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## John Williams: An Evaluation of his Impact Upon the Culture of the Classical Guitar

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# **John Williams: An evaluation of his impact upon the culture of the classical guitar**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Dublin Institute of Technology  
Conservatory of Music and Drama

Supervisor: Dr Maria McHale

January 2018

Michael O'Toole

## **Declaration**

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of PhD, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for graduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any other third level institution.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the career of the Australian guitarist John Williams and his impact upon the culture of the classical guitar. Williams has been a celebrated guitarist for more than six decades and has performed and recorded extensively during that period. He has made a remarkably varied contribution to guitar culture, performing in a wide variety of different styles, highlighting the guitar's unique strength as a versatile and adaptable instrument.

Williams' career is in marked contrast to that of many of his contemporaries, including his mentor Andrés Segovia. Segovia believed the classical guitar must assert its individuality in order to be accepted as a concert instrument. Although Segovia attempted to disassociate the classical guitar from its usage in more popular and folk genres, John Williams' approach has been more inclusive and his work has forged links between the various musical styles into which the guitar has adapted. His work reflects the diversity of the guitar and has helped to develop new voices within the realm of contemporary guitar repertoire.

This study examines reception of Williams' work, and explores the impact of his career up to the present time. His own reflections on music are studied with the inclusion of an extensive interview, conducted in 2017 in London. The various strands of music drawn together by his career are examined and reviewed as a singular and significant contribution to guitar culture.



## Introduction

In the guitar world now, the boundaries between styles are thankfully disappearing. Groups like the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet and the Assad Duo have considerably broadened their audience base; they are marketed as groups that belong as much to the formerly defined pop world as they do to the classical one. Perhaps the strongest vision in this direction came from the Kronos Quartet, which forever changed the landscape of the string quartet, but Williams had anticipated all of this, doing what he wanted and crossing over stylistic borders freely. The guitar, now played by more peoples of the world than any other instrument, belongs happily to different stylistic and cultural worlds. The nylon-string guitar certainly has a tradition of crossover players, such as Charlie Byrd and Laurindo Almeida, but they did not have as powerful an effect as did Williams, who was already at the top of the classical guitar field.<sup>1</sup>

In this statement, David Tanenbaum alludes to changes in guitar culture brought about by the career of Australian guitarist John Williams (b.1941). His comments date from 2003 and appeared in his survey essay of twentieth century classical guitar trends in *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*. Although he mentions many other crossover artists, the particular significance of Williams in this account, lies in his enormous impact upon the attitudes of researchers, practitioners and audiences of the classical guitar. This thesis aims to examine that impact in detail and while Tanenbaum's assertions refer to the traversing of musical styles, it is also fair to say that Williams has brought about significant change and indeed vigorous debate in many other areas of classical guitar culture. Furthermore, although his influence has been considerable, it is important to assess it in the context of the career of his mentor Andrés Segovia, given Segovia's dominance of classical guitar culture in the first half of the twentieth century.

### The 'Segovian' narrative

There has been much discussion among guitar historians about the role of Andrés Segovia (1893-1987) in the development of the classical guitar. Similarly, the English guitarist Julian Bream (b.1933) has also been credited by many guitar scholars as being an important figure in the latter half of the twentieth century. Because both men were actively involved in commissioning new work from non-

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<sup>1</sup> Tanenbaum, David: 'The Classical Guitar in the Twentieth Century', *The Cambridge*

guitarist composers, Bream could arguably be seen to have carried on Segovia's work with regard to guitar repertoire. Indeed, guitar historian Graham Wade hints at an almost evolutionary process from Segovia to Bream, when he refers to the première of Britten's *Nocturnal* in 1964, as 'the beginning of the end of Segovia's domination over the twentieth century repertoire.'<sup>2</sup>

As the guitar grew in popularity during the twentieth century, writers such as Frederic Grunfeld, Harvey Turnbull, Tom Evans and Mary Anne Evans began to amass much historical evidence of a perceived low regard for the instrument among many scholars and musicians dating back to the fifteenth century.<sup>3</sup> These publications all date from the late 1960s to the late 1970s and the narrative largely expressed was that through an extensive process of concertising, commissioning new works and technical refinement undertaken by Segovia (all of which are discussed in Chapter One), the instrument achieved a new-found position as a classical instrument in the twentieth century. The narrative reflected in the guitar literature of much of the twentieth century is that Segovia took an instrument which was undervalued in comparison to other classical instruments and redeemed it to a point where the guitar had eventually attained a previously unimagined level of status and popularity. Writing in 1974, Harvey Turnbull remarked that Segovia managed to 'establish the guitar as a respectable instrument.'<sup>4</sup> Graham Wade adopted a similar perspective in 1983<sup>5</sup> and it is also illustrated by Tom Evans and Mary Anne Evans as follows:

Segovia has been a great inspiration not only because of his superb playing but also because of his personality. Always supremely confident of the potential of the guitar, and of his own ability to exploit that potential, he had the courage and the conviction to persuade people the guitar was a serious instrument at a time when it was not highly regarded.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wade, Graham and Garno, Gerard: *A New Look at Segovia: His Life and His Music, vol.II.*, (Pacific, Missouri: Mel Bay, 1997), 55.

<sup>3</sup> Grunfeld, Frederic: *The Art and Times of the Guitar*, (London: Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1969). Turnbull, Harvey: *The Guitar – From the Renaissance to the Present Day*, (Connecticut: The Bold Strummer, 1974). Evans, Tom and Evans, Mary Anne: *Guitars: Music, History, Construction and Players From the Renaissance to Rock*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Turnbull, *The Guitar*, 111.

<sup>5</sup> Wade, Graham: *Segovia – A Celebration of the Man and his Music*, (London, New York: Allison & Busby, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Evans, Tom and Evans, Mary: *Guitars – Music, History, Construction and Players – From Renaissance to Rock*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 164.

It is fair to say that when he became successful as a concert performer, Segovia, along with many of the following generation of classical guitarists, hoped to establish the guitar, in the words of Bream, ‘as a normal classical instrument.’<sup>7</sup> This was accepted by many as the correct path at the time and according to Luigi Atademo, the modern classical guitar developed a specific personal character because of the nature of Segovia’s crusade to establish a repertoire for the instrument:

This was the first time in the history of the guitar in which a guitarist didn’t emphasise his own compositions and preferred instead to play music by others. This, in the end, was the definitive break from the era of the composer-guitarists and brought about a guitar renaissance strictly tied to Segovia’s personality.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Segovia’s perception of the guitar and its music was seen to be of great importance and his description of his first contact with classical guitar music leaves no doubt as to his views about other styles of guitar:

I felt like crying, laughing, even kissing the hands of a man who could draw such beautiful sounds from the guitar! My passion for music seemed to explode into flames. I was trembling. A sudden wave of disgust for the folk pieces I had been playing came over me, mixed with a delirious obsession to learn ‘that music’ immediately.<sup>9</sup>

In *The Natural Classical Guitar* (1991), Lee F. Ryan again focused upon Segovia’s achievement in terms of the attainment of respectability: ‘Segovia’s presence and masterful playing have helped to give the guitar its present place as a respectable concert instrument throughout the world.’<sup>10</sup> Much of this literature from the 1960s till the 1990s, presents Segovia as a messianic figure who was without equal either in preceding or succeeding eras. However, it also established the idea of ‘respectability’ as being of paramount importance in popularising the guitar, ignoring the fact that the instrument was already popular. In fact, Ryan’s use of the word ‘respectable’ is interesting primarily because the guitar’s popularity over the last century, in genres such as jazz, folk, pop and rock music has often been linked with its perceived lack of respectability. Segovia’s role in

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<sup>7</sup> Baker, Emma: ‘Fingers on the Strings’, *Gramophone*, Vol. 84, No. 1014, (2007), 19.

<sup>8</sup> Atademo, Luigi: ‘Segovia’s Choices: Observations on Segovia and His Repertoire in Our Time’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 36, No. 2, (2010), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Segovia, Andrés, *Autobiography of the Years 1893-1920*, (London: Marion Boyars, 1976), 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Ryan, Lee F.: *The Natural Classical Guitar*, (Connecticut: The Bold Strummer, 1991), 160.

the popularisation of the classical guitar is immense but the tendency to over-state the role of perceived ‘respectability’ in that process, is not always accurate. It does not, for example, reflect the global popularity of the instrument in a multitude of pop and folk settings when John Duarte claims that ‘but for the work and influence of Segovia there would have been no platform (other than that of salon dimensions) for us to work on, no global world of the guitar for us to inhabit...’<sup>11</sup> This statement was intended as a tribute to Segovia but in no way reflects the truth behind the growth of guitar cultures in the twentieth century. In fact, this narrative ignores the important role that the guitar has performed in reaching across countless different genres and increasing its own popularity in the process. Reflecting a more inclusive approach to the instrument, Kevin Dawe speaks of ‘the common ground and interconnectivity found in the world of guitar, celebrating cultural difference but also offering a point of departure into the world of ideas about the guitar.’<sup>12</sup>

The ‘Segovian narrative’ arguably fails to provide a fully-rounded picture of the confluence of disparate influences that led to the guitar becoming so popular during the twentieth century. Segovia’s considerable impact upon the classical guitar is discussed in Chapter One, but it is clear that the invention of the electric guitar as well as seismic shifts caused by both the broadcasting and recording industries created an entirely new landscape for music in general with the possibility of global markets and exposure. Technological advances and ease of travel have also aided the instrument and these factors helped to increase the worldwide reach of all forms of guitar. However, the ultimate success of the electric guitar as a central component of many popular genres, has undoubtedly contributed significantly to an increased usage of and interest in all forms of guitar performance.

### **John Williams’ approach**

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<sup>11</sup> Wade, Graham: *Segovia – A Celebration*, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Dawe, Kevin: *The New Guitarscape in Critical Theory, Cultural Practice and Musical Performance*, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 61.

Williams' approach has been in marked contrast to that of his mentor Segovia, as well as that of many other contemporary guitarists. Indeed, he has often been viewed as something of a rebel in this context. In 2011, musicologist Leon Botstein made the point that because classical music in the twentieth century was to some extent dominated by the new technology of recording – which preserved the mannerisms and ideals of legendary performers of a previous era – it has become difficult for successive generations to develop their own musical personalities in the eyes of the public.

By the late twentieth century, therefore, credence was given to the notion that truly great performers were phenomena of the past (e.g. Toscanini, Furtwängler, Caruso, Heifitz). This seemed plausible, given the subordination of live performance to recording after 1945. All succeeding generations of performers, with rare exceptions (among them Gould) were defined as engaged in a species of nostalgic reproduction, imitators of personalities from a great age that had passed. Playing a historic work was understood as an act similar to what an artisan does when making an exact replica of an eighteenth-century table. A class of connoisseurs came into being who proudly preferred any historic or so-called standard recording to a live event or new recording.<sup>13</sup>

As Botstein suggests, a section of the public will always tend to mythologise the recordings of such artists, including Segovia, without acknowledging that performance practice has altered in the intervening time. This situation is exacerbated among guitarists by an understandable sense of gratitude towards Segovia, which at times has led to a refusal to be critical of him in any way. This attitude was illustrated by guitarist Eliot Fisk's aggressive response in 2000, when he was asked about negative aspects of Segovia's legacy:

Segovia was an enormous figure. He was like Mount Everest. And being a strong personality, he formed everything around him [...] If you disagree with what Segovia did, take that energy and go out and do something positive. Otherwise, shut up.<sup>14</sup>

What Fisk failed to acknowledge, is that a more balanced assessment of Segovia might, in some cases, *lead* to doing 'something positive'. The acknowledgement of a great debt to a venerated performer should not render them above criticism.

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<sup>13</sup> Botstein, Leon: 'The Eye of a Needle', *The Oxford Handbook of The New Cultural History of Music*, ed. Jane E. Fulcher, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 535.

<sup>14</sup> Tosone, James: *Classical Guitarists – Conversations*, (North Carolina, London: McFarland & Co., 2000), 50.

As will be shown in this thesis, many of John Williams' forays outside of the classical guitar spectrum, served to remind the public of a much older tradition than the one established by Segovia. That is, the history of the guitar as a popular instrument which has been relevant in a multitude of countries and cultures into which the instrument has migrated since its emergence in Spain around the fifteenth century. Segovia's rather narrow views about both the history and future of the instrument seemed, at times, to have been universally accepted by other classical guitarists and Williams frequently rallied against this tendency. In fact, the insistence of critics and guitarists to ignore the guitar's popular traditions has often led to Williams' own work being either overlooked or criticised in terms of its importance to the instrument.

A good example of Williams' diverse approach to the guitar can be gleaned from an interview in 2004, where he discussed his performance of *Rhapsody* by Patrick Gowers:

It was the *Rhapsody*, which was written for electronic organ, two electric guitar parts and classical guitar. I actually did a whole season at Ronnie Scott's on that. I had a tape which had the electronic organ and the two electric guitar parts and I used to play the live classical guitar with it. It was pretty good actually, pretty dramatic.<sup>15</sup>

There are many remarkable aspects to this simple description, and it encapsulates Williams' attitude both to music and his chosen instrument. For example, it would have been a rare occurrence during the early 1970s for a classical guitarist to perform a piece featuring both classical and electric guitars. The fact that Williams played the electric guitar parts also stands out as does his performance with a prepared tape during a residency at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club in London. In an era when the two other active major classical guitar performers, Segovia and Julian Bream, had publicly criticised the electric guitar, for Williams to play the instrument was a bold statement. Furthermore, for him to perform at a jazz club where people ate and drank as he played was no less of a breakthrough.

Tanenbaum discusses this tendency:

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<sup>15</sup> Yates, Stanley: *John Williams Interview* – 1 June, 2004, Accessed 5 February, 2017. [www.classicalguitarstudy.com/Articles/Williams-complete.pdf](http://www.classicalguitarstudy.com/Articles/Williams-complete.pdf)

What makes Williams' career so ground-breaking is his ability to exist both inside and outside the traditional boundaries of the classical guitar. After establishing himself as the dominant young guitar player of his time, he decisively stepped away, shocking many and alienating Segovia, who had virtually anointed Williams as his successor.<sup>16</sup>

This is a perceptive comment although it should also be pointed out that many of the 'traditional boundaries' to which he refers, had been established only a generation earlier by Segovia. Williams has sought to move guitarists away from some of these 'Segovian' traditions and this study aims to assess his contribution in terms of the unique attitudes that he has brought to the practice of classical guitar performance.

### **Biography and reception: sources**

William Starling's 2012 biography of John Williams, *Strings Attached*, is a reflection on Williams' career and life, but does not attempt to assess his contribution to classical guitar culture in a scholarly fashion. Starling embarks on a lengthy discussion about Williams' father Len, and in that sense provides insights into his development.<sup>17</sup> The book also touches on many important aspects of his career, providing a useful timeline, but does not analyse the relevant implications or the music in any great detail. However, Starling does attempt to gauge the influence of Segovia, and illuminates some crucial points in Williams' career. Although he makes little attempt to examine Williams' playing style, he provides a very clear picture of the personality behind the celebrity.

James Tosone's *Classical guitarists – Conversations* (2000), devotes an extended section to Williams, including a detailed interview and numerous reviews of concerts and recordings. It provides an interesting source of reception and opinion in relation to his career.<sup>18</sup> This thesis draws on both Starling's and Tosone's work in addition to Tanenbaum's comprehensive survey from 2003, but also focuses on reviews and articles about Williams which have appeared in journals and magazines over six decades, such as *Soundboard*, *Classical Guitar*,

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<sup>16</sup> Tanenbaum, 195.

<sup>17</sup> Starling, William: *Strings Attached*, (London: The Robson Press, 2012), 3-55.

<sup>18</sup> Tosone, 149-178.

*Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine*. These articles can be used to trace interesting patterns of reception which have emerged from various writers and examine how they portray Williams, and indeed to what extent these writers at times expose their own ideologies while discussing his performances. In searching for the opinions of various commentators about Williams' influence on the guitar, the study considers much of what has been published in reviews and commentaries, as a way of gauging reception to his performances. Although it would be tempting to source new verdicts about Williams, by interviewing musicians who have worked with him, it is fair to say that the study might then be in danger of becoming a 'tribute', with hindsight and professional respect obscuring the nature of how certain projects were actually received and thereby leading to a narrative lacking balance and scholarly interrogation.

The study uses Williams' recordings as a major resource, examining both the repertoire and performances therein. There are also many videos featuring both performances and interviews which help to provide a picture of Williams' musical personality. The liner notes for various recordings and video releases often provide a helpful insight into Williams' musical opinions because they have frequently been researched and written by the performer himself. Many of these are remarkably detailed, such as the thorough discussion of Venezuelan music that accompanies his *El Diablo Suelto* CD (2003).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, I focus on specific projects, examining their impact and reception, while also illustrating those attitudes of Williams which have greatly influenced classical guitar culture.

In addition to surveying various interviews and articles from books, journals and online sources, the study also seeks to examine Williams' own personal viewpoint about the impact of his career on guitar culture through the use of an extensive interview I undertook with the performer in London in 2017. This interview was semi-structured with prepared questions around areas of discussion that arose from my research. At the same time, my intention was to encourage Williams to react to a number of different topics that relate to the research while also facilitating flexibility so that the discussion could go in other directions.

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<sup>19</sup> Williams, John: 'Notes on *El Diablo Suelto*', SK90451, (Sony Music Entertainment, 2003).



Quotations from this interview are used throughout the study and illuminate many of the ideas explored. The interview was recorded on a Zoom digital recording device and is stored in a folder on my laptop computer. John Williams signed a consent form prior to the interview which gave me permission to include his responses in the study, while I agreed to allow him to read those sections of the interview that were to be included in the study in order to verify the accuracy of the information therein.<sup>20</sup>

The contrast between scholarly guitar-based literature, written from the 1950s until the 1980s (discussed earlier in this introduction) with work that has emerged from the 1990s to the present day, reflects changes in attitude towards the guitar which have either affected or been affected by the career of John Williams. One such example is *Guitar Cultures* (2001), which was published with the aim of examining ‘the role and meaning of the guitar in cultures and societies across the planet and one that looked at the cultures of the guitar as socially constructed and meaningful.’<sup>21</sup> Editors Kevin Dawe and Andrew Bennett established their task:

The purpose of this book then, is to examine the cultural significance of the guitar in some of its myriad everyday local contexts and, in doing so, begin to establish a picture of guitar performance, collecting and making – as well as the reception of guitar music – as both a global and a local phenomenon.<sup>22</sup>

*Guitar Cultures* marked a change in the nature of writing about the guitar and was an attempt to establish links between the various cultures of guitar. It established structural, historical, practical and musical reasons as to why the guitar emerged from these different cultures as arguably the twentieth-century’s most popular musical instrument. Indeed, in a later publication, Dawe quotes the performer Les Paul’s assertion that the guitar was ‘the number one instrument in the world’, giving some credence to the statement:

I have often heard people say that the guitar is the most popular instrument in the world – the number one’ instrument according to

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<sup>20</sup> In accordance with DIT’s research regulations, I obtained approval from the Institute’s Ethics Committee prior to the interview.

<sup>21</sup> Bennett, Andy and Dawe, Kevin: ‘Acknowledgements’, *Guitar Cultures*, ed. Andy Bennett and Kevin Dawe, (Oxford: Berg, 2001), vii.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

Les Paul as noted above – but how can one test such a claim? (Not that one has any reason to doubt Les Paul!). However, it is certainly worth pondering such a claim given its potential significance.<sup>23</sup>

The idea that the guitar has grown in popularity because of its own versatility and adaptability, challenges the notion that any one figure, whether that be Segovia, Robert Johnson, Paco de Lucia or Jimi Hendrix, can be afforded sole credit for either popularising or elevating the instrument. In an age of continuous dialogue between different cultures, the guitar has become a vital tool of translation. Dawe and Bennett deserve credit for recognising this and they hinted at the limitations of previous studies, pointing out that ‘it is very difficult to provide satisfactory accounts of the guitar’s cultural appeal using monocultural accounts.’<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, their work is reflective of the fact that players like John Williams had been establishing similar ideas for many years in both word and deed. For example, in 1971, thirty years prior to the publication of *Guitar Cultures*, Williams followed up his participation in a world premiere recording of the music of Webern from 1970 with *Songs of Freedom* with folk-singer Maria Farandouri and *Changes*, a cross-over pop/classical album with Stanley Myers which included the first recorded version of *Cavatina*. The same year he also performed and arranged guitar parts for Frank Zappa’s *200 Motels* film, performed on Myers’ soundtrack for the film *The Raging Moon* and also released an album featuring baroque and contemporary works with harpsichord player, Raphael Puyana and viola da gamba player, Jordi Savall. Williams’ activities in 1971 serve as a reminder of the guitar’s great adaptability. Over three decades later in *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar* (2003), Victor Anand Coelho reflected that same definitive change in attitude among guitar scholars, as he focussed on the various guitar traditions from around the world.

Despite the consistency in the guitar’s basic shape and tuning over the past four centuries, it has accommodated more diverse players, techniques, and styles than any other instrument in use today. The guitar’s universal presence in the world today testifies to its long history of crossing (and even bridging) cultures. It reminds us that the popularity of the guitar since 1900, even in the “classical” worlds, is largely indebted to the widespread dissemination of popular music – with which the guitar is virtually synonymous –

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<sup>23</sup> Dawe, Kevin: *The New Guitarscape*, 19-20.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 1.

and the global seeding of guitar cultures through human migration, colonialism, post-colonialism, technology and revival.<sup>25</sup>

Coelho also described how the guitar's versatility has led, at times, to it being undervalued in some respects:

The enormous cultural and stylistic breadth of this tradition has not made it easy for music history to digest. Consequently, because music histories have been written in a library rather than on the street, the contributions of the guitar have been relegated to little more than a few lines, a picture, and a footnote.<sup>26</sup>

If these publications exemplified a new style of guitar literature, which in turn reflected the numerous cross-over projects of certain guitarists, then they certainly also resonated with some broader shifts, which had already been established in the field of musicology. However, they clearly echo a shift away from the views of Segovia about folk and popular styles of guitar music. Writing about Segovia's relationship with the Spanish composer Joaquin Turina, Townsend Plant asserts that: 'One of Segovia's missions was to "rescue" the guitar from stigmas associated with popular and folk styles that had, in his view, plagued the guitar for years.'<sup>27</sup>

The rise of 'new' musicology in the last number of decades has provided the impetus for a re-evaluation of the role and function of the guitar and it is clear that the global landscape of music has changed beyond all recognition over the past thirty years. John Williams articulated this succinctly in 2000, when he observed that 'the assumed superiority of the European classical music tradition is being questioned, and rightly so.'<sup>28</sup> He continued:

For our culture to accept that idea is quite a dramatic change because there has been a belief that yes, jazz is wonderful, South American music is very vibrant, Indian music is full of improvising fantasy – but when all is said and done, Brahms, Beethoven, and Mozart are it. That assumption has got to go.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Coelho, Victor Anand: 'Picking Through Guitar Cultures', *Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed. Victor Anand Coelho, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>27</sup> Plant, Townsend: 'Joaquin Turina and the Classical Guitar' *Soundboard*, Vol. 36, No.3, (2010), 22.

<sup>28</sup> Tosone, 160.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 160.

In *The New Guitarscape in Critical Theory, Cultural Practice and Musical Performance* (2010), Dawe referred to the instrument as ‘a locus for musical and cultural interactions within and across cultures.’<sup>30</sup> The guitarist has developed into a common denominator for a vast array of diverse musical styles and Williams has frequently allowed himself to become that link, engaging in music which can be described as crossover. Indeed, by focussing on various musical styles through the prism of Williams’ career as a guitarist, this thesis finds much common ground with Dawe’s work, which also provided contexts on the current popularity of the guitar as well as its position in scholarly research.<sup>31</sup> Dawe focused on the role of technologies such as the internet, video games and various guitar effects, in addition to issues such as gender and sexuality as they relate to the guitar phenomenon and gave a rich overview of the instrument as it stands from a societal, cultural and musical viewpoint in the early years of the twenty-first century.<sup>32</sup>

Popular music studies and ethnomusicology have considerably altered the academic landscape and therefore, the perception of the guitar. While the instrument may not have been central to the development of classical music, its role in the history of folk and popular music is pivotal, not just over the past century but as far back as the sixteenth century. John Williams’ career has in many ways reflected both the varied history and the possibilities for the future of the instrument more than any other modern classical guitarist.

### **Aims of this study**

This study aims to fill a gap that exists in guitar literature by exploring Williams’ effect on how the instrument is perceived by both the general public and among classical guitarists themselves. Segovia’s influence upon the culture of classical guitar performance is discussed in Chapter One, including an examination of reviews and opinions about Segovia from various publications. This study discusses the ‘Segovian’ narrative at length and, as such, his autobiography of 1977 provides an extremely important insight into the attitudes and ideals which

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<sup>30</sup> Dawe, Kevin: *The New Guitarscape*, 179.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

underpinned his pronouncements on the guitar. Segovia's teaching methods are also discussed, as are both the positive and potentially negative aspects of his legacy.

Chapter Two discusses John Williams' career against the backdrop of Segovia's achievements. The chapter presents a significant contrast in the attitudes of these two men, not only in terms of their response to the guitar, but also with regard to their opinions about various styles of music and their political views. It is fair to say that given the popularity of both Segovia and Williams (and indeed Bream), their opinions and ideas have had a sizeable influence upon guitar culture.

Chapter Three deals with Williams' approach to the classical guitar, focussing on a range of areas such as amplification, ensemble playing, teaching, performance anxiety and guitar design. The latter area naturally involves his help and advocacy of Greg Smallman, which has been a landmark collaboration in the history of the instrument. The chapter also analyses his performances of J.S. Bach's *Chaconne in d minor* and Mauro Giuliani's *Concerto in A Opus 30*. These case studies are chosen because they are both pieces that had been recorded early in Williams' career and re-recorded by him many years later. Therefore, it is illuminating to compare his performances not only with other players, but also with his own earlier recordings.

In Chapter Four, Williams' more unusual and unconventional career paths are examined. These include his work with Sky, Stanley Myers, André Previn and Francis Bebey and include crossover projects linking the guitar with jazz, rock, popular, African and Venezuelan music. Williams' work in these areas can be said to have significantly broadened the appeal of the classical guitar and created radically new musical directions for the instrument.

Chapter Five discusses his work which can be said to have contributed to the 'standard' classical guitar repertoire, examining his collaborations with Peter Sculthorpe, Tōru Takemitsu, Stephen Dodgson and Leo Brouwer as well as his own compositions for guitar. Williams' programme choices are examined and his own compositions are scrutinised, while his duet with Julian Bream also features

in this chapter. Although Williams' relationship with Segovia is important because it places his career in context, his work with Bream is arguably more interesting because the analysis of their duet facilitates an examination of the character of these very different performers, who have remained friends since their collaboration from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. Finally, Chapter Five also focuses on Williams' role in the rehabilitation of the reputation of Agustin Barrios Mangoré, the Paraguayan guitarist/composer who endured a dismally unsuccessful career until his death in 1944. The release of the album *John Williams plays the music of Agustin Barrios Mangoré* in 1977, had a profound effect on how people perceived Barrios' music and the impact of this is explored by comparing literature on the subject dating from both before and after that year.

The above issues are all crucial with regard to an examination of Williams' career and an assessment of his impact upon the culture of classical guitar during the past six decades. However, as with so many discussions which relate to the classical guitar during the twentieth century, the most appropriate place to begin is with an examination of Segovia, whose influence provides an essential context for Williams' life's work.

## **Chapter One**

### **The impact of Andrés Segovia upon the popularity of the classical guitar**

The aim of this chapter is to establish a sense of the broad influence of Andrés Segovia (1893-1987) upon the culture of the classical guitar. Although Segovia's impact has been huge, it is important when analysing any figure of great stature, that a balanced picture emerges and this chapter aims to examine both positive and negative aspects of his approach to the guitar. In this way, the culture into which John Williams progressed in the 1950s can be fully appreciated. It is important not only to establish the opportunities that were available for Williams but also the deficiencies and 'gaps' which, as I will argue, presented in a culture built so much around the achievements and ideals of one individual.

Segovia, a self-taught guitarist, from the village of Linares in the region of Andalusia in southern Spain, exerted an enormous impact upon the perception of classical guitar in the twentieth century. He debuted in Granada in 1909 at the age of sixteen and over the next two decades, established himself as a successful concert artist throughout Europe. Segovia developed a highly influential network of friends and admirers in the early part of his career, which included Manuel de Falla, Pablo Casals and Pablo Picasso. Indeed Casals is said to have organised Segovia's official Paris debut in April 1924, which was enormously successful.<sup>1</sup> The approval of such luminaries was of great value to Segovia as he sought to establish relationships with music agents and promoters, who were initially cautious about placing a guitarist on the great concert stages of the world. Segovia's early tours in Europe and his South American tours were handled by the Cuban impresario Ernesto de Quesada and in 1924, he secured European representation by the British firm Ibbs & Tillet. From 1926, he began to make recordings, which also greatly improved the public's understanding of his repertoire and technique. He was introduced to North-American audiences by the New York-based promoter Francis Coppicus and in 1943, began to work with Sol

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<sup>1</sup> Henehan, Donal: 'Andrés Segovia is Dead at 94; His Crusade Elevated Guitar', *New York Times*,

Hurok who, according to Robert Bailey, ‘helped build a lifelong audience for Segovia in North America.’<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 Career, tributes and reception

The availability of recordings, along with Hurok’s skills as a music manager, altered Segovia’s status from being something of an unknown quantity within the classical concert world to being cherished as an exotic rarity. When he performed, the image that Segovia portrayed was one of old-world Spanish nobility and his desire to produce a beautiful sound seemed to outweigh more virtuosic tendencies. As one reviewer described:

Segovia cares as little about flamboyant showmanship as a master wood-engraver cares about seeing his meticulous designs blown up into bill-board poster size. His is an intimate art, balanced on the toes as gossamer-light as any sprite out of Shakespeare or Shelley.<sup>3</sup>

Although many factors contributed to his enormous success, the sound that Segovia produced left an enormous impression on all who witnessed him perform. Julian Bream has described Segovia’s sound as ‘ravishing and magnificent’ and comments that ‘you could recognise Segovia’s way of playing instantly: too many guitarists today would be unrecognisable after a whole concert.’<sup>4</sup>

Already an established celebrity in Europe, Segovia began touring America in 1928 and his first appearance in New York’s Town Hall on January 8, 1928, elicited the following response from Olin Downes, of the *New York Times*:

The appearance of Mr. Segovia is not that of a trumpeted virtuoso. He is rather a dreamer or scholar in bearing, long hair, eyeglasses, a black frock coat and neckwear of an earlier generation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bailey, Robert W.: ‘El Guitarrista Feo: A Critical Investigation of Barrios’ Career’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 37, No. 3, (2011), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Humphries, Henry: Review of Segovia’s Concert in Cincinnati, for the Cincinnati Press, 7 April, 1956, cited in Wade, Graham: ‘Segovia – A Centenary Celebration Part X – 1955-56’ *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (1993), 45.

<sup>4</sup> Green, Andrew: ‘The Father of the Guitar’, *BBC Music Magazine*, Vol. 24 No. 5, (2016), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Downes, Olin: ‘Review of Segovia’s 1928 Concert in Town Hall New York’, *New York Times*, (29 January, 1928), cited in Henehan: ‘Andrés Segovia is Dead at 94: His Crusade Elevated Guitar’, Published 4 June, 1987, Accessed 26 June, 2015. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)



This review highlights the importance of Segovia's image, which was carefully cultivated. However, although Downes was generous in his praise for Segovia, he also stated that the Spaniard could become the 'trick player' of the age, and focused heavily on the guitar's perceived lack of quality:

Saying all this, it must be added that Segovia cannot succeed in removing the limitations which will always surround his instrument. He has far outdistanced himself from the ordinary twanger of strings. Nevertheless, the guitar remains the guitar, with limits of sonority, color, dynamics. These limitations make Bach less impressive through its medium than on the piano or harpsichord. They reach their utmost effect and their entire significance in music less sculpturesque and contrapuntal than Bach's and with warmer harmony and more elementary rhythms.<sup>6</sup>

The same concert was also reviewed by Samuel Chotzinoff for *The World* and although generous in his praise for Segovia, he seemed to be bizarrely fixated upon the fact that the guitar was not in fact, a piano, stating that the guitar was 'an instrument with one fatal limitation, or rather two – it is plucked and has no sustaining pedal.'<sup>7</sup>

Segovia's career entered a crisis during World War II because of his support for Franco and Robert C. Powell mentions boycotts outside his concerts in New York during the 1930s and 40s. This led to his temporary banishment from the American concert scene for much of the 1930s, leading him to focus on European and South American territories during that time. It has also been said that his relationship with former friend and artistic ally Pablo Casals, deteriorated because of their contrasting political beliefs. Paul Elie refers to Segovia as 'Casal's Spanish opposite – Andalusian, self-taught, royalist in politics.'<sup>8</sup> Sensing a level of general distaste for Franco, particularly throughout the artistic world, Segovia did endeavour to play down his political beliefs by making light of what he

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<sup>6</sup> Downes, Olin: 'Review of Segovia's 1928 Concert in Town Hall New York', *New York Times*, (January 29, 1928), cited in Horn, Guy: 'January 8, 1928: The Moment of Truth for the Classical Guitar in the United States', *Soundboard*, Vol. 20, No.3, (1994), 19.

<sup>7</sup> Chotzinoff, Samuel: Review of Segovia's New York Town Hall Concert, *The World*, (9 January, 1928), cited in Horn, Guy: 'January 8, 1928: The Moment of Truth for the Classical Guitar in the United States', *Soundboard*, Vol. 20, No.3, (1994), 19.

<sup>8</sup> Elie, Paul: *Reinventing Bach*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2013), ii.

regarded as Spain's inability to find good governance as illustrated by the following quotation:

“When God created Spain, he allowed the Spaniard three wishes: 1) to have the most varied climate, 2) the most beautiful women and 3) the most delicious food, fruit and wine. God granted all three, but after a little while they came back demanding a fourth wish: to have the best government. And God said ‘That is too much to ask,’ muy español!”<sup>9</sup>

While this remark may seem to indicate a playful indifference to politics, his letters to the Mexican composer Manuel Maria Ponce betray more staunch political sentiments and paint him in a less than favourable light. In this excerpt he complains that he must hide his true beliefs while in the United States:

I do not pretend to be a friend of the reds, God save me, but here I avoid imprudent declarations. I help Franco with what I can, ostensibly in Europe but behind the scenes in this country.<sup>10</sup>

These letters, first published in 1989, show a darker side to Segovia's character and include one particular letter from 1941, in which he blames Jewish artists, such as Heifetz, and Jewish impresarios for his ban in America, as well as defending his right to support Franco or play in Nazi Germany. He describes the conclusion of a meeting with a young activist in which he describes America as ‘a thousand times more dictatorial’ than either Germany, Italy or Russia.<sup>11</sup> Segovia's indifference to the suffering of others and his blatant concern for his own business concerns in the face of such tragedy is regrettable and it is safe to assume that, had the sentiments contained in these letters become public during the post-war era, his career might never have recovered. However, after the war, circumstances combined to revitalise his career in the USA. The promoter Harold Shaw, who worked for Sol Hurok in the post-war years, has spoken of the subtle changes in perception, which had such an enormous impact, both specifically upon Segovia and more generally, upon the guitar itself:

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<sup>9</sup> Powell, Ronald C.: ‘Segovia Remembered’, *Soundboard*, Vol.14, No.3, (1987), 168.

<sup>10</sup> Andrés Segovia: *The Segovia-Ponce Letters*, ed. Miguel Alcazar, trans. Peter Segal, (Columbus: Editions Orphee, 1989), 168.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 243-244.

Segovia was managed by Sol Hurok and it was my job as sales representative to arrange bookings and dates for Segovia. Unfortunately, it was very difficult to make the promoters understand what I was talking about. I would go to different cities – Kansas City, Topeka, Denver – and talk to promoters about their concert series. When I mentioned that we had a guitarist, Segovia, I got a very sharp answer which was essentially, “Look fella, we’ve got guitar guys playing and singing around here all day, all night, every day of the week. We don’t need any more thank you very much.” That isn’t precisely what people said but that’s what they were basically saying. Until they could actually hear Segovia play, they wouldn’t be able to understand. Fortunately Decca came out with a Segovia recording and when I played it for the promoters, it really opened up their ears [...] You see most promoters at the time took as a rather elite novelty to present to their people – but it helped build Segovia’s career.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, Segovia established himself as a genuinely successful concert artist against a backdrop of indifference towards his chosen instrument and his career continued to prosper until his death in 1987. Taken from a Danish newspaper, the following is a typical example of the type of reception garnered by Segovia throughout his career:

We have never heard anyone who can possibly be compared with the way he plays his guitar. With his incomprehensible virtuosity and his sense of taste, proving the high level of his musical culture, he makes the guitar an instrument on which proper music can be performed.<sup>13</sup>

Segovia received many such tributes from various critics and luminaries throughout classical music world. Ever since his Madrid debut in 1909, he enjoyed an unprecedented level of success for a guitarist, illuminating the most prestigious venues with his artistry and charisma. It can clearly be gleaned from the above quotation that many reviewers expressed surprise at what could be achieved on a classical guitar. French critic Bernard Gavoty humorously described Segovia’s performance of Bach’s *Chaconne in d minor* as follows:

They covered their faces, as Spanish ladies do when watching a bullfight – that is, with their fingers slightly parted so as to see

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<sup>12</sup> Tosone, Jim: *Conversations – Classical Guitarists*, (North Carolina, London: McFarland & Company, 2000), 140.

<sup>13</sup> Review from *Politiken*, Denmark, 1927, cited in Wade, Graham: *Maestro Segovia*, (London: Robson Books, 1986), 12.

through the spaces [...] Be that as it may, the violinophiles arrived in profound gloom to witness the “murder.” As for myself, my enjoyment of this performance was unclouded [...] No painter’s palette was ever richer in colours than Segovia’s guitar in tones and nuances on that particular evening.<sup>14</sup>

There are many reviews of this nature and a similar narrative can be detected throughout. In an echo of the type of reviews elicited by the performances of Viennese child prodigy Leonard Schulz, a hundred years earlier, it seems as though critics were trying to outdo each other both in terms of praising the young Spanish virtuoso and in their lack of respect for his instrument.<sup>15</sup> As Segovia’s star rose, a certain degree of respect gradually emerged for the instrument on which he performed. And yet, in his early career the accepted view was that his great technique and artistry were achieved in spite of the guitar rather than because of it. Indeed, the celebrated composer Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) was quoted as saying that before Segovia’s arrival as a concert artist the guitar was ‘regarded as a piece of romantic stage furniture.’<sup>16</sup>

The overwhelming perception towards the end of Segovia’s life was that the guitar had, by that time grown in stature and that this was virtually all due to the work of Segovia. The pianist Louis Kentner wrote:

I only had the honour of meeting Maestro Segovia twice, once when, still as a young man, he took my then home town of Budapest by storm, and much later, when I visited Spain. His playing electrified his audiences on each occasion; he made the guitar from an instrument of popular entertainment into a vehicle of serious classical music, thus inscribing his name in the annals of music history.<sup>17</sup>

Segovia became, in a very tangible way, a personification of the Spanish guitar and his rise to popularity within the refined classical music world is a good example of what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has referred to as ‘embodied cultural

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<sup>14</sup> Gavoty, Bernard: Notes on *Andrés Segovia*, for MCA410033, (Geneva: Great Concert Artists series, R Kister, 1955), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Stenstadvold, Erik: “‘The Worst Drunkard in London’: The Life and Career of Leonard Schulz”, *Soundboard* Vol XXXVIII, No. 4, (2012), 9-16.

<sup>16</sup> Wade, Graham: *Maestro Segovia* (London: Robson Books, 1986), 12.

<sup>17</sup> Wade, Graham: *Segovia – A Celebration of the Man and His Music*, (London: Allison & Busby, 1983), 27.

capital.’<sup>18</sup> A sense prevailed during the early part of the twentieth century that Segovia, by his talent, his rarity and the sheer force of his personality, had ensured that his career seemed inexorably linked to the popularity of the instrument, as the two rose proportionately in terms of status and profile. Culturally, he was a giant of the instrument and his Spanish nationality added to his stature as an iconic figure: in short, this was a perfect fit. Yehudi Menuhin touched on the appeal of Segovia’s nationality when he noted that, ‘in Andres Segovia there dwells that quiet fire – fierce yet controlled – which is the mark of the Spaniard.’<sup>19</sup> History places him alongside such players as Casals and Menuhin as figures that have encapsulated and embodied their instrument with, in his case, one significant difference. The low esteem in which the guitar had been held in classical circles at the onset of his career seemed only to add weight to Segovia’s perceived achievement. The scale of Segovia’s achievement and the aura surrounding him, was summed up by the Hungarian cellist and professor at Bloomington, Indiana, Janos Starker who wrote the following in celebration of Segovia’s ninetieth birthday:

Andrés Segovia! A name which conjures up many images for me: a child entranced by the sounds of his guitar, a youngster awed by his overcoming the hitherto considered impossibilities of his instrument, a young man admiring his unbending principles toward his art, and his refusal toward the commercialization of his fame. Today, half a century later, all the above merges into a belief that as an artist and as a human being there is but one unique man in all the fields of interpretive art – Segovia.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike the great players of other instruments, who might have to content themselves with the consideration of having reached or, in some cases marginally improved upon the standards of past masters, a perception existed that he had raised the level of performance to such an extent that he had all but invented the modern classical guitar.

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<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre: ‘The Forms of Capital’, *Readings in Economic Sociology*, ed. Nicole Woolsey Biggart, (Massachusetts/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 283-284.

<sup>19</sup> Wade, Graham: *Segovia – A Celebration*, 27.

<sup>20</sup> Wade, Graham: *Segovia – A Celebration*, 30.

Segovia also contributed in many practical ways to the betterment of the guitar, for example his advocacy of the use of nails over flesh of the right-hand fingers and his consultancy with Albert Augustine to aid with the design of the first nylon string, an innovation that greatly benefitted the instrument, both in terms of temperament and consistency of sound. Indeed, both these innovations can be said to have radically changed the sound of the twentieth century classical guitar and had an enormous impact upon audience reaction to the instrument. Segovia's practical responses to the problems of tuning and sound projection represent vital moments in the evolution of the instrument.

