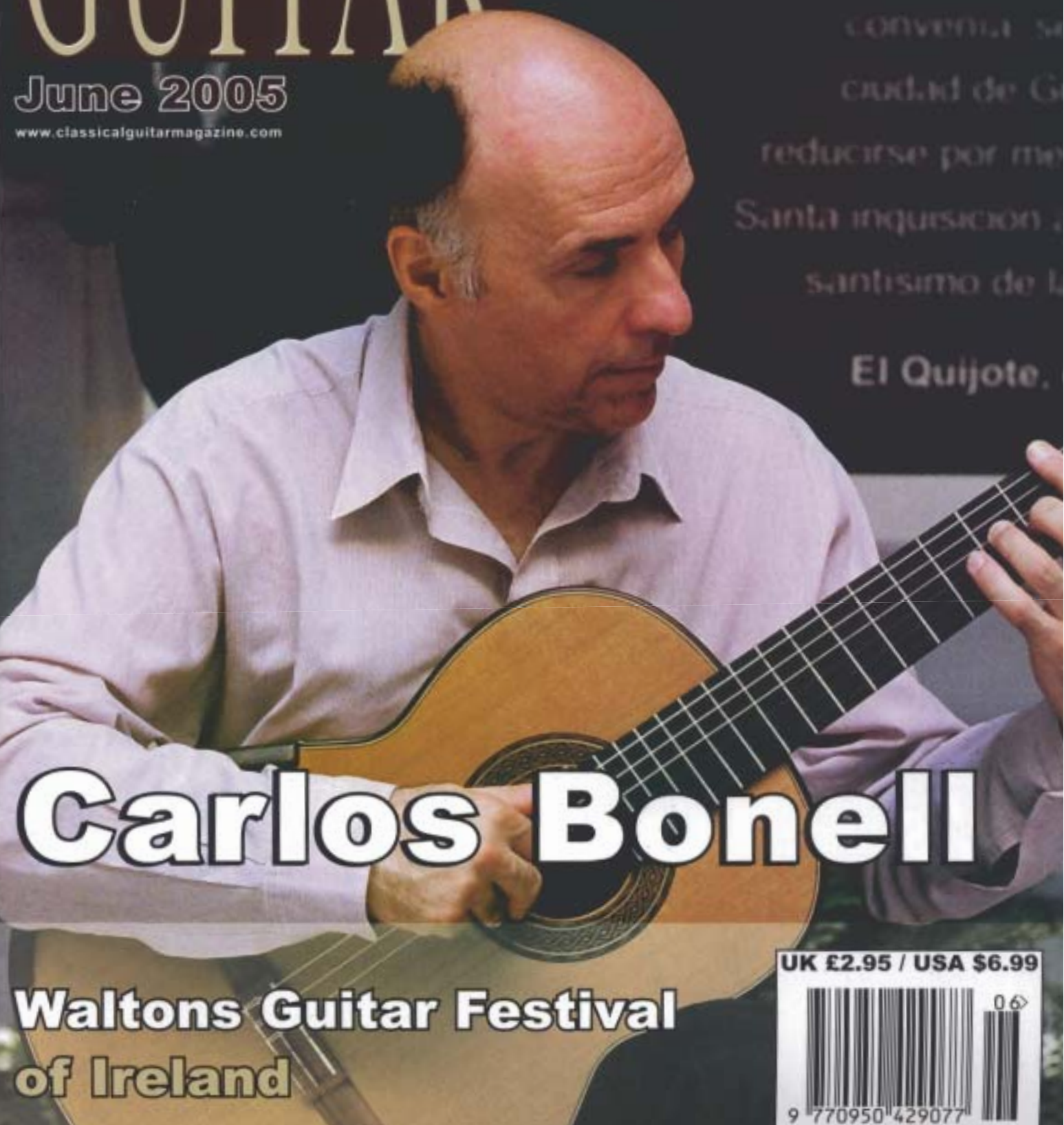
Rincón Flamenco

**Views from
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June 2005

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LETTER FROM NEW YORK

By JULIA CROWE

DAMPITS have been slithering out of soundholes like earthworms, making way for a bloom of concerts around New York now that the warm weather has returned to the city along with ice cream trucks and outdoor café tables.