Segovia's autobiography, covering the years 1893-1920, gives an interesting insight into how he viewed his own achievements.<sup>21</sup> It is clear from this publication that Segovia himself enjoyed basking in his role as a sort of messianic figure in the history of the instrument. In the preface, he emphasised this narrative by stating: 'I found the guitar at a standstill – despite the noblest efforts of Sor, Tarrega, Llobet and others – and raised it to the loftiest levels of the music world.'<sup>22</sup> Later, he concludes with another profession of his own self-belief: 'I pride myself only in having been a daring, tireless prober of the subtle beauty of the guitar, in conquering for it the love of millions in the world ahead.'<sup>23</sup> The use of the word 'only' in this remark is quite redundant, as the reader might reasonably ask the question: for what else Segovia *could* have wished to take credit? In one typical passage from the main text of the book, he describes playing for a noted violin professor at the workshop of luthier Manuel Ramirez in Madrid. Segovia recounted the episode as follows:

'Bravo, young fellow, bravo! I like your temperament and your technique,' he said 'What a pity such skill should be wasted on the small and undeveloped world of the guitar. Beautiful, perhaps but solitary and wild, few men of talent have ventured there and you have chosen to spend on it all your God-given talent – why not consider changing instruments? You are still young enough; you could become famous playing violin.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Segovia, Andrés: *Segovia – An Autobiography of the Years 1893-1920*, (London: Calder & Boyers, 1976).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* viii.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* ix

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 51.

Segovia goes on to explain to the professor that he must do for the guitar what great people of the past had done for the violin. He accepts his fate with the statement that ‘[I] would never turn my back on the guitar. It needs me; the violin doesn’t.’<sup>25</sup> Segovia’s account of this meeting concludes with the declaration: ‘And I added, “I have sworn to walk in the steps of the sainted Francisco Tárrega, who lived and died for his beloved instrument, with little hope of glory or gain.”’<sup>26</sup>

This account gives a good indication as to the tone of Segovia’s autobiography and indeed of a good deal of his public pronouncements that relate to his own achievements. While it is true that praise and credit has been rightly showered upon Segovia for almost a century, it is also fair to say that he himself set the tone of much of this commentary.

## **1.2 Other contributions to classical guitar culture in the early twentieth century**

It is impossible to read the memoirs of Segovia without a sense that he created a specific narrative that placed him as the central and at times, the *only* relevant figure in the history and evolution of the guitar. However, the truth is slightly more complicated. While Segovia achieved an enormous amount, there are other figures whose contributions to the instrument’s rise in popularity were also of great significance. The aforementioned Francisco Tárrega (1852-1909) is one such figure, although he pre-dates Segovia by some distance. He did, however set in motion some of the trends that began to transform the fortunes of the instrument after his death in 1909. Indeed, his career provided Segovia with a perfect model for the development of the guitar in that Tárrega not only taught a talented and highly motivated cohort of younger players who possessed the willingness and talent to help spread his theories on technique and interpretation, but also extensively transcribed the works of multiple composers from Bach through to contemporary nineteenth-century composers such as Albéniz, Malats, Verdi and even Wagner. Indeed, Walter Aaron Clark believes that Tárrega is

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 52.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

responsible for having encouraged transcription among twentieth century guitarists on a grand scale:

To be sure he was not the first guitarist in history to transcribe works from other media to his own, but he did so more extensively and influentially than any of his predecessors, thus establishing a practice continued by virtually every guitarist since his time. Indeed, though it is no longer incumbent on classical guitarists to compose and perform their own music, and has not been customary for many decades, they are expected to have made their own arrangements and transcriptions of music other than that for the guitar. This is as a direct result of Tárrega's influence, a practice that is not without its critics and controversy.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, Tárrega devised a comprehensive series of technical exercises that are still in use today, and composed a substantial collection of original works and studies. He was a shy and relatively unambitious person who did not live to fully observe the fruits of his labour but nonetheless his influence on the classical guitar during the twentieth century was immense. He is also credited with establishing the *apoyando* right-hand stroke as a standard guitar technique, which replaced the somewhat unwieldy practice of placing the little finger upon the table of the instrument.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps Tárrega's greatest contribution was his tremolo study *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* (1896), which became something of an iconic piece for the instrument and remains one of the most popular and recognisable solo guitar pieces in the world. Certainly this piece along with the evocative *Capricho Árabe* (1892) formed a cornerstone of Segovia's repertoire and Tárrega should be regarded more as a catalyst for change at the turn of the century rather than a vague historical figure from another time. This view was echoed in 1977 by Tom Evans and Mary Evans, who highlighted Tárrega's legacy:

Tárrega died at the age of fifty-seven, but his pupils Emilio Pujol, Miguel Llobet, Rita Brondi, Daniel Fortea, and Alberto Obregon continued his work. Emilio Pujol in his tremendous *Escuela Razonada de la Guitarra* has passed on the elements of Tárrega's

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<sup>27</sup> Clark, Walter Aaron: 'Francisco Tárrega, Isaac Albéniz, and the Modern Guitar', *Soundboard*, Vol. 36, No. 1, (2010), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Evans, Tom and Evans, Mary, *Guitars – From Renaissance to Rock*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 122.



teaching. With this new advanced technique, particularly that of the right hand, the guitar's music was once again ready to develop.<sup>29</sup>

Although Segovia frequently praised his compatriot, he has also, at times tried to undermine Tárrega legacy as both composer and musician. In the context of Segovia's own narrative, this reading of Tárrega can be seen as an attempt to augment his personal sense of achievement with regard to guitar repertoire. He spoke on the subject in 1948:

As for Tárrega, more saint than musician, as I have said before, more artist than creator, his slight works are only the pleasant flowerings of a delicate talent. Within the compass of Hispanic music, it hardly need be said that he lacks the greatness of Pedrell, Albéniz, Granados, Falla.<sup>30</sup>

This comment arguably does not give sufficient credit to Tárrega either for his compositional technique or his innate gift for melody and technical mastery of the instrument. Despite his premature demise, he left behind over three hundred works for the guitar, most of which are still relevant to students, teachers and performers today. In this light, Segovia's undermining of Tárrega is highly questionable. Indeed, the guitar composer Leo Brouwer placed Tárrega in his rightful historic position when he referred to him as 'genial father of the guitar'.<sup>31</sup>

One of the principal evolutionary steps which becomes evident between the careers of Tárrega and Segovia is the latter's preference of the use of nails to strike the strings over flesh. This gave the guitar a more pointed sound and the increased projection enabled Segovia to perform in larger venues, but it was resisted by many disciples of Tárrega, including Emilio Pujol and Daniel Fortea, who felt that the tone achieved was overly harsh.<sup>32</sup> Miguel Llobet was a player, arranger and composer who, although he had studied with Tárrega, had decided that using fingernails was the most effective method of playing the guitar. However, as Segovia remarked, Llobet's tone on the instrument was '[...] rasping

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 122.

<sup>30</sup> Originally quoted in *Guitar Review* No.7, 1948, cited in Wade, Graham: *Segovia – A Celebration*, 51.

<sup>31</sup> Stover, Richard: *Six Silver Moonbeams*, (California: Querico, 1992) 178.

<sup>32</sup> Segovia, 58-63.

and metallic, lacking in roundness, volume and resilience<sup>33</sup> and therefore did not provide him much assistance in the context of his argument. Apart from Llobet, most of Tárrega's followers never really accepted Segovia's viewpoint on this subject but his immense popularity eventually made the debate largely irrelevant. Llobet was himself a figure of some stature within artistic circles and had many influential friends including Isaac Albéniz, Claude Debussy, Manuel de Falla and Enrique Granados. Indeed, Falla wrote his only guitar piece *Homenaje pour le Tombeau de Claude Debussy* (1920) for Llobet and despite its relative brevity (approximately four minutes in length), it remains a significant part of the repertoire, exploring a range of interesting instrumental techniques as well as quoting from Debussy's *La Soirée dans Grenade* (1903). Llobet premiered the work at the Teatro de la Comedia in Madrid on 8 March, 1921.<sup>34</sup> In *Britten and the Guitar*, Benjamin Dwyer emphasises the importance of the piece in altering the twentieth-century approach to guitar composition:

It may be argued that Falla's *Homenaje* represents the beginning of a renaissance in the history of guitar music. It is not only a significant work in itself – Britten described it as 'a twenty-minute piece condensed and distilled into four minutes' – but it also marks a moment in the history of the repertoire when the guitar emerged from the parochial world of the guitarist-composer. This is important, as it initiated a movement away from music ensuing from the prodigious dexterity of the virtuoso and the idiosyncrasies of the fretboard to music that arose out of independent musical thought. Free from the cult of the virtuoso, which saw its apogee in 19<sup>th</sup>-century virtuosos such as Mauro Giuliani, Fernando Sor and Giulio Regondi, *Homenaje* is the first guitar work that belongs to the more comprehensive world of music at large.<sup>35</sup>

Although it could be argued that in his discussion of Britten, Dwyer tends to eulogise music composed by non-guitarists, his point about the importance of the work is well made. He also states that the work, as well as being a tribute to Debussy, was the result of a request by Llobet, establishing the performer's role

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 101.

<sup>34</sup> Harper, Nancy Lee: *Manuel de Falla – His life and Music*, (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 94-95.

<sup>35</sup> Dwyer, Benjamin: *Britten and the Guitar: Critical Perspectives for Performers*, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2016), 8-9.

in the creation of the work and underlining his considerable influence.<sup>36</sup> In his autobiography, Segovia describes an instance where he felt the need to rearrange certain travel plans in order to introduce himself to Llobet:

The day before I was to return to Cordoba via Madrid, I was given some news which made me change my plans: Miguel Llobet would be arriving soon in Valencia to stay for a few days. What else could I do but postpone my leave and meet him? Llobet was Tárrega's star pupil. His prestige was further enhanced by the eminent friends he made while living in Paris; Ravel, Debussy and Fauré had heard him play and admired him as an interpreter and as an artist.<sup>37</sup>

It is clear from his own account of their time together, that Segovia consciously cultivated a friendship with his older compatriot, seeking help on several occasions and attracting feelings of deep mistrust from Llobet's wife in the process.<sup>38</sup> However, despite their closeness, Segovia found much to criticise in Llobet's playing and as with Tárrega, sought to deflate his friend's reputation as a musician:

First, his technique was far from being the feat which so impressed both musicians and laymen at that time. The musicians attributed his effects to the magic of virtuosity because they probably had not yet heard polyphonic music played on the guitar; and laymen would raise their hands in awe the moment they heard fast scales executed smoothly on any instrument. Actually, without being extraordinary, Llobet's technique was excellent. I did notice that he always faltered in the same passages, even in relatively easy ones – probably because of lack of discipline or more likely due to laziness.<sup>39</sup>

Another seminal contribution to classical guitar repertoire came in the form of the *Concerto de Aranjuez* by the Spanish composer Joaquin Rodrigo (1901-1999). This work was influenced by the folk-styles of Granada and became one of the most performed concerti for any instrument in the second half of the twentieth century. The second movement encapsulates the beauty and hybridity of the

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>37</sup> Segovia, 98.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 110-111. Segovia described Llobet's wife showing her displeasure as he persuaded Llobet to use his influence to help him arrange a recital. She demanded that Segovia not give premiere performances of transcriptions given to him recently by her husband and Segovia's contempt for her was evident.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 101.

guitar with its flamenco-like cadenza and improvisatory melodic line. If there is any single work that placed the guitar on an equal footing with other classical instruments it is surely this piece. However, it was not written for Segovia but instead, for Regino Sainz de la Maza (1896-1981). Indeed, Segovia never performed the *Aranjuez* concerto and, perhaps sensing that his compatriot had not been pleased to have been overlooked as the dedicatee of the work, Rodrigo wrote another concerto for Segovia entitled *Fantasia para un Gentilhombre* in 1954. Despite being a fine work, it did not, according to John Williams, ‘have the transcendental qualities of its predecessor.’<sup>40</sup> Rodrigo lived a long and prolific life, producing many great guitar works for both solo and ensemble, including *Invocacion y Danza* (1961), one of the greatest solo guitar pieces of the twentieth century, which was dedicated to the memory of Manuel de Falla and utilises rasguado, tremolo and rapid scale passages to great effect.

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) also blazed a trail with his distinctive compositional style, which influenced legions of younger composers such as Leo Brouwer and Nikita Koshkin. Villa-Lobos produced music based on the natural tuning and open string relationships of the guitar. In doing this he freed guitarists to become more expressive and created a style of composition focused on the instrument’s strengths. The Brazilian composer, who played the guitar himself, used melodies, harmonies and scale-runs which fitted perfectly onto the instrument, allowing for easier and faster technical execution.

An important point to consider is the fact that Villa-Lobos was a very famous composer and a huge cultural figure both in Brazil and internationally. In fact he is often regarded as the most important figure in the history of Brazilian music and as David Appleby has remarked:

Love of nature and love of country were important elements in the life and music of Villa-Lobos. His music, which he called “letters to posterity” continues to speak to a new generation of Brazilian composers and to all of us.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Williams, John: ‘Notes on John Williams – The Great Guitar Concertos’, M2K44791 (CBS Masterworks, 1973).

<sup>41</sup> Appleby, David.P: *Heitor Villa-Lobos – A Life*, (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 180.

Although there is a perception that Segovia championed Villa-Lobos' work and indeed was the dedicatee of both the *Douze Etudes* (1929), and the *Concerto for Guitar and Small Orchestra* (1951), it is also true that Villa-Lobos played guitar and had written his earliest compositions for the instrument before ever meeting with Segovia.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, he dedicated several guitar works to other players such as Miguel Llobet and Abel Carlevaro. Segovia was often less than complimentary about Villa-Lobos during his correspondence with the Mexican composer, Manuel Maria Ponce (1882-1948)<sup>43</sup>. Indeed their very first meeting at a social gathering, was a fractious affair as described by the composer himself:

The Portuguese violinist, Costa, asked if he knew Villa-Lobos without saying I was there. Segovia said that Llobet, had talked to him and showed him some of my works. I had written a concert waltz for Llobet (by the way, the manuscript was lost). Segovia said that my works were not guitaristic and that I used some things that were not for the instrument. Costa said, "Of course, Segovia, Villa-Lobos is here" I went up to him immediately and said, "Why do you think my works are not guitaristic?" Segovia, half surprised – of course, he couldn't have known that I was there – explained that, for example, the little finger of the right hand is not used in classical guitar. I asked, "Ah, it's not used? Then cut it off? Cut it off?"<sup>44</sup>

Another composer with whom Segovia had a frosty relationship was Agustin Barrios Mangoré (1885-1944). The Paraguayan composer's reputation has grown immensely over the past forty years. The music historian and editor Richard Stover has described him as:

[A] great technical adventure on the guitar [...] He utilised the twenty frets and six strings like nobody before him did, and [like] I haven't seen anybody else after him. His music is traditional with lots of ingredients mixed together to come up with a unique personality of its own.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Postelwaite, Charles: 'Villa-Lobos and His Work with Three Guitar Icons', *Soundboard*, Vol. 35, No. 4, (2009), 30.

<sup>43</sup> Segovia, Andrés: *The Segovia-Ponce Letters*, ed. Miguel Alcazar, trans. Peter Segal, (Columbus: Editions Orphee, 1989), 214.

<sup>44</sup> Postelwaite, 31.

<sup>45</sup> Morris, Tony: 'Interview with Rico Stover in the Barrios Room', *Soundboard*, Vol. 39 No. 1, (2014), 19.

During his career, Segovia met Barrios a number of times. In *Six Silver Moonbeams* (1992), by Richard Stover, the author publishes a letter that Barrios sent to his brother following one such meeting with Segovia, whereupon the composer had played his three-movement work *La Catedral* (1921). The letter shows the depth of respect and admiration that Barrios had for Segovia and gives the impression that at that particular time, he felt this to be mutual:

He showed particular interest for *La Catedral* and he asked me to give it to him so that he could play it in his concerts [...] He encouraged me a great deal and told me that as soon as possible I should go to the old world. There wasn't the slightest hint of petulance between us.<sup>46</sup>

This letter illustrates how Barrios had wished for Segovia to help him in his career as a composer/guitarist. While there was clearly no reason why he *should* have felt compelled to perform the work of Barrios, many scholars such as Stover speculate as to why he did not choose to play this music. Later, Barrios is reported to have remarked that Segovia was 'deaf in the heart'.<sup>47</sup> Because the career of Barrios is closely linked to that of John Williams, a more expansive discussion of this topic and related issues will follow in Chapter Five. However, Tannenbaum notes the irony of the fact that despite a crushing lack of success during his own lifetime, today it is the music of Barrios that is more of a 'living presence' than the legacy of Segovia.<sup>48</sup>

Another figure of supreme talent who contributed to the popularity of the guitar and could legitimately claim to have been hampered by a lack of support from Segovia is the French guitarist Ida Presti (1924-1967). A child prodigy, possessed of a rare and refined musical sensibility which was allied to a superb technique and facility, Presti was most definitely a young performer who should have become a celebrity and thus further advanced the cause of popularising the guitar on the concert stage. According to John Duarte, Segovia wrote that 'her fingers

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<sup>46</sup> Stover, Richard: *Six Silver Moonbeams*, (California: Querico, 1992) 69.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 70.

<sup>48</sup> Tannenbaum, David: 'The Classical Guitar in the Twentieth Century', *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed. Victor Anand Coelho (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 189.

sometimes were disobedient to the right tempo'<sup>49</sup> and only endorsed her playing after her premature death in 1967:

In 1967 he wrote feelingly, glowingly and no doubt sincerely about the recently deceased Ida Presti, but, though he had heard her play when she was young (and surviving recordings testify to the magnificence of her playing when she was only 14), he withheld his help at a time when it would have been invaluable to her. Although she remained profoundly respectful of Segovia and his contribution, she was privately saddened by his lack of early support.<sup>50</sup>

Other guitarists who contributed to the rise of classical guitar in the early-to-middle twentieth century included; the Italian Mario Maccaferri (1899-1993), who taught Ida Presti and aided the Parisian company *Selmer* in their design of classical guitars; the Spaniard Narciso Yepes (1927-1997), who possessed a very fine technique and worked with composers such as Ohana, Brouwer and Rodrigo; and Len Williams (1910-1987), founder of the Spanish Guitar Centre in London and father of John Williams. There is no doubt that Segovia was the most significant figure in the development of the guitar during the first half of the twentieth century. However, despite his pronouncements and those of others, it seems more probable that the classical guitar thrived because of a number of talented and highly motivated individuals as well as developments in other musical genres, which caused a surge in the instrument's general popularity. Segovia may have been the chief beneficiary of all of this but it would be disingenuous to apportion to him all of the credit for causing it to happen.

### **1.3 Attitudes to other musical styles**

The surge in popularity of the classical guitar during the twentieth century is linked to a groundswell of interest in the guitar in all its forms during the same period. In fact, the growth of the classical guitar can be directly linked to the upsurge in fortunes of the electric guitar, despite the fact that in 1969, the guitar historian Frederic Grunfeld referred to it as not even worthy of the name.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Duarte, John: *Andrés Segovia, As I Knew Him*, (Pacific, Missouri: Mel Bay, 2009), 50.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>51</sup> Coelho, Victor Anand: 'Picking Through Cultures: A Guitarist's Music History', *Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed. Victor Anand Coelho (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5. In the course of this essay, the author praises the 1969 book *The Art and Times of the*

Nevertheless, the classical guitar has strong links with its electric counterpart and in the 1960s George Harrison of The Beatles went so far as to refer to Segovia as ‘the daddy of us all.’<sup>52</sup> This tribute elicited the following response from its dedicatee: ‘The Beatles are very nice young men, no doubt, but their music is horrible. Even as illegitimate children I could not accept them.’<sup>53</sup>

As rock music became more popular, it branched off into many different directions in the search for new influences and from the late 1960s onwards, the guitarist was seen in many cases as the leader of the band, with a central role in shaping the sound and providing virtuosic solos and riffs. The interest in virtuosity and the discipline of learning the technique and theory behind diatonic scales frequently led these guitar-heroes towards classical music and their fans followed them in even greater numbers. Coelho has identified rock music as a commonly used bridge for students towards classical guitar and the growth in representation of the guitar at third-level owes a great debt to its worldwide popularity across all styles.<sup>54</sup>

As shown by his dismissal of the music of The Beatles, Segovia held a great antipathy towards the electric guitar, remarking that it had ‘turned a lovely instrument into a monster’.<sup>55</sup> Jazz guitar, or to be more accurate all forms of jazz, was also something for which he did not show any great affection, as illustrated by the following comment about the great Django Reinhardt: ‘I once heard a man play jazz on the guitar. He had only two fingers on one hand and he did it very well. But it is not what I would call music.’<sup>56</sup> When asked about Yehudi Menuhin’s collaborations with Stephane Grapelli, Segovia replied that Menuhin ‘did not have to listen to a world full of electric violins.’<sup>57</sup> This comment, clearly relates to the prevalence of electric guitars at the time of reference, but ignores

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*Guitar* by Frederic Grunfeld, while at the same time pointing to Grunfeld’s consideration that the electric guitar is not even worthy of the name ‘guitar’ as outdated by the standards of today.

<sup>52</sup> Wade, Graham: *Maestro*, 1986), 76.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 76-77.

<sup>54</sup> Coelho, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Wade, Graham: *Segovia – A Celebration*, 103.

<sup>56</sup> Wade, Graham: *Maestro*, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Wade, Graham: *Segovia – A Celebration*, 109.



the positive impact of the electric guitar upon the popularity of Spanish guitar music. It is sometimes hard to decipher whether Segovia disliked the actual music or simply the sense of fun that surrounded it. Again commenting on The Beatles, he contrasts his own sombre art with what he perceived as the corrupt world of popular music:

I do not think it is anything to do with art as I know it. I do not like the movements of the boys, the loud electric guitars, the cries, the way the girls go crazy. I distrust quick popularity. An artist should concentrate on his guitar with all his life, and let his public come later. We guitarists – or any serious musicians – need the stern discipline of life-long practice, many years of self-denial.<sup>58</sup>

When asked about his views on the electric guitar, Julian Bream said the following in 1993:

One of the sad things about the electric guitar is a lack of variety in its sound. It all comes out like chocolate fudge. And if you listen to the sound, I mean *really* listen to it, it's a coarse and nasty instrument. But in its context it fits the bill.<sup>59</sup>

This is a surprisingly candid and controversial view and suggests that Segovia's views about other forms of guitar playing and indeed music, may have permeated down to the following generation. It is interesting to note the certainty of tone in this statement, and the acknowledgement that, 'coarse' and 'nasty' though it is, the electric guitar is deemed to be perfectly suitable for popular music. It is also very typical of the 'Segovian' narrative displayed by many classical guitarists in that Bream expressed his personal opinion about electric guitar in such a definitive manner. He believed that his theory would be obvious to anyone who could '*really* listen' thus implying that advocates of the electric guitar might be labelled as people who are either unwilling or incapable of properly appreciating music. However, as previously discussed, these other forms of guitar have nonetheless contributed to the universal expansion of interest in classical guitar. What makes the comment all the more perplexing is that Bream did in fact play electric guitar during his time served in the armed forces, and has often expressed

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<sup>58</sup> Wade, Graham: *Maestro*, 76.

<sup>59</sup> Harrison, Mark: 'Julian Bream', *BBC Music Magazine*, July 1993, 19.

a great fondness for jazz, particularly the music of Reinhardt.<sup>60</sup> It could be argued that the comment was simply an offhand remark but it is not Bream's only dismissal of electric guitar and is reflective of an adversarial view which is often expressed by classical guitarists about other genres.

An attempt to justify the prejudice of many classical guitarists can be found in Harvey Turnbull's *The Guitar from the Renaissance to the Present Day* (1974). Turnbull notes the achievements of Tárrega and Segovia in expanding the guitar's repertoire. He also speaks about other forms of guitar playing as follows:

This development must be seen against the constant background of the guitar being used for accompaniment, a role it is still filling. In this context a number of offshoot guitars have appeared, ranging from the flamenco guitar to the ubiquitous electric guitar, and these, too, have developed their own techniques. Some of these techniques involve the use of a plectrum to produce sounds, thus limiting the musical possibilities. When the right hand fingers are used, the position of the hands reveals the extent of the demands of the music on the performer. In short, the simpler the music, the more casual the approach can be. The classical guitarist must therefore adopt a very strict posture.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to giving some dubious advice about posture and the classical guitar, Turnbull is arguably guilty of offering his own opinions as if they were established facts. This statement is referenced by Kevin Dawe, who notes that Turnbull clearly sees the flamenco and electric instrument as offshoots of the 'true' classical guitar.<sup>62</sup> Dawe also refers to the fact that Turnbull's discussion of electric guitar technique involves a suggestion that picking with a plectrum inhibits 'musical possibilities', as opposed to classical technique, which uses four fingers of the right hand to pluck and strum the notes.<sup>63</sup> Presumably because he is trying to argue a different point, Dawe inexplicably accepts this point of view and explains how electric guitarists have used various percussive right hand 'tapping' techniques to overcome such limitations. However, Turnbull's logic in making

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<sup>60</sup> Baker, Emma: 'Fingers on the Strings', *Gramophone*, January (2007), 44.

<sup>61</sup> Turnbull, Harvey: *The Guitar from the Renaissance to the Present Day*, (Connecticut: The Bold Strummer, 1974), 125-126.

<sup>62</sup> Dawe, Kevin: *The New Guitarscape in Critical Theory, Cultural Practice and Musical Performance*, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 49.

<sup>63</sup> Turnbull, 126.

the assertion is flawed. The plectrum does indeed limit the number of individual fingers with which the player can strike the strings but no more so than in bowed stringed instruments. In addition to this, he is possibly in danger of inadvertently implying that flamenco guitar technique might be superior to classical in that flamenco guitarists use all five fingers of their right hand as opposed to the four which are most commonly used on classical guitar. In fact, Turnbull's assertion reflects poorly on any single-line instrument and it must be noted that the ability to play a chord does not automatically bestow musical value upon an instrument. Furthermore, the technical abilities of plectrum guitarists such as John McLaughlin, Pat Metheny and Steve Vai also provide a definitive response to such a theory. In Jeffrey Noonan's *The Guitar in America: Victorian Era to Jazz Age* (2008) he argues that guitar historians such as Turnbull and Frederic Grunfeld deliberately ignored America's guitar traditions in their work, possibly under the influence of Segovia, 'whose Old World manners did little to hide his palpable disdain for the steel-string and electric guitar.'<sup>64</sup>

Flamenco, a style that has become inexorably associated with the Spanish guitar, also displeased Segovia, who frequently focused his wrath upon modern flamenco musicians for being too interested in virtuosity at the expense of musicality as opposed to their more traditional ancestors. He spoke at times of his love for flamenco, 'but not the flamenco heard these days.'<sup>65</sup> He criticised players such as Paco de Lucia, who pushed the boundaries of flamenco in an attempt to appeal to wider audiences – much as Segovia himself had done for the classical guitar. He admonished this generation of players for failing to understand flamenco:

[...] they want to show their technique, to dazzle the public with pyrotechnics. And so they not only insert chords not belonging to the true flamenco, but they also emphasise the rapid scale passages, tremolos, and so forth. The result is not to my taste.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Noonan, Jeffrey: *The Guitar in America: Victorian Era to Jazz Age*, (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 176.

<sup>65</sup> Wade, Graham: *Segovia – A Celebration*, 94.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 94.

However, this displeasure with modern styles of performance could not entirely mask his contempt for flamenco in general which can be discerned from his autobiography: ‘My first audience in Granada could not conceive that the Spanish guitar was for anything but flamenco. I have spent a lifetime trying to redeem the guitar from flamenco.’<sup>67</sup>

As indicated above, Segovia’s ambivalence towards flamenco may be borne out of the natural pro-flamenco backdrop against which he tried to establish his reputation in Spain in the early twentieth century. His own account of an early trip to Valencia is revealing when he mentions the critics’ “disparaging remarks about the ‘anti-flamenco’ guitar.”<sup>68</sup> It is possible this early prejudice stayed with Segovia and the results of his distaste for flamenco can be heard in many of his recordings where he frequently eschews the production of a flamenco technique in favour of a ‘more classical’ option, as in the famous transcription of *Asturias* by the Spanish nationalist composer Isaac Albéniz. Large chords are played on the first beat of each bar, punctuating the rapid melody and highlighting the Phrygian modality of the piece from bars 25-45. Segovia can be heard to drag his thumb through the notes of these chords despite the fact that many other guitarists who have recorded this piece have used the backs of their nails, producing a sharp flamenco-like sound and also retaining the thumb in a good position so as not to risk slowing the piece down.

Segovia was also dismissive of the lute, in contrast to those guitarists who came after him, most notably Julian Bream, who led a revival in the instrument’s fortunes by performing with it in his early music ensembles. Allan Clive Jones, writing for *Classical Guitar* notes that the guitarist Regino Sainz de la Maza, who was a contemporary of Segovia, retained a healthy respect for early music instruments ‘in sharp contrast to the opinion of, say, Segovia, who held the lute in contempt.’<sup>69</sup> To take a deliberate public stance against an instrument such as the

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<sup>67</sup> Wade, Graham: *Maestro*, 60.

<sup>68</sup> Segovia, 88.

<sup>69</sup> Jones, Allan Clive: ‘Regino Sainz de la Maza’, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 19, No.1. (September, 2000), 52.

lute is something which defies rational explanation and certainly flies in the face of any desire to see guitar studied at conservatory and university level, where the links between related plucked stringed instruments are of practical and academic significance. John Duarte describes a typically humorous outburst on hearing Malcolm Arnold's Guitar Concerto for the first time when Segovia showed simultaneous contempt for two significant styles of music: 'It is a pity it was not written for the lute – then it could have discredited the lute instead of the guitar.'<sup>70</sup>

Although Segovia was a pivotal figure in placing the instrument firmly in the concert platform so that it would be deemed worthy of the respect and attention of many great twentieth-century composers, his musical tastes were extremely conservative and he preferred not to encourage the more daring composers of his day to compose music for him. Duarte recalls Segovia's response to Stravinsky, when questioned as to why he had not requested a piece from the Russian master: 'Because I do not want to insult your music by not playing it.'<sup>71</sup> In an essay for *Soundboard*, the guitarist Walter Aaron Clark recounts a story that highlights again Segovia's antipathy towards Stravinsky's music and accuses him of having double-standards on the issue:

In 1975, on the night before a masterclass he gave at the North Carolina School of Performing Arts, Segovia once recalled to the group of guitarists slated to perform (including me) a conversation he had with Tárrega's foremost disciple, Miguel Llobet, in which Llobet confided that once Debussy had invited him to Paris to play for him, as he was interested in writing something for the guitar and wanted to learn more about it from Llobet. But Llobet confessed that he was too intimidated to play for Debussy and never accepted the invitation. Segovia scolded him by saying, 'for that you will rot in hell.' And yet sometime later, Segovia himself passed up a similar opportunity. Stravinsky told a mutual friend that he was puzzled why Segovia never asked him to write a piece for the guitar, something he wanted to do. Segovia's cavalier explanation for his indifference was that he was afraid Stravinsky would have him throw the guitar into the air!<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Duarte, 34.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 132.

<sup>72</sup> Clark, 7.

Segovia encouraged more conservative composers to write for the guitar and while their contributions were hugely successful but the fact remains that a significant piece written by a giant of modern composition like Stravinsky would have contributed considerably to the repertoire. For a musician who harboured such a burning desire to establish the guitar as an instrument of high art and not folk-music, it arguably represents an abandonment of his stated objectives to have ignored the advances of the truly great composers of his day. Duarte explains in his book how Frank Martin, whose music was far from avant-garde, decided never to write again for guitar after his *Quatre Pièces Brèves* (1933) was labelled ‘not music’ by Segovia.<sup>73</sup> Dwyer states that ‘as a direct result of Segovia’s explicitly conservative tastes, by the 1950s the guitar repertoire was, with some notable exceptions, effectively a catalogue of rather traditional miniatures written by composers who had not actively engaged with the modernist enterprise and its radical transformations...’<sup>74</sup> Although his dismissal of the pre-1950s repertoire constitutes something of a sweeping statement, which fails to acknowledge substantial works by Giuliani, Sor, Regondi, Mertz, Tárrega, Ponce, Villa-Lobos, Rodrigo and many others, Dwyer does succeed in pointing to a large gap in Segovia’s legacy.

Segovia boasted that he never commissioned works from composers but instead, they wrote for him willingly and out of admiration.<sup>75</sup> However, this would also have led to the creation of works by composers of lesser stature so it becomes clear when analysing the facts that in terms of attracting key modern composers towards the guitar of the calibre of Britten, Walton, Ginastera, Henze, Takemitsu, Sculthorpe and others, the responsibility would fall to the next generation of guitarists. Although he garnered works from composers such as Ponce, Torroba, Turina, Tansman and Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Segovia was also known to have interfered with the process of composition. John Patykula indicates this during his discussion of Ponce’s *Concierto del Sur*:

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<sup>73</sup> Duarte, 46.

<sup>74</sup> Dwyer, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Wade, *Maestro*, 57.

As with other works by Ponce, Segovia did suggest several changes to the guitar part of the concerto. In one letter, Segovia wrote Ponce stating that “I have modified a few small things [...] All the essentials are intact.” In another, Segovia requested several changes to the cadenza of the first movement. Viewing a copy of the original score, one can immediately see that several modifications to the guitar part were made.<sup>76</sup>

When factoring in his dislike for folk-inspired music, his aversion to the work of Barrios and his polar-opposition to jazz, popular and rock music, it becomes increasingly questionable to associate Segovia with the modern guitar repertoire, as so little of it would even have found favour with him. It is true that Segovia made important transcriptions of lute-works by Bach and Weiss for guitar but he was not the first to do this and as with those of his predecessors Tárrega, Pujol and Llobet, his editions are not commonly in use today.<sup>77</sup>

#### **1.4 Teaching**

One of Segovia’s aims was to establish a guitar programme in every conservatory and music school in the world, and by and large this was more or less achieved within his lifetime. Indeed, he is rightly viewed as a catalyst for this sprawling growth over the course of the twentieth century. And yet, perhaps the greatest single factor in the heightening of interest in guitar studies is the influence of folk and rock music. Coelho points out that electric guitar and its music was of great assistance to the establishment of the classical guitar in all of the major conservatories and universities around the world:

It is ironic that while Segovia denounced rock, the overwhelming profile of the modern classical guitar student at college or conservatory is one who began as a rocker. In fact, it is difficult to see how the classical guitar could have maintained its presence without the many rock-trained students who began flocking to guitar programs since the middle 1970s, successfully transferring some aspects of their self-taught rock training (particularly left-hand technique) to classical guitar.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Patykula, John: ‘Ponce’s *Concierto del Sur* – the story of the 1941 premiere in Montevideo’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (2012), 10.

<sup>77</sup> Tanenbaum, 198.

<sup>78</sup> Coelho, 10.

To further illustrate his point, Coelho describes the process whereby rock guitarists transform into classical guitarists:

Using the basic principle that playing one's favourite tunes, however simple, can unlock innate musical expression, rock guitar has introduced music to many students with absolutely no prior musical experience. They are never as musically "rounded" as the pianists or string players, but many music majors in classical guitar and composition began precisely in this manner.<sup>79</sup>

In William Starling's book, Williams notes that Segovia's method of teaching was very prescriptive and he encouraged students to imitate his particular style, rather than expressing their own individual ideas.<sup>80</sup> Although Segovia made himself readily available to teach at masterclasses and summer schools during his life, there are many guitarists who have less than fond memories of studying with him because of his frequently petulant behavior. Furthermore, John Williams has also stated that Segovia expressed his disapproval for much South American music, particularly that of Barrios, much modern music and indeed any editions or transcriptions other than his own.<sup>81</sup> There is footage that shows many instances of Segovia's impatient and dictatorial approach to teaching, particularly what has become known as 'the Segovia-Chapdelaine incident' from 1986,<sup>82</sup> where the talented young guitarist Michael Chapdelaine was humiliated during a masterclass because he had altered some of Segovia's fingerings in a piece written by Manuel Maria Ponce. The footage shows Segovia interrupting the young player repeatedly to remonstrate with him for the fingering decisions before eventually stopping the class short, advising Chapdelaine to find another teacher who could give him better fingerings, or words to that effect. Chapdelaine's subsequent interviews are interesting in that he chastises himself for drawing Segovia's ire and expresses gratitude that the class ended in such an abrupt fashion. Such a blind refusal to criticise what is clearly ill-judged and personally biased behavior by any standard is indicative of both a debt of

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Starling, 100-101

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Segovia-Chapdelaine Master Class, Accessed 5 August, 2015.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiAbqfaYGwk>



gratitude and subservience which guitarists felt they owed Segovia at this time. In an earlier example of a Segovian masterclass, the Spanish guitarist Narciso Yepes (1927-1997), who was already a successful international guitarist in his own right, decided to play for Segovia during the 1950s. This was described by the composer Leonardo Ballada:

When it was his turn Narciso played his own version of Bach's *Chaconne*. Segovia did not approve and was very hard on him. Yepes replied that he had come with great humility to study with him and to hear his advice, not to hear him criticise him so harshly and so personally [...] But Segovia simply did not like Yepes.<sup>83</sup>

Being a concert guitarist in his forties, Yepes found it difficult to accept Segovia's authority but a recurrent theme of those guitarists who did not fare well in Segovia's classes seems to be that they either displayed some element of individuality in performance, or chose not to follow his edition of a particular piece. It is worth noting that many of the guitarists admonished by Segovia played to a high standard and went on to have very successful careers. In 1993, the renowned guitarist William Kanengeiser recalled his own experience of playing for Segovia:

I went into the Segovia master class playing the Martin Four Short Pieces, and my own transcriptions of a Bach violin sonata, and all these other pieces [...] Well, I didn't know the rules. The rules are if you want to have a very good experience in a Segovia master class, you play Segovia repertoire, you use Segovia fingerings and, ideally you listen to his recording and emulate him as much as possible. If you do that he'll love you; if you don't he'll trash you. He trashed me.<sup>84</sup>

Christopher Parkening also describes falling foul of Segovia for daring to change some fingerings in Bach's *Chaconne*:

Suddenly, I was startled by Segovia stamping his foot on the stage, his face red. All but shouting, he demanded, 'Why have you changed the fingerings?' I meekly replied 'My teacher did.' He scowled. 'Change it back tomorrow' When I played the re-fingered

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<sup>83</sup> Bruzal, Alejandro: 'Leonardo Ballada', trans. Edward Lugo, *Soundboard*, Vol.34, No.4, (2008), 83.

<sup>84</sup> Bell, Douglas: 'A Conversation with William Kanengeiser', *Soundboard*, vol.20, no.2, (1993), 36.

Chaconne the following day, Segovia immediately seemed to relax!<sup>85</sup>

The guitarist Elliot Fisk, who speaks glowingly about his time studying with Segovia, nonetheless describes altering his natural interpretation of music in order to please his teacher and ‘get inside that gorgeously put-together universe of his.’<sup>86</sup>

### **1.5 Interpretation of the Segovia legacy**

The era in which Segovia dominated the culture of the classical guitar spanned from the mid-1920s until his death in 1987. However, it is useful to distinguish between the pre-World War II years, where he established himself as the first guitarist to become successful on the classical performance platform, and the post-war era, when he became re-established in America and Europe. This post-war era marks a period when Segovia became a powerful influence on the classical guitar, through the dissemination of his ideas, in various magazines (as discussed earlier in this chapter) and also through a stream of books that established his narrative. During this era, the public became familiar with ‘Segovia the ideologue’: a messianic figure whose personal achievements rendered his opinions to be of paramount importance. Tanenbaum describes a speech from 1969, made by Segovia in acceptance of an award, where he sets out his ‘five purposes aiming at the redemption of the guitar’.<sup>87</sup>

My prime effort was to extract the guitar from the noise and disreputable folkloric amusements. This was the second of my purposes: to create a wonderful repertoire for my instrument. My third purpose was to make the guitar known to the philharmonic public all over the world. Another and fourth purpose has been to provide a unifying medium for those interested in the development of the instrument. This I did through my support of the now well-known international musicological journal, the *Guitar Review*, developed by Vladimir Bobri. I am still working on my fifth and maybe last purpose, which is to place the guitar in the most important conservatories for teaching the young lovers of it, and thus securing its future.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Green, 34.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Tanenbaum, 205.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 205-206.

While this extract gives a good overview of some of the processes with which he was associated, it is interesting that Segovia, with the benefit of hindsight, attempted not just to claim ownership of these events, but also to establish them as tasks that he had undertaken at the outset of his career. By establishing the ‘five purposes’ in this way, Segovia could bask in the glow of having achieved his life’s aims, despite the fact that, as discussed earlier, many other individuals were also responsible for these achievements. There is, unsurprisingly, no record of Segovia stating these objectives at the outset of his career in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, the speech echoes the oft-repeated Segovian idea that the instrument had to be ‘saved’ from its folkloric associations, rather than acknowledging that those very associations were of huge benefit to the success of the classical guitar. However, in an article from 1987, the prominent English educator Mary Criswick mentioned an illuminating conversation with guitar maker Tom Humphrey, which contradicted the Segovian ‘redemption’ narrative:

I met Tom recently while he was staying with Vladimir Mikulka in Paris and [...] he expounded his theory as to why there are so many guitarists between the ages of 30 and 40. ‘If you work backwards’, he said, ‘today’s successful performers in that age group must have started the guitar in the early 60s, when they were between the ages of, say, 7 and 12, seeing as that is the age at which future professionals start. Now, what was the most important musical influence at that time? Not Segovia but the Beatles, and they played guitars. They are the ones who have contributed to the rise in guitar activity.’<sup>89</sup>

Humphrey’s theory, which ultimately amounted to little more than speculation, did at least give expression to an alternative viewpoint to that of Segovia. His assessment was at odds with the more conventional view of the guitarist Lee F. Ryan, who stated in 1984 that ‘Segovia’s presence and his masterful playing have helped to give the guitar its present place as a respectable concert instrument throughout the world.’<sup>90</sup> In 1987, Segovia’s death naturally provoked a massive reaction, sparking a race to attribute to him as many achievements as possible.

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<sup>89</sup> Criswick, Mary: ‘Letter from France’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 14, No. 3, (1987), 184.

<sup>90</sup> Ryan, Lee F.: *The Natural Classical Guitar*, (Connecticut: The Bold Strummer, 1984/1991), 160.

Ronald Powell's obituary for *Soundboard* even credited Segovia with the guitar's popularity in Japan, claiming that it 'is presently estimated that he has influenced more than two million aspiring guitarists in this country [Japan] alone.'<sup>91</sup> This somewhat spurious claim ignores the appeal of the guitar's myriad of other genres and provides a good example of the tendency to exaggerate Segovia's already considerable contribution to the popularity of the classical guitar.

In fact, there was even a fear towards the end of Segovia's life, that without him, the classical guitar would simply sink back out of the public consciousness and return to its ignominious position on the periphery of the art music spectrum. Duarte refers to this and interestingly, frames the argument as being relative to Segovia's perception, rather than that of other guitarists: 'It may be that he felt that the guitar was 'identified' with him to such an extent that it might suffer a recession after his death...'<sup>92</sup> Graham Wade went further than Duarte, stating that Segovia's death 'created a profound sense of loss akin to the demise of a great leader or a beloved Founding Father.'<sup>93</sup>

Gradually a more measured response to Segovia emerged, as some guitarists sought to distance themselves from his influence. William Kanengeiser (1993), made the following comments, which while still complementary, offered a more balanced view of Segovia's legacy:

I have tremendous respect for what he [Segovia] was able to do. When you measure his accomplishment, you have to see where he came from and what the guitar world was when he started [...] All of us owe our livelihood to him. The guitar world has kept its momentum, and I feel he's been surpassed in some aspects, in terms of stylistic correctness, or technical competence.<sup>94</sup>

It is clear that Kanengeiser did not wish to offend the memory of Segovia, but he felt compelled to be honest in his assessment. Equally honest was Tanenbaum's

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<sup>91</sup> Powell, Ronald C.: 'Segovia Remembered', *Soundboard*, Vol. 14, No. 3, (1987), 168.

<sup>92</sup> Duarte, 118.

<sup>93</sup> Wade, Graham: *A Concise History of the Classic Guitar*, (Pacific, Missouri: Mel Bay, 2001), 172.

<sup>94</sup> Bell, Douglas: 'A Conversation with William Kanengeiser', *Soundboard* vol.20, no.2, (1993), 36.

assessment of Segovia for *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, also complementary, but balanced and without masking some of the personal and musical flaws for fear of diminishing his legacy.<sup>95</sup>

In 2011, the Brazilian guitarist Marcelo Kayath, published an online article in which he compared Andrés Segovia's method of playing guitar to the sound of a small orchestra, with its huge variety of colours and timbres.<sup>96</sup> He wrote that he considered Bream to be a natural successor to Segovia, gamely trying to overcome technical problems to achieve his desired outcomes. Against this backdrop he placed Williams, as a model of technical perfection with one significant drawback; according to Kayath, Williams' sound is more akin to a grand piano than a small orchestra: that is, even and technically powerful but with less variation in tone. He asserted that in recent times there had been a general move among guitarists to adopt Williams' approach to guitar (he mentions David Russell and Manuel Barrueco as examples of this phenomenon), which led to a situation where audiences were diminishing in numbers and interest in the classical guitar had waned. He concluded that the guitar was at an historic crossroads and closed his argument as follows:

There is no use continuing to pursue the formula of the piano. In my opinion, this has led to musical regression in the past twenty years and the consequent flight of the general public and return of the guitarist's pattern. It is also useless to try to go back and imitate Segovia's style of playing. We must tread our own path, which has really been followed since the 1920s by Segovia and then perfected in the 1960s by Julian Bream. People easily tire of mechanical guitarists with an ugly sound that have nothing original to say.<sup>97</sup>

The last sentence of this quotation is particularly provocative, implying that guitarists should resist the urge to play like John Williams, David Russell and Manuel Barrueco, in order to save the instrument. He refers to the style of these players as 'ugly' and having 'nothing original to say', comments not supported by

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<sup>95</sup> Tanenbaum, 182-190.

<sup>96</sup> Kayath, Marcelo: 'Reflections on the Guitar', Accessed 10 July, 2015, [www.guitarsalon.com](http://www.guitarsalon.com).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

any reviews of these artists stretching back over many decades.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, apart from his own opinions, Kayath offers no evidence to support this radical departure, but his article of 2011 is certainly indicative of a continuing level of support for Segovia's narrative. The piece created much debate on the internet and even prompted an essay by Mark Small in *Soundboard* entitled 'In pursuit of the New Poets: Observations on whether the Segovia Phenomenon could Happen Again.'<sup>99</sup> The reaction to Kayath's article illustrates that while honouring the memory of a great artist is important and laudable, the preservation of his ideology can indeed have significant consequences within a musical culture. In the years following Segovia's death, aspects of his legacy had been questioned by guitarists such as Williams and Kanengeiser, but Kayath's response represents the persistence of the post-war Segovian narrative. Christopher Parkening is an example of a player who dedicated a large portion of his concert career to preserving this narrative. Parkening had been a fine young performer who had retired from the concert scene in the late 1970s, before making a successful comeback during the 1980s. Many of his concerts since then, have tended to eulogise Segovia and Parkening's popularity in America, in some ways serves to illustrate the tendency among guitarists to dwell on older traditions rather than moving forward independently. The following excerpt is taken from a review of a Parkening concert at the 1999 Guitar Foundation of America Convention:

A film preceded the performance – “A Celebration of Segovia” – which did nothing to enhance Segovia's reputation other than make some exaggerated claims (“He single-handedly elevated the guitar to a concert instrument”). Parkening spoke into a microphone before each piece, providing anecdotes which were sometimes inaccurate (Ponce's Prelude in E was originally part of a suite) or ludicrous (“As you know, Segovia always championed the cause of new music”).<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Cooper, Colin: 'David Russell plays Antonio Lauro', *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 4, (March/April 1983), 47. Colin Cooper describes Russell's performance as 'a poised cultured reading, but nonetheless lively; a performance of serene assurance, illuminated by deft playing and a concern for texture and phrasing even in the lightest and most superficial pieces that is the hallmark of true musicality.'

<sup>99</sup> Small, Mark: 'In Pursuit of the New Poets: Observations on whether the Segovia Phenomenon could Happen Again', *Soundboard*, Vol. 37, No. 4, (2011), 27.

<sup>100</sup> Long, Richard: 'GFA Festival and Competition, 1999: Charleston, South Carolina', *Soundboard*, Vol. XXVI, Nos. 3/4, (2000), 12.

The reviewer Richard Long is obviously being sarcastic when referring to Segovia's attitude to modern music, and he goes on to describe the performance as 'more a parody of Segovia than a tribute.'<sup>101</sup> However, it is clear that this concert and others like it were very popular and Parkening still attracted enormous interest with a similar format up until his retirement in 2012. In an interview given in 2016, Parkening echoed Kayath's views when he remarked: 'There's been a trend away from beauty, warmth and lyricism in performance towards colder, mechanistic playing [...] The guitar is often reduced to an inferior "miniature keyboard" rather than being valued for the romantic and poetic instrument it really is.'<sup>102</sup> Obviously, Parkening is entitled to express a preference for a particular style of performance but to imply that guitarists need to revert en masse to Segovia's technical approach to the instrument in order to avoid losing their audience seems fanciful. If audiences have diminished at all, then surely this is reflective of a trend within classical music in general. In fact, a crisis has occurred in all forms of music, resulting in a decrease in record sales over the past twelve years and it is important for musicians not to personalise any perceived drop in concert attendance, which is undoubtedly reflective of broader music trends.<sup>103</sup> Another aspect of this is not comparing like with like. Julian Bream and John Williams have attracted massive audience numbers throughout their entire performing careers just as Segovia did before them and to this day Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* continues to fill out concert halls, regardless of the performer. In Segovia's heyday, there were a small number of guitarists who toiled away in his shadow and some of these were of questionable ability. Now, while Williams, Barruecco, Russell, Isbin, Miloš Karadaglić, Xue Fei Yang and the LA Guitar Quartet command huge audiences and fees, there are large numbers of superbly talented individuals throughout the world graduating from college, playing concerts, composing and teaching. This can be seen to represent

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Green, 34.

<sup>103</sup> Byrne, David: *How Music Works*, (Edinburgh, San Francisco: Cannongate, 2012) 209-10. David Byrne graphically illustrates the decline in CD sales from a high of almost 18 billion dollars around the year 2000 to just over 3 billion dollars in 2011 and goes on to assert that because '[...] Radiohead left EMI not so long ago and debuted its 2007 album *In Rainbows* online, and that Madonna defected from Warner Bros. to sign with Live Nation, a concert promoter, are said to signal the end of the music business as we know it.'

real progress and one challenge facing the modern guitarist is that there are simply so many talented young performers vying for the same concerts and the same recording opportunities. The music business as a whole has been lurching from one crisis to another since the arrival of the internet as the public have found novel and inexpensive ways of obtaining music. The guitar is by no means immune to these developments, but it is perhaps better not to draw hasty conclusions, based on a particular interpretation of the available statistics. Furthermore, the music of Francisco Tárrega and Agustin Barrios continues to inspire guitarists and listeners alike and modern composers such as Leo Brouwer and Roland Dyens draw on wide-ranging influences from jazz, pop and folk, all of which Segovia detested.

In 2012, as part of their exploration into the relationship between the composer Frederico Moreno Torroba and Segovia in the 1920s, Walter Aaron Clark and William Craig Krause reflected on the fact on the fact that in the opinion of many music critics, Segovia, because of his ‘late-Romantic predilection for tonal, metric music,’ lost ground with regard to repertoire that later generations could never make up.<sup>104</sup> This opinion is included within an article that is generally positive about Segovia as a musician and as a driving force for the instrument, but also shows an attempt to be balanced in approach to the subject. Benjamin Dwyer is less circumspect and more precise in criticising Segovia for his indifference to contemporary trends in music:

There is no doubting Segovia’s exceptional contribution to the development of the repertoire through his commissioning of works by non-guitarist composers, many of which are of considerable quality. However, it must also be acknowledged that he not only missed opportunities to encourage some leading figures to write for the instrument, he actually rejected some significant music by a number of prominent composers, presumably on the basis that it was too ‘modern’. His dismissal of *Quatre pièces brèves* by Frank Martin and *Tombeau de Robert de Visée* by André Jolivet, to name

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<sup>104</sup> Clark and Krause, Walter Aaron and William Craig: ‘Frederico Moreno Torroba and Andres Segovia in the 1920s: A Turing Point in Guitar History’, *Soundboard*, Volume XXXVIII, No. 3, (2012), 12.



just two, gives us some indication of Segovia's regrettable shortsightedness and conservatism.<sup>105</sup>

Dwyer's 2016 publication shows an air of objectivity emerging in relation to the 'Segovian era.' Less encouraging is a 2016 *BBC Music Magazine* interview with guitarist Miloš Karadaglić in which he states the following: 'When I came out of the Royal Academy in 2007, knocking on all those doors, it was a huge challenge to be taken seriously as a classical guitarist [...] We needed to change all that.'<sup>106</sup> From this remark, it appears that Karadaglić is almost attempting to cast *himself* as a redeemer of the guitar's fortunes, seemingly oblivious to the achievements of Segovia, Bream, Williams and others. The tendency of successful guitarists to refer to the guitar's low level of respect in order to bathe their own achievements in a better light, does no favours to the instrument and can be interpreted as an echo of Segovia's narrative.

Segovia succeeded in elevating the status of the classical guitar but it should be acknowledged that prestige alone is not responsible for the increased popularity of the instrument. Segovia's lack of generosity towards other gifted performers such as Ida Presti and Agustin Barrios, his tendency towards self-praise and his reluctance to share the stage with the more celebrated composers of the day, suggest that he himself had a major role in manufacturing this 'cult of personality'. He certainly created an extremely 'European' style of classical guitar culture, which was enriched by Julian Bream's policy of commissioning many British composers to contribute to the repertoire.

However, it most certainly fell to John Williams to expand the culture of the classical guitar beyond European styles, incorporating music from South America, Australia, Asia and Africa, as well as forging links with the ever-widening popular, jazz and folk genres. Although Williams received tuition from Segovia, his reaction to the influence of his former mentor has been notable, because of their contrasting musical and ideological opinions. The next chapter

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<sup>105</sup> Dwyer, Benjamin: *Britten and the Guitar – Critical Perspectives for Performers*, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2016), 9.

<sup>106</sup> Ainsley, Rob: 'Enter The Guitar', *BBC Music Magazine*, Vol. 24, No. 5, (2016), 26.

focuses on these differences in order to further establish a context for examining Williams' career.

## Chapter Two

### John Williams and the Segovia legacy

A prince of the guitar has arrived in the musical world. God has laid a finger on his brow and it will not be long before his name becomes a byword in England and abroad thus contributing to the spiritual domain of his race. I hail this young artist on the occasion of his first public performance and make the heartfelt wish that success, like his shadow, may accompany him everywhere.<sup>107</sup>

Segovia wrote this tribute for the programme note of John Williams' Wigmore Hall debut in 1958. Despite the inaccuracy of Segovia's description of Williams as English, his comments were a generous as well as a helpful commendation, which presented an ideal platform on which to build a promising career. Segovia's choice of words is interesting in that by bestowing on Williams the title of 'prince', he was also establishing a sense of lineage: the implication being that he himself was 'King of the guitar' and there is certainly no argument as to his justifiable claim to such a title at that point.

In many respects, there is no more divisive figure in the twentieth-century history of the classical guitar than John Williams, as he has carved out a career that contrasts starkly with that of Segovia. This chapter focuses on the fundamental changes of perspective and attitude that have been influenced by Williams, both among guitar audiences and perhaps more importantly, among classical guitarists themselves. The chapter is less concerned with the style and influence of particular performances or recordings and more with the philosophies behind certain aspects of his career and their impact on the culture of classical guitar performance. Julian Bream's career has often been regarded as being a continuation of the work of Segovia, albeit with a far more contemporary sensibility and Benjamin Dwyer describes his career as 'an almost messianic project to nurture an entirely new type of repertoire for the instrument. This new music was not only broadly modernist in its aesthetic character and

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<sup>107</sup> Programme details cited in Starling, William: *Strings Attached – The Life and Music of John Williams*, (London: The Robson Press, 2012), 114.

language, it was also decidedly English.’<sup>108</sup> Williams, on the other hand, had often been perceived as rebelling against the ideals of Segovia. Tanenbaum asserts that Williams, ‘who had by all reports mastered the guitar repertoire by the age of twelve, quickly started to jump over the normally held bounds of the instrument, in one act foreshadowing a very popular trend and alienating Segovia.’<sup>109</sup> However, Williams’ variances in approach could equally be viewed as logical evolutionary steps, which were equally necessary to aid the further development of the instrument. Initially, however, it is helpful to examine Williams’ youth and focus on some of the factors that shaped his views in such a contrasting nature to those of Segovia.

## 2.1 Andrés Segovia and John Williams

Possibly the most obvious benefit to Williams of Segovia’s ‘prince of the guitar’ tribute was the fact that, as discussed in the previous chapter, Segovia had, up to this point, not been very generous towards fellow guitarists. However, as John Duarte notes, his support for younger players became more common, as he grew older:

Williams was the first of many, although the only one to be described in such regal terms, and there are now many such letters of commendation in the world, some of those later bestowed suggestive of surprisingly liberal judgement.<sup>110</sup>

The endorsement of Williams is all the more interesting, given the personal difficulties that had arisen just two years previously, between Segovia and John Williams’ father Len, which are outlined below. A further aspect of this endorsement is that the dedicatee, from a relatively early point in his career, rallied against the perception of the guitar that Segovia had cultivated. As Tanenbaum has stated:

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<sup>108</sup> Dwyer, Benjamin: *Britten and the Guitar: Critical Perspectives for Performers*, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2016), 11.

<sup>109</sup> Tanenbaum, David: ‘The Classical Guitar in the Twentieth Century’, *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed Victor Anand Coelho, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 195.

<sup>110</sup> Duarte, John: *Andrés Segovia: As I Knew Him*, (Pacific Missouri: Mel Bay, 2009), 92.

Williams was always a very independent thinker. He joined a rock band, and completely offended Segovia. But he was ahead of his time. He foresaw the breaking down of these barriers.<sup>111</sup>

However, the words written by Segovia for that programme in 1958 were subsequently proven to be prophetic and coupled with Williams' own virtuosity and personality, helped to lay the foundations for a glittering career. He attracted attention at a very young age and, from a technical point of view, surpassed all who had gone before him on the instrument. Taught from a very young age by his father, who was a fine jazz musician, Williams developed quickly on the instrument and gives credit to his father's holistic approach:

[H]e taught me in joint lessons along with Sebastian Jorgenson, a boy who was two years older than me and living in a big art colony called Montsalvat. From about the time when I was seven years old, Seb used to come down to Melbourne for the lessons. One of the things that stand out in my mind is that my father wasn't insisting on me doing hours of practice. I did a maximum of half an hour every day. Apart from getting the technique right and understanding tone production he was very good at psychology. He always felt that it was the quality of practice that was more important than the quantity and also felt that it was counter-productive to try to get children to do huge amounts of practice that they didn't like to do. I can remember that I'd be playing Carcassi [study] no.7 and if the clock was coming up to a half hour, I might play a little slower so that I wouldn't have to play the repeat or something like that [laughs]. So...he gave me a relatively light amount of work, coupled with occasionally overseeing some of my practice, where he might make the odd comment or give a little advice here and there. Generally, he would leave me to it and trusted that I'd remember the advice from the lessons.<sup>112</sup>

By the time the family left Australia for England in late 1951, Len Williams was aware that his son possessed a rare talent. In fact, in 1953, Wilfred Appleby published an article for *Guitar News*, in which he described witnessing the eleven-year old John Williams' prodigious abilities:

Mr Williams had just shown us his fine Esteso guitar. 'Could John play on it?' we asked. John took the guitar and in a moment his agile little fingers were bringing forth music by Rameau, Tárrega and Sor with a facility and natural sureness which was most

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<sup>111</sup> Hamlyn, Jesse: 'For Guitarists, the Bay Area is Heavenly', *San Francisco Classical Voice* Website, 9 November, 2010. Accessed 30 March, 2017. [www.sfcv.org](http://www.sfcv.org)

<sup>112</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

astonishing in one so young. I suggested that a passage in the Sor – Mozart Thème Variè could be played ‘top-stroke’ – without hesitation he played it thus, although he had not previously practised it in that way.<sup>113</sup>

Williams Snr. soon established the Spanish Guitar Centre in London, which arguably became the catalyst for an entire cultural movement around the classical guitar in England. When he speaks about the Spanish Guitar Centre, John Williams is aware of his father’s virtues and flaws:

When he established the Spanish Guitar Centre, he specialised in teaching adults who were amateurs. He was quite clever in knowing his target market for the Spanish Guitar Centre because he started it by putting advertisements in all of the bookshops on Charing Cross Road in London. He did this because he thought that the people who buy and read books might be interesting people and might be willing to learn an instrument. Therefore he put advertisements saying that for 9 pence a week they could learn Spanish guitar. As a teacher in the Spanish Guitar Centre he was different character and would often get involved in political discussions and arguments. Of course, if anyone argued with him in a disagreeable way...well they were out! He taught in classes and thought that it was very important for people to learn in front of others: to be able to discuss how other people had played in an open and honest way and ultimately subject themselves to the same treatment.<sup>114</sup>

A tribute by Charles Scott appeared in *Classical Guitar Magazine* some months after Len Williams’ death in 1987, and helps to put his career in context:

Len had returned to London in 1952 and set up the Spanish Guitar Centre for teaching classical guitar, with such luminaries as Jack Duarte on his teaching staff, and using his unique methods of class tuition in small groups – which contributed considerably in my opinion, to the high standards of guitar musical literacy in the country.<sup>115</sup>

Scott also praises his work with his son:

At his home the ‘kid’ (John, then about 12 years old) played for me and of course he *was* good. John, born in Australia in 1941, had been taught by Len from as early as four years of age. Here again, I

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<sup>113</sup> Appleby, Wilfred: ‘John Christopher Williams – Child Prodigy’, *Guitar News*, No.11, (Feb-March, 1953), 1.

<sup>114</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>115</sup> Scott, Charles: ‘Leonard Williams (1910- 1987)’, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 6, No. 6, (1988), 50.

believe Len's deep understanding of the youthful mind, and the ability to motivate it, gave us the player who has done more to popularise the guitar (particularly with the lay public) than any other single player.<sup>116</sup>

Julian Bream also spoke very highly of Len Williams, referring to him as 'a fine teacher'.<sup>117</sup> In 1952, Williams Snr used his contacts to arrange for his son to play for Segovia at a London hotel. Segovia was impressed and invited the young guitarist to study with him at a summer course in Sienna in 1953, organising a bursary to cover lodgings and tuition. However, Segovia was unable to teach at the 1953 summer course for health reasons and Williams instead studied with the Venezuelan player, Alirio Diaz.<sup>118</sup> Over the course of the following two summers, Williams finally got to play at masterclasses for Segovia and subsequently, as Starling points out, had less reason than most to be intimidated by his renowned teacher:

That year he took classes with Segovia and he could not help noticing that all the other students sat around looking absolutely terrified; they knew that the maestro would take them to task for the slightest mistake or deviation from his instruction. This prospect did not bother him at all – he had survived the academy of Len so what was left to fear?<sup>119</sup>

While Starling's comments make reference to Len Williams' legendary lack of patience with students, Williams' own comments indicate a very nurturing and supportive approach towards him, while acknowledging that to others, his father was an abrasive character.

Williams quickly established a reputation as a prodigious young talent and in 1955, became the first student to be chosen to give a solo recital at the Sienna summer school, which gave him invaluable performance experience. During these years, Williams noticed that Segovia employed a very dictatorial style of teaching and, according to Starling, was frequently displeased if his students

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Nupen, Christopher: 'John Williams at the BBC', Classical Guitar 2016 Documentary, Accessed 26 March, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VctU0oBUoX8&sns=fb>

<sup>118</sup> Starling, 91.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 99.

performed music derived from folk or popular sources.<sup>120</sup> Williams became friendly with many of his fellow students in Sienna, most notably Alirio Diaz.<sup>121</sup> Diaz had a major influence upon Williams and introduced him to the work of various South American composers such as Antonio Lauro and Agustin Barrios. Williams also notes that, as a child, his father had insisted on him adopting an arched right-hand technique, to imitate the technique of Segovia. He credits Diaz with helping him to modify this technique:

Well, my dad was very particular about getting the Segovia hand position and in retrospect he was a little bit slow to realise that its very much dependent on the size of your thumb. Segovia had a short bent thumb, which allowed him to arch his wrist and play in the way he did, but my dad had a larger thumb. Its hard to recall the exact details at this remove but my father's natural right hand position was very like Alirio Diaz's who had a straighter right hand and was even quite similar to Julian's back then. I never made a strongly conscious decision to change my right hand technique at the time but I just moved towards something which felt more natural to me: that is to have the right hand not so bent and not so arched. It was probably the influence of Alirio in 1953 that had an impact on me in that regard. [...] Later in my twenties and thirties, I began to think of it in terms of teaching advice and I still think that right hands should be allowed to develop in a way that suits their natural position. I think its wrong to copy a specific player such as Segovia whose technique, even for him, is not always perfect.<sup>122</sup>

A flashpoint in Williams' relationship with his teacher occurred in 1956, when Segovia urged him to enter a prestigious guitar competition in Geneva. Len Williams thought that the competition would have a negative effect on his son's development. In the end, John Williams decided not to take part in the competition and endured a torrid phone call from Segovia, during which, according to Starling, he was abused and cursed, both in English and Spanish. Starling describes a heated discussion about the topic between Len Williams and Segovia some months later at a London hotel, which culminated in an unseemly physical confrontation, with John Williams' father being forcibly led away from

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* 99.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* 100.

<sup>122</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.



the premises by security guards.<sup>123</sup> John was summoned to meet Segovia at the same hotel the following day. Starling describes the meeting:

The older man did not attempt to go through the debate or argue the merits of his view that John should enter the competition. Instead, he said simply, 'I must tell you that I can no longer be your teacher and one day, I shall tell you why I despise your father,' then dismissed the youth.<sup>124</sup>

Soon after this incident, without the influence of Segovia and with far less input from his father, Williams found himself following his own instincts.<sup>125</sup> It is not uncommon for a young musician to explore different paths from those of their mentors, but as can be seen above, the abrasive relationship between Segovia and Len Williams arguably had a significant effect on John Williams' development. It seems as though this was a particularly fractious time for all concerned and Williams still recalls it quite vividly:

Very soon after the incident at the hotel, we moved into town and when I was seventeen, I moved out and went to share a flat with Christopher Nupen. After the bust up with my father, my mother had to do a lot of repairing of the relationship with Segovia... and she was keen to do that. By that stage I was largely doing my own thing and tried not to get involved. It was a very complicated business with my father and his relationship with Segovia because he'd always idolised Segovia. I've spoken to several other musicians who've experienced similar situations as children, where their teacher would seek to take on a parental role. I think Segovia was trying to adopt a parental kind of role in my development and I don't think that's ever a good idea.<sup>126</sup>

Although Williams' opposition to Segovia's principles can be seen to have ideological grounds, his motivation was also informed by personal experiences.

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<sup>123</sup> Starling, 105-106.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* 106.

<sup>125</sup> Williams did return once more to study at Sienna with Segovia in the summer of 1958, the same year that he was pronounced 'Prince of the Guitar.' Furthermore, it is worth noting that, despite falling out with Len Williams, Segovia also proved to be magnanimous in recommending John to 'Ibbs and Tillett', the classical music agency, which was another great advantage for the young guitarist.

<sup>126</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

## 2.2 Contrasting approaches to popular and folk music styles

The previous chapter established that Segovia brought a conservative and elitist sensibility to the classical guitar world. Furthermore, of the generation of guitarists that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, many were heavily influenced by Segovia's views. Indeed, Julian Bream was certainly influenced by Segovia and expressed similar views, particularly relating to the status of the electric guitar. In *A Life on the Road* (1982), Bream described the sound of the electric guitar as 'the most boring, lifeless, phoney, vulgar noise that could have ever been contrived by humankind on this planet.'<sup>127</sup> This illustrates how successfully Segovia's message had been transmitted among this younger generation, although it could also be argued that this type of elitism was necessary in order to allow the instrument to be taken seriously in classical music concert halls. In 1981, some twenty-three years after his Wigmore Hall debut, the journalist Philip Purser asked Segovia for his thoughts on John Williams' numerous crossover projects. His response was that his former pupil was '...doing the reverse of what I did, he is putting the guitar out of classical music again.'<sup>128</sup> Broadly speaking though, Segovia was relatively silent in public pronouncements about Williams' career choices. However, John Duarte was surely speaking of Williams when he referred to an unnamed 'famous guitarist' who became 'over-catholic in his activities, making forays "across the tracks"' Duarte continued: 'Segovia was beside himself with rage, as the person concerned was one to whom he had previously given unstinting support.'<sup>129</sup> Duarte continues that on one occasion Segovia was asked as to whether he would agree to sit on a competition jury with this individual and replied that '...He (the offender) has betrayed the guitar; he has undermined everything I have ever tried to do. I have told the organisers that I will not sit in the same room as this man.'<sup>130</sup> Williams seems to have been less conscious of the extent of Segovia's anger although he was aware that 'Sky was the last straw for Segovia.'<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Palmer, Tony: *Julian Bream – A Life on the Road*, (London: Macdonald, 1982), 185.

<sup>128</sup> Wade, Graham: *Segovia – A Celebration of the Man and His Music*, (London: Allison & Busby, 1983), 109.

<sup>129</sup> Duarte, John: *Andrés Segovia*, 101.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

Segovia's ire is understandable, given that his life's work was predicated on the idea that classical guitar deserved to be considered as superior to other forms of the instrument. However, Williams sees many of his career decisions in a broader historical context:

[T]he guitar has always been basically a popular instrument. And I think that in our enthusiasm one doesn't want to forget that just as much good music is done in all forms of popular music as is done in classical music. It's different but it's just as good.<sup>132</sup>

Williams' actions did indeed undermine Segovia's work. The principal area of disagreement was in their attitudes to forms that fall outside the sphere of art music: Williams appeared to be drawn to all of them and Segovia none. Although Bream was not enamoured of the electric guitar or rock music, he seemed to have a more light-hearted opinion of Williams' crossover music, as shown in an interview from 1980, when he compared the chart-topping popularity of Sky, to his own 'Julian Bream Consort', which performed early music on authentic instruments, saying that '...of course he's making more money with his consort than I ever made with mine!'<sup>133</sup>

However, given that the study of music has changed so much in recent times, it has become increasingly difficult to assess what is artistically 'serious' or 'worthy.'<sup>134</sup> Indeed, before the advent of the 'new' musicology in the 1980s, it was notable that Williams' forays into folk, jazz and popular music were not seen as being of equal importance to his performances of standard classical guitar repertoire. In *A Concise History of Rock Music*, classical guitarist and writer Paul Fowles described Williams' crossover projects as 'a series of adventures and misadventures from which, apart from appearing on some classy film scores [...] and an often overlooked contribution to Frank Zappa's *200 Motels* (1971), few

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<sup>132</sup> Evans, Tom and Evans, Mary Anne: *Guitars-Music, History, Construction and Players – From the Renaissance to Rock*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 166.

<sup>133</sup> Wager-Schneider, John: 'Conversation with Julian Bream', *Soundboard*, Vol. 7, No.1, (1980), 9-12.

<sup>134</sup> 'Worthy' in this context refers to the idea that certain styles of music might be seen as not sufficiently complex or difficult for a musician of Williams' capabilities.

items of any lasting merit emerged.’<sup>135</sup> It is interesting that Fowles singles out the Zappa project as being ‘of merit’, implying that other ventures including such figures as Cleo Laine, John Dankworth, George Martin, Stanley Myers, Sky, Inti Illimani, John Etheridge and many others are of less value. I would argue that the reason for singling out the Zappa project for praise at the expense of others has to do with the ‘rock-centred’ focus of the book, but it must be pointed out that Williams’ ‘contribution’ to *200 Motels* is quite brief. In fact, the film displayed Zappa’s penchant for surrealist and at times absurd art forms and Barry Miles declared that ‘...most audiences found it utterly incomprehensible.’<sup>136</sup> It is not difficult to see why Fowles expresses a preference for the music of Zappa, whilst not placing a high value on more obviously commercial and accessible projects. However, his comments are indicative of the opinion of many classical guitarists that Williams has somehow belittled his talent by becoming involved in popular projects such as his work with Stanley Myers. In *Soundboard*, Daniel Corr refers to *Changes* (1971) and *The Height Below* (1973), as the ‘depths of the middle-brow spectrum.’<sup>137</sup> The perception of Williams in this context is often set against the example of Julian Bream, who is said to have devoted himself to more serious artistic pursuits. It could even be argued that Graham Wade was drawing a comparison with Williams in 2009, when he made the following pronouncement about Bream:

Nothing diverted him from his central mission. Neither was he ever seduced into compromise with the commercial world of the “music industry.” Julian Bream’s success was achieved on his own terms, the principles by which he valued his art.<sup>138</sup>

Wade rightly praises Bream for ‘the principles by which he valued his art’, but also implies that more commercial music involves compromising those principles. Tanenbaum asserts that Bream ‘stayed within the narrow, traditional definition of the instrument and investigated every aspect of the repertoire in

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<sup>135</sup> Fowles, Paul: *A Concise History of Rock Music*, (Pacific, Missouri: Mel Bay, 2009) 264-265.

<sup>136</sup> Miles, Barry: *Frank Zappa*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), 297.

<sup>137</sup> Corr, Daniel: ‘John Williams – The Great Guitar Concerto Commissions’, *Soundboard*, Vol.39, No. 1, (2013), 63.

<sup>138</sup> Wade, Graham: ‘A Tribute to Julian Bream’, *Soundboard*, Vol.35, No.1 (2009), 41.

great depth.’<sup>139</sup> However, despite these assertions, Bream had, in fact, featured on a number of film soundtracks throughout his career, the most recent of which was for the 1995 American film *Don Juan de Marco*.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, he played on the accompanying hit single *Have you ever really loved a woman?* which, given the criteria often used to dismiss much of Williams’ work in this area, could arguably be labelled a ‘middle-brow project’. Therefore, given Bream’s participation in this and other soundtracks such as *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers* (1978)<sup>141</sup> and while Bream was clearly engaged in far less ‘popular style’ projects than Williams, it might seem reasonable to ask the question ‘how much crossover is too much?’ It is also possible that the reason Fowles was compelled to label Williams’ crossover recordings as ‘mediocre’ and ‘an all too obvious effort to capitalize on the cash-generating power of *Changes*,’ is because of their high profile and chart success.<sup>142</sup> While critics such as Fowles and Wade question Williams’ principles in comparison to Bream, they arguably fail to acknowledge that both men had very different taste in music, both showed a consistent approach throughout their careers, and that neither player could or should have forced themselves to play music which they did not enjoy. It is reasonable to assume therefore that, had Bream received a huge surge in popularity for his contribution to Bryan Adams’ song, he too would be subject to criticism along the same lines as Williams. Therefore it is tempting to wonder whether the criticism received by Williams from Segovia, Fowles and others, emanated from the style, the music or merely the high profile of the projects in question. In this context, it becomes difficult to assess whether negative criticism is being specifically levelled at a particular work, its accessibility, or simply the level of popularity it gains on the performer’s behalf, subsequent to its commercial release. Furthermore, it is clearly difficult to predict how reception of a work of art can vary from one era to the next.

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<sup>139</sup> Tananbaum, 191.

<sup>140</sup> Wade, Graham: *The Art of Julian Bream*, (Newcastle: Ashley Mark, 2008), 163.

<sup>141</sup> Imdb.com: Julian Bream. Accessed 7 June, 2015, [www.imdb.com/name/nm0106438/](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0106438/)  
Other soundtracks on which Bream has performed include *Chase a Crooked Shadow* (1958), *Pacific Destiny* (1956), *The Romantic Young Lady* (1955) and *Swashbuckler* (1976).

<sup>142</sup> Fowles, 265.

In *How Music Works*, pop-music performer and writer David Byrne asserts the difference of his own opinion with that of philosopher David Hume, who theorised that great art ‘...has been universally found to please in all countries and in all ages.’<sup>143</sup> Byrne argues that context exerts an enormous influence upon the reception of many works of art.<sup>144</sup> To place the argument in another musical context, throughout his life J.S. Bach was more renowned for his skill as an organist, than for his great compositions, of which only a handful were published during his own lifetime.<sup>145</sup> The greatness of Bach became apparent many years after his death when Mendelssohn sparked a revival of interest which has eventually led to his work being regarded as one of the highest forms of artistic endeavour. In *Who needs Classical Music?* Julian Johnson criticises the policy of claiming superiority for either contemporary or ancient art, maintaining that to idealise one at the expense of another is to miss one of the central points of art:

Art has not been well served by an older approach that treated it as “unworldly” and placed it on a pedestal in the museum, or by a more recent approach that emphasises its thoroughly historical and worldly aspect. Taken separately, both are inadequate and fail to grasp a definitive quality of art – that is both of these things at once.<sup>146</sup>

These shifts in opinion permeate all art forms and although reception of Williams’ more popular and folk-based recordings was not always as positive as for his more standard classical recordings, there are many reasons why a process of re-evaluation may be long overdue on some of these recordings.

### **2.3 Williams and politics**

The unwelcome controversy surrounding Segovia’s right-wing political convictions, was mentioned in the previous chapter.<sup>147</sup> The fact that he was

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<sup>143</sup> Carey, John: *What Good Are the Arts?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20-32, Cited in Byrne, David: *How Music Works*, (Edinburgh: London, Canongate, 2012), 277.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Wolff, Christoph: *Bach, Essays on His Life and Music*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 371-374. The Author offers many reasons for this and mentions the fact that Bach’s obituary in 1754 focussed principally on his skill as an organist and clavier player rather than his ability as a composer.

<sup>146</sup> Johnson, Julian: *Who Needs Classical Music?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 95.

<sup>147</sup> See Chapter One, 3-4.

banned from playing in America during the 1930s, at a time when he was the instrument's most celebrated ambassador, could even be interpreted as having had a negative impact upon the popularity of the classical guitar, albeit temporarily. Perhaps not surprisingly, this right-wing outlook was in sharp contrast with the deeply held socialist beliefs of John Williams. Having absorbed many of his parents' convictions, Williams became politically active at a very young age. He describes an event that had an enormous impact upon him as a teenager:

I had very left wing parents and being an only child I heard a lot of political discussions in the house. The first thing I can remember doing was in 1958 – there were news reports about the Christmas Island Nuclear bomb tests and an English Quaker named Harold Steele, who travelled on a boat into the bombsite area: he was stopped obviously before he came to any harm but I remember being very inspired by that. Around that time the 'Campaign against Nuclear Weapons' became known as the 'Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament' or CND. I felt like I should do something to help and I somehow found out where their offices were – off Fleet Street – and went along. I met an old campaigner called Peggy Duff and arranged with her to do a concert, which my dad helped organise in Conway Hall. That was my first contact with them and I've always been involved with CND ever since. I suppose it came from being from a politically minded family. I was always interested in things as opposed to being disinterested.<sup>148</sup>

In 1970, Williams actually stood as a candidate for the independent political movement 'Homes before Roads' for the Greater London Council election in Hackney.<sup>149</sup> His motivation for running was to encourage the government to build a new play area for children in North Kensington instead of progressing with a proposed Inner London motorway. Williams gave two concerts in aid of this project, one of which also featured Julian Bream. Despite the fact that Williams was not elected, ultimately, the campaign proved successful, with the party attaining enough support to convince the Labour Party to abandon the motorway proposal in order to preserve its majority in the Greater London area.

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<sup>148</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>149</sup> Starling, 335-36.

Many of Williams' politically motivated collaborations with other artists have tended to be of the protest variety, such as his 1971 recording *Songs of Freedom*, with singer Maria Farandouri (b. 1947). This arose from their concerts together, performing the works of Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis (b. 1925). Theodorakis had opposed the 1967 military coup in his homeland and was subsequently imprisoned and then exiled. Farandouri had also left Greece, but was determined to bring Theodorakis' music and its message to a wider audience given that it had been banned in Greece. Williams became involved through his sympathies and support for exiled political groups.<sup>150</sup> An interesting point about collaborative music used for specific political or charitable events, is that the music itself is often of secondary importance to the activity and to the unifying visual element or message. However, with this collaboration, the music itself was of critical importance to the project and the very performance of this programme was in itself an act of defiance against an oppressive regime. The ten songs featured on the recording are performed with great passion by Farandouri, accompanied by an urgency in Williams' playing, combining classically precise passages with simple folk-style accompaniments. It also features four solo guitar pieces, arranged from Theodorakis' *Epitafios* song-cycle, which was written about the murder, in 1939, of thirteen striking tobacco workers in Greece.<sup>151</sup> The songs chosen, numbers 2, 3, 4, and 5, have become an important part of the classical guitar repertoire since the release of *Songs of Freedom*. This recording was clearly a direct politically motivated statement, which also managed to function as a convincing artistic work. Paul Fowles wrote of the album:

Perhaps the secret ingredient in *Songs of Freedom* was that it is not a crossover recording in the usual sense. Farandouri was appearing in her established role as Theodorakis' interpreter *par excellence*, while Williams was providing an intricate and precisely notated backdrop that only a premium grade classically trained guitarist had the skills to handle. So both parties were effectively operating from the heart of their specialist fields. But the very existence of this release led many a pundit to hail John Williams as the quiet yet determined hero who, as a brilliant young classical musician at the gateway to a new decade, was set to apply his creativity in

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<sup>150</sup> Starling, 159-61.

<sup>151</sup> Holland, Janet: 'Notes on *Epitafios* 2, 3, 4 and 5', SMK62266, (Sony Classical, 1971, Re-issue 1995).



challenging and controversial areas where existing boundaries no longer applied.<sup>152</sup>

Through playing with Maria Farandouri, Williams encountered the Chilean group Inti Illimani and decided to collaborate with them. Paco Peña was also drafted in and the collaboration proved very fruitful, resulting in many concerts and two albums in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The profile of both Williams and Peña helped to attract enormous attention in Europe, not just to the music of Inti Illimani but also to the cause of democracy in Chile. Inti Illimani was at that time, in exile from Agustin Pinochet's oppressive military regime and Williams' support for the group again demonstrates his use of music as a political tool. Horacio Salinas, the group's musical director and composer, described the pieces written during this period as follows:

Their spirit, I believe, lies within the feeling that the history of music has always given me; that in years gone by it enabled communities to join hands and dance in times of both joy and despair. They were created during years of exile from the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile and something of this condition comes through in the solemn moments of the music. They are wanderers' dances, perhaps from a tradition still looking for a home.<sup>153</sup>

Musically, these recordings and concerts presented a unique combination of differing styles and talents that are complementary. *David of the White Rock* is an old Welsh folksong which features on the recording as a beautiful guitar solo, acting as a prelude for the raucous *La Fiesta de la Tirana*, a joyous dervish-like dance tune and a is a good example of music in motion, featuring here in a most unlikely context. As Jan Fairley notes, the addition of Peña and Williams led to different arrangements and new challenges for the group:

These instrumental compositions expand with the collaborations, begun in 1984, with classical guitarist John Williams and Spanish classical/flamenco guitarist Paco Peña. Incorporating these two guitarists into the group, for concerts and tours, created a 'string'

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<sup>152</sup> Fowles, 264.

<sup>153</sup> Salinas, Horacio: 'Notes on *Concerto – John Williams*', notes for JCW3, (John Williams, 2014.).

ensemble; the mostly guitar-based music meant reworking existing pieces, new compositions and adaptations of Spanish music.<sup>154</sup>

Another example of how this project enabled music to cross between contrasting borders and styles is that Williams' *Concerto* album (2014) features Horacio Salinas' *Danzas Peregrinas*, which is an orchestral arrangement of pieces, taken from the Inti Illimani/Williams/Peña collaborations of the 1980s. The work features three soloists, namely Williams, Horacio Duran on charango and Richard Harvey on a number of different instruments, with the English Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Paul Daniel. It shows Williams bringing folk music into a classical setting, rather than his more usual approach of placing a classical guitarist in a variety of unconventional ensembles. Peña's description of how he first came into contact with Williams in 1969, gives a good indication of how his musical and political activities interact:

[I]t was in 1969, when I was asked to take part in a concert at the Round House theatre to support the Camden Committee for Human Rights. As far as I was concerned, I was supporting the cause against racial discrimination – and in those days I didn't speak English terribly well. I arrived to find that John Williams was instrumental in organising this event. I had known of John before and admired him very much. I wasn't dramatically well-known, but I had achieved some kind of name in the solo guitar world. John, however, had been a child prodigy and was world-famous at 18. I had seen him several times in concert and he was my kind of guitarist: complete somehow – with wonderful posture and delivery of music, clean, beautiful, flawless. I was in awe of meeting this man whose reputation was, to outsiders, rather on the serious side. It was wonderful to discover how "normal" he appeared: one of the most down-to-earth human beings you could meet. I don't think we hit it off immediately, partly because my English was a problem, and partly because I was more in awe of him then. However, the political and social connotations of this event were a good start to forming a friendship. John is very politically minded, and I don't know if he could be the friend of someone with whom he had violent differences of opinion. This is not to say he doesn't like a good argument: we certainly have lots of those, despite our views largely coinciding. He just loves arguing. He comes from a politically active middle-class family.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Fairley, Jan: *Living Politics, Making Music: The Writings of Jan Fairley*, ed Ian Christie, Simon Frith, Stan Rijven, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 55.