Roland Dyens spent a week in New York, performing for the New York Classical Guitar Society and Long Island Guitar Festival and teaching masterclasses at Mannes College of Music. For the New York Classical Guitar Society concert, he dazzled throughout with his range, color and control over dynamics, especially with his layered arrangements of *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* and *Take the A Train*.

Clarice Assad debuted at Satalla, with an evening of piano, singing and jazz standards. She has an easy stage presence and is a bit of a comedienne with her wise cracking, off-the-cuff introductions to various pieces and a humorous evocation of her dream jazz band acted out entirely on the piano. She has that trademark Assad style of flying-fingered aplomb. At times it sounded like she had eight hands on the keys while her scat style floated effortlessly above it.

Paco Peña held a solo performance at the 92nd Street Y. Wearing an elegant, cut silk velvet scarf tossed over one shoulder (made by Ben Verdery's mother-in-law, Fumi), he presented a palette of various flamenco styles, including Alegrías, Bulerías, Cana, Fandangos, Farruca, Palmas, Siguiriyas, Sevillanas, Soleares, the Tientos from Cádiz and Tonas. His explanation of the historical background of each style gave the evening the flavor of an intimate salon recital within a large hall.

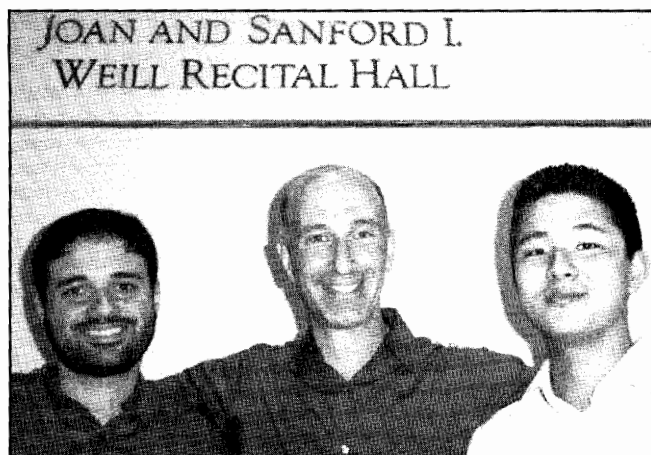
Michael Newman and Laura Oltman of the Newman and Oltman Guitar duo cancelled a scheduled concert at Mannes College of Music on account of heavy rains flooding the Delaware River that runs beside their home in rural Warren County, New Jersey. After spending two days moving everything from their basement and first floor to the second floor and following town evacuation procedures, they returned home to find six feet of the muddy, oily river in the basement. They were fortunate enough to find their house's foundation left otherwise intact as a few neighboring houses had foundations that sank. Their rescheduled concert featured a program of 18th and 19th century classics by Rossini, Sor, Carulli, Giuliani, and Gragnani with guests artists, flautist Lauren Settino and clarinetist Erin Finkelstein.

David Leisner and his student Luiz Mantovani performed at the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall with a programme that included the New York premieres of William Bolcom's *Tres Piezas*



Paco Peña.

Lindas for flute and guitar and Osvaldo Golijob's *Fish Tale*. For these pieces, they were joined by flautist Lance Suzuki. Mantovani, a member of the Brazilian Guitar Quartet, is a winner of the 2002 Pro Musicis International Award, chaired by Pulitzer-Prize-winning composer Gunther Schuller. The award is given annually to solo musicians, who are given the opportunity to perform in major concert halls within the US and abroad and also to perform two community service concerts for audiences who might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience a live music performance. Mantovani's uncanny precision was complimented by Suzuki's graceful renderings of many of the evening's pieces, which also included Leisner's *Acrobats*. Leisner perform a solo set of selections from Villa-Lobos' *Twelve Etudes*, and his relentless pacing of the



Luiz Mantovani, David Leisner and Lance Suzuki.