<sup>155</sup> Moss, Robert Tewdwr: 'How We Met; Paco Peña and John Williams', *Independent Online* Accessed 19 March, 2017. *Website*, [www.independent.co.uk/arts.../howwe-met-paco-pena-and-john-williams](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts.../howwe-met-paco-pena-and-john-williams).

It is clear from Peña's account that Williams' beliefs attracted him to certain causes, resulting in the forming of either personal or professional relationships, which frequently impacted on his career. Indeed, he displayed a keen sense of diplomacy on being awarded the Presidential Medal in Paraguay, in 1994, in honour of his work on behalf of Agustin Barrios Mangoré. Before his visit, the President's wife asked if he would give a performance on behalf of her favourite charity. Williams agreed but only if he could be permitted to give another performance for the benefit of Amnesty International, who had campaigned tirelessly on behalf of political prisoners during a forty-year period of dictatorship which had only ended the previous year. He gave both concerts, received the medal and also made his way to Barrios' home town, where he was given a hero's reception, performing a recital in the local church, which was also relayed outside to a packed crowd in the town square via some stacked Marshall electric guitar amplifiers.<sup>156</sup> This type of activity sets Williams apart from Segovia, in terms of how his career interacted with his political activities. While it is natural that two individuals should have differing political mindsets, it is clear that Williams often used his profile to highlight and support political causes in which he believed. Segovia's decision to return to Spain in 1952 and live under the right-wing regime is in stark contrast to the exile of artists such as Picasso and Casals.<sup>157</sup> He sought whenever possible to distance his career from politics, possibly due to the fact that he was aware that his conservative views would not be well-received among the artistic community. The letters he wrote to Manuel Ponce indicate that he felt victimised because of his beliefs during World War II:

The infamous Mr. Coppicus, the same day that we were to embark in London for New York, cabled me announcing that my tournée had been voided. Now you will understand the motive for such drastic measures. It was the reprisal of the Jewish societies, of which I had already been warned. That if I did not retract my nationalist sentiments, I would lose my concerts in the United States.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Starling, 332-334.

<sup>157</sup> Powell, 168. *Soundboard's* tribute from 1987, contains a photo of Segovia and Franco from around 1960, in conversation and exchanging a handshake.

<sup>158</sup> Segovia, Andrés: *The Segovia-Ponce Letters*, ed. Miguel Alcázar, trans. Peter Segal, (Columbus: Editions, Orphée, 1989), 190.

Thus, he kept these beliefs to himself during the post-war era. In 1980, he expressed his disdain for politics:

In [things] political is confusion. And here [he nods toward his guitar sitting in its black leather case on a bureau], here is absolutely the order, everything order and discipline. And the political is just the antagonism of that.<sup>159</sup>

Bream for his part declared in 1982 that he was ‘not a political animal, in any shape or form’.<sup>160</sup> Like Segovia, he betrayed a rather conservative and unsympathetic mentality when explaining why he chose to play in Greece, Chile and Argentina in breach of various cultural boycotts:

Some people think that artists should be figure-heads – even cultural and political revolutionaries. Do you know, I couldn’t give a damn about all that. I care when people are suffering, but only people that I know or I’m involved with or when I’m in some situation that I can help. I find it very difficult to get upset about people suffering in Tobago or Samoa or some such place.<sup>161</sup>

Williams however, has never had any difficulty in blending his political convictions with his career, and this has resulted in many interesting projects.

Mark Swed made this point in an article from the *LA Times*:

Unlike Segovia, however, Williams, who is proud of his life-long involvement in liberal causes (he rails against the hotel laundry for putting cardboard in shirt collars, wasting trees like that), found that it was through social causes that he has often expanded his own musical horizons. It was, for instance, performing at benefit concerts for the African National Congress in the early 1970s that he met Cleo Laine.<sup>162</sup>

This has certainly brought new perspectives to guitarists and is a recurring theme throughout Williams’ career. Furthermore, this tendency represents one of the

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<sup>159</sup> Sweeney, Louise: ‘Segovia; Waiting for Silence’, The Christian Science Monitor Archive, Website, Originally published in 1980, Accessed 17 March, 2017.

[www.csmonitor.com/1980/0327/032738.html](http://www.csmonitor.com/1980/0327/032738.html)

<sup>160</sup> Palmer, Tony: *Julian Bream – A Life on the Road*, (London: Macdonald & Co, 1982), 170.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Swed, Mark: ‘Few Strings to the Past: Music: Guitarist John Williams doesn't fret about breaking with Segovia's classical teachings’, [www.articles.latimes.com](http://www.articles.latimes.com). Originally published 23 March, 1994, Accessed 19 March, 2017. [articles.latimes.com/1994-03-23/entertainment/ca-37497\\_1\\_guitarist-john-williams](http://articles.latimes.com/1994-03-23/entertainment/ca-37497_1_guitarist-john-williams).

many ways in which Williams pushed the boundaries of classical guitar culture during the 1970s and 1980s.

#### **2.4 Shifting attitudes about classical guitar**

In 1971, the same year as he released *Songs of Freedom*, Williams also produced *Changes*, an album which altered the entire shape of his career. *Changes* was a collaboration with the arranger and composer Stanley Myers and featured many jazz/rock versions of pieces by composers as diverse as J.S. Bach, Mikis Theodorakis and Joni Mitchell, along with some of Myers' own compositions, including *Cavatina*. A good indicator of the extent to which *Changes* represented a radical departure in style, is that Williams' label CBS, decided that it was unsuitable for one of their classical artists and this led to its release on Fly Records, a smaller label run by David Platz.<sup>163</sup> This decision serves to illustrate how the recording divided opinion and the album was also the genesis of Sky, which would be formed many years later featuring many of the musicians from the *Changes* project. In fact, *Changes* led to the release of two more similar albums before the formation of Sky: *The Height Below* (1973), which was produced by George Martin and *Travelling* (1978), which again featured Stanley Myers as arranger/producer.

If Segovia successfully brought a refined and exclusive brand of guitar performance to the art-music world, then it can be said that John Williams made that style of playing more accessible among the general public.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, in terms of making the instrument visible to the general public and creating an environment whereby people who did not usually hear classical guitar became exposed to the instrument, Williams' participation in Sky, as well as his

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<sup>163</sup> Wingate, Jonathan: 'Notes on Cavatina – The John Williams Collection', SALVODCD215 (London: Union Square Music, 2010).

<sup>164</sup> Eisentraut, Jochen: *The Accessibility of Music: Participation Reception, and Contact*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28. In this regard, it is useful to consider Eisentraut's theories on musical accessibility. Eisentraut describes musical accessibility using three categories; physical access to music, personal reception and finally, participation and the social power of music. Obviously, some of these are more relevant than others to the career of a classical guitarist.

appearances on the television shows of Eric Sykes, Val Doonican, Jimmy Saville and Les Dawson all had a huge impact upon the public's access to his music. His famous performances at Ronnie Scott's jazz club also helped to break down barriers between jazz and classical music as was highlighted in Christopher Nupen's BBC television special about those concerts.<sup>165</sup> Williams can be seen to have garnered a great deal of exposure for the classical guitar with the release of works such *Cavatina*, which became a top 20 hit single in the United Kingdom in 1978 and with projects such as Sky, whose arrangement of Bach's *Toccatina and Fugue in D minor* reached number 5 in the UK singles chart in 1980.

Williams showed his personal commitment to the principle of encouraging others to play the instrument when he toured China in 1995. During the Cultural Revolution in China there was an outright ban on playing or teaching the guitar, as it was seen to represent the decadence and corruption of the West. A teacher named Chen Zhi, who had completed ten years of forced physical labour, established a classical guitar school in 1982, and eight years later, established a guitar department at the Beijing Central Conservatory of Music. He has produced some remarkable students including the international recording artist Xuefei Yang. Having given masterclasses to some of the conservatory's students (including Xuefei Yang), Williams donated two of his own Greg Smallman guitars to Chen Zhi. The significance of this act was not lost on the teacher himself who commented:

He was deeply moved by the performances given by Yameng Wang and Xuefei Yang, and two other students of mine. Then he decided to give me two of his own used Smallman guitars. From then on, my students began to use these guitars – two wonderful instruments – for international competitions. John Williams's generosity not only gave us two top guitars, but also strengthened our confidence, which inspired our morale for marching towards the international arena. It is very unusual in the history of the guitar that a great master of world fame presented his own instruments to others.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Starling, 172-174.

<sup>166</sup> Byers, Greg: 'Chen Zhi', *Soundboard*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1, (2012), 64.

From the early 1960s, John Williams began to appear on a variety television show entitled *The Billy Cotton Band Show*.<sup>167</sup> This was to mark the beginning of a long-standing association with light-entertainment television shows. Writers on this show included Michael Palin and Terry Jones, who would go on to achieve fame through the seminal *Monty Python* comedy series. Williams would later cross paths with these comedians on the *Secret Policeman's Ball* series of Amnesty International benefit concerts in the 1970s and 1980s. Through *The Billy Cotton Band Show*, Williams also met comedian Eric Sykes and began a lifelong association which would greatly enhance and enrich the careers of both men, Williams frequently appearing as a 'straight-man' in sketches characterised by Sykes' unique talent for visual comedy and mime.

During the 1960s Williams performed at Ronnie Scott's legendary jazz club in London, and a BBC programme by Christopher Nupen captured the event, which was very positively received. The performance at Ronnie Scott's club highlighted again, Williams' desire to bring to the guitar a broader sense of appeal, and the sight of a world-famous classical musician performing on television in a dark room full of people who were drinking, eating and chatting, was quite a change from the traditional concert platform. Evidently, Williams was open to the idea of conveying a different image of himself as a performer, or at least that he was not interested in preserving the image of classical musicians which had prevailed up to that time. This should be seen in the broader context of other young classical musicians such as Jacqueline du Pré, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Itzhak Perlman, Fou Ts'ong, Stephen Bishop, and Daniel Barenboim who, alongside Williams, appeared to show a more accessible side of their personalities to the public.<sup>168</sup> As well as filming Williams at Ronnie Scott's, Nupen (described by Norman LeBrecht as 'the David Attenborough of the musical jungle') sought to make other programmes about this engaging group of musicians.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Starling, 142-143.

<sup>168</sup> Wilson, Elizabeth: *Jacqueline du Pré: Her Life, Her Music, Her Legend* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999), 223. Jacqueline du Pré described this group of musicians as a clan who shared 'the spirit of music making'.

<sup>169</sup> Lebrecht, Norman: 'Was This TV's Finest Hour', *La Scena Musicale*, September 24, 2008, Accessed 30 October, 2015. [www.scena.org](http://www.scena.org)

Norman Lebrecht captured the mood of these programmes by describing Nupen as:

[...] a young man at the BBC, [who] invented films about music. In the late 1960s, when 16mm cameras got lighter and silent, he took them into the heart of performance and captured a new breed of musicians having fun as they played. Daniel Barenboim jumped on Vladimir Ashkenazy's back after a Mozart double-concerto shouting 'that was good!' John Williams took his classical guitar to Ronnie Scott's. Jacqueline du Pré glowed with enigmatic contentment.<sup>170</sup>

This cohort of talented musicians helped to redefine the concept of the classical musician, attracting younger audiences and establishing themselves as celebrities in the process:

Similarly, the cellist Stephen Isserlis recalls that his viola-playing sister Rachel had her bedroom decorated with pin-up pictures of Daniel [Barenboim] and Jackie [du Pré]. Their enthusiastic response was indicative of the excitement generated by these interpretative artists, whose combination of youth, vitality and artistic brilliance was irresistible.<sup>171</sup>

In 1968, Williams decided to dispense with the formal convention of wearing a suit in concert, and began wearing clothes that he felt to be more comfortable onstage. This move seemed again to be directly opposed to Segovia's aspiration that the guitar should be of equal status with other classical instruments by its performers dressing in standard concert attire. Ashkenazy soon decided to follow Williams' lead and dress casually for concerts, prompting some recriminations:

Some time later, Ashkenazy appeared at a Swansea festival in a lounge suit and turtle-neck shirt and the organisers wrote to his London manager complaining bitterly about his lack of professionalism.<sup>172</sup>

According to Starling, Ashkenazy remarked that it was 'easier for John as a guitarist to get away with it,' and it is an understandable point of view, given the

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Wilson, 318.

<sup>172</sup> Starling, 157.



guitar's roots in folk and popular music.<sup>173</sup> The removal of this formal convention from classical music was also arguably a generational issue and it is not coincidental that Williams and Ashkenazy dispensed with formal wear in concerts just a year after the famous 'Summer of Love' in 1967. They were undoubtedly influenced by popular culture and increased the public's accessibility to its celebrity classical performers. Williams remembers that it took a little time for audiences to adjust to the idea and remembers a reviewer remarking 'that I came onstage looking like a cross between a refugee from the Don Cossack Chorus and Doctor Kildare.'<sup>174</sup> Segovia's pragmatic elitism may have given the guitar a certain cachet within the classical world, but after some initial reservations, the time was clearly right to alter the public perceptions. Paul Fowles examines the results of this change in some detail:

But as the 60s progressed, his image became subtly yet perceptibly more radical. The 'short back and sides' received less regular maintenance, and the formal evening wear and sombre lounge suits gave way to an eye-catching collection of patterned shirts [...] Insignificant though all this may sound in retrospect, it should nonetheless be emphasised that the Williams makeovers were underway more than two decades before such previously 'straight' classical musicians as the violinist Nigel Kennedy (b.1956) came up with much the same idea, albeit in an 80s post-punk context.<sup>175</sup>

William Starling gives interesting accounts of some of Williams' appearances on Amnesty International's *The Secret Policeman's Ball* concerts during the 1980s. During a performance of *Cavatina* in 1989, he is interrupted in mid-performance for comedic effect by Jennifer Saunders, who walks onstage dressed as a road crew member and suggests aloud that the audience are 'bored', which causes great laughter. Williams is then ushered off the stage by John Cleese to huge applause from the audience. Williams is an interesting choice for this type of role. He encapsulates the duality and versatility of image that is central to the guitar's unique appeal. As a classical musician he is worthy of the greatest respect and admiration, yet as a guitarist he can easily appear to share common ground with those around him in a setting such as this. Of course, it is difficult to imagine

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>175</sup> Fowles, 262-263.

Segovia or even Julian Bream agreeing to take part in such sketches. In fact, Williams acknowledges and understands his teacher's objections to such performances: 'I know it annoyed him but it was really a case of Segovia being a product of his own time whereas I was equally a product of mine.'<sup>176</sup>

In the context of these shows, the guitar represents both the establishment and the anti-establishment. The subversive nature of British alternative comedy requires a high level of disrespect for authority and Williams offers himself up to be lampooned as a representative of all that is conservative about the old world. It is an interesting conceptual development from earlier comedic references to classical music. Whereas the general theme of comedy sketches of this type has always involved the sense that classical musicians take themselves too seriously, usually the comedian is presented as a buffoon who does not understand the conventions of high artistic performance. Williams' work with Eric Sykes and Andre Previn's appearance on the Morecambe and Wise Show provide good examples of this. However, the idea of the entire audience rejecting a classical musician without even granting him the respect of completing his performance is quite novel. It resonates with the comment of Charles Hiroshi Garrett about comedy and classical music when he states that recently, it is 'more common for contemporary parodists to resort to gallows humour.'<sup>177</sup> It is also a good example of the way in which perception of the guitar evolved throughout the twentieth century, in tandem with other performance arts and in relation to opportunities created by the seismic developments in media and technology.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Segovia accorded the classical guitar, an elitism, which he felt was necessary in order for the instrument to flourish. Julian Bream cemented the guitar's status as an art-music instrument by commissioning works from highly esteemed composers such as Britten, Walton and Henze. However, John Williams has often

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<sup>176</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>177</sup> Garrett, Charles Hiroshi: "'Shooting the Keys": Musical Horseplay and High Culture', *The Oxford Handbook of The New Cultural History of Music*, ed. Jane F. Fulcher, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 260.

travelled unrepentantly in the opposite direction. He has sought to rediscover the classical guitar's links with folk and popular music from almost every part of the globe and has resolutely refused to claim any sense of superiority on behalf of the classical guitar over other styles. It is this inclusive and popular quality that has drawn John Williams into so many different projects throughout his career and as well as being in and of itself a culturally interesting phenomenon, his work also has repercussions for the future of the instrument. Matthew Hinsley describes the guitar's unique position as follows:

At a time when so many 'fine arts' disciplines lament the aging of their audiences, *classical* guitar, with at least one toe dipped into the world of 'guitar' (the ubiquitous pop instrument of the world) enjoys as diverse an audience as ever.<sup>178</sup>

Williams has been a major catalyst in helping the classical guitar to straddle these two diverse worlds to such great effect. The classical guitar has come through two interesting transformations in the last century: on one hand, through the pioneering work of Segovia, Tárrega, Villa-Lobos, Rodrigo, Williams, Bream and many others, it has gained a real foothold on the classical concert platform, while at roughly the same time the guitar in general has become transformed into the most popular instrument in the world, through its associations with jazz, pop, folk and rock music. The career of John Williams is uniquely reflective of both these transformations and he has contributed enormously to the classical guitar's ability to capitalise on the popularity of its younger relatives in a post-rock'n'roll and later post-internet world. To achieve this he has had to adopt radically different perspectives from both Segovia and Bream on a broad range of issues, which are crucially important, not just at the present time, but also as they relate to the future of the classical guitar. Thus Williams' approach to the guitar is examined in detail over the following chapters.

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<sup>178</sup> Hinsley, Matthew: 'Classical Guitar and Community', *Instrumental Influences*, ed. Donn LeVie, (Texas: Kings Crown Publishing, 2011), 249.

## Chapter Three

### John Williams' approach to the classical guitar

This chapter seeks to establish the philosophies and attitudes that underpin many of John Williams' decisions regarding the performance, perception and communication of his music. These attitudes have led to a number of changes in the practice of performing classical guitar. Practical issues such as guitar design, amplification, education and even the reduction of extraneous noises are discussed, as is Williams' approach to performance, which has always been subject to intense interest and scrutiny because of his high profile. However, despite the fact that his technical ability has been so conspicuous throughout his career, this chapter focuses on stylistic and practical aspects of Williams' response to his instrument and with his broad influence upon the culture of classical guitar.

Tanenbaum noted that Williams' style 'is characterized by rhythmic drive and propulsion, clarity and flawlessness. It is not burdened by an overly nuanced "classical" approach or much affect.'<sup>179</sup> The use of the term 'classical approach' is interesting in this context, especially relating to how guitarists might understand the term since Bream, by contrast, has interpreted Williams' style as somehow resonant of music from the classical era:

John is a very different guitarist from me; his playing has a fine aristocratic quality; quite unique; very classical and beautifully controlled. He is the sort of player that Mozart would have liked; Beethoven perhaps might not have gone overboard, because it is the restraint with which he plays that is so remarkable. He doesn't over-indulge; everything is held in proportion, nothing is over-stated. In fact very eighteenth century.<sup>180</sup>

Bream's response implies that the 'flawlessness' to which Tanenbaum refers is due to a certain level of restraint that he perceives in Williams' playing. However, it is through playing in ensemble with musicians from other genres, that Williams

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<sup>179</sup> Tanenbaum, David: 'The Classical Guitar in the Twentieth Century', *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed Victor Anand Coelho, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 196.

<sup>180</sup> Palmer, Tony: *Julian Bream – A Life on the Road*, (London: Macdonald & Co., 1982), 165.

gained a slightly different sense of pulse and rhythm to many of his classical guitar-playing contemporaries. Indeed, he asserts that he has ‘learned more about the inner feel of music from playing with popular musicians as opposed to classical players.’<sup>181</sup> This statement hints at a crucial difference between Williams and many of his contemporaries, concurring in a sense with Tanenbaum’s description of his style.

### 3.1 Following the pulse

In an interview from 2009, John Williams hinted at the difference in approach between classical musicians and other performers, using the interpretation of slow, reflective pieces as an example:

Classically trained people find it very difficult to keep a given rhythm absolutely even. A lot of them will start rushing; they won’t have the internal feel of it. But in jazz and in popular music – and when I say popular music I mean the whole history of traditional music, going back to anything that is danced to, which has a beat – you have a slow beat or a fast beat. You don’t hang around with your foot in the air waiting for it to come down!<sup>182</sup>

Stylistically, Williams’ playing represented a marked change from that of both Segovia and Bream. Whereas Segovia forged a highly romantic and personal interpretative voice, Bream displayed what could be described as an idiosyncratic performance style.<sup>183</sup> In this context, Williams has frequently been criticised for being ‘less expressive’ than many of his contemporaries:

He is a musician who seems reluctant to reveal himself in his playing, so seriously constricting the expressive range of his music making that piece after piece comes out sounding much like what went before. There is such a thing in music as brilliant sameness.<sup>184</sup>

This excerpt represents the view that Williams somehow represses some aspect of his own personality while performing. However, it would perhaps be more

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<sup>181</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>182</sup> Wassily Saba, Therese: ‘John Williams’, *Classical Guitar*, Volume 28, No. 1, (2009) 16-17.

<sup>183</sup> Tosone, James: *Classical Guitarists – Conversations*, (London, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2000), 70. Composer Richard Rodney Bennett describes Bream’s playing as ‘eccentric, but it has depth and poetry.’

<sup>184</sup> Henahan, Donal: ‘John Williams in Solo Guitar Recital’, published April 21, 1986, Accessed 14 October, 2017. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

accurate to assert that Williams was merely articulating a very different personality to his contemporary guitarists. Even as a relatively young man in the early 1970s, he seemed eager to establish and explain this difference in approach: ‘Segovia thinks pretty vertically in music [...] It is beautiful sounds and no hurry. It has always been and it’s a beautiful style whereas my feeling is more urgent and I’ve always had this inner tension, and no matter how relaxed the music is.’<sup>185</sup> Elliot Fisk has interpreted this stylistic difference as something of a personality clash and John Williams has found himself cast in the role of an upstart, rebelling against his mentor both in terms of his choice of music, his collaborations with popular musicians and his style of playing. Fisk, who was himself endorsed by Segovia early in his career, expressed this sentiment:

There I see a difference in generation. Now, it’s different when John Williams, who studied with Segovia, says he wasn’t a good teacher and the like. I said to John, “Look, you had a much more difficult time with Segovia than I did. You had a father-son thing with him, while I had a grandfather-grandson thing.”<sup>186</sup>

However, as was pointed out in Chapter One, Fisk has also admitted that he altered his own natural tendencies when playing for Segovia in order to avoid displeasing his teacher. This sentiment is one echoed by Williams:

[...] mostly it was just a meeting at whatever hotel he might be staying in London. He’d ask what was I playing at the time and sometimes I’d play for him. I always played badly for him because I would have always tried to play in a style that might please him, rather than my own natural style.<sup>187</sup>

Segovia is rightly credited as being a supremely musical player but Williams often finds himself painted as more of a technician, almost ‘anti-Segovian’. Critic and publisher Matanya Ophee, described Williams’ performance of Bach’s *Chaconne in d minor* as ‘a bizarre attempt to de-Segovianize the work,’ although he fails to explain how the work had come to be ‘Segovianized’ in the first place.<sup>188</sup> Furthermore, his use of the word ‘bizarre’ implies that deviation from

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<sup>185</sup> Cinton, George, ‘The Guitar Doesn’t Need Great Players’, *Guitar*, Vol.2, No.1, (1973), 20-22.

<sup>186</sup> Tosone, 50.

<sup>187</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>188</sup> Ophee, Matanya: ‘Toronto ‘87’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 14, No.3, (1987), 209.

Segovia's approach to this work is in some way unorthodox. Critics can at times confuse rhythmic drive with musical inflexibility and tend towards judging artists on somewhat arbitrary parameters. Pianist Daniel Barenboim, mentions this issue in conversation with Edward W. Said:

The trouble is, when one speaks about freedom in today's world, this applies almost exclusively to freedom of speed, freedom of tempo. When somebody says in criticism of performances, "He was free with tempo"; or "He was very strict", it implies "He was strict, therefore he's analytical, uncompromising"; "He was free with the tempo, therefore he's romantic, emotional."<sup>189</sup>

Here, Barenboim refers to a tendency of critics to establish a correlation between freedom of expression and rhythmic license, thereby implying that if a performance adheres quite strictly to the pulse, as laid down by the composer, it might be viewed as less expressive than one in which the tempo fluctuates.<sup>190</sup> He touches on the point that although in some cases a strict adherence to the given tempo might be perceived as inexpressive, it might also be the most suitable way to perform a particular piece of music in a given context. In 2002, Eric Clarke offered a helpful example of how contrasting performers are often perceived by drawing attention to the work of Wilfrid Mellers.<sup>191</sup> Mellers distinguished between performers who are 'intermediaries' and 'interpreters' and Clarke explained as follows:

Mellers identifies 'intermediaries' as those who are a channel for the composer's intentions, and 'interpreters' as those for whom the composer's intentions (or more tangibly, the score) are as starting

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<sup>189</sup> Barenboim, David and Said, Edward W., ed. Ara Guzelimian, *Parallels and Padoxes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), 57.

<sup>190</sup> Fabian, Dorottya and Timmers, Renee and Schubert, Emery: *Expressiveness in Music Performance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), xxiii. The Authors Fabian, Timmers and Schubert ask whether the western ideal of expressiveness is important when discussing music of other styles. To help answer this question they draw on the example of an authentic performance of a folksong in which with the criteria often used to measure expressiveness in classical music are largely absent and conclude as follows: "Listening to old peasants singing in an apparently "neutral" style of performance one is nevertheless often deeply moved, perhaps by the text, perhaps by the fragility of the voice, perhaps by something else. The performance is experienced as expressive, even though there may be no "artistic" manipulations of tempo and dynamics, and no explicit "deviation from the norm.""

<sup>191</sup> Mellers, Wilfrid: 'Present and Past: Intermediaries and Interpreters', *Companion to contemporary musical thought*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), II: 920-930, Cited in Clarke, Eric: 'Listening to Performance', *Musical Performance – A Guide to Understanding*, ed. John Rink, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 189.

point for their own creative/interpretative work. Although there is a historical dimension to this issue, distinctions can also be drawn between different approaches at the same moment in history: in the 1940s and 1950s, for example, the conductors Toscanini and Furtwängler were respectively stereotyped as ‘intermediary’ and ‘interpreter’, Toscanini being revered (or pilloried) for his ‘fidelity to the score’, and Furtwängler for his creative insight and idiosyncrasy. If there are such fundamental disagreements about what performers should even *try* to do, it is not surprising that listeners may have radically divergent responses: what is wayward and indulgent to one (perhaps on the basis of its ‘departure from the score’) may be committed and inspired to another (because of the ‘originality and idiosyncrasy of its interpretation.’<sup>192</sup>

This example could be said to mirror opinions about Williams and Segovia, with Williams in the role of ‘intermediary’ and Segovia (and latterly Bream) as the ‘interpreter’. It is interesting to note that in this example, Toscanini can be seen to have attracted some degree of criticism for his ‘fidelity to the score’, as is the case with Williams. However, it is also important to remember that Segovia was born in the nineteenth century and was consequently disposed to play in an extremely Romantic fashion. In ‘The legacy of recordings’, Peter Johnson notes the huge stylistic and technical differences between two recordings of Elgar’s Violin Concerto: the first by Marie Hall from 1916 and the latter by Yehudi Menuhin from 1932.<sup>193</sup> Johnson highlights the massive differences between the two performances when he notes that ‘although Elgar expressed unqualified delight at Menuhin’s playing, he could not have imagined such playing when he wrote the work in 1910, for the modern style did not then exist.’<sup>194</sup> This quotation underlines the rapid rate of change both in violin technique and musical taste. It is worth noting that Johnson contrasted the approaches of two musicians who were far closer in age than Segovia and Williams. In fact, Marie Hall was only five years younger than Segovia, while Menuhin (the ‘modern’ musician in this example) was born in 1916, twenty-five years before Williams.

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<sup>192</sup> Mellers, Wilfrid: ‘Present and Past: Intermediaries and Interpreters’, *Companion to contemporary musical thought*, Paynter et al. (eds.), 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1987), II: 920-30. Cited in Clarke, Eric: ‘Listening to Performance’, *Musical Performance – A Guide to Understanding*, ed. John Rink, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 189.

<sup>193</sup> Johnson, Peter: ‘The Legacy of Recordings’, *Musical Performance – A Guide to Understanding*, ed. John Rink, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 208-209.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*



Clarke described ‘expression’ in music as ‘the construction and articulation of musical meaning, in which the cerebral, bodily, social and historical attributes of a performer all converge.’<sup>195</sup> He highlighted the problems associated with what he regarded by then as dated definitions of ‘expression’, which define it as ‘a departure from some norm.’<sup>196</sup> He also indicated that using deviations of tempi or dynamics as a way to assess ‘expression’ was fraught with contradictions:

But how are deliberate departures to be distinguished from accidents? How is music that has no score to be treated? What should be done about expressive markings already in the score (accelerandos and ritardandos, crescendos and decrescendos etc.) – must the corresponding tempo and dynamic changes be regarded as inexpressive simply because there is a marking in the score?<sup>197</sup>

While Clarke’s discussion did not offer any easy answers, he certainly suggested that to judge musical expression on the basis of tempo or dynamic shifts alone is overly simplistic. What some critics have tended to forget is that Williams’ less Romantic approach to music does not necessarily equate to a lack of musicality or emotional expression: it is in fact absolutely consistent with the approach of other performers of his generation. Even a performer such as the pianist Glenn Gould displayed a propensity for great rhythmic drive in his performances and recordings.<sup>198</sup> To express surprise at the interpretative contrasts between a performance from 1987 and that of a performer who was born almost a century earlier is, to say the least, somewhat baffling. The reality is that, as a musician steeped in nineteenth-century traditions, Segovia’s performance of Bach is consistent with the approach of his contemporaries, while as a more recent performer, Williams’ reading is equally reflective of shifting trends in performance practice. Williams argues that is unwise to compare performers from different eras without acknowledging the context:

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<sup>195</sup> Clarke, 69.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.* 63.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> Bazanna, Kevin: *Glenn Gould, The Performer in the Work*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2. Bazanna describes Gould’s playing as follows: ‘His highly individual piano style, interpretive liberties, and published pronouncements made him a controversial musical figure, but he was also widely admired, by audiences, colleagues, and critics, for his technical virtuosity, probing intellect, command of musical architecture, rhythmic dynamism, precise fingerwork, and extreme clarity of part-playing.’

Segovia was 100% genuine in what he was doing – he was being true to himself but I think some people then sought to apply his standards to our era during the late twentieth century and this strikes me as bad culture. In my opinion this is unconsciously arrogant. I say that because the people in question might not realise they are being arrogant but I think that's what it is: the assumption of an illegitimate superiority of one form of culture over another.<sup>199</sup>

In a *South Bank Show* television documentary from 2001, Williams discussed the essence of Spanish folk music with flamenco guitarist/composer Paco Peña and concluded that the preservation of a sense of rhythmic vitality, so integral to Spanish dance music, would be a major priority of his own performances of the works of composers such as Albéniz or Granados.<sup>200</sup> Williams discusses his approach to interpreting music in reference to this particular piece and acknowledges that his approach in this particular case may not have been historically accurate:

It's not so much about authenticity but it does illustrate my approach to an extent. Personally, I feel that if I'm playing a so-called dance, I want to learn as much as possible about what that entails. In *Sevilla* for example, you have the outer sections, which are dance-like and the middle section that is slower. I like to make the dance sections feel related to the type of dance on which they are originally based. However, having said that I'm really not saying that you have to play like that and I'm not saying that Albéniz would have wanted that or that he himself would have played the piece in that way. In fact, having listened to recordings of Granados playing piano, (which I feel gives a good indication of the type of performer that Albéniz might have been) its very plausible that Albéniz would've played with a very romantic style and a huge amount of rubato. The dance rhythm that he's suggesting by the title seems as though it would have been almost incidental as far as he was concerned. Like all classical composers, he would probably have taken such folk music directions with a pinch of salt and thought of the material as a generic source, and not necessarily something that was supposed to be played in a stylistically accurate way. The important thing for me is that the person who is playing a piece performs deliberately in the way they want to play. That's the point.<sup>201</sup>

In this way, Williams considers his approach to be informed rather than necessarily accurate. He decides that, although his knowledge of history tells him

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<sup>199</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>200</sup> Williams John: *The Seville Concert*, 533359, (Sony, 1993).

<sup>201</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

that Albéniz would probably have played in a certain style, he can justifiably approach the work differently, as long as he is not doing so out of ignorance.

Williams has attempted to explain what he has referred to as his ‘conscious affinity with the simple pulse of music,’ by offering the slow movement of Rodrigo’s *Concierto de Aranjuez* as an example.<sup>202</sup> His reason for choosing this movement is that the guitar part contains a fluid and melismatic melody, which sounds almost improvised and resembles a tune which might be sung by a flamenco singer (see Ex. 3.1).

Ex. 3.1.1, Joaquin Rodrigo, *Concierto de Aranjuez* II (Piano Reduction). 7-10.

To accompany this, steady rhythmic chords are played on each crotchet beat by the orchestra and Williams comments on the fact that many conductors attempt to hold the music back, in response to the comparatively free rhythms employed by the guitarist, rather than simply articulating the beat and meeting the soloist at cadences:

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

[...] most conductors will expect to accompany that by following what the soloist is playing. This is, in the European sense, a very classical traditional way of accompanying and it is viewed as automatically good if the conductor does that. And it is viewed as being very good if the soloist is playing with the assumption that the conductor will do that. That is viewed as being expressive. But European classical music is unique in making that assumption. If you listen to any popular music, where there is a slow beat, and more than anything in jazz, a beat is a beat, is a beat... And what happens above it, around it, upside down, in front, behind, that's what the soloist is doing – the beat is, internally and externally, pulsating like a heart beat – slow or fast.<sup>203</sup>

This description reflects the fact that Williams is trying to focus on the differences between his own experience of music and that of many other similar classical performers. He is convinced that as a classical player, he has learnt a lot from his various excursions into jazz, pop and folk music. Music educationalist Janet Mills subscribes to this view since her skill as a chamber musician in a string quartet was greatly improved by playing in a gamelan ensemble.

When playing gamelan, my focus was on the overall sound, the requirement to work from memory enabled me to think of my part as patterns within structures rather than notes, I was more conscious of being part of a group and I was able to evaluate my playing from a greater distance, i.e. more objectively [...] this experience proved very useful to me, and illustrates the potential benefits of working in a wide range of music.<sup>204</sup>

Mills continues to argue this point and concludes:

Opportunities to engage with a broad range of musical opportunities are valuable at all levels, and within all aspects of learning in music. There is no need for classical musicians, in particular, to specialise to the extent that is sometimes supposed. Of course they must develop the skills that they need for the music that they want to perform. But doing so to the exclusion of developing other skills in other music is likely to be counter-productive.<sup>205</sup>

Nonetheless, Williams is also convinced that many contemporary classical musicians are in fact possessed of a solid sense of rhythmic pulse in their playing. He feels that this trait of personalising the pulse and allowing it to fluctuate in a

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<sup>203</sup> Wasily Saba, Therese: 'John Williams', *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Volume 28, No. 1, (2009), 16.

<sup>204</sup> Mills, Janet: *Music in the School*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 146-147.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* 147.

manner often associated with nineteenth-century music, is something that, while not absolutely unique to guitarists, is quite typical. He is also aware that in this context, many guitarists tend to view him as a less expressive performer than players such as Segovia or Bream. He acknowledged this in an interview from 1990 when asked about the tendency of students to imitate the ‘Williams technique.’ He commented that ‘if students do see me as Mr Technique, then that can reflect negatively on me too, because Mr Technique isn’t usually also Mr Music!’<sup>206</sup> In a more recent interview, he justifies his approach by referring to the perception of non-guitarists:

A lot of people in the guitar world regard me as a somewhat technical player, but I just know that among all the different players and conductors in the various orchestras I’ve played with, they are always prepared to accept my sense of rhythm and pulse. They accept this pulse as being properly rhythmical, in congruence with their own. The sense I’ve always gotten from getting feedback from other musicians is that, in adhering to a more personal sense of pulse, some musicians, especially guitarists, can produce results which are often what people informally refer to as being ‘all over the shop!’<sup>207</sup>

This rhythmical, and at times, ideological difference between Williams and his contemporary guitarists is, in his own view, because many have adopted Segovia’s approach to the instrument and this has led to a remarkable variety of opinions among guitarists and guitar writers about his playing. Whereas guitarists such as Segovia and Bream tended to elicit a consistent thread of similar reviews throughout their careers, it is fair to say that the reviews of Williams offer contrasting opinions. An interesting example of this can be found in the reception of a concert that Williams had given in Toronto in 1987, during which he had premiered Leo Brouwer’s *Concerto Toronto*. Richard Long wrote in *Soundboard*:

John Williams’ concert was everything we expected. His playing reminded us all of the reasons we first learned to love the guitar. An audience containing some of the most eminent guitarists and aficionados in the world called him (and Leo Brouwer) back for nearly a dozen curtain calls.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Levy, Austin Prichard: ‘John Williams Interview’, Accessed 15 March, 2017. <http://www.guitarteacher.com.au/interview/john-williams-interview-with-austin-prichard-levy/>

<sup>207</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>208</sup> Long, Richard: ‘Toronto ‘87’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 14, No.3, (1987), 201.

However, the same publication printed a contrasting review by Matanya Ophee of the same concert. He described the event as ‘pathetic’ and while conceding that Williams’ performance was ‘clean and of a high standard,’ described his playing as having ‘all the properties of a perfect porridge: smooth, mushy, insipid and tedious.’<sup>209</sup> These reviews indicate the diverse reactions Williams engenders among guitarists and guitar writers. It is interesting to note that in the letters page of the subsequent issue of *Soundboard*, the following appeared from Sanjay Mishra, of Baltimore, M.D.:

It was amusing to read Mr. Ophee’s report of the Toronto Guitar Festival in regards to Mr. John Williams’ performance and ‘disappointing’ American tour. Mr. Ophee reminds me of a car mechanic whose head is stuck in the bonnet of a corvette while Rolls Royces drive by.<sup>210</sup>

Williams is conscious of the variety of different responses which have been elicited by his performances and attempts to contextualise his approach, based on his own experience of how different performers react to their respective genres:

It’s difficult enough for me to comment on how people view my playing in the guitar world. I’m fully aware of how people view my playing. I have a conscious affinity with the simple pulse of music and I like music which tends to preserve that pulse. I believe that the reason I enjoy working with popular jazz, pop and folk musicians so much is because they also like to preserve that sense of pulse – even in jazz, whatever else is going on over the top there is usually a good sense of pulse and this does not mitigate against those styles being adequately expressive. Classical music doesn’t always have that pulse. It creates a pulse but doesn’t always stay with it. Some classical musicians over the years have tended to express all melodies rather like in an aria or slow song. They do this instead of considering what is in fact the most apt approach for the given melody. In a lot of classical tuition, ‘expression’ seems to be seen as a thing that you put into music after you learn the notes and that’s slightly psychotic to me [...] Many classical guitarists are hung up on being very individualistically expressive and this involves being quite liberal with the pulse.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Ophee, Matanya: ‘Toronto ‘87’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 14, No.3, (1987), 209.

<sup>210</sup> Mishra, Sanjay: Letter to editor, *Soundboard*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (1988), 4.

<sup>211</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

Despite these contrasting views about his interpretation of music, there are few critics who have not been struck by Williams' ability to perform to an extraordinarily high level under pressure. This ability has continually provoked debate and discussion among guitarists and David Tanenbaum was probably referring to his remarkable facility in performance situations when he described Williams playing as being 'so powerful that he is known, justifiably, as the greatest guitarist of our time'.<sup>212</sup> The assumption that he will perform well has in fact led to a tendency among audiences to take his performance technique for granted, but his skill as a performer is based on a carefully considered approach.

### 3.2 Performance anxiety

What can I say about John Williams? His sell-out concert (featuring incidentally, a new work by Stephen Dodgson) was the model of understated craftsmanship and artistic integrity. The fact that we've all seen him do it before may reduce the immediate impact, but sheer quality cannot possibly be subject to the law of diminishing returns.<sup>213</sup>

Paul Fowles' comments from 1995 echo the sentiments of reviewers in numerous guitar publications since the late 1950s. Arguably, the most commonly remarked upon aspect of John Williams' career is the ease with which he appears to perform and the consistency with which he seems to produce his best playing. Words such as 'unflappable', 'mistake-free' and 'perfect' regularly appear in concert reviews. Furthermore, a very common feature of these reviews, as Fowles references, is the air of predictability from the fact that most of the audience at a John Williams concert, are not shocked by his technical brilliance but merely reassured that he has not lost any of his ability or nerve. Colin Cooper's review of Williams' performance and rehearsal of Brouwer's Toronto Concerto in 1988 is somewhat hyperbolic but does give a very accurate indication of how people at times view his skill and his 'perceived perfection' as somehow super-human:

Williams had received the part only two weeks before the Toronto debut. To memorise it in that time, and to be note-perfect, was a magnificent feat. But with John Williams, such feats are virtually

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<sup>212</sup> Tanenbaum, 196.

<sup>213</sup> Fowles, Paul: 'Darwin International Guitar Festival 1995', *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 14, No. 6, 1996, 22.

commonplace. How does he do it? I wish I knew. Time and time again during the BBC rehearsal, the orchestra stopped to check some point in the score [...] After every halt in proceedings, John Williams repeated the difficult passage he had just played with an equal perfection. Only once, to my recollection, was a scale passage not quite perfect; I have the feeling that the BBC decided to leave it in, to show that the tape hadn't been 'laundered' and that John Williams is as 'human' as the rest of us – a demonstrable untruth when it comes to guitar playing!<sup>214</sup>

Although it has been demonstrated in the previous section, that his playing is not always to everyone's taste, even Williams' harshest critics usually find themselves marvelling at his flawless and high-level performances.<sup>215</sup> Many commentators, who know the instrument, wonder, as Cooper does, how he manages to perform at this level so frequently and how he appears to be so relaxed in the performance environment. Indeed, there are those who feel that his performances lack the danger and excitement that often accompanies watching other performers play. For many, the 'high-wire' attraction of live virtuoso music is lessened if the performer seems so assured as to prompt the audience to believe that they are simply never going to err. However, Williams has spent his whole career working on his performance craft because he believes that the audience should be there to appreciate the work of the composer, and not to see if a performer can make it through a difficult programme without embarrassment:

I'm not knocking anyone else here, but I don't want to appeal to that part of the audience that wants to experience my 'ego-trip'. I use the term 'ego-trip' because a lot of audiences feel that its musically expressive if the musician is so involved that they're really nervous about it. They almost get the impression that certain performers are making mistakes and cocking things up because they're so involved with the music. That's valid if you like the musician's style of playing and are prepared to put up with some errors. However, making mistakes and looking nervous are very different things from playing expressively. Whatever limitations people might observe in my playing, I'm concerned to the best of my ability, with getting that piece of music over to the audience. I

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<sup>214</sup> Cooper, Colin: 'A Meeting of Talents', *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1988, 14.

<sup>215</sup> Schneider, John: 'From The Jungles of Paraguay: John Williams plays Barrios', *Soundboard*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (1996), 72. In his review of Williams' second Barrios recording, Schneider states the following: 'After decades of note-perfect but rather gelid, non-emotional music-making, the great John Williams has finally revealed a more playful side which, when coupled with his astounding technique, has produced his best solo recording ever.' This review is typical of the response that Williams' playing can engender among guitarists, with Schneider calling into question his musicality while praising his technical mastery.



believe that it doesn't help if I seem nervous so yes indeed, I will hide that side of myself. That means that in a way I'm responding to the environment much like the audience. If things are going really well and I'm enjoying the acoustic, then I might feel like I'm being rewarded with the sound. In that situation I might be feeling as good as if I was playing at home. At times such as these I can really enjoy myself and I feel I am at my most expressive – and I would say it happens for about half of most of my concerts – but not every concert.<sup>216</sup>

This passage gives a revealing insight into how Williams feels onstage. One aspect of this viewpoint is the way it tallies with many other performers' descriptions of their craft. Williams in no way gives the impression that he feels performance comes easily and his description of how he reacts to his environment in concert resonates with Jane Davidson's description of the same phenomenon:

[...] the performer and the audience are continually exchanging information through visual and aural cues. In such circumstances, the performer 'goes with the flow' of the moment. Researchers have noted that if the performer senses the many cues of live performance context and interprets them positively, a new state of psychological awareness can be achieved which allows the individual to become highly focused and able to explore spontaneous thoughts and feelings in a creative manner.<sup>217</sup>

Williams goes further, describing moments where he feels he is not fully in control and how he responds to these obstacles. One of his primary objectives appears to avoid anything that might distract people from the music:

The first thing, from very early on in my career, was that I was very aware of was the absolute necessity to hide – or maybe that would be too strong a word – but let's say not to convey any anxiety that I might be feeling to the audience. The reason I felt that this was so important was that if I'm the medium of playing a great work by someone like Bach for example, then the audience's appreciation of the piece would not be enhanced in any way, if I seem nervous about presenting and playing the piece. I felt this urge very strongly, to the extent that it would perhaps inhibit me – and musically I might even play safe. So I would be nervous of pieces that I didn't know well enough – maybe pieces that I had learned quickly or a new piece, which I hadn't fully memorised. I still do get such feelings in concert occasionally. However, whatever the reason for

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<sup>216</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>217</sup> Davidson, Jane: 'Communicating with the Body in Performance', *Musical Performance – A Guide to Understanding*, ed. John Rink, (Cambridge: Cambridge Music Press, 2001), 149.

anxiety such as this, the first thing in my mind is that I do not want to convey that to the audience. I feel that if I seem calm and composed, then the audience can focus on the music.<sup>218</sup>

This strong urge to hide any anxiety ties in with Williams' relaxed style of dress and presentation to give an overall picture of a performer who wishes to focus all attention upon the music being performed. However, while he accepts that many people perceive that he never makes mistakes, Williams does contend that he makes many, and insists that his strong sense of rhythmic flow and dynamism often masks the errors in concert situations:

Another aspect to my own performance technique is that I think that the real rhythmic flow of a piece is paramount. I hear this a lot – for example André Previn always says, “I’ve never heard John Williams make a mistake.” Well, the truth is he’s just missed it, because a lot of my little glitches and mistakes are in the flow of the rhythm and it simply passes people by. If you can keep the rhythmic flow in a piece than people often don’t hear these things. It’s only when that flow breaks down that it becomes uncomfortable.<sup>219</sup>

Williams' thoughts on performance anxiety and mistakes are at odds with many critics and writers who have assumed that he is possessed of some sort of special temperament, that has rendered him almost impervious to anxiety. He seems in fact, to experience nerves in a similar way to any other performer but sees the making of mistakes as undesirable, and works hard to minimise the level of distraction from the point of view of his audience. He may have a superior technique to many other guitarists, but it is interesting to note that John Williams' famed performance style is something that has been carefully cultivated and nurtured over six decades of experience.

### **3.3 Approach to J.S. Bach's *Chaconne in d minor***

If the first two sections of this chapter illustrate the different reactions to his methods, further examples of Williams' approach to classical guitar are provided by his recordings of Bach's *Chaconne in d minor*, the first recorded in 1965 and again, in 1987. In his earlier recording, he adopts a more restrained approach,

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<sup>218</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

using softer dynamics and a freer sense of rhythm in the opening bars of the section. The two recordings are quite different and it is possible to discern a subtle shift in musical priorities. The editions used for the recordings are in themselves indicative of Williams' viewpoint. Although he has not published his own edition of the work, he prefers to use the violin version and make alterations where necessary.

The first recording contains elements similar to the famous Segovia edition (published in 1935) of the piece, albeit with fewer bass notes added to the original, and with decisions based loosely on that particular version. The later recording is has more individuality and contains more intricate ornamentation and daring decisions, such as a shift up the octave at the end of the piece which returns to the original register of the violin version. Williams thought that this innovation might have prevented a sense of anti-climax at the end of the work but has conceded more recently that if he was to record the piece for a third time he would not make that same decision.<sup>220</sup> These changes rest very easily with Williams as a performer and he does not share the belief of many players that performers should wait many years before recording certain canonic works such as the *Chaconne* so as to do them justice:

I'm not a person who has a set view on how a piece should go, whether it's for me or a student. I see it as a process and never go with this idea – which permeates much of musical thinking – that certain pieces are so profound and deep that you shouldn't try them until you're in your thirties and have had life experiences. I've heard this a lot and I really think that its total rubbish: absolute pretentious and misplaced rubbish. Music is for all ages and evolves if you change your perception between the age of ten and eighty. So, applying that to myself and those two recordings, I just accept that if I did another one now there would be a lot of changes again. I did change register for the last sixteen bars of the piece on the second recording, going up the octave and I really think that didn't work now looking back on it, but that's okay.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> Gardner, Charlotte: 'Too Young to play Bach?' posted on 3 June, 2008. Accessed 6 March, 2016. [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com) In this article Gardner also questions the assumption that a performer can be too young but cites the examples of Steven Isserlis, Rostropovich and Pablo Casals as artists who waited until later life before recording the solo cello suites. She points out that Bach was only thirty-five years old when he composed these works.

This comment illustrates some familiar patterns of behaviour in Williams' career, namely his distrust of conventional wisdom and his ultimate desire for guitarists to follow their own career paths, unencumbered by the expectations of others. His reaction to the notion that musicians should avoid playing certain pieces until they are more mature is reflected in the fact that he has often re-recorded the same pieces with different interpretations. To illustrate this point, he cites a recent discussion with the Czech guitarist Pavel Steidl:

If I were doing it again, I might approach it differently. For example, recently during the interval of a concert I did with Pavel Steidl he mentioned that in Chaconnes by guitarists of that era such as de Visée, the chords were strummed and I wondered if that would work with Bach's *Chaconne* so there's a constant evolution of thought.<sup>222</sup>

When he first performed the *Chaconne*, Williams found that there was a tendency among guitarists to perform it in a romantic style, following the lead of Segovia. He, in turn, had been influenced by Busoni's transcriptions, adding harmonies and realising Bach's implied chords, wherever they were deemed necessary.<sup>223</sup> Williams found that he learned a huge amount about performing this type of music through working with New Zealand violinist Alan Loveday, who drew his attention to certain inconsistencies in the contemporary approach to Bach.<sup>224</sup> For example, most of the guitar versions of the piece would begin with a repeat of the opening chord on the second half of the third beat and continue that pattern throughout the first section. However, Loveday had pointed out that this repeated chord was not in the original music and that Bach never indicated that the performer should play anything other than the single note that he had written. The guitarists who played this piece had replicated an inaccuracy from the violin editions of the time. In the example shown from the Carl Flesch edition (1931),

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<sup>222</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>223</sup> Berg, Christopher: 'Bach, Busoni, Segovia and the Chaconne' published 2009, Accessed 14 October, 2017. [www.pristinemadness.com](http://www.pristinemadness.com). Berg establishes that Segovia's transcription of the *Chaconne* owed much to Busoni's early arrangements of the work, even citing an error in Segovia's edition which mirrors a mistake made by Busoni in the same bar.

<sup>224</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

the violin ‘edition’ is the larger and uppermost stave in each system, with the lower one showing the notes as written by Bach.<sup>225</sup>

Ex. 3.3.1. *Chaconne in d minor*, Johann Sebastian Bach. (Ed. Carl Flesch 1931), 1-10.

CHACONNE

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the Chaconne in d minor. The top system is the violin edition, featuring a large staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The bottom system is the original manuscript, showing the same music in a smaller staff. The music is in 3/4 time and consists of a series of chords and melodic lines. The violin edition includes dynamic markings such as 'f' and 's'.

It is clear that although violinists may have valid reasons<sup>226</sup> for veering away from Bach’s original, there seems to be no compelling justification for guitarists to adopt these variations into their own editions without question. Beyond specific instances such as this, Williams credits Loveday with helping him develop ‘the lightness of touch required’<sup>227</sup> for works such as the *Chaconne* and he also describes his interpretation of Bach as being ‘based around my own ideas and also the work I did with Alan and Rafael Puyana.’<sup>228</sup>

<sup>225</sup> J.S. Bach: *Partita in d minor for Solo Violin*, ed. Flesch, (Bucks, England: Peters, 1948), 12-25.

<sup>226</sup> De Los Santos, Carmelo: *Performance-Practice Issues of the Chaconne from Partita II, BWV 1004, By Johann Sebastian Bach*, (DMA dissertation, Athens: University of Georgia, 2004), 43-44. ‘The editors who indicated reiteration of the chord on the eighth note in the opening eight measures implied a forte dynamic and a slow tempo. Most of the editors of this group suggest an up-bow on the eighth note and a down-bow re-take on the second beat of the next measure because of the characteristic chaconne rhythm. Only Hambourg and Szeryng indicated consecutive down and up-bows for every chord. This majestic gesture embodies the Romantic tradition of playing the Chaconne. Phillip Spitta (1841-1894) expresses this conception: “The hearer must regard this chaconne as some phenomenon of the elements which transports and enraptures him with its indescribable majesty.”’ This quotation highlights some of the motivations behind violinists reiterating the chord, with bowing, musical expression given as possible reasons. It is interesting to note that the Author relates the idea to a ‘Romantic tradition’ of playing the piece, stemming perhaps from the nineteenth century revival of Bach.

<sup>227</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

A marked difference between Williams' second version of the piece and many others is his interpretation of the middle section of the piece, which is in the key of D major. Williams sees this as joyous and majestic in nature and plays accordingly with strong dynamics and purposeful rhythmic drive. Most other guitarists and indeed violinists, play this section very softly and with extreme tenderness. Williams explains:

It's almost become a convention to play it very quietly and almost religiously, as if it was being played reverently on a little organ in the loft, whereas I see it more as a triumphant and more open-hearted section. This is in contrast to the following section, which is more tonally ambiguous to begin with.<sup>229</sup>

Williams argues that the beginning of the final section is more worthy of a gentler and more reserved approach, arguing that the tonal ambiguities which are present at the point in question, lend themselves to a freer and less strident interpretation. Because this section opens with a b flat major chord in first inversion, as opposed to the tonic major and minor key openings of the first two sections of the piece, the listener is immediately aware of a sense of tension and 'ambiguity' to which Williams refers.<sup>230</sup> This is a good example of his approach to interpreting Bach, which is often structurally based. In this particular section Bream for example, in his recording of 1994, reacts expressively to many different harmonic stimuli to produce a complicated and rich tapestry of dynamic contrasts, whereas Williams adopts a broader more structural basis for expression, which highlights the differing sections of the piece rather than focusing a great deal on individual moments within those sections. Thus Williams' version of the *Chaconne* can be clearly felt to be in three distinct sections whereas many other guitarists, including Bream and Segovia, weave between smaller contrasting sections. When comparing the *Chaconne* recordings of both Bream and Williams, the result of Williams' view becomes clear and his ideas on the subject resonate with the philosophies of Canadian pianist Glenn Gould, who also interpreted Bach based principally on structural criteria. In *Conversations*, Jim Tosone reviewed a live performance of the *Chaconne* from 1994, and observed how much Williams'

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<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> The three 'sections' mentioned here are taken to begin at bars 1, 132 and 208 respectively.

version contrasted with that of Segovia.<sup>231</sup> He noted Williams' clarity and precision and his comments were generally consistent with the traits exhibited in the second recording, which had been made seven years previously. He described it as 'a performance of perfect balance and cohesion.'<sup>232</sup>

### **3.4 Contrasting approaches to Mauro Giuliani's *Guitar Concerto No. 1 in A Major, Op. 30, (1808)***

While accepting that his two contrasting approaches to the *Chaconne* are equally valid within the context of his own artistic evolution, Williams takes a different view about his two recorded performances of Mauro Giuliani's first guitar concerto. The first version was recorded in 1968 and featured the English Chamber Orchestra, and is now seen by the performer as a less valid and less well-informed performance of the piece than the second, recorded in 1998 with the Australian Chamber Orchestra.<sup>233</sup> The initial recording is brisk and accurate, sparkling with energy and seemingly limitless technical accomplishment. However, during the mid-to-late nineties, Williams met a classical guitar scholar named Carlo Barone, based at Accademia l'Ottocento in Milan, who specialises in the study of Mauro Giuliani and this altered his viewpoint profoundly. From his discussion with Barone, Williams became convinced that a more vocal, and even operatic, style of performance was needed to do the Giuliani concerto justice and has described 'that sense of freedom and improvisation about his [Giuliani's] style which had disappeared by the time I made my first recording.'<sup>234</sup> In his own contribution to the liner notes, Barone notes that recently discovered texts had contained many revealing traits of the performers of the day. He outlines some of those traits below:

The great guitar virtuosos often captivated their audiences by improvising on themes that were well known and loved. At the same time, they were able to display the full extent of their technical and improvisational skills. Certain elements such as phrasing,

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<sup>231</sup> Tosone, 161.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>233</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

rubato, colorations and various embellishments were especially indebted to vocal music for their inspiration.<sup>235</sup>

Furthermore, Williams felt the need not just to re-engage with the work as he had done with the *Chaconne* and with Barrios' music during the 1990s, but rather to *disengage* with his previous approach to the piece. He gives greater dynamic and rhythmic variety to various sections of the piece in order to give the listener a sense of the different characteristics often found in nineteenth-century opera. The second recording employs a much freer sense of rhythm than the first and is recorded on a period instrument dating from 1814. These elements allied to his realisation of Giuliani's original score, which contained a much longer opening movement, represent a departure from the earlier recording and Williams is in no doubt as to which approach he favours:

The Giuliani concerto represents an entirely different ball game to the Bach *Chaconne*: it is simply a case of learning from someone and gaining an appreciation of what was the context of a given piece. There is a great body of academics around these days and I believe it is of enormous help to a performer, if they can access these people in order to get closer to an authentic way of performing certain music. With the Giuliani concerto, in the case of my first recording of it, I just played it as we all played Giuliani at the time. Also, with regard to this particular piece, in the first recording I didn't know that half of the first movement had been removed from the piece. I was in Australia and heard Carlo Barone giving a talk about Giuliani and his *bel canto* style of composition. After that, I simply went back to the Giuliani [concerto] having learned more about the style.<sup>236</sup>

The differences between the two recordings represent a distinct shift in approach and Williams remains convinced by the direction of the latter performance, indicating that if he were to revisit the piece, he might make further changes:

I would play the Giuliani even more in that style now than I did at the time. In fact, the way I approached the Giuliani, in the second recording was a learning curve for me. However, I'm very pleased I did it and I'm personally very convinced that someone like Pavel

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<sup>235</sup> Barone, Carlo: 'Notes on *Giuliani Concerto in A Major*', trans. Judyth Schaubhut Smith, SK 63385, (Sony Classical, 1999).

<sup>236</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017. Williams' use of the term '*bel canto* style' can be interpreted as referring to the expressive vocal style of composers such as Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti.



Steidl for example, embodies the spirit and style of playing that music really well.<sup>237</sup>

While Williams is by no means known as a leading figure in historically informed performance, his second recording of this concerto gave a very public platform to an aspect of performance practice which has not always been of paramount importance to guitarists, understandable perhaps, given the number of transcriptions which help make up the standard repertoire. The fact that Williams decided to adopt this approach has had huge significance according to Roger Allen Cope:

Of course lute and vihuela players were among my peers, and at that time one third of Michael Lorimer's program material was performed on a Baroque guitar. Later Richard Savino and David Starobin both made important discoveries and contributions, then John Williams brought our whole audience online with a performance of the Giuliani Concerto in A Major, Op. 30, using a borrowed Gaetano Guadagnini guitar made in 1814.<sup>238</sup>

Just as Julian Bream's adoption of the lute in the 1950s and 1960s drew the public's attention to that instrument, so Williams' approach to this recording highlighted the practice of historically informed performance of music in this era. It also illustrates Williams' willingness to be self-critical and to revisit earlier decisions when necessary.

### **3.5 Ensemble playing**

As an ensemble player, Williams has helped to transform the image of the classical guitar in modern music. In the 1960s he featured in ensemble performances and recordings of works by such figures as Schoenberg, Webern, Boulez and Tippett among others,<sup>239</sup> in direct contrast not only with the musical tastes of Segovia but also with the well-cultivated image of the guitarist as a solo

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<sup>237</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>238</sup> Cope, Roger Allen: 'Early Romantic Music for Two Guitars: Pasquale Rucco and Douglas James, nineteenth century guitars (music by Barco, Gragnani, Haydn/Fossa, and Rossini/Giuliani). Cala Vista Classics, 2001.' *Soundboard*, Vol.29, No. 1, (2002), 84.

<sup>239</sup> Traviss, Guy: 'Interview with John Williams', *Soundboard*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2015), 50. During the course of this interview Williams mentions his performances of the works of these composers as a way to illustrate how his commitment to contemporary music has often been more substantial than many people might perceive.

classical artist: an idea which had, up till then, been so consistently presented.<sup>240</sup>

Segovia had not seen performance within the confines of an orchestra as beneficial for the instrument and explained as follows:

The guitar is best without the orchestra; that is why I no longer play concertos. The guitar imitates all the colours of the orchestra – the violins, the oboe, the cellos, the brass – but when they guitar plays with the orchestra, all these colours are already there, so the guitar sounds tiny and that is all.<sup>241</sup>

Nonetheless, Segovia's theory fails to offer a valid reason for guitarists to exclude themselves from the possibility of playing with orchestras either as part-players or soloists. All instruments concede certain attributes of their individuality in ensemble and the complete sound of the group is of greater significance in that context than the singular contribution of an individual instrument. Based on tonal and dynamic similarities, a harpist might make a similar claim as Segovia about their own instrument. Ensemble playing is inherently different from solo performance and Segovia's insistence that the guitar should not compromise by playing in orchestras could arguably imply more about his own personal desire for individuality than it does about any legitimate concern for the instrument.

Segovia's attitude to the guitar as an ensemble instrument might also be linked to his curious views about sight-reading on the instrument. John Duarte attempts to explain this:

[...] guitarists should, like other musicians, be able to play without watching their hands – as one needs to do when reading from a score. Of course, everyone who looks in the direction of their left hand is not necessarily *looking* at it but, increasingly in his later years, Segovia did just that. The nature of his career was such that he rarely, if ever, *needed* to sight-read fluently – as many working guitarists now do when playing with other musicians; on the few occasions when Segovia did play 'in company' he would have had ample time to acquaint himself with his own part, and even to memorise it [...] Returning to his earlier statement that "It is not possible to sight-read on the guitar": it is perfectly possible to do so, as many players now prove on every day of the average year.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Starling, William: *Strings Attached – The Life and Music of John Williams*, (London: The Robson Press, 2012), 147.

<sup>241</sup> Wade, *Maestro*, 39.

<sup>242</sup> Duarte, 59.

As Duarte concedes, Segovia was mistaken in his pronouncement on sight-reading, and Williams was able to elevate this skill to a high level, which was evident in his ensemble performances of the works of post-tonal composers such as Schoenberg and Webern. It highlighted the fact that if guitarists demanded to be taken seriously, then surely this also implied that they could and should be possessed of the same skill-sets as other instrumentalists. Throughout his career, Williams has consistently advocated that guitarists perform more chamber music and become adept at sight-reading.<sup>243</sup> In the following extract from an interview with an Australian music journal in 1990, his frustration with the standard of sight-reading is evident:

Another thing I've noticed in master classes, is that players will come on and play the most difficult solo works from memory, and yet if you give them a part to play in one of the easier Haydn String Quartets, as I often do, they're lost in no time, and have a very poor sense of ensemble or timing. Guitarists are among the worst sight-readers I've come across. Julian Bream and I are both dead average sight-readers by orchestral standards, but among guitarists, we are outstanding! This is an area of the guitar that has been poorly taught up until recently.<sup>244</sup>

Williams outlines the central role sight-reading played in his development and it provides an interesting contrast with the education of many guitarists, who do not tend to focus as much upon musicianship skills. He credits his father, himself an accomplished session guitarist, with establishing sight-reading as an integral part of his tuition and it has undoubtedly been a crucial advantage throughout his career:

I think sight-reading was an absolutely crucial aspect of my education and subsequent career. When we came to London and I started practising for one or two hours a day I was constantly reading. I had two afternoons each week off school to do work on guitar and almost all my practice was sight-reading. I would even read through technical studies such as those by Tárrega and

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<sup>243</sup> Kilvington, Chris: 'A Day with John Williams at the RNCM', *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol.8, No. 9, (1990), 14-20. Chris Kilvington gives a detailed account of a master class with John Williams in which he advises the students on how to perform in ensemble.

<sup>244</sup> Prichard Levy, Austin: John Williams Interview, [Accessed 5 July, 2015](http://www.baroque2rock.com/index.php?...john-williams-australian-guitar-journal-interview).  
[www.baroque2rock.com/index.php?...john-williams-australian-guitar-journal-interview](http://www.baroque2rock.com/index.php?...john-williams-australian-guitar-journal-interview).

Aguado. I had a lovely old copy of the Aguado method that I used to read through all the time and wherever I'd stop, I'd start from that point the following day. Reading was certainly very important to my father and that's why he was very strong on duets and ensemble playing. Apart from guitar trios and duets, which we were even doing in Melbourne, he had met a viola player from one of the London Orchestras who came along to the house. I think he may have been someone who'd been at the Spanish guitar Centre sometime before 1955. We got Jack Duarte to write a Quartet, which was Guitar and string trio. So we played that piece and it wasn't bad actually but I'm not sure if it was ever performed since. He was keen on arrangements some of which were later published by Schott but he didn't teach that stuff at the centre – that was just for me.<sup>245</sup>

The importance of sight-reading is paramount and this skill leads naturally to easier participation in ensemble, along with the huge benefits of that particular discipline. Williams clearly feels that sight-reading should be central to a guitarist's skillset but too often that is not the case. In their polar opposition on the question of the reasons for poor sight-reading among guitarists, both men may be slightly wide of the mark. Segovia's decision to simply blame the instrument represents something of a metaphorical shrug of the shoulders regarding the whole issue. However, the truth probably lies in the way most classical guitarists initially find the instrument via less formal styles of music. Quite often, guitarists are poor readers not because of 'poor tuition' but because of 'no tuition'. Williams has been proactive in this respect by encouraging masterclass students to play in ensembles and by removing many of the left-hand fingerings from his own editions, in the belief that guitarists habitually read the fingerings and not the notes.<sup>246</sup> He advocates for a simple solution to the problem is to make chamber music a necessity for guitarists from a young age. He argues that the weekly activity of playing together and reading is a matter of necessity:

I don't know about the origins of why we're bad sight-readers but I think that what makes other musicians good at it, is the absolute necessity of being able to read in order to play in ensembles, from the earliest stages of development. Whether its recorder ensembles or youth orchestras, they all have to sight-read and the skill

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<sup>245</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>246</sup> Tanenbaum, 199. Tanenbaum quotes Williams as saying 'guitarists generally read badly and in an unmusical way because they tend to read fingering.'

develops from that point onwards. That's what I believe guitarists are missing more than anything.<sup>247</sup>

### **3.6 Amplification and other manipulations of the natural sound**

While Segovia's concerns about volume were arguably more legitimate than his reservations about sight-reading, the answer to the problem of balancing the guitar with other instruments must surely lie with amplification. This solitary point of compromise allows the performer to adjust volume and even tone quality if necessary to better suit each ensemble and indeed each venue. Amplification also facilitates the guitarist being able to adjust volume and sound within a particular piece if required.

In a curious echo of the 'Segovia/nails' issue from the early years of the twentieth century, Williams has embraced the use of amplification in his concerts.<sup>248</sup> Not surprisingly, Segovia was resolutely opposed to amplification, claiming it '...alters the beautiful sound of the guitar, nullifies it, renders it acid and metallic.'<sup>249</sup> Many other prominent figures such as Julian Bream and the composer Joaquin Rodrigo also favoured the non-amplified sound of the Spanish guitar. David Tanenbaum offers the following description of some of Segovia's concerts that he witnessed as a young man. He draws attention to the problem faced by audience at an acoustic classical guitar concert in a large venue.

Refusing to use amplification, even during concertos, Segovia played many concerts in his later years in oversized halls. I saw him more than once stop a concert to ask someone to refrain from coughing or rustling a program, insisting that large crowds should make the effort to hear him – and they did.<sup>250</sup>

Another account by the guitarist Domingo Prat in 1934, paints a rather austere picture and conjures the image of Segovia as an artist who regularly chastised his own supporters: 'During the concert he requires a religious silence from the

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<sup>247</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>248</sup> The 'Segovia/nails issue' is dealt with in Chapter One on page 8 and relates to Segovia's advocacy of the use of the nails of the right hand instead of flesh despite opposition from disciples of Francisco Tárrega.

<sup>249</sup> Wade, 78.

<sup>250</sup> Tanenbaum, 185.

audience; the smallest sound annoys him and he indicates with a subtle gesture that it should not be repeated.<sup>251</sup> Segovia's reason for dismissing amplification may have had more to do with traditionalism and conservatism. However, his objections carry more resonance, taken in the context of his unique philosophy as described in 1974: 'my idea always is to reduce this enormous quantity of people to the intimacy of eight or ten persons. To obtain from the audience the quality of silence and attention that the guitar needs and then transform the whole audience into an intimate gathering.'<sup>252</sup> This is a laudable theory but how it might work in practice is another matter. Segovia frequently performed in large venues and as illustrated, many accounts refer to the audience having some difficulties in hearing the music. It would seem plausible that, if the performer demands a breathless stillness from an audience, it may affect their enjoyment and appreciation of the event. It is worth considering whether or not a concert given by Segovia would entail the appreciation of a gifted, nuanced performer, or an uncomfortable effort to hear a barely discernible sequence of distant sounds.

In 1990, Williams put forward his argument for using amplification as follows:

The guitar played in a large hall is not heard at its loveliest for most people in that hall; ideally, the guitar should not be played in a large hall if we want to experience the full range of its tone, because it doesn't sound the same at a distance of 20 meters or more. This is because it's a partly percussive instrument, and the percussive aspects carry more than its other dynamic and tonal qualities, so what we're hearing is not really a true guitar sound. So it's not whether you can hear a guitar at the back of the Sydney Opera House, but what you hear that counts. I find that amplification helps in that regard, but obviously it has to be well done.<sup>253</sup>

Williams originally used amplification in order to be clearly audible when performing as a soloist in a concerto, but gradually began to use it in solo recitals as a way of ensuring that his musical ideas were communicated with relative equality to everyone in the venue. One interesting aspect of this argument is that

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<sup>251</sup> Wade, Graham: *Segovia – A Celebration of the man and his music*, (London: Allison and Busby, 1983), 111.

<sup>252</sup> Evans, Tom and Evans, Mary Anne: *Guitars: Music, History, Construction and Players – From the Renaissance to Rock*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 164.

<sup>253</sup> Williams, John: 'Australian Guitar Journal Interview', (1990), Accessed 22 July, 2015. [www.baroque2rock.com/index.php?...john-williams-australian-guitar-journal-interview](http://www.baroque2rock.com/index.php?...john-williams-australian-guitar-journal-interview).

during Segovia's career, the quality of amplification for classical instruments would have been at a much lower level than it is today. It is possible that Segovia may have approved of the technical advances that have led to the clearer and more accurate sound, which can now be achieved. Furthermore, it is worth remembering that Segovia battled vehemently to earn the right to perform on a solo acoustic guitar in large concert halls. He prevailed despite opposition, not just from critics and impresarios, but from his own friends and supporters such as Miguel Llobet who informed him that 'the guitar doesn't have the power to carry sound from the stage to the entire hall.'<sup>254</sup> Segovia succeeded spectacularly and his frustration was perhaps understandable given that a mere generation later, most guitarists were using amplification to help fill large halls. Of course, there are those who do not accept that amplified sounds can ever create an 'authentic' experience for the listener, echoing what Peter Narvaez refers to as 'the myth of acousticity' in his essay about the use of acoustic and electric guitars in blues and folk music:

This myth pits the supposedly superior, authentic, 'natural' sound of the traditional wooden guitar, as perceived by sensory media (ears and eyes), against the inferior amplified sounds of guitars employing electronic magnetic pick-ups, sound processors, and amplifiers. In part, the 'tonal-purity-of-the-acoustic-guitar' argument may be understood as a legacy of cultural hierarchy, a well-worn High Culture aesthetic.<sup>255</sup>

Those who are vehemently opposed to amplification in classical guitar tend not to consider the recording process, which creates a product, which can be aurally appreciated via amplifiers, speakers, and an endless amount of compressors and limiters, all found in either stereo systems or radio stations. Therefore, it is possible to observe an inconsistency of approach in Segovia's denouncement of amplification in spite of his willingness to engage with the same type of technology during the recording process. As Williams points out, the greatest asset of amplification is the intimacy with which the guitarist can perform,

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<sup>254</sup> Segovia, Andrés: *Segovia – An Autobiography of the Years 1893 – 1920*, trans. By Marion Boyars, (London: Calder & Boyars, 1976),102.

<sup>255</sup> Narvaez, Peter: 'Blues Guitarists and the Myth of Acousticity', *Guitar Cultures*, ed. Andy Bennett and Kevin Dawe (London: Berg, 2001), 29.

whether as a chamber musician, a soloist with orchestra or simply as a solo performer in a large venue.

The point of amplification in this context, is to make it more intimate, strangely enough and bring it closer to the person that's listening [...] you hear it in pop music and in jazz, where people sing quite naturally because they're singing into a microphone.<sup>256</sup>

Williams is drawing attention here to the opinion that a guitarist without amplification may not always play as naturally or as musically as a jazz or pop singer, who, with no need to force their sound, can shape their music according to their own aesthetic. When faced with a passage of music marked *ppp*, the unamplified guitarist's choice is to either ignore the composer's wishes or risk not being heard at all by much of the audience. With amplification, the performer can play softly without fear of being too quiet or inaudible. Many reviewers criticise performers who have raised the volume of the guitar artificially, in relation to the orchestra in both live and recorded settings. These reviewers usually express the opinion that the composer would have understood the challenge of pitting the guitar against the orchestra and taken it into account in the way they have orchestrated their work. Indeed, a review in the *Irish Times* of my own performance of Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* from 2004, Martin Adams wrote:

[T]he playing of the soloist [...] was fluent, shapely and always apt. So it was frustrating that this evocative music was distorted by gross amplification of the guitar. Rodrigo's orchestration is precisely calculated to address the challenges of balance presented by the combination of orchestra and guitar. His efforts counted for nothing.<sup>257</sup>

Adams makes a compelling argument and goes on to bemoan the modern tendency of those who produce live concerts of this nature to 'imitate falsities perpetrated in the recording studio.'<sup>258</sup> However strong this argument, it fails to acknowledge the fact that a venue of this size (in this case Dublin's National

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<sup>256</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>257</sup> Adams, Martin: 'O'Toole, RTÉCO/Brophy, National Concert Hall, Dublin', *The Irish Times*, 26 August, 2004, 14.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*



Concert Hall) would not suit a solo guitar without the aid of amplification, let alone a guitar, which must be heard above an orchestra. Williams argues that in order to fill a larger space, the guitarist will often endeavour to ‘produce a large unmusical sound output, even if it is totally natural.’<sup>259</sup> How effective the composer’s methods of maintaining balance may be is open for debate but even allowing for that, most orchestral performances take place in large venues in which the guitar struggles to project. Adams’ view is idealistic, but in a practical sense many compromises are made in order to successfully stage an event in a large space. The British composer Richard Rodney Bennett has given an interesting and revealing insight into his own experiences in writing for guitar and orchestra:

When I wrote the guitar concerto, I thought rather naively that if I used a scoring with three winds, two brass, three strings and percussion, it would be so light that the sound of the guitar would not be covered. What I learned was that although forty strings won’t cover the guitar, a solo oboe will [...] Since the orchestra tends to cover the guitar, I prefer that the guitar be amplified.<sup>260</sup>

Bennett also gave an account of a performance of his concerto at the Lincoln Centre in New York, where Julian Bream, despite being against the idea, was forced to use amplification and seemed to be pleased by the result.<sup>261</sup> Speaking in 1997, Harold Shaw, a successful and respected agent who has represented Segovia, Bream and Williams in America had a typically pragmatic view on the issue:

Segovia certainly didn’t want amplification. Years ago he could give a recital in Avery Fisher Hall or Carnegie Hall and the public would pull their hearing down and listen carefully. I don’t think today’s audience is capable of that type of listening. Bream does not want to use amplification, while Williams uses a slight bit. But it means Julian plays in 1,100 to maximum 2,000-seat houses while John can play a 3,000-seat house. The promoter has to ask if he can afford to pay an artist to play a house with 800 or 1,200 seats.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Prichard-Levy, Austin: ‘Interview with John Williams’, part 2. Accessed 22 July, 2015. [www.classicalguitarreview.com](http://www.classicalguitarreview.com)

<sup>260</sup> Tosone, James: *Classical Guitarists – Conversations*, (London, North Carolina: McFarland, 2000), 67.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.* 148.

Williams clearly believes in the use of amplification, but also in the fact that microphone technique should be taught in conservatories. He considers that because of the intimacy of amplification, guitarists need to become accustomed to the demands of finding their sound within this new context:

I think the understanding of amplification is critical for guitarists. It's absolutely a musical thing and when you play for yourself in practice, you've got a certain understanding of colours and changes of timbre and so on. However, it's not a musical thing to transport those same colours into a larger room or concert hall and many performers end up forcing the sound in that context. In the large hall suddenly everything changes: the relationship between loud and soft, the dolces the ponticellos and many other things. These elements all become different in large spaces as the guitar struggles in these venues and in my opinion, when people use the term 'projection', they are in fact talking about forcing the sound. I think that microphone technique is hugely important should be learned wherever guitar is being seriously taught. I think an understanding how a microphone works should be a basic part of guitar teaching and should be expected to be used all the time in large halls. Actually, in my opinion amplification should be used even in smaller halls that have a dead acoustic.<sup>263</sup>

Williams is attempting to illustrate that the intimacy which Segovia sought in his concerts, can be realised with the help of amplification. In 1987, the guitarist Alice Artzt wrote an interesting article from the performer's point of view, in which she advocated for the use of high-quality amplification. She used the popular guitar as an example to classical guitarists and warned of the perils that could lie ahead, should guitarists refuse to adapt:

The pop guitar has now finally done what the classic guitar and lute have failed to do through two cycles of renaissance and decline. It has managed to make itself pretty well indispensable. It has done so by adapting to pop/jazz/folk music and by using technology to enable itself to do whatever musicians wanted to do, better than other instruments could. We classic guitarists need to study this phenomenon and see what we can learn from it.<sup>264</sup>

Artzt points to the pitfalls and advantages of amplification, but concludes that it is ultimately fruitless to ignore the technology completely:

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<sup>263</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>264</sup> Artzt, Alice: 'The Guitar in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Concert World', *Soundboard*, Vol.14, No. 3, (1987), 156.

I have heard guitarists use a free-standing microphone instead of a contact mike. Such a setup can easily over-amplify the loudest tones, while leaving the softer ones untouched, making a progression of inscrutable rubbish out of what might have been originally a quite musical performance [...] But recently I have also heard concerts with the guitar amplified [...] Interestingly, one of these concerts was performed by John Williams, who has by now done enough pop music that he should know more about amplification than most of us. The expertise showed. It can be done, and if done well this is also something to encourage [...] No one in an orchestra wants to play pianissimo all the time so that a delicate little guitar can be heard. Orchestras sound funny when they do that and even so, an unamplified guitar isn't heard easily.<sup>265</sup>

Perhaps the most compelling argument for amplification came from Heitor Villa-Lobos. He worked closely with Segovia and as well as writing for the instrument, was a very capable guitarist in his own right. Interviewed around the time that he composed his *Concerto for Guitar and Small Orchestra* (1951), he argued:

It seems to me that, even though the guitar has the capacity on its own to fill a recital hall – especially in the case of Segovia – it cannot, in the case of a concerto, stand against the entire mass of an orchestra. In my opinion, the guitar can and should be amplified for the concerto with the help of a microphone. Technology has made enormous strides, and one can affirm that the character of the instrument is not in the least distorted. Why deny ourselves the possibility offered to us? But Segovia will hear nothing of it, which I sincerely regret.<sup>266</sup>

The views of composers such as Villa-Lobos and Bennett are surely prescient, given that they have had such a personal stake in solving this problem. As to the ‘falsities of the recording studio’ to which Martin Adams refers, Williams has accepted that the guitar level is artificially high in recordings of certain pieces but also notes that many violin concerto recordings represent an unrealistic level of balance between the soloist and orchestra.<sup>267</sup> Williams has raised the point that this never gets mentioned because there is an assumption that the violin can carry over an orchestra, whereas reviewers seem to regard it as tantamount to cheating if a guitar is clearly heard above its louder counterparts in a recorded or a live

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<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.* 157.

<sup>266</sup> Postelwaite, Charles: ‘Villa-Lobos and his work with Three Guitar Icons’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 35 No. 4, (2009), 40.

<sup>267</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

setting. However, to raise the volume of a soloist in any concertante setting would seem to be both sensible and musical, and to describe this action as a ‘falsity’ seems to imply that there is something dishonest about manipulating technology to create a certain effect on the listener. Of course, Adams’ concern about the over-use of amplification in concerts is reflective of broader trends within modern musical discourse. For every commentator who expresses the fear that the art of music performance might be tainted by technological advances, there is another viewpoint that embraces the possibilities of such progress.

Williams has occasionally been willing to use technology in alliance with his own skill to produce the best result possible, whether in studio or live setting.<sup>268</sup> In 1982, *New York Times* critic Allan Kozinn noticed a deliberate manipulation of reverberation that occurred during one of his recordings:

Only one selection will come as a shock: In “Cordoba”, Mr. Williams begins softly, his guitar closely and dryly recorded. When he reaches the gorgeous chorale-like passage, though, the sonic character shifts radically – as if he paused to listen to a second guitarist, positioned at the far end of a vast reverberant cathedral, before continuing with his own performance. This novel and almost cinematic manipulation will no doubt raise the hackles of purists, and Mr. Williams’s recent ventures into the pop world with the progressive rock band, Sky, will inevitably be cited as the reason for this break with propriety. Yet, the effect is quite striking, even after repeated listening; and perhaps a contrary argument could be made that Mr. Williams’s pop activities have left him more open-minded about recording studio technique. Obviously, one hardly wishes for this kind of approach to be taken consistently on classic guitar disks, but it is attractive here, and not overdone.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Payzant, *Geoffrey: Glenn Gould – Music and Mind*, (Toronto: Key Porter, 1992), 122. Like Williams, Glenn Gould was a performer who staunchly advocated the use of any means possible in the recording process to improve the listener’s experience. He began manipulating sound recordings ‘after the event’ so to speak when he discovered that by adjusting the tone control of his phonograph machine, he could eliminate a frequency that had bothered him from a recording of Mozart on a bass-heavy piano. He described his ‘light-bulb’ moment and the inspiration it presented: ‘I had prevailed upon the most primitive technology to sponsor a suggestion of that which was not; my own contribution, as artist, was no longer the be-all and end-all of the project at hand, no longer a *fait accompli*. Technology had positioned itself between an attempt and the realization; the ‘clarity of the machine,’ to quote the theologian Jean Le Moyne, had interposed itself between the frailty of nature and the vision of the idealised accomplishment. “Remarkable clarity- must have been an incredible piano,” friends would say. “Believe me, you simply can’t imagine,” I would respond. I had learned the first lesson of technology: I had learned to be creatively dishonest.’