No. 12 in *A minor* elicited whoops of approval from the audience.

One of the highlights of this year's Long Island International Guitar Festival was its composers panel, moderated by Alicia O'Malley and presented by the Department of Music of the School of Visual and Performing Arts at Long Island University's C.W. Post Campus. The festival's theme this year was 'The Guitarist-Composer,' and the panel featured Carlo Domeniconi, Frederic Hand, David Leisner and Benjamin Verdery in a roundtable discussion of their approach toward composing for the guitar.

Both Domeniconi and Leisner agreed their personal approach toward composition comes from a particular moment of inspiration, rather than as a product of sitting down daily to write. Verdery described finding inspiration from all kinds of music and from humming while doing mundane things like washing the dishes. He has also found that pieces can have a tendency to take on a life of their own from what he first hears inside his head and that much of his work relates to his state of mind, emotions or images and impressions of people and places.

Leisner spoke of how he derives many of his ideas for compositions from reading poetry and short stories, citing his composition *Acrobats*, inspired by a Nathan Englander short story about a group of Polish Jews during WW II who are herded onto trains headed for a concentration camp but find they are instead aboard a train full of circus performers on tour to entertain German officers.

Frederic Hand prefers to map out the beginning and then the end of a piece before fleshing out the body. He enjoys hearing a basic folk tune and building his own structure and interpretation upon it. Han also expressed the process of composing as: 'when I feel the happiest and most alive in spite of the agonizing misery' of committing the work to paper.

Leisner explained he does most of his composing at the keyboard instead of the guitar to avoid letting his fingers fall into familiar patterns. He feels the process of writing music down provides not only a bird's eye view but also lends the opportunity to create a piece with solid structure.

Both Hand and Verdery spoke of double checking their work every so often to make sure they haven't inadvertently fallen prey to an insidious musical mind worm, as Verdery did once when it dawned on him that a compelling three-note melody and variations of a piece he had labored over for two guitars was none other than *Three Blind Mice*.

Domeniconi shared his childhood memory of standing in his parents' bedroom and listening to old records and spoke of the continuing influence of music he had heard in his childhood.



Frederic Hand, Carlo Domeniconi, Ben Verdery, David Leisner and Roland Dyens.

PHOTO: DENNIS RIEF

Hand similarly recalled spending afternoons as a teenager with his pianist friend Jamie LaVerne trying to imitate Jim Hall recordings and growing his enthusiasm for jazz while being grounded in a classical playing technique. Verdery mentioned 'being electrified' upon first hearing The Beatles', *I Saw Her Standing There* during the one year his family lived in France. Later on in his musical career, when he developed a passion for Bach's music, Verdery described feeling conflicted as to whether classical, eurocentric music was superior to folk rooted and popular music.

He brought up the salient point that much of folk and popular music has probably not been recognised because so little of it has been written down on paper but he believes guitar programs are becoming more open to exploration of these musical genres. When a fan approached Verdery after a concert in Spain and asked why he had come all the way to Spain to play Spanish music instead of pieces of his own culture, it spurred his thinking. 'Part of writing music is about discovering who you are and being at peace with that,' Verdery says. 'Also, you need to make concrete decisions as a composer when committing music to paper if other people are going to play it. The pieces you see on paper are the result of many choices and much consideration.'

Domeniconi described an encounter he had once had while visiting Japan. He had seen a scroll of music hanging on a wall with but a few brush marks upon it. When he had asked about it, his guest informed him: 'The paper does not play the notes. It is there to remind the community what to play.' Domeniconi expressed his conviction that the emotion of playing is central to music and he voiced concern that: 'Sometimes, as classical guitarists, we can be playing the right notes. But what is it about putting notation at a higher level than playing?'

To close, Leisner offered the panel a wonderful quote from Stravinsky: 'Mediocre composers borrow. The great ones steal.'