<sup>269</sup> Kozinn, Allan: ‘John Williams Re-interprets Albéniz’, *New York Times*, 5 September, 1982. Accessed 22 July, 2015. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

This shows a more daring side to Williams' manipulation of the recording studio and echoes the opinions and methods of Gould. Williams' alteration of the recorded sound in the middle of a piece is indeed a controversial studio technique, and is applied to enhance the recording in a manner that would be unachievable in a concert setting. The fact that the reviewer links the idea of manipulating microphone positions for effect with Williams' contentious work in popular music genres, illustrates just how unconventional the technique would have seemed on a classical guitar recording from the early 1980s.

### 3.7 'Squeaks'

An interesting aspect of Williams' approach to the guitar is his attitude towards the extraneous 'squeaks' that are often produced by movements of the left hand along the bass strings of the instrument. These noises are often accepted without question as part of the sound of the classical guitar. Many guitarists have likened the sounds to the extra-musical noises made by a violinist or cellist, or even the breathing or key-pressing sounds of wind players. In 'Silence, sound, noise, and music', Jennifer Judkins has argued that in fact, the noises from a guitarist are less obtrusive than on other instruments:

It can be difficult to draw lines between musical noise (noise resulting from the process of music-making) and regular noise, or less-musical noise and more-musical noise, or even between body and instrument. For example, with the guitar, the fingertip applies force to the string on the fret, and the string vibrates not only either side but also underneath the fingertip. Thus the squeaking noise of the fingers moving along the strings from note to note, or chord to chord, seems more closely connected with sound production than, say, the noise of the keys on a bassoon. The latter seems to be a more discrete relation, as opposed to the more continuous relation of the fingers to the strings.<sup>270</sup>

In this passage, Judkins opines that the noises emanating from a guitar interfere less with the musical process than on other instruments but Williams disagrees, feeling that the squeaks often occur slightly after the shift has taken place. This is

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<sup>270</sup> Judkins Jennifer 'Silence, Sound, Noise, and Music', *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, ed. Theodore Gracyk, Andrew Kania, (Abingdon, Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2011), 15.

because of the frequently positional nature of guitar reading, where the player often moves from position to position rather than from note to note. He elaborates as follows:

I don't think squeaks are musical. The shift along a string between notes and chords – and indeed any sound which occurs during that movement – often forms part of the musical sound on a musical instrument such as the violin or cello: it's the connection between the notes. However, the squeak that comes from a guitar – for example when you shift from one barré chord to another – is different. In this instance, the sound of the squeak itself is not connected to the music and comes a fraction of a second after the shift. It's basically an interfering noise – it is not musical or nice.<sup>271</sup>

Williams feels that these noises are often deemed acceptable 'as part of the culture of acoustic steel-string playing. The steel string sound has a much brighter resonance that the squeaks probably don't register as being as so different or undesirable when set against that, or maybe it is just a cultural acceptance.'<sup>272</sup> It does not seem to have been an issue for Segovia, and in 1982, Bream admitted that it was something to which Williams had given more time than himself. He seems to praise Williams for this but also calls into question whether eliminating these noises is worth sacrificing the musical line:

Another difficulty is the squeaks you make sometimes as your fingers travel up and down the fretboard, like the clatter of jacks on the harpsichord. It would be lovely if squeaks were not there, but they nearly always are. Some performers manage to eliminate a lot of the squeak; John Williams, for instance, doesn't squeak very much, partly because I know he takes especial care not to squeak, but also because his left hand release action is meticulously correct. I squeak more than some, possibly because I tend to let myself go in concerts. If I worried about taking my fingers off the string, and then putting them down again on the same string, merely to avoid the squeak, I might lose the musical line. I know that if you keep your fingers on the string while you move to the next position, you risk a squeak. But at least the melodic line is unbroken, and there are ways of minimizing the squeak. That's what I'm working on at the moment. Christ, I sound like the Prime Minister and the problems of inner cities; you know, "I'm working on it at the moment." After a while, though, I don't think some of these sounds

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<sup>271</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

matter too much, provided they are not too distracting from the music or distressing for the listener.<sup>273</sup>

It is clear from this quotation that Bream was acutely aware of the issue but is equally cognisant that in some cases, it may not be a problem worthy of a solution. Bream settles on the idea that the minimisation of squeaks might be desirable, but decides that it is preferable not to risk 'losing the musical line'. He implies that if he were to concentrate too much on squeaks, it might affect his musicality but that argument could be made about almost any technical issue. For example the performance of a technically difficult scale might occupy a performer's mind to the detriment of musical matters in a given work, but that would merely render the scale as something to be practiced rather than as unimportant. In fact, the solution to technical problems such as these, can be seen to be part of the process which ultimately creates a musically satisfying performance. In the time since Bream's observations most top guitarists have come to agree with Williams' opinion on this issue. Sharon Isbin gives the following advice in her *Classical Guitar Answer Book* of 1999:

You can avoid left-hand squeaks by preventing your calluses from scraping against the coils. There are three basic ways to do this: lift the finger, slide on the flat part of the fingerpad, or slide at an angle on either side of the fingertip.<sup>274</sup>

More recently the guitarist Douglas Niedt observes that although guitarists often get used to these sounds, non-guitarists do not, and often blame the squeaks on poor technique:

Let me first say: string squeaks matter. They are extraneous nonmusical sounds and can spoil a performance. They are on the same level as Romeo passing gas while passionately kissing his Juliet. They can ruin the moment! Unfortunately, there are a number of guitarists out there who say squeaks don't matter. They say that squeaks are just part of the instrument, an acceptable part of the performance. Squeaks are natural. Some people on the Internet think, "They're cool." I'm not kidding. If you are one of those, quit reading right now. I'm sure you're a nice person and your mother loves you, but we live in different universes. I don't think it will do either of us any good to argue the point. Many guitarists don't

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<sup>273</sup> Palmer, Tony: *Julian Bream- A Life on The Road*, (London: Macdonald, 1982), 111.

<sup>274</sup> Isbin, Sharon: *The Classical Guitar Answer Book*, (California: Hal Leonard, 1999), 26.

notice squeaks because they are so used to hearing them in their own playing and in others' playing, both live and on recordings. They simply ignore the squeaks and their brain learns to not hear them. It becomes a type of selective hearing. When other instrumentalists hear guitarists, they are appalled at the string squeaks we make. They often ask, "Are those normal?" Or they may ask if the guitarist is making the squeaks because his technique is faulty. They also comment on how obtrusive the finger squeaks are on the music.<sup>275</sup>

Niedt goes on to reference Williams on the subject and offers his own suggestions on how best to minimise squeaks, while playing. For Williams, there is a musical solution contained within this technical issue. He contends that if guitarists shift between individual notes rather than positions, then the noises will at least be connecting the music.

For whatever reason, when playing in the classical style on a nylon string guitar, I think the squeaks are best avoided or minimised, so part of my style is to move along the string more. If you're converting that squeak into the sound of movement like a 'mini-mini-glissando' which you get on violin all the time, the squeak is then converted into a shift and is just part of the movement from one note to the next. You then avoid position shifts which might seem practical but might not relate directly to the rhythm of the music as it is happening.<sup>276</sup>

Perhaps Williams' most significant contribution to this debate was to mention while in conversation with string-maker Jim d'Addario that he always brushed his strings lightly with sandpaper before using them in order to minimise the squeaks. Williams suggested that d'Addario's company could achieve a better result by doing this mechanically and since then they have sold a range of lightly polished strings that have become very popular. Although Williams does not accept sponsorship of any kind from string manufacturers, he has unofficially endorsed these strings to many other concert players and believes that they are a very important step in the right direction:

The other aspect of this issue is that I've always polished my bass strings with nail paper. I would always polish them gently, just enough to lessen the squeaks. In addition to this, lately d'Addario

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<sup>275</sup> Niedt, Douglas: 'String Squeaks and Romeo and Juliet', Internet article, Accessed 30 December, 2016. [www.douglasniedt.com](http://www.douglasniedt.com).

<sup>276</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.



[the American string manufacturer] brought out a set of lightly polished bass strings and I think they're great. Personally, I cannot work out why anyone would not use these strings – I can understand that people like different things and the different tonal quality of different materials but I think that to reduce the occurrence of squeaks overrules all these differences for me. I still get the occasional squeak but it's just minimised. However, its important to add that when I refer to lightly polished strings, they are not to be confused with flat wound recording strings which are disastrous, in my opinion and lose their resonance after about a half hour of playing. I think that's because flat wound strings are very complicated, expensive and difficult to make whereas its very simple to lightly polish an ordinary string so that's obviously preferable.<sup>277</sup>

The issue of 'left hand squeak' is interesting because it gives another example of John Williams' approach to music, whereby, in one sense his attention to technical detail has enabled him to considerably reduce the occurrence of these noises, and in another, his practicality and desire to engage with other interested stakeholders such as d'Addario, has further diminished the problem.

### **3.8 Guitar design**

Since the 1980s Williams has worked closely with the Australian luthier, Greg Smallman, helping him with aspects of his designs and also endorsing the resultant instruments. Smallman has revolutionised the area of guitar construction to the extent that he is regarded as one of the greatest innovators in the history of the instrument.

Perhaps the most celebrated figure in the history of guitar construction was Antonio de Torres (1812-1892), who enlarged the frame of the standard classical guitar to roughly the size that is recognised today. He also pioneered the use of fan-strutting on the underside of the soundboard; a system whereby seven wooden struts are glued to the inside of the soundboard in a specific fan-like shape in order to solidify the structure of the guitar in a manner which minimises the level of sound inhibition. He famously constructed a guitar using a solid spruce soundboard with cardboard sides and back to illustrate the importance of the soundboard and his own fan-strutting system. The guitar apparently projected

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<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

quite well and is extant in the Barcelona Conservatory.<sup>278</sup> Of greater significance was the fact that his guitars were adopted by prominent players such as Francisco Tárrega and Miguel Llobett and were described as being both louder and more resonant than the instruments of any of his contemporaries. His designs were adopted on a large scale and became the standard for classical guitar construction from that point onwards.

Madrid became the hub of the guitar construction world with two brothers, José and Manuel Ramirez adopting Torres' design specifications and passing his methods on to following generations of Spanish makers, so that a unique culture was established in the true home of the guitar, steeped in tradition and linked to the nationalistic fervour with which the Spanish viewed their national instrument. Famous names such as Bernabé, Fleta, Marin-Montero and Contreras emerged from this tradition and a certain mystique developed around the culture of Spanish guitar construction. In his exploration of this world, Kevin Dawe remarks:

We are told by guitar makers and others that the Spanish guitar is something best made in Spain and even better, made by hand in Spain...The Spanish guitar, its sound, images, players and personalities continue to be woven into the fabric of Spanish life. There is no doubt that the guitar is more important to some people than others, however, it is undeniably important in many areas of Spanish social, cultural and artistic life. From Lorca to Picasso, Espinel to Ramirez, Sor to Paco de Lucía, flamenco to the Cordoba Festival, the amateur to the professional, the art and times of the guitar form an impressive whole held together by an even more impressive sense of community and an all pervasive sense of place.<sup>279</sup>

Although many luthiers of different nationalities made guitars throughout the twentieth century, they more or less followed the Torres method of construction and it was generally accepted that this was the most effective and most acceptable design to follow. There were experimental guitars by such makers as the American Richard Schneider, but in general these were viewed with scepticism

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<sup>278</sup> Evans, Tom and Evans, Mary Anne: *Guitars: Music, History, Construction and Players – From the Renaissance to Rock*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 61.

<sup>279</sup> Dawe Kevin and Dawe, Moira: 'Handmade in Spain: The Culture of Guitar Making', *Guitar Cultures*, ed. Dawe and Bennett (Oxford: Berg, 2001) 81.

and although these makers could point to increases in volume to justify their adaptations, followers of the Spanish school would point with justification, to a lack of sound quality, which gave an unwelcome and ‘un-Spanish’ compromise. Kevin Dawe confirms that on his quest to explore the culture of guitar construction, many Spanish makers have opined that ‘the *Spanish* guitar is something best made in Spain.’<sup>280</sup> Against this backdrop, few of the above-mentioned experimental makers prospered until Greg Smallman, perhaps the most experimental and ‘un-Spanish’ of them all.

Under the guidance and advice of Williams, Smallman has applied his own considerable talent for innovation and design to become a giant of guitar construction, altering the perceptions and pre-conceptions that pervaded the classical guitar until his career took flight. In 2010, he stated:

If it wasn’t for John Williams, I’d probably be making furniture. He talks to me, he lets me know what he likes, what he doesn’t and why. John would play a guitar and, when he reached a “bad” note, or short note, he’d look at me to let me know he had found it and that it was not good. Lesser players thought these were good notes because they were louder!<sup>281</sup>

Equally, Smallman has provided Williams with instruments that enable him to realise his musical objectives. So closely are the names Smallman and Williams linked in fact, that it might be tempting to assume the existence of a sponsorship deal of some sort, with Williams receiving some sort of benefit for his help and advocacy. However, as Williams has explained, he only plays Smallman guitars because he feels they are the best and most suitable guitars for him:

I think it is important to establish that I have always paid Greg in full every time I’ve taken one of his guitars. I think recommendations can sometimes sound a bit hollow if the performer is getting their instrument for free. Of course, that is not always the case but to be absolutely clear – I never received any payment for talking to Greg about his designs and I have always bought my Smallman guitars. I’ve currently got two from 2000, one from 1984 and another from 1992.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.* 81.

<sup>281</sup> Starling, 365.

<sup>282</sup> John Williams, Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

Indeed there are many similarities between the effect of both Williams and Smallman on their chosen fields. Both have ushered in new eras of technical excellence and both have built upon the accepted traditions and norms of their trade. Williams has explained how Smallman has experimented with some of the fundamental principles of guitar construction:

I believe that you get more tonal variety and dynamic range with Greg's guitars, which are lightweight and lattice-topped. However, Greg's guitars are also slightly different in character from the Torres-style guitars that everyone had gotten so used to hearing over the last two hundred years. Personally, I've found that they've been a little more musical and with a broader range of possibilities. Volume is a bi-product and it is not a problem getting volume depending on how you tune the top but the question really is volume of what? It depends on how you produce the sound. The total number of harmonics is what contributes to the character of the sound. If you push all that range into one fundamental you can make a huge sound because it's all concentrated on the fundamental pitch. Therefore, his view is to have as many of the upper harmonics present. In terms of physics, the lighter the mass in terms of force used, the more efficient. With a traditional guitar, the top is more 'springy', so it reacts more to the initial force of your finger. With the Smallman the top is lighter and less springy. The whole thing works more like a drum skin and is lighter and therefore more of the upper harmonics come into play quicker, giving a greater variety to the sound.<sup>283</sup>

When the pair first met in 1978, what impressed Williams most about Smallman was his eagerness to learn. On a radio programme in Australia, Smallman remembered this occasion:

What I really did was I said, 'Can you teach me something about what I do? I understood that I had three guitars that sounded different, and he played them all. He was impressed with the fact that I wanted to learn from him and I didn't say 'You need to play one of my guitars.' I said 'What's going on? Which way do I go?'<sup>284</sup>

While Smallman showed effusive admiration for the Spanish Fleta guitar which Williams played at the time, he also asked if there was anything that could be

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<sup>283</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>284</sup> Johnston Robyn and Le May, David: 'Guitar Maker Greg Smallman', Recorded 2009. Accessed 22 July, 2015. <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/intothemusic/names-greg-not-jose-guitar-maker-greg-smallman/2939302#transcript>.

better about that instrument. Williams responded to this and, armed with criticisms of his own and other instruments, Smallman set about re-imagining the design of the classical guitar. He revolutionised the structures of the great Spanish makers in terms of how the soundboard of the guitar can be supported, adopting an unconventional lattice bracing system that gives support to the instrument without overly inhibiting the sound. He has also used carbon fibre as a way of strengthening his design as William Starling describes:

There is a small amount of carbon fibre used on the struts, and much more of this material is used in the frame that supports the soundboard. Greg uses it to provide long-term stability as it does not ‘creep’ like wood and thus increases immunity to changes in humidity.<sup>285</sup>

Graham Wade emphasised the impact of Williams’ support upon public perception of the Smallman guitar:

The results were outstanding and, within a few years, John Williams’s advocacy of Smallman’s guitars made the luthier internationally famous and his instruments greatly in demand.<sup>286</sup>

Smallman’s innovations also include an arching of the back of the guitar, extremely thick sides and an armrest on the table, so that the right arm of the guitarist does not dampen the sound. Writing for *Acoustic Guitar* magazine in 2013, Mark Small described Smallman’s innovations as ‘revolutionary’ and pointed out that opinion is often divided as to the quality of his guitars:

The distinctive Smallman sound is adored by some and excoriated by others. John Williams, the most renowned player of Smallmans, has stated that he chose the Smallman for its musical characteristics rather than its increased volume.<sup>287</sup>

However, given that his design and innovations have been adopted by so many other luthiers, it is fair to say that Smallman has had, and continues to have, a profound influence on the guitar and its players. Colin Cooper’s review of a

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<sup>285</sup> Starling, 368.

<sup>286</sup> Wade, Graham: *A Concise History of the Classical Guitar*, (Pacific, Missouri: Mel Bay, 2001) 186.

<sup>287</sup> Small, Mark: ‘Classical Innovations – How the Modern Classical Guitar has Evolved’, Accessed 7 July, 2015. [www.marksmallguitar.com](http://www.marksmallguitar.com)

Segovia tribute concert in 1987, which featured Williams as well as Carlos Bonell and Charles Ramirez, highlighted the qualities of Smallman as a maker:

The opportunities for studying the techniques and absorbing the subtleties of tone from three good guitarists must have been seized gratefully by the collection of guitar students who were there. Bonell's Fleta tone is as warm and communicative as ever, but the Smallman guitar of John Williams was generally held to be something quite exceptional, its warm woodiness pervading the classicism of the RCM concert hall in a totally irresistible way.<sup>288</sup>

This review captures the sheer excitement felt by guitarists during the 1980s at these novel developments in guitar design. Since then, Smallman has, in consultation with John Williams, continued to experiment and develop his ideas in order to maintain his reputation as a true pioneer of his craft. Williams maintains a firm interest in Smallman's innovations and Smallman it seems, still places a huge value on his compatriot's opinions:

Greg is always tweaking. However, when I played that first guitar that he came back to me with, it was already starting to give me some of the things that the Fleta guitar was just about lacking. I have used the first one in fact, on a couple of recordings. Having said that, he's definitely made huge improvements since then and the principles were always the same with Greg. What he is constantly striving for, is a characteristic of the way the instrument sounds. In addition to that he experiments all the time [...] I don't really know what he's doing a lot of the time but every now and then he says 'this is worth listening to what do you think of this?' He still likes to know what I think and when he's done something that he thinks is enough of a difference, he'll say 'Listen to the one that so and so has got. That's the latest model, so let me know what you think.'<sup>289</sup>

In a comprehensive survey of trends in guitar construction, John Huber commented that both Williams and Smallman have helped to make their native Australia more relevant in the field.<sup>290</sup> He also credits Williams with reflecting the interests of younger guitarists:

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<sup>288</sup> Cooper, Colin: Tribute To Segovia, by Carlos Bonell, Charles Ramirez and John Williams Royal College of Music, London, 5 November, 1987, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol.6, No.6, (1988), 48.

<sup>289</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>290</sup> Huber, John: *The Development of the Modern Guitar*, (Westport, Connecticut, London: The Bold Strummer, 1994), 71-72.

Like Andrés Segovia before him, John Williams is partially responsible for both setting and changing precedents. Although he received Segovia's blessings as the legitimate heir of Spanish guitar tradition, Williams has consistently demonstrated that tradition has not isolated him from his own generation's interests. Among his many contributions to iconoclasm in the guitar world is his use of Greg Smallman's guitars.<sup>291</sup>

### 3.9 Williams and guitar teaching

In his youth, John Williams enrolled as a student in the Royal College of Music (RCM) in London. However, as was also the case with Julian Bream some years earlier, he was forced to take piano as his first instrument, because there were no guitarists in the faculty of the RCM. In 1959, he was invited to create the guitar department at the RCM and he attracted many students throughout the 1960s and up until 1973, when his contract was terminated. William Starling notes that student complaints over missed lessons were central to his dismissal.<sup>292</sup> He describes a process whereby Williams at times initiated concerts for students, instead of their regular lessons, being of the belief that performing might sometimes be of more benefit more than individual instruction. It was because of this practice that he was ultimately asked to leave the College. He describes how his unconventional methods may have upset some of the students at the RCM:

It was a bit crazy given that I was only around twenty years old when I started teaching and I suppose it showed where the guitar was at that particular time. I was honoured and agreed to do it. I suppose its fair to say that I gradually got a little bored with the notion of teaching individually, which is why I still don't do it. I think that I've inherited the notion from my father that maybe class teaching works better in many cases. However, there were particular incidents when students looked for permission to go and do some playing in public. They were supposed to go and ask the registrar and often were refused permission, but I just said 'go and do it', which, strictly speaking is not correct. In addition to this, when I went touring in America for about three weeks at a time, I couldn't always make up all of the lessons. I did make up almost all of the lessons but a few of my students reacted badly and two of them complained about me. Soon after, I received a rather disappointing letter from Sir Keith Faulkner [Director of the RCM] saying that maybe I was too busy to do this, and that was it really.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>292</sup> Starling, 140.

<sup>293</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

Following a fourteen-year spell at the RCM, Williams confined his teaching to masterclasses for the remainder of his career. He retains a strong interest in guitar education including some controversial views about guitar instruction that stem from the unorthodox methods of his father. When they returned from Australia in 1951, Len established The Spanish Guitar Centre in London and achieved much success there, utilising an unusual, communal method of teaching.

Starling describes the method:

Williams [Len] broke with the prevailing convention of the few classical guitar teachers around who taught on a one-to-one basis by working with groups of between five and eight students. A single guitar was used for each lesson, being passed around from student to student for each to demonstrate their progress. All the students worked on the same piece and they would usually be asked to play only a part of it. They played in turn and were subject to the scrutiny and comment of their fellows and to the advice and criticism of their teacher, sometimes bluntly expressed. The philosophy behind this method was that students would benefit by learning not just from their own efforts and mistakes but also by observing those of their colleagues.<sup>294</sup>

This method left an impression on John Williams and while he acknowledges the role of individual tuition in helping to sort out finer points of technique, he considers its role to be over-emphasised in modern instrumental teaching. Although he accepted the call for his resignation from the RCM without controversy, Williams does harbour some regrets reflecting that ‘it would have been nice to introduce new things at the RCM. Temperamentally I’m usually in favour of changing things from within rather than from the outside but that’s just not the way things worked out.’<sup>295</sup>

As someone who was well-taught from a young age, but who also adapted his own technique, Williams feels that at the very early stages of a guitarist’s development, more careful thought needs to be applied as to how a beginner should strike the string with the right-hand fingers. There are two methods of striking the string: *apoyando*, or rest-stroke, where the finger plays through the

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<sup>294</sup> Starling, 71-72.

<sup>295</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.



string and lands on the string above, and tirando, or free-stroke, where the finger does not land on any string. Williams explains his views as follows:

I'll preface this by saying that I'm not an expert at teaching from the beginning stage but I would like to express an opinion about the type of right-hand technique that is applied to beginners. Learning apoyando well depends on how you do the apoyando. The problem with the Segovia technique is that you must change the hand position to play rest-stroke. Therefore, I think that if you can develop a rest-stroke as similar as possible to your tirando stroke – so that in music that alternates between both techniques and demands that certain notes would be played differently to others – you might not get caught out changing your hand position around quite so much. Following on from that, my instinct would be that it might not be good to learn apoyando at first. I think that tirando should be approached head-on at the start in an effort to ensure that the student is not using the first smaller joints of the right hand fingers to claw at the string. Later on, a rest stroke can be developed which involves a minimal hand-position change from the natural position of the student. So you need a hand position, which accommodates the natural shape of your hand. The problem of separating the apoyando stroke from the tirando is that people often rely on apoyando to achieve a more rounded sound and then achieve a thinner sound when playing arpeggios or sections that require tirando. In fact, I believe that the student should instead try to reverse that pattern and develop a more rounded free stroke pattern. Segovia would alter his whole hand position to play scales and just produced a totally different sound on these passages. I think you should really try to avoid that at all costs.<sup>296</sup>

Williams feels that a student learns as much if not more from their peers as they do from their teachers and that creating the right environment in which to learn and prosper is an important aspect of education. He warns against the dangers of students wanting only individual tuition and seeking only to mimic a teacher's habits rather than establishing more individual approaches. He often prefaces masterclass sessions with a warning that his approach differs from many other players, and that he will be as interested in what the student thinks as what he himself has to say. This has often led to disenchantment and one such example is Mark Switzer, who expected a more prescriptive approach:

What distressed me was that he took the attitude that everyone's opinion or interpretation is just as good as anyone else's. Clearly, this cannot be so! How can a student half-way through college have

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<sup>296</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

a musical interpretation – much less the study, listening and performance experiences which shape musical interpretation – equal to a genius such as J.W.? I agree that a student could have a valid interpretation for that moment in his or her life, but I came to hear what Williams had to say about this piece or that piece, not the opinion of a student.<sup>297</sup>

This review from a masterclass at the ‘Guitar Foundation of America Convention’ in 2003, represents a viewpoint which has frustrated Williams for many years. Switzer clearly attended the class in the hope of finding out what an iconic performer thinks about music. However, in this account, Williams appeared to be more interested in encouraging the students to think for themselves. The opinion of the reviewer here is that John Williams has a responsibility to interpret the piece, so that the students can follow his instruction or at least become familiar with his approach to music. Williams, on the contrary, feels that good musicians must find the interpretation within themselves, rather than merely copying an idea from someone else. He recounts that in fact, in many cases, he takes students to task, not because they play in a certain way, but because they are unable to explain why they are playing in a given style:

The important thing for me is that the person who is playing a piece performs deliberately in the way they want to play. That’s the point. It’s not that this or any other music should or should not be played a certain way..<sup>298</sup>

What Williams seeks to encourage in students is critical thinking. However, he is frustrated by the perception that this impulse to engage with students could be interpreted as being unwilling to impart his own opinion about certain musical and historical principles. In an interview from 2017, he spoke about certain aspects of performing Giuliani as well as mentioning the Albéniz piece *Sevilla*, in order to clarify his attitude towards teaching. It is interesting to note the contrast between this approach and that of Segovia, which was discussed in Chapter Two. Williams was quick to emphasise that his eagerness for students to think for themselves should not be misunderstood:

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<sup>297</sup> Switzer, Mark: ‘Another View’, *Soundboard*, Vol.30, No. 2, (2004), 91.

<sup>298</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

I'm very free and non-prescriptive when I'm talking to people about how to play impressionistic, nationalistic or modern music: often frustratingly so. People say 'why don't you tell them how to play?' and so on [...] There are many styles of music where I'm more interested in finding out why people have taken a particular decision rather than trying to make them play it in the same way as myself. However, when it comes to the style of Baroque music or this type of bel canto style from the classical era, I'm not very free. When I ask someone what they were trying to do with a piece, I want to know that whatever the musician has done, it has been deliberate. Let's hypothesise for a moment that someone might play some baroque music in a totally inauthentic style with no inégales and no ornaments. I might listen to it and say 'What were you trying to do with the piece and why did you play it like that?' If they say that they have no idea and don't know why, then I will throw the book at them and tell them how it is supposed to be played etc. However, if they say that having read all the information and in the knowledge that they should play in a certain way, they simply preferred to play it in a more romantic style like that, then I have no problem with that at all. That's a decision they've made and is not just done out of ignorance. It's a bit like with the *Sevilla* and the *Sevillanas* dance that we spoke about earlier. I might point that out to someone and they might say 'I know about the dance but I would still like to play the piece more romantically like this.' That interpretation would be fine with me because it is not performed out of ignorance. Where I become prescriptive is when they have no idea why they've played in a certain style.<sup>299</sup>

The situation, as described in the above review, serves to illustrate the dual nature of masterclasses: the sense that as well as being a lesson, the masterclass can also become something of a public performance. The audience may have come, as in this case to hear Williams' view on the music, but he is more interested in building upon the approach of the student, which, after all, has usually been presented at the outset of the class, in the form of an uninterrupted performance. Williams feels that the focal point really ought to be the students who actually play. For many years, he refused to teach anything but ensembles at courses and masterclasses and he explained this decision as follows:

I think they come along expecting directions as to how to play like I play it! Sometimes you get misunderstandings, because I'm loathe to direct people in that way. It is important, but it's ceased to have the importance that the ensemble thing has for me. It's no good mixing it. In one of these Cordoba courses I was doing both. People were putting up with the ensemble thing so that they could get a

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<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

chance to play [solo]. I thought, no, there's only one answer to this – no solo tuition [...] It becomes a crutch: 'Give me the formula and I'll play it like you – that's what it amounts to!' <sup>300</sup>

Evidently, Williams feels there is more to be learned from ensemble playing. The merits of ensemble teaching have been evident for many years and José Antonio Abreu's El Sistema project, formed in 1975 in Caracas, Venezuela, provides a great example of the transformative power of such methods albeit in an orchestral setting.<sup>301</sup> In North America, guitar classes have become very successful in second level education, most notably in Austin, Texas where Matthew Hinsley has overseen the establishment of a classroom-based guitar ensemble curriculum, which runs in over fifty schools in the area, with incredibly positive results.<sup>302</sup> The Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie concurs, having experienced group tuition herself as a young musician, and describes it as 'an environment of demonstration and inspiration from the teachers and fellow pupils.'<sup>303</sup> In February 2018, Williams will release a cd of two ensemble works featuring guitars and various other instruments. The works are *The Flower of Cities* (2012) by Steve Goss for two guitars, violin, double bass and percussion as well as *The Light on*

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<sup>300</sup> Cooper, Colin: 'Persuasion in the Right Direction', *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 6 No.2. (1987), 24.

<sup>301</sup> Mills, Janet: *Instrumental Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 193. Mills describes El Sistema as follows: 'For more than 30 years, large numbers of children living in an impoverished area of Caracas, have spent the mornings at school, and six afternoons a week, from 14.00 to 16.00, following the so-called System by learning to play an instrument in large groups. The System includes supervised practising and ensemble experience that merge with tuition.' Mills recounts that the System's primary motive was to help children out of the cycle of poverty and it is no surprise that it has succeeded in this regard. What is surprising is the number of top-class musicians who have been produced by the system, who now earn a living as professionals. She uses the world famous conductor Gustav Dudamel as well as Edicson Ruiz, who became a bass player in the Berlin Philharmonic at only seventeen years of age as examples of this and gives many reasons why learning in a classroom situation can be more beneficial than individual tuition.

<sup>302</sup> Hinsley, Matthew: 'Texas Ex Takes Classical Guitar into Austin Classrooms', first published 15 August, 2012, Accessed 22 July, 2015. [www.alcade.texasexes.org](http://www.alcade.texasexes.org) Such was the appeal of the guitar to young people, that Hinsley felt that the biggest challenge which faced the group was not finding pupils, but finding a unified curriculum which could deliver at the correct standards as well as being suitably graded and matching to the appropriate skill-sets and taste of each age-group. As Hinsley explains: 'So it was not difficult to get students who normally would not show interest in classical music excited about learning it on the guitar. Yet society staffers were finding limited materials available to help them teach classical guitar from the podium in an ensemble format.' With that in mind, Hinsley and his colleagues set about establishing a curriculum which could help them achieve their goals and have succeeded spectacularly. The curriculum is based around a vast array of graded ensemble repertoire, ranging from very easy beginner level pieces to advanced level playing.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.* 192.

*the Edge* (1993, revised 2015), by Phillip Houghton for two guitars, harp, double bass and percussion. He has spoken of his desire that these ensembles might become more widespread and has outlined his intention to encourage music departments to perform this type of work:

I intend to send a copy of the cd to music departments in various different countries in the hope that they might start looking at putting on works like these, because I really think they would be of great benefit to young guitarists – just playing among small groups like string and wind players do regularly.<sup>304</sup>

John Williams' views on the benefits of ensemble playing for young guitarists have been reflected in the ABRSM's inclusion of a number of duet pieces on their current syllabus, (the pieces on this syllabus have been in place since 1994) where the teacher plays an accompaniment part. Many of the relevant books from the syllabus are published under the banner of the European Guitar Teacher's Association (EGTA) series, and Williams provides the foreword for these books, explaining his enthusiasm for this approach:

For more than a century the guitar has relied on approaches to studies and general learning which, based as they are almost exclusively on solo playing, often leave students with gaps in their technical and musical understanding. Such inflexible conventions are gradually being replaced by much more creative and progressive attitudes among amateur and professional players alike. The EGTA series with its parallel use of solo and accompanied pieces consolidates and develops these changes methodically and imaginatively, and represents a major contribution to the changing needs of guitar teaching.<sup>305</sup>

The success of these publications over the last twenty years marks a major shift in guitar education, emphasising ensemble and musicianship skills and encouraging a more social approach for guitarists from the earliest stages of development.

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<sup>304</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>305</sup> Wright, Richard (Ed.) *Solo Now!* (Heidelberg, Nottingham: Chanterelle, 1994)

### 3.10 Summary

As this chapter has illustrated, John Williams' approach to the classical guitar has been colourful and wide-reaching in scope. His attitude to solo and ensemble music has been examined as well as his thoughts on amplification, guitar design, education and aspects of performance practice. His relationship with his instrument has resembled his approach to interpreting music, in that he has sought to express himself clearly and effectively at all times. Where conditions have not been suitable to the ideal communication of his intentions, he has resolved to change or refine those conditions. These changes have been met with resistance from other classical guitarists (for example the 'amplification' issue), but he has been definitive and determined in his actions. Furthermore, in striving to achieve these goals, he has revolutionised many crucial aspects of modern classical guitar performance. However, the next chapter focuses on the projects that brought new voices into this culture. Williams wrote the following in his foreword to *The Guitar – A guide for Students and Teachers* (1998):

[T]he guitar itself can help and even give a lead in relation to other musical cultures and the popular traditions they have maintained: jazz is often considered as the most obvious and important example but the same values apply to many others. The guitar has always been a popular instrument and this is its ultimate strength. It can be the bridge from the popular to the classical traditions and vice versa, but it must learn from both to do it well.<sup>306</sup>

Five years later, Victor Anand Coelho wrote that 'musicology's apprehension (until recently) to engage in the study of popular cultures (or even *culture*) has been chiefly responsible for ignoring the guitar's role within music history, even in studies of the Iberian Peninsula.'<sup>307</sup> Although Coelho's statement reflects changes in the field of musicology, it must be acknowledged that, in adopting the narrative that Segovia somehow single-handedly saved the guitar, classical guitarists have been often guilty of ignoring the instrument's role in music history. Nonetheless, from very early in his career John Williams has been acutely aware of this and has been a forerunner in changing mindsets.

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<sup>306</sup> Stimpson, Martin (Ed.): *The Guitar, A Guide for Students and Teachers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), vi.

<sup>307</sup> Coelho, 4.

## Chapter Four

### ‘Putting the guitar out of classical music’<sup>308</sup>

In 1983, Segovia accused Williams of undoing his own life’s work by consenting to play in various popular music projects. This chapter examines the various ways in which Williams achieved this, and while it is true that he did not initially intend his actions to have the consequences implied by Segovia, these projects have generally helped to broaden the appeal of the classical guitar. Williams has explored the folk traditions of South America and Africa, commissioned and performed numerous jazz-style concertos and achieved remarkable chart success, both with his performances of film music and with the progressive rock group Sky. This chapter also examines a number of interesting crossover concertos written for Williams by composers such as André Previn, Patrick Gowers, Paul Hart and Steve Gray. These works explore jazz idioms in different ways and represent a juxtaposition of popular and classical traditions. Williams’ input in these concertos is considerable and his candid opinions offer insight into the effectiveness of each work. However, of all the projects in which Williams participated, no single work has had such a significant impact, both in terms of the guitar and his own career, as Stanley Myers’ *Cavatina*.

#### 4.1 *Cavatina* and other film projects

Stanley Myers had previously used the theme from *Cavatina* as part of a soundtrack for the film *The Walking Stick*, in 1970. He played it for John Williams soon after this and Williams asked him to develop the theme further and expand it into a full-length piece for guitar and orchestra. The work became the centrepiece of Williams’ *Changes* album in 1971, which was produced by Myers and although the guitarist expertly arranged the solo part, he chose to record it as a duet with himself on the album in order to achieve the best possible resonance and voicing possibilities. Despite the piece being extremely popular, it was not until the mid to late seventies that it transformed into what could be described as

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<sup>308</sup> Wade, Graham: *Segovia – A Celebration of the Man and His Music*, (London, New York: Allison & Busby, 1983), 109. Segovia made this comment in reference to Williams’ numerous crossover projects.

a cultural phenomenon, achieving repeated chart success in a variety of different forms over a relatively short time. The singer Cleo Laine, who recorded two successful albums with Williams in the seventies, wrote lyrics to the tune and it was released as *He Was Beautiful* in 1976. The instrumental version was later used in Michael Cimino's gritty anti-war film *The Deer Hunter*, which was released in 1978 to huge critical acclaim. Williams re-recorded the piece for the soundtrack and it featured over a reflective scene in the film. The film won several academy awards and although Williams had already been regarded as one of the foremost classical guitarists in the world, the success of this piece transformed him into a 'household' celebrity. In 1979, *Cavatina* was released as a single and reached number 13 in the UK pop music charts. At the same time, pop instrumental band *The Shadows* released their version of the work and it too made its way into the higher echelons of the UK singles chart. The two different versions were simultaneously in the top twenty and curiously, later in 1979, the singer Iris Williams had a top 5 hit single with a cover of Cleo Laine's *He was Beautiful* version. It is remarkable that within the same year three different versions of the same piece achieved such high sales. Miguel Mera notes that soon after this success, when Stanley Myers was asked by the BBC to compose music for the political programme *Question Time*, he again chose classical guitar as a solo instrument, perhaps believing that the instrument was particularly popular with the general public at the time.

The popularity of *Cavatina* may have been an important factor in the decision to employ Myers as the composer for the Question Time theme; he may have been encouraged to use the classical guitar as the centrepiece of the arrangement as a consequence.<sup>309</sup>

Mera suggests that the British public had a particular fascination for Spanish guitar at the time and suggests that societal factors could have been at work:

An important socio-cultural influence is the fact that international package tourism flourished in the 1970s and 1980s when millions of middle-class Brits went in search of a fortnight's relaxation on beaches in Benidorm, the Costa del Sol or Mallorca [...] Spain was

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<sup>309</sup> Mera, Miguel: 'Re-inventing Question Time', *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Music Research*, ed. Derek B. Scott, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 68.



exotic but not too exotic [...] The use of the guitar in *Question Time* arguably taps into the particularly British obsession with Spain during this period. The popularity of recordings of John Williams and Julian Bream is part of the same cultural movement.<sup>310</sup>

This opinion could offer an explanation for the striking success of many versions of *Cavatina* – although the main theme is not overtly Spanish in nature, the middle section of the piece emphasises the Phrygian mode, so idiomatic in Iberian music. However, it’s popularity probably hinged more on the success of the film and the fact that it is an undeniably memorable tune. In fact, the piece was used by the BBC as their ‘close-down’ music in the 1970s and the vocalised version has often been covered from the late seventies onwards. Williams’ solo guitar version was used on the popular children’s television show *Take Hart* during the 1980s and also in the 2005 war-film *Jarhead* as a reference to the *Deerhunter* film. In fact the piece is used in *Jarhead* to trigger what Hoeckner and Nusbaum refer to as ‘the Casablanca effect’: a soldier plays a video that features *Cavatina* in order to remind the audience of the *Deerhunter* and indeed it has also come to represent the Vietnam conflict.<sup>311</sup> The piece’s iconic significance has greatly benefitted Williams and the classical guitar by association. Although *Cavatina* was written by Myers and covered by so many other artists, it was always linked to John Williams and the performer retains a fondness for the piece to the present day. While he concedes that not everything he worked on with Myers was of the highest order, he feels very grateful for that particular work:

Stanley was brilliant on some things and a bit dated on others even at the time. What I mean by that is that, although *Cavatina* was terrific, some other parts of *Changes* sound very dated now [...] In fact, I thought that at the time, even after having played for him for two or three of his film scores. Anyway, we hit it off and I think he had a really nice feeling for guitar and although sometimes musically the arrangements weren’t great, I think he was one of the

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<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.* 70.

<sup>311</sup> Hoeckner, Berthold and Nusbaum, Howard C.: ‘Music and Memory in Film and Other Multimedia: The Casablanca Effect’, *The Psychology of Music in Multimedia*, ed. Siu-Lan Tan, Annabel, Annabel J. Cohen, Scott D. Lipscomb and Roger A. Kendall, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 235-263. ‘The Casablanca effect’ as outlined in this essay is when a piece of music invokes a memory and signifies a narrative or mood in a film, without the necessity of the director filling the audience in on specific details.

few people who knew the magic of the instrument – I mean no-one else certainly in the guitar world would have the courage to have written a tune like *Cavatina*, which had just one melody note per bar. He really understood that the guitar had the kind of magic in its sound that could carry that.<sup>312</sup>

Williams has also recounted his experience when re-recording the piece for the film in Los Angeles and expresses his enjoyment and engagement with the whole process of recording for film:

Musically what it stands for, what it expresses in the case of the film and how you match the little bits to Robert De Niro's expression, all those things that come up when you're doing film music. It's a great privilege and incredibly enjoyable.<sup>313</sup>

Following the success of *The Deer Hunter* soundtrack, Williams performed on the soundtracks of *Emma's War* (a 1988 film for which he actually composed the score), *Blame it on the Bellboy* (1992) and *A Fish Called Wanda* (1998), among others, although perhaps the nostalgic and evocative *Estrella's Theme* for guitar and orchestra from *Great Expectations* (1998) was the closest Williams has come to being involved with a soundtrack as memorable as *The Deer Hunter*. This score, written by the composer Patrick Doyle, is again central to the film and Williams again performed the piece as a duet in order to strengthen the resonance and intensity of the melody. On this occasion, rather than play both tracks himself as on the *Deerhunter*, he enlisted the guitarist Dario Bonnell (son of renowned guitarist Carlos Bonnell) to play the other guitar part.<sup>314</sup>

Williams regarded the experience of playing for films as fascinating and remembers having to 'collaborate' not just with the composers, but with the actors:

I had to record a lot of the *Deerhunter* to screen so that I would get certain musical ideas to match with the visual direction of the film. Another example of that process was in *A Fish Called Wanda*, where there's a scene where he [John Cleese] goes into a shop to

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<sup>312</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>313</sup> Marshall, Greg: 'John Williams: Classical Guitarist', *Soundtrack Magazine*, vol. 21.No.83, (2002), Accessed 28 August, 2015. [www.runmovies.eu](http://www.runmovies.eu)

<sup>314</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October 2017.

see Jamie Lee Curtis and I had to play that to screen. The idea was not just to follow the action in that scene but also to follow facial expressions of the actors so it was a very interesting process.<sup>315</sup>

In spite of his various ventures into the genre of film music both as performer, arranger and even on one occasion as composer, Williams will always be closely associated with *Cavatina*. Guitarist Benjamin Verdery praises Williams' involvement in the evolution of the piece and sums up the immense impact of the piece:

John has the ability to hear a beautiful melody and instantly recognise its guitaristic possibilities. Stanley Myers 'Cavatina' might have slipped by many but not John. He recognised it as the jewel that it was, and recorded a haunting, timeless interpretation. The recording placed the classical guitar front and centre in the score of one of the world's most popular and poignant movies of the time, *The Deer Hunter*. "The Theme from The Deer Hunter," as it was commonly called, inspired hundreds of amateur guitarists to study with their local guitar teacher so they could learn to play it.<sup>316</sup>

While the success of *Cavatina* and his part in other film scores such as *A Fish called Wanda* and *Great Expectations* has enabled Williams to create a high-profile platform for the classical guitar, the most dramatic example of this is arguably his controversial classical/rock fusion band Sky.

#### 4.2 Sky

Any assessment of John Williams' more unconventional career paths must be prefaced by an acknowledgement that contrary to what may have been written and said in the past, Williams has always performed and recorded what can be termed 'the standard classical guitar repertoire'. He has recorded more repertoire for classical guitar than almost any other musician and has consistently performed around the world as a 'classical guitar soloist'. Despite this fact, there still persists a viewpoint that when he joined Sky, Williams was somehow turning his back on classical guitar. This is illustrated in statements such as the following, issued as part of David Wells' biography of the band Sky in 2004: '...the departure in early

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<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> Verdery, Benjamin: 'Reflections on a Guitarist America Loves', *Soundboard*, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2013), 9.

1984 of the guitar virtuoso John Williams, who had decided to resume his classical career, certainly impacted upon their sales potential.<sup>317</sup> A similar sentiment is expressed by Colin Bertram, when he states that Williams left the band in 1984, ‘to return to his solo career,’ and these remarks represent the common assumption that Williams left one genre to join another.<sup>318</sup> It arises from misconceptions on both sides of the musical spectrum, with popular music commentators such as Wells, sometimes unable to grasp how a musician might keep many different strands going simultaneously without spreading themselves too thinly, while classical guitarists and reviewers simply seem to discard Williams’ popular and folk-inspired work to ‘the lost years’.<sup>319</sup> In his *Concise History of Rock Music* (2009), Paul Fowles comments:

Although the sum total of *Sky* was unquestionably less than its individual parts, the formula somehow found a vacuum in the market. This first vinyl offering reached an alarming No. 2 in the UK Album Chart within a month of release. Its sequel, a double LP that bore the unsurprising title of *Sky 2* hit the UK No.1 spot in July 1980.<sup>320</sup>

Fowles displays a clear antipathy towards *Sky* and goes on to describe its music as ‘so bland as to be almost impossible to describe in words.’<sup>321</sup> He seems perturbed by their success and attributes it to the group’s appeal to older generations, which had the effect of creating a ‘uniquely wide age spectrum’ in the popular music market.<sup>322</sup> This represents not only a criticism of the band itself but is also a slight on those who identified as fans of *Sky*. Although progressive rock groups were quite popular at this time, Fowles makes no attempt to place *Sky* in that context, but prefers to consider its success as something of an aberration. However, there can be little doubt that *Sky* shared some common musical ground with acts such as Yes, Mike Oldfield and Curved Air. Furthermore, his own biography on the second page of the above-mentioned book

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<sup>317</sup> Wells, David: ‘Notes on *Sky 2*’, CMRCD1087, (Castle, London, 2005).

<sup>318</sup> Bertram, Colin: *Drum Solos, Bottles, & Bands- Memories of a Concert Goer*, (Lancaster: Bertram, 2012), 14-15.

<sup>319</sup> Starling, William: *Strings Attached – The Life and Music of John Williams*, (London: The Robson Press, 2012), 276-267.

<sup>320</sup> Fowles, Paul: *A Concise History of Rock Music*, (Pacific Missouri: Mel Bay, 2009), 267.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.* 268.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

describes him as a regular contributor to *Classical Guitar* magazine, which may, perhaps, give an insight into his bias.<sup>323</sup> Despite his pronouncement that ‘many rock encyclopedias conveniently ignore the fact that Sky even existed’, he devotes over eight pages to discussing the band as well as other Williams’ crossover projects.<sup>324</sup> This is only one page less than he devotes to The Beatles (Bob Dylan merits only four pages), and seems excessive for a so-called ‘concise’ historical account. Therefore, while Fowles’ article appears in a rock music history book, his opinions can be seen as representative of a number of classical guitarists and it is also worth noting that his reviews of Williams’ more conventional recordings and concerts have tended to be extremely positive.

Tanenbaum (2003) muses as to the reasons behind Williams’ recording of the Sky albums: ‘Was it boredom? Foresight? Simple musical desire? Probably some of each.’<sup>325</sup> While this statement is quite speculative, it would be difficult to accept that ‘boredom’ could be justified as a reason for embarking upon such a significant musical journey. Certainly John Williams has never remarked that he formed Sky because of boredom or because of some sense that there would be a large market for the resultant music. Instead, Williams has simultaneously performed and recorded classical guitar music alongside his explorations of other styles since the late 1960s. An examination of the musical styles he has chosen to perform gives a picture not only of a very open-minded approach to music-making but one which is also thoughtful and socially aware. In an interview published in 2000, Williams cautioned against the notion of classical musicians having a sense of entitlement and superiority in relation to other styles. Asked about what could be done to halt the diminishing quantities of people tuning in to classical music stations and programmes on radio, he replied:

As soon as you select classical guitar music and assume that there is something intrinsically good about there being more of it for a hypothetical audience that you want to improve, you’re putting up a

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<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.* 268.

<sup>325</sup> Tanenbaum, David: ‘The Classical Guitar in the Twentieth Century’, *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed Victor Anand Coelho, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 196.

whole lot of assumptions about what should be done – which I’m afraid I can’t do. I can’t say it’s better that Britten or Takemitsu wrote this wonderful piece for guitar and we as serious guitarists are playing it, and [...] say that is more significant than the jazz group around the corner at the club or the Chieftains at a folk music festival.<sup>326</sup>

This sentiment explains many of his career choices and places Williams broadly at odds with many of his fellow performing classical guitarists, aligning his approach more, in scholarly terms with the new musicologists of the late twentieth century, which has redefined the parameters of how music is judged and studied over the last few decades. In fact, Victor Anand Coelho places an open-minded approach to crossing genres in direct contrast with the views of certain classical performers:

Throughout the twentieth century, guitarists in the areas of jazz, blues, pop, folk and country have assimilated, modified and personalised styles of astonishing cultural diversity, partly because they are (blissfully) ignorant of the classical hierarchies – promoted more, to be honest, by performers like Segovia than by musicologists – that constructed an “impenetrable” firewall around the Western art tradition.<sup>327</sup>

In his book *The Accessibility of Music*, Jochen Eisentraut states that the protectionist policies of universities in the twentieth century had previously led to an artificially high value being placed upon art music and in particular, inaccessible art music.<sup>328</sup> He points to the lack of freedom that such an approach engenders in students and notes with irony that third-level modules in modern composition often masquerade under the title ‘free composition’. Eisentraut feels that this approach has at times been detrimental, as it has made a virtue of incomprehensibility:

Two contributing factors to this have been the circular argument that mass incomprehension is a guarantee of artistic value and the

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<sup>326</sup> Tosone, Jim: *Classical Guitarists – Conversations*, (North Carolina, London: McFarland & Company, 2000), 159-160.

<sup>327</sup> Coelho, 8.

<sup>328</sup> Eisentraut, Jochen, *The Accessibility of Music: Participation Reception, and Contact*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 201.

inclination in an educational environment to create music requiring study rather than offering enjoyment.<sup>329</sup>

He argues that ‘the success of rock and contemporary popular music generally lies in the fact that it often combines regular rhythm and *cantabile* melody effectively (as do Coldplay for instance), whereas much art music has come close to abandoning both.’<sup>330</sup> Sky found a public who could both comprehend and appreciate its work. The single, *Toccata*, reached number 5 in the UK singles chart (this is commonly viewed as an indicator of appeal to lower age demographics which contradicts Fowles’ assertion about the age profile of Sky’s fans) and the group embarked upon a series of successful tours.

*Toccata* provides a concrete example of the appeal of Sky. The rise of progressive rock and heavy metal groups in the 1970s and their perceived links with virtuosic classical musicians of the nineteenth century created a space into which Sky could easily step. Steve Waksman describes this tendency in the context of Eddie Van Halen’s rise to prominence in the rock band Van Halen:

Although many of Van Halen’s songs were based around fairly conventional blues and rock progressions, Edward Van Halen’s recourse to a classical musical vocabulary in his soloing enhanced the aura of virtuosity surrounding rock guitar. As a writer from *Guitar World* magazine observed, ‘the classical approach [was already] a heavy metal tradition’ by the early 1980s, having been used in different ways by different guitarists such as Ritchie Blackmore, Jimmy Page, Leslie West, and German metal guitarists Michael Schenker and Ulrich Roth. In the aftermath of Van Halen’s success however, classical music increasingly became the focus for a new style of electric guitar virtuosity that displaced the presiding blues based vocabulary in favour of a much more Eurocentric notion of harmonic and melodic complexity.<sup>331</sup>

Waksman goes on to reference other guitarists such as Yngwie Malmsteen, Randy Rhodes and Tony MacAlpine, who cultivated a perceived ‘classical’ identity and in that context it is possible to comprehend how a group such as Sky

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<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.* 201.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.* 205.

<sup>331</sup> Stix, John: ‘Randy Rhodes Stumbles into the Spotlight’, *Guitar World*, 3, (May, 1982), 53. Cited in Waksman, Steve: ‘Rock Guitar since 1976’, *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed. By Victor Anand Coelho (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 126.

achieved such enormous mainstream success. Where Sky differed from the above-mentioned rock acts, was that at its centre was a mild-mannered classical-style guitarist rather than the stereotypical ‘Paganini-esque’ electric guitar speedsters that abounded at the time. Although *Toccata* was a ‘rocked-up’ version of Bach’s *Toccata and Fugue in d minor*, Williams’ guitar part in the arrangement is very typical of standard classical guitar playing and as such would have exposed a younger generation of listeners to that style. In fact, in using a repeated a note (achieved by tuning the b string down a tone) on the second string, while playing the melody with the thumb on lower strings, the part is very similar in style to *Asturias* by Albéniz, which is synonymous with the Spanish guitar. For a group such as Sky to achieve such high chart positions, competing with major pop acts and record labels, is truly remarkable. When viewed against the backdrop of the classical music scene of London in the 1960s and 1970s, it is easy to understand why some of Williams’ more popular projects were viewed with derision by some commentators but it is equally clear that these same projects may ultimately be seen in an entirely different light. Many musicologists, in recent years, have focused on music that has had a wide audience and therefore a strong cultural impact. In *Who needs Classical Music?* Julian Johnson questions the very point of composing music that very few people wish to consume. He turns on its head the argument that much popular music is of very little value because of its inherent commercialism:

The sheer presence of this [pop] music confirms its own validity. The reverse may well be case, too: it becomes equally meaningless or irrelevant to assert the musical value of work that appears to have no commercial value. In reply to the assertion that this music is good comes the question, “Good for whom?” Its lack of commercial success, following this logic, is de facto proof that it is effectively good for nobody: it has zero value.<sup>332</sup>

This may seem like a severe judgement, but the basic logic of commercialism is persuasive. In addition to this, musicologist Georgina Born, in *Rationalizing Culture* which explores the creation and impact of IRCAM (Pierre Boulez’s research group which was set up in 1977 to explore new methods of avant-garde

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<sup>332</sup> Johnson, Julian: *Who Needs Classical Music?*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16.



music composition), presents a more philosophical argument when she questions the future of some genres within the art music spectrum that have failed to capture the public's imagination:

From this perspective, the evidence of profound public antipathy to serialist music cannot be ignored and must be translated into a transformed compositional practice or risk a music that cannot communicate, because no one will listen.<sup>333</sup>

While the purpose of this study is in no way to dismiss or denigrate art music, it is interesting to note that while Williams has frequently been harshly judged by classical guitarists, many other performers have escaped such judgements because of a more conventional classical career-path.<sup>334</sup> Indeed, one example of this is the comparison of Williams' forays into rock music with Julian Bream's commission and performance of contemporary classical music. Williams was often criticised for projects such as *Sky* and the artist himself frequently refers to certain pieces and recordings with which he was not entirely happy. However, very few critics have questioned Bream's recordings in the same way. It is generally assumed that in performing and commissioning works by established classical composers, Bream was 'doing the right thing'. This attitude is an echo of a perception described by both Born and Johnson above, and implies that a small group of artists know what is good for the general public, even if the public themselves remain unmoved. In 1979, the critic Roger Hughes gave a dismissive review of *Sky*'s first album, questioning Williams' very motives for releasing this work:

What does an artist, whose performances of the guitar classics set a standard others strive for, find in music as inconsequential as this? Perhaps the album's achievement of a high position in the L.P. charts makes the question irrelevant.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Born, Georgina: *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*, (California: University of California Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>334</sup> Schneider, John: 'John Williams Plays the Movies', *Soundboard* Vol.24, No. 3, (1998), 82-83. In this review Schneider compares Williams' recording unfavourably to a similar recording by Itzhak Perlman. He states that 'Williams' efforts sound more like half-heard end-titles as one dodges the empty popcorn containers, heading up the ramp for the green glow of the exit signs. Is that glow of green really coming from Sony's bank account.' Schneider is clearly unimpressed and the implication is that the recording is motivated by financial concerns.

<sup>335</sup> Hughes, Roger: 'Easy Listening', *Gramophone*, Vol. 57, No. 676, (September, 1979), 526.

In a number of sources on the internet and in print, this quotation has been erroneously attributed to the guitarist/composer and reviewer John Duarte, and is often used as a method of illustrating the resistance among established classical guitarists to Williams' crossover music.<sup>336</sup> It may well be that many classical guitarists such as Duarte did not like Sky, but in truth, most kept relatively quiet on the subject. In reply to this quotation and its implication about financial motivation, Williams is keen to point out the reality of the fact that solo concerts have always been more profitable for him than ensembles, particularly those of the nature of Sky.

In all, being on my own was a far easier option! In addition, we had five or six crew on yearly retainers and paid all our recording costs, which for a cd would be a month in the studio. One result of tabloid and celebrity journalism is the false hype surrounding Top Ten single and album charts. Apart from some being one-week wonders, the fact is that the gap between the top few and the rest is enormous. The top bands and singers sell massively more than everyone else – we were with the 'everyone else'!<sup>337</sup>

Nevertheless, Hughes' review of Sky's debut album was not entirely negative, as he described the slower pieces on the album as 'quite beautiful' and a year later he was more positive in his appraisal of the next album:

This double album, recorded digitally (although the fact is only modestly recorded on the sleeve) and sounding very good indeed, provides an entertaining blend of rock instrumentals, often based on classical themes, cleverly thought through and impeccably played.<sup>338</sup>

While writers such as Hughes wrestled with the idea of Williams performing rock music, it is clear that rock journalists also struggled to come to terms with the image of a group of conservatively-clad classical musicians following in the footsteps of hell-raisers such as the Rolling Stones or Jimi Hendrix. In fact, keyboard player Francis Monkman did possess a good degree of credibility, having already played with rock bands like Procul Harem and Curved Air,

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<sup>336</sup> Starling, 276-277. Also in Richard Sliwa, *John Williams Biography 1980s*, Accessed 29 June, 2017, [www.plumcream.org](http://www.plumcream.org)

<sup>337</sup> Starling, 359.

<sup>338</sup> Hughes Roger: 'Easy Listening', *Gramophone*, Vol.58, No. 686, (July 1980), 68.

whereas bassist Herbie Flowers was one of the most sought after session musicians of the day, and famously created the sliding chordal bass-line for Lou Reed's *Walk on the Wild Side*, in 1972. In many ways the band's appearance and background was a reaction to the colourful imagery, shocking messages and limited instrumental competence of the punk generation, which came to prominence in the late 1970s. David Randall comments on the band's questionable rock credibility and contrasts this with the quality of their music: 'Yes, you may have thought Sky were uncool and somewhat studied at the time (they remained seated for much of their live shows) but – goodness me – the music has aged better than most.'<sup>339</sup>

Colin Bertram self-consciously paints himself as the target audience of Sky, while admitting that it might not have been the most credible rock act:

Having read biographies of others of my generation, whose first gigs featured the punk and ska bands of the day, it must seem a bit dull going to see a respectable band like Sky. But for a quiet kid from a comfortable middle-class background this was a step into a brave new world.<sup>340</sup>

It is true that much of the criticism attracted by the band, focused on Williams' involvement, or more accurately the *idea* of his involvement. While Sky was most definitely one of his more controversial projects, attracting as much criticism as praise, it is fair to say that it had a considerable cultural impact and provided a blueprint for future generations of classical musicians to venture into the rock and pop music genres. Nigel Kennedy, Yo-Yo Ma, The LA Guitar Quartet, The Kronos Quartet and Lang Lang are just some of the classical artists who have followed this example. It also acted as a bridge between genres, exposing many pop and rock music listeners to classical music, or at least a version of it.

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<sup>339</sup> Randall, David: 'Get Ready To Rock', Album Review Reissues Sky 1, Sky 2, Accessed 03 August, 2015. <http://getreadytorock.me.uk/blog/2014/12/album-review-sky-reissues-sky-sky-2/> Dec 13 2014

<sup>340</sup> Bertram, 16.

### 4.3 Africa

In 2001, John Williams embarked on one of his most adventurous musical detours with the release of *The Magic Box*, an album of African music, performed by a small group under the title John Williams and Friends, which is a name he has often used for various ensembles he has formed since the late 1970s. The album reflected Williams' fascination with African music and the way the guitar functions as a thread that binds together several differing cultural strands, from the Griot songs of Mali to the music of Madagascar, off the south coast of the continent. Kevin Dawe quotes the ethnomusicologist Cynthia Schmidt who notes that despite the guitar's undoubted influence on the music of several African countries 'fundamentally, guitar music is not defined by ethnicity and lacks the association with long-standing traditions.'<sup>341</sup> Despite this, Schmidt reveals that following the many independence struggles of the continent, one of the most surprising aspects has been the guitar's emergence 'as a symbol of national identity in various African countries.'<sup>342</sup> Banning Eyre gives a good account of some good examples of the guitar's ubiquitous presence throughout Africa.

In places like Mali and Madagascar, ancient instrumental traditions have inspired distinctive acoustic guitar finger-picking techniques. Elsewhere – in Zimbabwe, Guinea and Cameroon, for example – pre-guitar traditions have evolved into guitar based, electric 'afropop,' once again engendering and sounds unique in world music.<sup>343</sup>

Throughout *The Magic Box*, Williams employed the advice and input of the archivist, ethnomusicologist and composer Francis Bebey from Cameroon who composed some of the works on the album. Williams viewed the project as a process of immersing himself in a new culture and having listened to a compilation CD called *The Moon and the Banana Tree*, featuring various

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<sup>341</sup> Schmidt, Cynthia: 'The Guitar in Africa: The 1950s-1990s', special issue of *The World of Music*, Vol. 36/2, (1994), 5, Cited in Dawe, Kevin: *The New Guitarscape in Critical Theory, Cultural Practice and Musical Performance*, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 183.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>343</sup> Eyre, Banning: 'African Reinventions of the Guitar', *Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed. Victor Coelho, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 44.

guitarists from Madagascar, he was struck by the variety of different techniques and musical styles which were all being played on a guitar of some sort.<sup>344</sup>

He decided to devote himself to the study of African guitar music around the turn of the twenty-first century and with the help and advice of Bebey and some other colleagues (notably the South African guitarist Timothy Walker), he attempted to educate himself in the culture of African guitar for almost three years. One of the key decisions in arranging the music was the use of a steel-stringed acoustic guitar alongside his nylon model. This was unconventional but reflected the diversity of the African guitar sound and also reflected the simultaneous use of various different stringed instruments (such as the kora and ngoni) with guitar across the spectrum of African music. Williams chose to work with the renowned jazz guitarist John Etheridge for *The Magic Box* and they have collaborated since then on a regular basis. Williams felt that the steel-string/nylon combination would be a sonic fulcrum for the CD around which everything else was based: ‘In a way that was the lynchpin of the idea. It was kind of guitar-based, whatever else we did.’<sup>345</sup>

Etheridge was an interesting choice for Williams as a collaborator. Jazz is not an alien style to him given that his father was a noted jazz guitarist. Furthermore, in 1969 Williams became the first classical guitarist to play at Ronnie Scott’s legendary jazz club and he had worked with many great jazz musicians during his *Fly and Cube* recordings as well as his albums with Cleo Laine and Johnny Dankworth. Sky was also a project that veered into jazz at times, and he premiered many jazz-influenced works by figures such as André Previn, Paul Hart and Steve Gray. However, Williams has always remained resolutely a classical guitarist in all of these contexts. He expresses his musical voice in these situations through his interpretations and technique rather than by improvising. There are many jazz musicians who would blend very neatly with Williams’

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<sup>344</sup> Cooper, Colin: ‘The African Connection: John Williams: A New Departure (Part 1)’, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 19, No. 9, (May, 2001), 22.

<sup>345</sup> Cooper, Colin: ‘The African Connection: John Williams: A New Departure (Part 2)’, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 19, No.10, (June, 2001), 20.

precise and apparently flawless technique (for example the British player John McLaughlin) but Etheridge is an unusual choice with his idiosyncratic technique and what the *London Evening Standard* referred to as ‘his subversive jazz style’<sup>346</sup>. It seems that Etheridge suited Williams precisely because their approach to music is so different and the album is in many ways built around the thoroughness, technique and rhythmic drive of Williams in contrast to the loose, creative and off-the-cuff improvisations of Etheridge. Speaking to the *New Zealand Herald* in 2008, Williams outlined the benefits of working with opposing forces: ‘These days we play to each other’s strengths. I don’t try to improvise and he doesn’t try to play the classical. We simply use the different colours available to us.’<sup>347</sup> Indeed the pair enjoyed collaborating so much on this album that they have toured many times together and recorded *Places Between*, a live duet album from Dublin’s National Concert Hall in 2006.

On *The Magic Box*, the contrast in styles can be heard most sharply on Williams’ own composition *Musha Musiki* where the opening section is an elegant study of repeated note patterns in a minimalist style building to a powerful climax that leads to a wild middle section full of abandon, clearly showcasing Etheridge’s unique talent for improvisation. The second section derives its inspiration from Zimbabwean dance in which drummers play an ostinato rhythm, which is in turn accompanied by dancers who have tied shakers around their legs. Just as the duet of Bream and Williams represented a meeting of opposites within the narrow spectrum of the classical guitar in the 1970s, so the Etheridge/Williams combination goes even further, highlighting cultural, structural and notational differences between jazz, folk, popular and art music forms. As Josef Woodard stated in 2002: ‘At the group’s centre were Williams, a model of clarity on

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<sup>346</sup> Broughton, Simon: ‘John Williams, John Etheridge and Derek Gripper, Sam Wannamaker Playhouse’ *London Evening Standard*, 18 March (2014), Accessed 28 August, 2015. [www.standard.co.uk](http://www.standard.co.uk).

<sup>347</sup> Dart, William : ‘John Williams and John Etheridge at Auckland Town Hall’, *The New Zealand Herald*, March 13, (2008 ), Accessed 28 August, 2015. [www.m.nzherald.co.nz](http://www.m.nzherald.co.nz)

classical guitar, and John Etheridge on steel string, a looser player with jazz and folk instincts.<sup>348</sup>

Another important decision made by Williams on *The Magic Box* was to use acoustic double bass instead of an electric bass, which is a mainstay of most African ensembles. Williams admitted in 2001, that although electric bass was undeniably prevalent throughout the genre, he simply did not like the sound in the context of this project. In a sense, there is an echo here of the ‘myth of acousticity’ argument, with Williams on the other side of the fence on this occasion. He explains his choice as follows:

Generally in African and world music, they tend to use an electric bass guitar all the time, which I don’t think works well because African music predominantly has an acoustic feel to it. I’m not saying that all the pop groups could do anything else other than what they do. They need to have the kind of sound they do because it’s already a mixed crossover thing when you’ve got African pop music. But if you’re trying to be more traditional in the sense of the sound, it has to be acoustic.<sup>349</sup>

In one sense the choice of acoustic double bass is authentic because of the reasons outlined above and yet Williams deliberately ignores the fact that it is not found in many African ensembles. What the instrument does add to the group is the sense that as opposed to the many crossovers, which occur between the popular and traditional African music genres, this project can be seen to be more of a classical/folk fusion. The double bass adds depth to the sound in a way that electric bass might add rhythmic vitality. The player in question is Chris Laurence who underlines this aspect by playing, both with and without the bow on various tracks from the album. The playing of Laurence and of Paul Clarvis on a huge variety of percussion instruments lends individuality to this particular recording. Although in some ways Williams can be seen to be searching for authenticity in this recording, he realises that it is ultimately unachievable because of his identity and nationality: ‘We don’t want to just copy African traditional music. Why copy? You might as well listen to the original thing and

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<sup>348</sup> Woodard, Josef: ‘A visit to the Spirit of Africa’, *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 2002, Accessed 28 August, 2015. [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com)

<sup>349</sup> Cooper, (Part 1), 20.

not just five white guys from North London.<sup>350</sup> The question raised by this point is that if the style cannot be accurately reproduced by ‘five white guys’ then why bother making the recording at all? Williams’ motivation for recording this album is clearly to expose guitarists to African music, which has been composed either on guitar or other plucked stringed instruments. Reviewing for *Classical Guitar*, Colin Cooper comments on the project from this perspective:

The infiltration of the classical guitar into African music is a fascinating subject. John Williams’ new record may well do something to stimulate the reverse process [...] Even the dyed-in-the-wool neo-colonials, who are opposed to mixed marriages, will have to admit that there is a lot more to African music than drumming. In releasing some of the heady aromas of its rich and varied melodic tradition, John Williams has revealed an enormous number of further possibilities for the guitar and for those who listen to it.<sup>351</sup>

In addition to the above-mentioned players, Richard Harvey played a huge number of instruments throughout the album from Indian bamboo pipe and dulcimer to various traditional whistles. As always Harvey’s playing seems intuitively linked to Williams’ and he gives the album a sort of ‘world-music’ sensitivity.

Francis Bebey contributed five compositions to the album and performs his specially written song *Engome* with Williams, Etheridge, Clarvis and Harvey. This song has a haunting melody, which is pentatonic and modal using the flattened seventh and a strong rhythmic pulse to great effect. *Engome* had originally been composed as an instrumental duet for sanza (thumb piano) and guitar.

*Maki* is another piece on the album that can be categorised as ‘classical/folk fusion’. The piece was composed by the legendary guitarist Paul-Bert Rahasimanana of Madagascar, better known as ‘Rossy’. The name *Maki* literally means *Lemur* and the busy movement of those creatures so associated with Madagascar, are simulated as Williams performs an endless stream of delicate

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<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

<sup>351</sup> Cooper, (Part 2), 22.



scale runs, arpeggios and tremolo. The piece was originally played on a valiha, which is a bamboo harp. Williams describes the structure and sound of the instrument:

Traditionally – this is going back before modern technology – they used to slice strands of bamboo down the side and soak them in water so that they shrank, and then they’d stick little bits of wood to make little bridges. The strands acted as strings. It was very, very quiet but nowadays of course they’ve developed it into an instrument where they use actual strings fastened down to the bamboo. It has a magical sound.<sup>352</sup>

Sensing that the sound of a modern classical guitar might seem a little robust for a piece written for such an ethereal and delicate instrument, Williams chose to record his part on a requinto guitar but the over-riding feature of the track is the sonorous lower string section of bowed double-bass and three cellos, which underpins the entire piece playing simple primary chords to great effect.<sup>353</sup>

As an emotional climax, the album features the group performing a version of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, the South African national anthem, with an African children’s choir, giving some political and emotional resonance to the collaboration between English and African musicians. Ultimately, *The Magic Box* was successful and garnered extremely positive reviews. Melinda Bargreen, the *Seattle Times* music critic described it as a ‘rich trove of all kinds of musical influences’ and attempted to outline the scope of the project by referencing some of its more extreme influences such as: ‘...blues-classical music from Zaire, Portuguese-influenced sounds from the Cape Verde Islands, thumb-piano influenced music from Cameroon, and considerably more.’<sup>354</sup>

However, praise for Williams’ approach to African music was not absolutely universal. After hearing him play two of the Francis Bebey pieces in a concert, *Classical Guitar* reviewer Tim Panting wrote the following:

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<sup>352</sup> Cooper, (Part 2), 20.

<sup>353</sup> A Requinto guitar is a ‘soprano guitar’, which is tuned a fourth higher than a standard guitar.

<sup>354</sup> Bargreen, Melinda: ‘The Magic Box, John Williams, Sony Classical’, *Seattle Times*, 20 October, 2002, Accessed 29 August, 2015. [www.seattletimes.com](http://www.seattletimes.com)

It is interesting though that with all his powers as a guitarist and musician he seems to miss the fact that African music is almost all about ‘feel’ and not virtuosity. Unless you allow a little roughness and sway, then the music sounds twee.<sup>355</sup>

Williams responded to this criticism in an interview with the same magazine a year later by stating that he regarded the assumption that all African music must be about rhythm and roughness as a ‘neo-colonial thing’ and ‘rather patronising’.<sup>356</sup> Throughout this interview, Williams drew attention to the fact that a tradition of string-based music has existed in Africa for centuries and yet sometimes there is an assumption from Europeans that African music was all about drums until the colonial powers arrived. Williams feels that in opening up to those subtler aspects of African music, it is possible to understand it on a deeper level and better grasp the influence it has had on various different global cultures. He explains as follows:

And that’s what Africa is. It’s not all drumming. Sometimes people think it sounds Caribbean. And where did Caribbean music come from? It came from the coastal regions of West Africa, brought by slaves. And the rhythms and cross-rhythms in Venezuelan harp and guitar music – they don’t traditionally come from South American drumming. They come from stringed instruments. And the style, as you can tell, doesn’t come from the Spanish guitar style of playing, it comes from a harp style of playing, from the West African kora.<sup>357</sup>

This is a very rare instance of John Williams responding to criticism. It is unusual for Tim Panting’s remarks to evoke such a response although it seems that the judgement of his performance bothered him less than the generalisation about African music. To further illustrate Williams’ approach, it is possible to explore the writings of Bebey himself who hinted at a similar point in 1966, in his book, *African Music – A People’s Art*. Bebey explains as follows:

The Westerner who wishes to understand the authentic music of Africa must be willing to reject the notion that it is “primitive” music consisting merely of rhythmic noises. This simple act of

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<sup>355</sup> Panting, Tim: ‘John Williams Concert in Aid of The European Youth Guitar Ensemble’, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Volume 19, No. 2, (2000), 18-19.

<sup>356</sup> Cooper, (Part 1), Vol.19, No. 9, 25.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

rejection will “open his ears” and allow him to discover gradually that African music in many respects resembles his own.<sup>358</sup>

Bebey pleads with Western audiences to avoid having pre-conceived ideas about what African music should and should not be. However, most reviewers have been favourable towards *The Magic Box*. Josef Woodard of the *Los Angeles Times* noted that ‘...Williams and his group captured an African-rooted spirit in a prime example of sensitive musical adaptation.’<sup>359</sup>

Williams has explained that although he had hoped that this album would inspire more guitarists to explore African music, he has been slightly disappointed with the results in that regard:

I wanted it in a way to be slightly educational – and I mean educational for guitarists – and I have to say that by and by they haven’t been quick enough to take it up in a big way. I felt that the album was addressed to guitarists – in that I was saying that there is a massive amount of music out there, which you can get such a lot of enjoyment out of. For example in Madagascar, (which obviously is an island off the coast of Africa) there’s a recording called *The Moon and the Banana Tree* (on the label Seanachai Recordings from the US) which features eight to ten guitarists playing their music: it’s a fantastic album. There is music to be played and guitarists have often come up to me and ask where can I get the sheet-music. In fact, that’s one example of what’s wrong with guitarists today, in my opinion. I’m talking about people who’ve been to college. I always say ‘you buy the CD and you learn the piece off it’. People have not done much of this – I suppose it could be that they are not taken with African music.<sup>360</sup>

Although he expresses disappointment that more guitarists have not explored African music in the same way, Williams has been very impressed in recent times by the emergence of the young South-African guitarist Derek Gripper. Gripper plays kora music on solo classical guitar and Williams has been one of his most staunch advocates. Williams describes how he included Gripper in a concert series which he was organising at the Globe Theatre:

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<sup>358</sup> Bebey, Francis: *African Music – A People’s Art*, Translated by Josephine Bennett, (Westport US: Lawrence Hill, 1969, 1975), 2.

<sup>359</sup> Woodard, Josef, A Visit to the Spirit of Africa, Accessed 28 August, 2015. [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com)

<sup>360</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

Just two days before I planned to meet with [Globe Musical Director] Bill Barclay, to finalise the programmes, I received these CDs of Derek Gripper. I had never heard of him but was so knocked out by them, I immediately changed some of the plans and put him in for two dates! [...] he plays amazing transcriptions of kora music, mostly of the great kora player Toumani Diabaté – incredible! What he is doing in his life with educational and other projects is inspiring, and to be honest, I think it is where the guitar should be going.<sup>361</sup>

Williams is excited by Gripper's style as well as his desire to use the guitar to further explore the rich musical heritage of Africa. His advocacy of Gripper is another indication of his commitment to the guitar's role in the evolving culture of African music.

#### **4.4 Venezuela – *El Diablo Suelto***

As a teenager, John Williams attended the *Accademia Musicale Chigiana* in Sienna in Italy, an elite summer school where some of the most celebrated musicians in the world, including Segovia, gave masterclasses. Williams first met Daniel Barenboim in Sienna and greatly enjoyed socialising and talking with other musicians. The Venezuelan guitarist Alirio Diaz also studied with Segovia at these classes and became good friends with Williams. In fact Williams has claimed that he learned more from Diaz than from Segovia and credits his friend with his first exposure to the music of Barrios during their time at Sienna.<sup>362</sup> Diaz also introduced Williams to some of the musical heritage of Venezuela, where the four-stringed miniature guitar or 'cuatro' is the national instrument. Diaz had particularly introduced him to the music of Antonio Lauro, a fine guitarist/composer who had studied alongside Diaz with Raul Borges, a celebrated Venezuelan guitar teacher and friend of Barrios. Williams had indeed performed and recorded the music of Lauro throughout his career but had not fully explored the traditions of Venezuelan music until the *El Diablo Suelto* (2003) project began in earnest.

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<sup>361</sup> Williams, John: Derek Gripper reviews page, Accessed 17 February, 2017. [www.derekgripper.com/about/press](http://www.derekgripper.com/about/press)

<sup>362</sup> Starling, 325.

In a striking programme note for the album, Williams writes a quite detailed summary of Venezuelan musical and cultural history, using material sourced and translated by his wife, Kathy Panama. He also enunciates his personal gratitude to Diaz, who arranged all but one of the 26 pieces on the album:

[H]aving first met Alirio Diaz when I was a boy of 12, I remember now, fifty years later, with humility and affection, how much I have learnt from him and just what an inspiration he has been to me in my love of Venezuelan music.<sup>363</sup>

The album is also a direct result of the efforts of two music producers, Count Peter Hamilton MacDomhnaill and Michel d’Arcangues Marquis d’Iranda, who founded Caroni Music, a publishing company with the aim of preserving, promoting and producing reliable editions and recordings of Venezuelan music. They approached Alirio Diaz, who had performed many of his own unpublished arrangements of Venezuelan folk songs throughout a career spanning over five decades, and secured the rights to publish quality editions of his work. To various different degrees, Caroni music encountered many legal problems associated with securing the rights for much of this music. However, they persevered and John Williams almost immediately set about recording a selection of Venezuelan music, which helped to raise the profile of their publications.

Williams was very anxious to play this music and convinced Sony to support the project. Four of the selected pieces were arranged as duets to be played with a cuatro, and the Venezuelan musician/composer Alfonso Montes was drafted in to play on these tracks. Montes also contributed a very delicate solo guitar piece to the album entitled *Preludio de Adios*, which expresses the composer’s sadness at having to leave his Venezuelan home in 2000 and go into exile as a result of his opposition to the Hugo Chavez regime.<sup>364</sup> Montes’ performance greatly enhances the album and his solo guitar piece is arguably the most popular work on the album. The composers most represented on the album are Antonio Lauro and Vicente Emilio Sojo and compositions by nine other composers also feature. Just

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<sup>363</sup> Williams, John: ‘Notes on *El Diablo Suelto*’, SK90451, (Sony Music Entertainment, 2003).

<sup>364</sup> Unknown Author: Biography page, Accessed 28 August, 2015. [www.monteskircher.com](http://www.monteskircher.com)

as the *Magic Box* album reflects the presence of guitar and various other plucked stringed instruments across Africa, *El Diablo Suelto* performs the same task for Venezuelan folk and popular music, with the narrower task of covering the musical traditions of a single country as opposed to an entire continent, leading to a satisfying sense of cohesion and thoroughness throughout the album.

With this recording, the backing of Sony and indeed the celebrity of Williams, could be deemed to have significantly raised the international profile of Venezuelan guitar traditions (and indeed that of the cuatro) in a somewhat similar fashion to the effect that Williams had upon the music of Barrios in the 1970s (as discussed in the next chapter). Furthermore, Barrios himself forms part of the story behind the growth of the guitar in Venezuela. During the period of his career when he masqueraded as Chief Nitsuga Mangoré and performed in full Amerindian costume onstage, Barrios performed a remarkable twenty-five concerts over a period of seven weeks in 1932. As Richard Stover points out: ‘Many of those who attended his concerts had never heard a classical guitarist before, but were intrigued by the opportunity to see an Indian Chief from the jungles of Paraguay play the guitar.’<sup>365</sup>

Despite his difficulties elsewhere, Barrios was highly acclaimed in Venezuela, particularly during this period and he left an indelible mark upon many musicians who witnessed his unique talents. Williams describes this extended visit of Barrios as something of a catalyst which enabled the further development of the classical guitar in Venezuela, particularly referencing the influence he had upon the talented multi-instrumentalist Raul Borges:

A local guitarist, Raul Borges, became Mangoré’s friend, joining him in concerts and learning from him. Borges also played violin, piano and importantly, the cuatro, which gave him a real understanding of popular music. From that time Raul Borges became the ‘father’ of the guitar in Venezuela, teaching a whole generation of players including the composer-guitarist Antonio Lauro and Alirio Diaz.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Stover, Richard: ‘Agustin Barrios Mangoré – His Life and Music’, *Guitar Review*, No. 100, (1995), 18.

<sup>366</sup> Williams, John: ‘Notes on *El Diablo Suelto*’, SK90451, (Sony Music Entertainment, 2003).

Borges' *Vals Venezolano* also features on the album, which is apt, considering his vast contribution to the musical heritage of his native country. Williams has pointed out that Latin American music had been dominated by drums and flutes before the invasion of the Spanish in the sixteenth century, in contrast to Africa, where a myriad of ancient stringed instruments already existed.<sup>367</sup> Venezuela's rich tradition in popular song owes much to the synthesis of native Venezuelan music with both Spanish music and African music, which was introduced by the slave trade. The following is a description from the folklorists Juan Liscano and Charles Seeger to accompany an album of Venezuelan dances for the American Library of Congress and serves to illustrate one example of how the disparate cultures of Spain and Africa exerted their influence on Venezuelan music:

It is interesting to compare this *folia* with *fulias* recorded in the negro region of Barlovento (Miranda) which are also contained in this album. Although both melodies are played on the same occasions (the Velorios de Santo or the Feast of Cruz de Mayo), there are notable differences in musical order. While in the Margaritan *folias* the Spanish elements are predominant, new rhythmic action is introduced into the Negro *fulias* which serves to enhance their beauty. On the other hand, the Negroes of Barlovento call the *folia* 'fulia' while the inhabitants of the island of Margarita conserve the phonetic purity of the name. The *folia* is a melody of Spanish origin to which numerous references exist. In Spain however, the *folia* is a dance; in Venezuela it is only a song.<sup>368</sup>

As indicated in the above example, many Venezuelan dances have specific relationships with particular festivals and religious feasts, and Williams mentions a synthesis of Spanish religious music with African 'devil dances' that results in a unique Venezuelan musical identity.<sup>369</sup> However, this could be said of much South American music and it is fair to say that there are distinct social reasons for the strong African traits that can be felt in this music. Ana Maria Rosado notes that as the South American colonies slowly adapted to emancipation throughout the nineteenth century, freed slaves found that becoming a musician was a useful

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<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>368</sup> Liscano Juan: *Folk Music of Venezuela*, (USA: Lib of Congress, 1939), 25.

<sup>369</sup> Williams, John: 'Notes on *El Diablo Suelto* ', SK90451, (Sony Music Entertainment, 2003).

professional option, and one which the whites and creoles (people of European descent born in South America) felt was beneath their own station:

Astutely, free blacks learned to play the European instruments to which the colonial aristocracy danced and by which its soldiers marched. Leaving a rhythmic footprint upon the music they performed was a natural next step in this process of “creolization” or creation of a new culture from pre-existing forms.<sup>370</sup>

The title track of the album is an example of a European waltz, which has been transformed by the African tendency to use cross-rhythms. Williams notes that in Spanish music it is common, for example, to alternate between 3/4 and 6/8 time signatures but it is the simultaneous use of these two and other time signatures that gives Venezuelan music a distinctively ‘African’ sensibility. Rosado refers to this juxtaposition as ‘an African hemiola’ and notes its use in the work of Antonio Lauro.<sup>371</sup>

The *Aguinaldo*, which is part of a suite of five miniature pieces by Vicente Emilio Sojo provides a concise snapshot of the history of this music in one brief work. Firstly, the composer Sojo, was an immensely important figure, who, from the early twentieth century onwards, taught composition to a whole generation of fine musicians, including Antonio Jose Ramos, Carlos Figueredo, Antonio Lauro and the founder of El Sistema, Jose Antonio Abreu. However, he also had a great interest in the folk music of Venezuela and performed a similar role within his country to that of Béla Bartok in Hungary. In the Caroni editions of his guitar music, he is dubbed ‘The father of Venezuelan music’<sup>372</sup> and his importance to the cause of Venezuelan music history is emphasised in this account:

He worked with devotion in the research, compilation and harmonisation of a vast repertoire of traditional Venezuelan music which would otherwise certainly have been lost and would have disappeared from the musical memory of his country.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Rosado, Ana Maria: ‘Latin American Rhythms and Modern Guitar Music’, *Soundboard*, Vol.35, No. 2, (2009), 11-12.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.* 14.

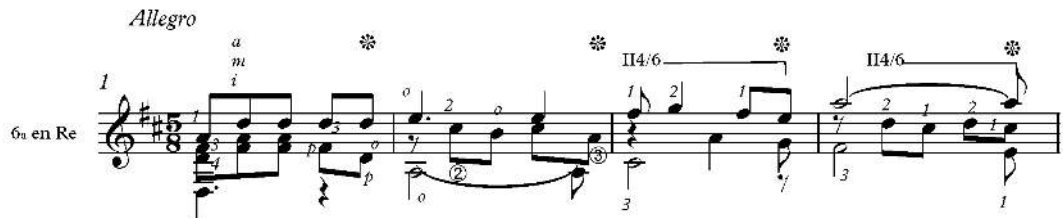
<sup>372</sup> Diaz, Alirio: *Vicente Emilio Sojo*, (Arcanges: Caroni, 2000), iii.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*



The piece itself is in a quirky 5/8 time signature whereby the last quaver of each bar sound slightly dragged, giving a very unique sound. In Ex. 4.4.1, these ‘dragged beats’ are marked with an asterisk:

Ex. 4.4.1 Vicente Emilio Soho, *Aguinaldo*, 1-4.



Once again, this is an example of a piece specifically associated with a festival, in this case Christmas. Williams’ interpretation attempts to realise both the rhythmic and festive nature of the dance. Another important figure featured on the album is Ignacio ‘Indio’ Figueredo, who was a celebrated performer on the Llanera harp, a Venezuelan harp, similar to the harps of neighbouring Latin American countries such as Paraguay. In the two works by Figueredo, Williams can be heard to imitate the harp, dragging the finger rapidly across the strings in a similar way to the use of rapid arpeggiation in Spanish works, such as his own transcription of *Sevilla* by Isaac Albéniz. One of the Figueredo pieces is *Los Cuajaritos*, an example of a *pasaje* dance, which Williams describes as a variation on the *zoropo* dance, which is in turn a Venezuelan version of the Spanish *fandango*. This piece is played with *gusto* and is an appropriate opening track for an album, which excellently represents the colour and imagination of Venezuela’s national music.

If Sojo is his own nation’s ‘Béla Bartók’, then perhaps it is apt to label Antonio Lauro as something akin to a Venezuelan ‘Astor Piazzola’, with his style involving the development of ideas from within his own heritage and the use of more complex ‘European-style’ chord-progressions and modulations than many of his contemporaries. He is a composer whose guitar music has been performed extensively for many years and was perhaps more than anyone else, a beneficiary of Alirio Diaz’s pioneering work in concertising around Europe throughout the

1950s and 1960s. Lauro has written large-scale suites such as the beautiful *Suite Venezolano* and *4 Valses Venezolanos*, but Williams opted not to record these for this recording and although he included eight works by Lauro, they are not placed together but rather scattered throughout the album. It is as though because of the almost scholarly approach taken by the performer, he did not wish Lauro to overshadow the work of others, despite making him the most represented composer on the album. However, he makes the point that he had a stronger reason for omitting the larger Lauro works, owing to the more overt European style of these compositions. This is a very valid point as they are similar in form and style to some of the works of Villa-Lobos or Piazzolla. Therefore he felt that they might not fit in with the overall theme of the album:

The thing about the *Suite Venezolano* or the Venezuelan Waltzes is that they are not in a typically Venezuelan idiom so I wanted to keep within the theme of Venezuelan popular song as opposed to the more classical European approach of some of those other works.<sup>374</sup>

One of Lauro's best-known works to feature on the album is *Seis por derecho* (1977), which makes a prominent feature of what Rosado refers to as 'apart-playing', which, in an ensemble context involves different instruments playing in different time signatures which function well together.<sup>375</sup> She describes the challenges of performing this type of piece on a solo instrument:

One of the best known of the guitar pieces that explore these rhythms is the *Seis por derecho* (1977) by Antonio Lauro of Venezuela. Its subtitle "joropo, al estilo del arpa venezolana" (in the style of a Venezuelan harp) reveals its secret. The interpretation of this type of music on a polyphonic instrument such as the guitar or the piano requires accenting both meters within the same measure to highlight the conflict and thus bring out the excitement and drive of the music.<sup>376</sup>

*El Diablo Suelto* was universally well received, with Ken Smith of *Gramophone* noting that the guitar is 'one of the most culturally portable of all instruments'

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<sup>374</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>375</sup> Rosado, 14.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*

and ‘a one-stop point of musical reference.’<sup>377</sup> Smith credits Williams with being ‘an inveterate musical explorer’<sup>378</sup> and praises the research and depth of understanding displayed by the performer:

The music’s visceral appeal, as Williams points out in his highly cogent insert notes, stems largely from the polyrhythmic complexity of African music meeting the metric consistency of Europe (such as in the collection’s title piece, a typically fiery variation on the European waltz).<sup>379</sup>

The reviewer indicates that Alfonso Montes’ performance on cuatro adds to the authenticity of the recording:

Much of the recording’s appeal comes not only from Williams, but from the periodic appearance of Alfonso Montes performing on the cuatro, a four-stringed variation on early Venezuelan guitars that has since evolved into an icon of national culture. Not only does this seemingly simple music reveal hidden layers of varied richness, but the sound itself is filled with an unmistakable sense of place.<sup>380</sup>

David Hurwitz of *classicstoday.com*, praises the recording for its ‘exceptional solo playing that is both rhythmically charged and lyrically impulsive’<sup>381</sup> and also notes that ‘it would be difficult to imagine a finer tribute to a remarkable and appealing musical tradition.’<sup>382</sup> Hurwitz also comments upon the remarkable sound quality of this recording achieved by the renowned engineer Mike Stavrou, a long-time collaborator with Williams, and praises the performer’s remarkable technique, which holds up under such a strong glare:

Sony’s engineers offer extremely close-up realistic sound that puts the players right in front of you – but happily Williams can withstand the scrutiny and there’s virtually no distracting squeaking of fingers across the frets such as mars so many guitar recitals. In a word: Brilliant.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> Smith, Ken: ‘El Diablo Suelto, John Williams’, *Gramophone*, Archive, Accessed 28 August, 2015. [www.gramophone.co.uk](http://www.gramophone.co.uk)

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>381</sup> Hurwitz, David: ‘El Diablo Suelto – Guitar Music of Venezuela’ 13 September, 2003. Accessed 6 August, 2015. [www.classicstoday.com](http://www.classicstoday.com)

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*

Josef Woodard of the *Los Angeles Times* exudes a general admiration of Venezuelan music and more specifically of Williams: ‘Post-Dudamel, Los Angeles knows something of Venezuelan music, and thankfully, plenty about the clean-burning expressive mastery of Williams’ guitar.’<sup>384</sup>

Reviewing a live performance of the works featured on the album for the guitar journal *Soundboard* in 2004, J. Andrew Dickinson focuses on the repertoire and employs a florid description: ‘Each piece was like a miniature treasure that had been found on the beach, full of sparkling, zesty dance rhythms that had been slightly corroded by the salt water of melancholy and tortured souls.’<sup>385</sup>

*El Diablo Suelto* managed to focus public attention, both on the vibrant and elegant style of popular Latin American guitar music, and on the career of Alirio Diaz, a Venezuelan pioneer who has worked tirelessly throughout his career to popularise this style.

#### **4.5 John Williams and jazz**

John Williams’ first exposure to jazz aficionados came when he appeared at the legendary Ronnie Scott’s Jazz Club in Soho, London. His appearances at the club represented the first time a classical musician had played in Ronnie Scott’s and the occasion was deemed important enough to be documented by celebrated director Christopher Nupen in a film for the BBC in 1971. Frequent appearances at this venue helped to forge strong connections between Williams and various jazz performers, which would prove to be very fruitful. Although he freely admits that he does not improvise, Williams feels that because his father was an accomplished jazz guitarist, he has an innate ability to play in this style. An early example of this is his elegantly played version of *Nuages* by Django Reinhardt on the *Changes* album in 1971. However, the general public may not have guessed that this was the case as he presented himself in quite a conservative light during

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<sup>384</sup> Woodard, Josef: ‘John Williams at the Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts’, Posted on Oct 21 2010. Accessed 06 August, 2015. [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com).

<sup>385</sup> Dickinson, J. Andrew and: ‘GFA 2003 in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (2004), 87.



Ex. 4.5.2 André Previn, *Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra*, First violin part, 73-74

Musical score for Violin 1, measures 73-74. The score is in 4/4 time and begins with a *mf* dynamic. Measure 73 features an 'exaggerated' slur over a series of notes, including a flat sign. Measure 74 contains two triplet markings over groups of three notes.

The soloist borrows a figure from the low strings and mimics jazz-guitar style vamping in bar 77 (see Ex. 4.5.3), playing bass notes with the thumb and alternating with three-note chords. This figure provides an interesting counterpoint with the solo clarinet melody, producing a quirky cross-rhythmic effect against the more predictable guitar part.

Ex. 4.5.3 André Previn, *Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra*, 77-78

Musical score for Clarinet in Bb and Guitar, measures 77-78. The Clarinet part (top staff) is in 4/4 time and begins with a *mp* dynamic. The Guitar part (bottom staff) is in 4/4 time and features a series of chords. The score shows a change in time signature from 4/4 to 3/4 between measures 77 and 78.

The snare drum enters to accent the upper guitar chords three bars later. Previn's skill as an orchestrator can be observed clearly at bar 85, where his complex jazz chord-voicings give colour to an otherwise simple E Major progression. This expressive writing with unsettling 'wrong note' chords calls to mind the work of Joaquin Rodrigo, as does the guitar solo in bar 88, with the A and B $\flat$  bass-notes clashing very deliberately (see Ex. 4.5.4).

Ex. 4.5.4, André Previn, *Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra*, 88-90



Daniel Corr suggests another influence upon Previn's style:

Previn may have been inspired not only by Williams' suggestion to write for the guitar, but by the peerless guitar compositions of Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968), Previn's one-time Beverly Hills composition teacher.<sup>387</sup>

The second movement is a quiet and thoughtful movement, which appears to set the tone of the finale, by establishing a more reserved sound for both orchestra and soloist. Corr describes it as 'more American, with a sultry and smokey [sic] atmosphere, punctuated by a Coplandesque fanfare and a concise and idiomatic cadenza.'<sup>388</sup>

The third movement features the orchestra and soloist performing quite serene and melodic music, while being intermittently interrupted by a noisy jazz bebop trio (complete with electric guitar), which plays complex and lively riffs and indulges in something of a duel with the orchestra. Corr notes:

Striking indeed is the superimposition, in true Ivesian fashion, of a jazz trio playing unrelated bebop over a mellifluous bed of strings and classical guitar during the *andante finale*. This Quotation Music-era concerto seems to beg the question: will the ghost of popular music forever haunt any high-minded exploits to which the guitar may endeavor?<sup>389</sup>

Although the last point is well made, it must be noted that it represents the perspective of neither Previn nor Williams for that matter, but of Corr himself. It is clear from the career paths of both Williams and Previn that they both value jazz, popular, folk and classical music equally, and while the piece certainly

<sup>387</sup> Corr, Daniel: 'John Williams – The Great Guitar Concerto Commissions', *Soundboard*, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2013), 63.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*

reflects the conflict between popular and classical music, the composer has never indicated that he wished to denigrate any particular style. As the music careers towards a climax the rhythmic and harmonic clash between these opposing sections becomes more apparent before ultimately the soloist and orchestra are left to bring the work to a peaceful close. In the words of the composer ‘and finally the guitar has the last word, quietly but obviously victorious.’<sup>390</sup>

Previn’s concerto is a work of real colour, and it is tempting to wonder why it has not been performed more often since its composition. Corr noted the following:

The piece is striking – not least in its obscurity, as it may be the only guitar concerto penned by a truly household name the world over. The recording, conducted by Previn, was nominated for a Grammy in 1973 and had been inexplicably unavailable in digital remaster until 2009.<sup>391</sup>

Corr’s remarks highlight the fact that, despite having been initially well-received, the work faded out of the public’s imagination. Williams has expressed an opinion that the composer’s idea to contrast the bebop trio with the orchestra in the finale could be the source of the piece’s relative lack of recognition:

I think it’s a great piece, let down a little by the last movement. It is really interesting because I do find it surprising that its not played more often. I often lay awake at night thinking about how to resuscitate that piece and I’ve come to the conclusion that the last movement with the Barney Kessel-style interruptions, doesn’t quite work. I like the idea of it but I just feel that the style is a little dated. I did suggest to him that this could be improved and I feel that if I did it he would approve. I feel that if that section could be changed – with some of it written out because I’m not an improviser – John Etheridge and myself could play in those jazzy sections with the drums and so on in the background. I know the idea was originally to have a contrast between the jazz band and the orchestra but I do feel that musically we could achieve that contrast without the absolute necessity of the soloist dropping out. Although I’m a classical player I’ve had to play fast jazzy passages a lot during my career, I particularly recall some very rapid playing in *Let the Music Take You* with Cleo Laine and John Dankworth. So, with a bit of

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<sup>390</sup> Previn, André: ‘Notes on *John Williams/André Previn, Previn, Ponce Guitar Concertos*’, M31963, (Columbia, Columbia Masterworks, 1973).

<sup>391</sup> Corr, 63.



lively jazz in those sections with everyone scampering around, I think it would have given that piece an enormous lift.<sup>392</sup>

The guitar works of Patrick Gowers (1936-2014) provide a very good example of a composer utilising Williams' unique and varied background and sensibilities. Throughout these works the classical virtuosity and technique of Williams is combined with jaunty jazz rhythms and lyrical 'filmic' sections with compelling results. Gowers was a very successful film and television music composer and in fact his *Rhapsody for guitar, electric guitars and organ* (1972) featured Williams playing electric guitars as well as the traditional acoustic nylon-stringed guitar. The *Chamber Concerto for Guitar* of 1972, arose from a request that Williams made of Gowers during one of his residencies at Ronnie Scott's for some jazz-style arrangements, to perform at the club and although Gowers did not produce anything suitable, his ideas led him to produce this one movement thirty-minute work, which shows remarkable understanding of the guitar. Williams often feels that composers who work in film and TV tend not to receive the same critical respect as composers who work solely within the contemporary classical genre. However, one of the benefits of performing the works of a composer such as Gowers, is that his music has a fascinating variant quality, with plaintive simple melodies, jazz rhythms and folk-like harmonies placed alongside dissonant avant-garde techniques to create a constantly changing musical landscape. Despite all this, Williams has expressed dissatisfaction with elements of Gowers' compositional style, particularly with reference to the way in which he wrote for guitar:

[T]o be honest Patrick was sometimes pretty impractical and had very fixed ideas about what he had written and what exactly he wants the music to sound like. It's twice as difficult as it sounds. And I feel with a lot of his music he has written great sections and I feel that there are also a couple of patchy sections which sort of let down the entire piece, despite there being so much good music in there. I could never talk him out of what he wanted and he didn't write guitaristically at all. His music was fiercely difficult and I believe that would've led to it not being taken up by other people so much.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*

This work and indeed the *Rhapsody* show how film and television composers often avoid the rigorous adherence to a particular sound or set of conventions that feature in much music from the classical, jazz and popular genres. Gowers' music for the 1978 film *Stevie*, also featured Williams as a soloist and because of the reflective nature of the work, the music is less virtuosic in general than Gowers' other guitar-based works. Indeed much of the film draws on a familiar descending theme ('Stevie's Theme') and the orchestra often seems to support the guitar, adding colour and depth, rather than rhythmically engaging with the soloist as in earlier works. The music from *Stevie* was later condensed into the *Stevie Concerto*, which was performed a number of times but never recorded. This is a work with which Williams was especially pleased, although he does indicate that Gowers was again quite intransigent with regard to the playability of his music:

In the first movement of the *Stevie Concerto* he used pedal notes very effectively. For example he used a B minor tuning with low b and f # in the bass. And that worked really well. I used two guitars for it to change between the lower tuning and standard. The slow movement was okay but it was a bit awkward technically and it did get a bit dreary in the middle. The last movement was a simple tune which had gone back to the B minor tuning and I think this would have worked really well if he'd just chosen simpler chords; I'm not referring to his choice of chords as such but rather the spacing of the voices in those chords. He organised the chords in such a way that they were awkward and actually *sounded* awkward to play.<sup>394</sup>

The Paul Hart *Concerto for Guitar and Jazz Orchestra* (1987) gives a good insight into Williams' musical values and tastes. The piece came about because, as curator of the South Bank Festival in London, Williams asked Paul Hart and the National Youth Jazz Orchestra of the United Kingdom to perform. Hart then wrote this piece with Williams as soloist and a concert and recording followed. The idea of playing with young jazz musicians appealed enormously to Williams and the joyous and expressive piece which resulted, gave great validation to the project. Although the guitar-writing is idiomatic of the traditional classical style and makes huge demands of the soloist, (particularly in solo/episodic material) this aspect is integrated seamlessly into the general feel of the piece. Hart manages to combine his excellent skills as an orchestrator with a great sense of

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<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*

daring which pervades the work. Williams remarked that Hart ‘writes really well for the guitar and has a performer’s sensibility about what is going to really come off in performance.’<sup>395</sup> The beautiful and sensitive xylophone solo in the second movement provides relief from the rhythmic buoyancy of the opening movement, and the third movement injects the work with an infectious sense of fun with its frenzied bluegrass ‘Plymouth hoe-down’. Although the jazz guitar concerto is not an entirely new concept (and in fact dates back to Malcolm Arnold’s concerto in 1959, which was written for Julian Bream and inspired by Django Reinhardt), this piece seems unique as it features *classical* guitar accompanied by a *jazz* orchestra, which leads to a very buoyant and fresh artistic work.

Williams commissioned the jazz musician Steve Gray, to write a concerto in 1987 and the piece formed half of a 1996 world premiere concerto recording on Sony classics, which also featured the Richard Harvey concerto. Gray’s career as a jazz pianist and orchestrator is fully in evidence throughout this work. The lavish orchestration, using brass and percussion to stunning effect, gives this piece a unique colour (as opposed to the usual chamber orchestral approach to guitar ensemble) despite the fact that much of the guitar writing in the opening movement sounds similar in style to that of composers such as Torroba and Ponce. The lyrical second movement has the sensibility of a love-song throughout, from its searing Gershwin-esque orchestral swells, which threaten to smother the soloist, to more poignant moments where he is left alone and the audience becomes aware of the vulnerability of the solo guitarist. It could be argued that this movement is the most successful of the work and John Schneider might be specifically referring to it when he speaks of ‘dazzling inventions of the composer’s imagination in the realms of melody, style and orchestration.’<sup>396</sup> As in Rodrigo’s *Concerto de Aranjuez*, the slow movement elevates the piece to a higher aesthetic level than the outer movements. The third movement, entitled *Jokes*, is quite episodic, with the soloist battling against what is a grotesque and at

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<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>396</sup> Schneider, John: ‘Harvey Gray: Concertos John Williams, guitar, London Symphony Orchestra, Paul Daniel’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (1997), 79.

times comically unsympathetic orchestra. The orchestral sections are almost ‘Vaudevillian’ in nature as the composer describes:

There is a stock comic character (in the third movement), for example, who’s kicked offstage by the orchestra every time he tries to sing his ridiculous song.<sup>397</sup>

After eight minutes of battling, the orchestra finally accompanies the soloist, which leads to a brief recapitulation of earlier material, followed by a moving final section, where the guitar plays simple chords and harmonics over faint *col legno* glissandi from the strings. As Schneider remarks:

After some outrageous orchestral guffawing in the final “Jokes,” and some arrant take-offs of 20<sup>th</sup>-century “serious” music, Gray ends with a poignantly delicate texture of guitar harmonics and ethereal glissando violins reminiscent of the diaphanous luminosity found in the closing moments of Schoenberg’s *Verklarte Nacht*.<sup>398</sup>

Possibly because of the length of its individual movements, this piece may lack the accessibility and charm of other jazz-inspired works commissioned by Williams, but as James Tosone points out ‘its relative complexity sustains interest on repeated listening.’<sup>399</sup> There is a slight sense with this work that the composer has attempted to adapt his own natural style somewhat in order to suit the classical soloist and orchestra. At times it appears that the flow of the piece is a little disjointed because of Gray’s insistence on using impressively orchestrated chords. Williams comments as follows:

Steve Gray was an excellent musician and a fantastic arranger too but in the case of the piece he wrote for me, was possibly trying to be a little too clever with his use of Richard Strauss-like chords at times in the piece where I’m not sure they were necessary. Steve himself wasn’t at all pretentious but the scoring in that piece at times was just a little heavy and overdone. Where he’s just being himself – like in the slow movement – is brilliant but for me, the first and third movements don’t always work as well as they might.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> Gray, Steve: ‘Notes on Harvey/Gray: Guitar Concertos, John Williams Guitar, London Symphony Orchestra’, Paul Daniel, SK 68337, (Sony, Sony Classics, 1996).

<sup>398</sup> Schneider, 79.

<sup>399</sup> Tosone, Jim: *Classical Guitarists – Conversations*, (North Carolina, London: MacFarland & Company, 2000), 167.

<sup>400</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, October 21, 2017.

Nonetheless, the Gray concerto contains a very beautiful middle movement and a transcendent finale, and stands out as one of the finest achievements of a very gifted musician, who worked with Williams over a period of many years as composer, arranger and musician.

These examples show Williams in an interesting light. All of the works discussed feature various jazz elements from the orchestration in Paul Hart's concerto, to the jaunty interspersions of the Previn Concerto. However, Williams is placed at the centre, playing in a largely conventional classical guitar style, thereby creating an enduring sense of stylistic collaboration. It is almost as though he steps outside of his stylistic boundaries but retains the technique of a 'standard' twentieth-century classical guitarist and the works also provide a good example of Williams creating new opportunities outside of classical guitar culture.

#### **4.6 Summary**

In 2000, John Williams made the point that the culture of the classical guitar had a very Euro-centric approach, which did not always represent its varied history:

It's ironic for us in the classical guitar world because much of our recent history has been to try and become part of the European classical tradition. But this is such an exciting age for anyone that's interested in the world, culturally, to be associated with the guitar – because of its links to so many different cultures. The guitar is a fundamental instrument in jazz and it has strong links to all other plucked-string instruments, like the sitar. And it originally was a popular instrument, a social instrument, which can embrace a variety of styles.<sup>401</sup>

He also expressed his excitement at the fact that guitarists are '...able to be a part of all those different cultures [which] is a unique opportunity that other musicians don't have as much.'<sup>402</sup> This statement encapsulates Williams' views about the guitar and goes a long way to explain the various paths taken throughout his career, particularly in relation to the projects discussed in this chapter. The guitarist has become the common denominator for a vast number of diverse

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<sup>401</sup> Tosone, 160.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*

musical styles and Williams has frequently allowed himself to be that link, engaging in music that can be described as crossover. This chapter illustrates that tendency and highlights the effects that these projects have had in broadening the appeal of the classical guitar. The chart-topping success of both *Cavatina* and *Sky* is an obvious example of this, but his various African, Venezuelan and jazz-classical fusion performances have also been effective in encouraging guitarists to move away from pre-conceived notions about the parameters of the classical guitar repertoire.

## Chapter Five

### New directions in classical guitar

Perhaps one of John Williams' greatest contributions to the guitar has been raising the technical standard of the instrument. Jim Tosone expressed this succinctly when he wrote:

Many musicians and aficionados consider Williams to be the most technically proficient classical guitarist that ever lived. Over time, his musical expressiveness has grown ever more sublime. As a result, Williams conveys to an audience the essence of a composer's intentions, unconstrained by the limitations of the classical guitar.<sup>403</sup>

Despite the fact that Williams' entire recorded output far exceeds what is covered in this study, the purpose of this chapter is to deal with projects that had the effect of widening classical guitar repertoire and, in some cases (as in the 're-discovery of Agustin Barrios Mangoré), altering the direction of modern classical guitar history. Therefore, Williams' technical ability is not of paramount importance to the discussion although it does play an important role since his artistic direction comes under much scrutiny, a result of both his high profile and his skill as a performer. It is fair to say that both Williams and Bream were given a very strong platform from which to shape the repertoire and their respective actions in this regard are in sharp contrast. When Dwyer writes that Bream 'was clearly interested in building a new repertoire that took some cognizance of musical developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and that did not predictably regurgitate clichéd Spanish idioms', he is referring to the narrowness of scope within the guitar repertoire at the onset of Bream's career.<sup>404</sup> However, Dwyer also points out that Bream's contribution can be most keenly felt in the context of his work with British composers, such as Walton, Britten and Berkeley.<sup>405</sup> Therefore, Williams had the effect of broadening the definition of what it means to be a classical guitarist and exposing the instrument to a vast range of contrasting cultural styles. His work with Sculthorpe, Takemitsu, Brouwer, Dodgson, and Harvey is

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<sup>403</sup> Tosone, Jim: *Classical Guitarists – Conversations*, (North Carolina, London: McFarland & Company, 2000), 150.

<sup>404</sup> Dwyer, Benjamin: *Britten and the Guitar: Critical Perspectives for Performers*, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2016), 12.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

examined in this chapter along with his own compositions for the guitar. Much of this work brought new voices to the classical guitar repertoire from Australia, South America and Asia and helped to transform the cultural landscape of the instrument. While Chapter Four dealt with the attitudes that underpinned John Williams' career, this chapter focuses on specific projects, mostly collaborative in some way, which increased the range and repertoire of the classical guitar. One of the most productive collaborations involved commissioning and working with Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe (1929-2014).

### **5.1 Sculthorpe**

Williams has made a conscious effort to help with the development of guitar music from his native Australia. He has worked with many Australian composers to commission and also to perform works that have led to the establishment of a definitive Australian guitar sound with Peter Sculthorpe at the forefront. As Tosone remarks: 'Sculthorpe and Houghton demonstrate that Australia is finding its voice in the classical music world. In large part due to the efforts of Williams, the rest of the world is beginning to listen.'<sup>406</sup>

In Peter Sculthorpe, Williams found an important collaborator and the two men became good friends. In his youth, Sculthorpe exhibited a similar unease to that of Williams with avant-garde trends in European music and became a somewhat outspoken figure on the subject:

As a young composer, Sculthorpe had perpetuated a late-Romantic English pastoral tradition, à la Vaughan Williams. During his studies at Oxford in the 1950s under Rubbra and Wellesz, there was also considerable pressure to conform to the winds of high modernism. Sculthorpe never finished his doctorate at Oxford, choosing instead to return to Australia and seek a different path. Indeed, Sculthorpe sought musical renewal through the revival of melodic and rhythmic elements found in more ancient cultural sources in the Asia-Pacific region. While there is undoubtedly an anti-establishment, reactionary sentiment embedded in Sculthorpe's rejection of the European avant-garde, there was also the attempt to underscore Australia's geographical remoteness from Europe, as highlighted by his inflammatory remarks to the London Times in

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<sup>406</sup> Tosone, 163.



1966, in which he stated that “Europe is the past” (seeming to imply that the future, and Australia’s part in it, is with Asia).<sup>407</sup>

Sculthorpe was responsible for developing what could be termed a distinctive Australian style of composition. He fused elements of American minimalism with Aboriginal music and folk music from South-East Asia. Indeed, Paget notes that he always maintained a strong interest in Japanese music and his ‘continued reliance on repetition, rhythmic counterpoint, phase techniques and structural punctuation all relate to his fascination with Balinese music.’<sup>408</sup> Paget also discusses the circumstances in which Sculthorpe became a figure of huge cultural importance in Australia:

Following World War II, the young nation of Australia began to assert more strongly its political and cultural independence from Britain. This was partly a result of the perception that Britain had failed to protect Australia’s interests during the war. There had always been a tendency to imitate slavishly European music, albeit decades behind the times. Following the war, Australian composers became aware that Australia lacked a sense of national identity in its music and felt the need to create one. It was into this environment that Sculthorpe was coming to prominence as a young composer and seeking to carve out his own musical identity. At the same time, Australian musical culture, per se, was looking for heroes. The conditions were right for Sculthorpe’s adoption and the stage was set for his sound to become the very definition of Australian music.<sup>409</sup>

Critics have embraced the perception that both Sculthorpe’s music and character were definitively Australian. Following the composer’s death in late 2014, William Yeoman described Sculthorpe as having had:

[A]n abiding interest in Australian Aboriginal music and it is present in one form or another throughout much of his oeuvre. As he told me that day, this was not an appropriation but an absorption. ‘You have an indigenous melody that grew from the land; that was a way of looking at the land. I think about the melody and sing it to myself as a way of absorbing it, and it does change. It’s a

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<sup>407</sup> Paget, Jonathan: ‘Outback Dreaming: Peter Sculthorpe and the Guitar’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 37, No. 2, (2011), 12.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*

borrowing, yes; but it also becomes my way of looking at the land – based on their way.’<sup>410</sup>

Williams echoes all of the sentiments above, explaining how Sculthorpe’s music has helped give Australian music a distinctive voice, moving away from the Euro-centric approach, which had previously characterised Australian music, to reflect its geographical closeness with Asia rather than its historical connections with Britain.

In the same way I think the direction of its [Australia’s] culture will go more and more geographically, towards being a part of South-East Asia, with all those influences. But I don’t think at the moment there’s any conscious cutting of cords with Europe. I think Peter’s music probably has cut, and cut deliberately, more deliberately than anyone.<sup>411</sup>

Talking to the guitarist Julian Byzantine in 2000, Sculthorpe indicated that he was not overly keen on writing for the guitar, as he had previously written a concerto in the early eighties with which he was not pleased. He continued:

It was really through John Williams. He had been a very old friend of mine and he pushed me into writing for guitar [...] While I was initially somewhat apprehensive about writing for the guitar, about which I didn’t know a great deal, I had a lot of pleasure in writing for a friend.<sup>412</sup>

In *Nourlangie* (written in 1989 and commissioned by the Commonwealth Bank for Williams and the Australian Chamber Orchestra), Sculthorpe reacquainted himself with the medium of the guitar concerto and drew inspiration from a huge rock in Kakadu National Park, which is of great spiritual significance to the native Aborigine population. Throughout the work, there is ample evidence of a composer writing with an amplified rather than acoustic classical guitar in mind. It is not unusual for composers to use small orchestras to accompany guitar but Sculthorpe’s choice of strings and percussion would seem unconventional if the

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<sup>410</sup> Yeoman, William: ‘Sculthorpe – Complete Works for Solo Piano’, *Gramophone*, (January 2015), 61.

<sup>411</sup> Cooper, Colin: ‘John Williams: A New Profile’, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 12 No.3, (1994), 18.

<sup>412</sup> Byzantine, Julian: ‘Australian Guitar Composers’, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Volume 19, No. 2, (2000), 25.

guitar were not to be amplified. There is very little compromise as the composer attempts to create a soundscape to match the grandeur of the great Australian rock monolith after which the piece is named, using thunder sheets, bongos and Chinese cymbals to give an appropriate sense of vastness to the work. Example 5.1 below illustrates the composer's use of a powerful rhythmic section played by the guitar and bongos that punctures the serenity of the opening section and drives the piece forward. It is difficult to see how this section could be effectively performed without amplification, as the guitar part, which features only lower register notes, could easily be swamped by the force of the rhythmic bongo motif, particularly when the semiquaver movement enters as in Ex. 5.1, after four bars.

Ex. 5.1.1 Sculthorpe, *Nourlangie*, Figure 7

In a short introduction to the piece Sculthorpe remarks that the work reflects his personal response to Nourlangie itself rather than an accurate description of the rock. He does concede however that the use of bird-sounds give an impression of nature and ‘...in order to give a sense of place, the main melody is based on a Torres Strait dance song.’<sup>413</sup> During an interview for the BBC’s South Bank Show about John Williams in 1989, Sculthorpe remarked that he felt that the

<sup>413</sup> Sculthorpe Peter: *Nourlangie*, (London: Faber, 1989), i.

serene mood of the piece was reflective of what he knew of Williams' personality.<sup>414</sup> This is an interesting insight into the work and is not altogether in accordance with how Williams is perceived by classical guitarists. In fact, guitarists often view Williams as a strong, forceful and rhythmically aggressive player particularly in the context of his concerto performances. Perhaps the remark reflects the composer's response to the instrument. Indeed, the effect of that response can certainly be felt throughout the work. Paget is referring to this particular piece when he remarks that:

Sculthorpe's music has a satisfyingly high ratio of rewards to effort for the performer. Sculthorpe has shown little interest in extending the boundaries of guitar technique, preferring simply to use the guitar's unique lyrical voice to exhibit the inner beauty of his tonal language.<sup>415</sup>

Paget details the reasons for Sculthorpe's initial reluctance to write for the instrument, which included a failed earlier guitar concerto, entitled *The Visions of Captain Quiros* (written in 1979 for John Williams) that the composer has since withdrawn.<sup>416</sup> In fact, elements and themes from the earlier piece resurface in *Nourlangie*, as does the beautiful Torres Strait melody, which, as Paget notes was based upon a tune collected by the ethnomusicologist Jeremy Beckett during the 1960s.<sup>417</sup> After a dark and atmospheric opening, which uses thundersheets to great effect, it is this plaintive melody that sets the tone for the piece. The three-bar pentatonic theme, which is set against a repetitive triplet figure from the violin section, gives another indication that Sculthorpe is conceiving the guitar as amplified. Very much based in the middle to lower range of the instrument, the theme offers no serious attempt to make an unamplified guitar heard over the other instruments, unlike for example the first solo entry of Rodrigo's *Aranjuez*

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<sup>414</sup> Williams, John: 'The Sevilla Concert, Original DVD', SVD 53475, (Sony, Sony Classical, 1993).

<sup>415</sup> Paget, 14.

<sup>416</sup> This twenty-seven minute long single movement work was commissioned by ABC and dedicated to John Williams. It was scored for Solo guitar, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns in F, 2 trumpets, 2 tenor trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion (2 players), strings. It was first performed at Sydney Opera House in 1980 and was later withdrawn by the composer. Accessed 23 November, 2017.

[www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/workversion/...visions-of-captain-quiros/2132](http://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/workversion/...visions-of-captain-quiros/2132)

<sup>417</sup> Paget, 16.

concerto with its famous strummed opening motif. Andrew Clements comments upon the composer's intentions in his review for BBC's [classicalmusic.com](http://classicalmusic.com):

Sculthorpe's writing is contemplative and devotional, never attempting to depict the natural world in a programmatic way, but much more concerned with mapping the composer's personal response to it. It is far more than travelogue; the musical world parallels rather than imitates the real one.<sup>418</sup>

Despite protestations about the music not being programmatic from the composer himself and various reviewers, Sculthorpe does give a strong image of what he visualised as he conceived this piece:

Permitting my imagination to wander produced another powerful and important image for me, which was perhaps that as Torres sailed through the straits that separate Australia from New Guinea a guitar might have slipped off the ship and is still resonating in the sea.<sup>419</sup>

It must be said if not exactly a description of the work itself then the statement reveals what inspired Sculthorpe. The chaotic section beginning at Figure 21 of *Nourlangie* again shows a breadth and dynamism rarely seen in works for guitar and orchestra. It also illustrates the composer's tendency towards exploiting extended techniques on orchestral strings, while the guitarist strums in a very standard fashion. The full strength of the percussion section is also felt here and the cacophonous effect achieved by Sculthorpe's trademark bird sounds on strings is set against Williams' strong rasgado chords, again benefitting from amplification, enabling the guitar to be heard clearly all the way through (see ex.5.2).

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<sup>418</sup> Clements, Andrew: Sculthorpe/ Westlake, (2012), Accessed 24 August, 2015. [www.classical-music.com/sculthorpe/westlake](http://www.classical-music.com/sculthorpe/westlake)

<sup>419</sup> Byzantine, 26.

Ex. 5.1.2, Sculthorpe, *Nourlangie*, Figure 21

Musical score for Percussion, Guitar, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *cresc.*, *fp*, and a "thunder sheet" effect. It also features performance instructions like "ras.", "(unison)", and "nota reale".

Musical score for Drums (Dr.), Guitar (Gtr.), Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.). The score includes dynamic markings such as *cresc.*, *f*, and *dim.*. It also features performance instructions like "(uniso)".

Although the amplification helps to balance the sound of the guitar against the orchestra, the soloist still emerges from the chaotic third section as a serene and

calm voice with the Torres Strait song emerging in the midst of all the dissonance and gradually drawing the piece back to its peaceful mood. John Duarte notes the importance of Williams' recording of this work in his review for *Gramophone*, in which he remarks upon the unusually non-virtuosic style of guitar-writing employed by Sculthorpe:

The guitar's role in the orchestral pieces is that of a different voice, rather than a concerto soloist. Williams' performance is magnificent and his partnership with the orchestra is impeccable. This is not a record for lovers of most things that guitar music popularly represents, but Williams' name will doubtless ensure that many will at least give themselves a chance to find that there is more than that to be savoured. It is a commendable and finely recorded issue.<sup>420</sup>

Sculthorpe's previous works to feature the guitar included the above-mentioned *Visions of Captain Quiros* (1979), and also *Cantares*, a large-scale ensemble work of approximately twenty minutes duration, written for the 1980 Sydney Music Symposium and involving all types of guitar, from classical to flamenco to electric and a string quartet. In a candid appraisal of this work, Williams stated:

There's a very interesting piece that he wrote called *Cantares*, which is a bit of a mess at times. Its for strings and guitars and it was originally done for a festival in Sydney with flamenco guitar, jazz guitar and classical guitar. Peter Calvo played the flamenco part and Joe Pass played the jazz guitar part. I have to say it was greatly improved some time later at a summer festival in Melbourne, with Paco Peña taking on the flamenco part and giving the piece a more satisfying feel. I believe George Golla, the Australian jazz guitarist played the jazz part. It was much better that second time but I felt it could still be improved upon.<sup>421</sup>

Following the success of *Nourlangie*, Sculthorpe returned more willingly to write for the guitar with the solo works *From Kakadu* (1993) and *Into the Dreaming*, (1994) both of which are re-workings of themes from earlier works (a common trait of this composer) and both of which were dedicated to Williams. Paget notes the collaborative impact of Williams upon *Kakadu* and emphasises the importance of his fingerings, particularly in the difficult fourth movement:

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<sup>420</sup> Duarte, John: 'Sculthorpe Nourlangie. From Kakadu. Into the Dreaming', *Gramophone*, Vol. 72, (May 1995), 58.

<sup>421</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

This movement is certainly not easy. But in comparison to the technical awkwardness exhibited in other works by non-guitarist composers, it is by no means excessive. It has also benefitted enormously from the collaboration of Williams [...] whose masterful fingering solutions forge a comfortable path for others to follow.<sup>422</sup>

Williams also recalls a moment during the writing of *From Kakadu*, where Sculthorpe was forced to accept a compromise of his melody, for the sake of a better overall structure within the piece:

In the last movement, the tune goes right up into the high register of the guitar. However, in his first version it didn't go high because in his compositional style it was important for him to preserve the tune and the rhythm, especially with regard to which beats certain notes appeared on. Originally, he simply couldn't find a way to make that work because of his own lack of confidence with the guitar so he told me and I could see that the middle of the piece was missing a sense of rise and fall because he couldn't work out how to get that on the guitar. So, I worked out a way of doing that for him and the only compromise was that on the first beat of the seventh bar of the melody, there was a high 'a' which came in a quaver later than in the original tune, which can be heard at the beginning of the piece. However, on balance he decided to go ahead with this and was happy with the compromise.<sup>423</sup>

This example shows the importance of Williams' personal relationship with Sculthorpe and the influence of their mutual trust upon the resultant work. Indeed, Williams described Schulthorpe as follows:

Peter was a combination of being, in one sense very open to suggestions and listening to what people say, but in the end being absolutely specific about what he wanted. I feel that myself and Peter had that in common in fact: that desire to explore all aspects of an issue before deciding what to do and pushing on determinedly after that.<sup>424</sup>

The next example shows the theme as it appears earlier in the fourth movement of *From Kakadu*, whereas Ex.5.3 ii features the altered version of the theme as it appears later in the work:

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<sup>422</sup> Paget, 20.

<sup>423</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*



Ex. 5.1.3.i Sculthorpe, From Kakadu, 129



Ex. 5.1.3.ii Sculthorpe, From Kakadu, 153



Sculthorpe's *Tropic* (1992) was written for Williams' ensemble *Attaca* and *Love-Song* (1997) is a short piece for guitar and strings, which was again first performed by Williams with the Darwin Symphony Orchestra in 1977. Indeed, it was the close relationship of Williams with the Darwin International Guitar Festival, which led to the commission and first performance of many of the above works, while *Nourlangie* was commissioned by The Commonwealth Bank of Australia. In addition to these works, Sculthorpe's piano piece *Djilile* (1986), was arranged by Steve Wingfield for solo guitar in 2003 and Williams, having performed the piece extensively for the past ten years, included it on his *Stepping Stones* album of 2013. Williams feels that Sculthorpe is still under-appreciated in Europe and believes that he has been a hugely important figure in Australian culture. While not of the opinion that Sculthorpe opened up any new horizons for the guitar in the sense of how he wrote for the instrument, Williams nonetheless feels privileged that such a unique composer chose to write for guitar:

He writes in his own way. I think he has contributed enormously to the guitar but not at all self-consciously. What I mean by that is that I don't think he adapted his style much for the guitar but it's great

that he used it so much in the end. He made the guitar a part of his story.<sup>425</sup>

Williams has also worked closely with other Australian composers, most notably Ross Edwards, Nigel Westlake, Phillip Houghton and Graeme Koehne and it is fair to say that he has exerted a huge influence on the development of guitar composition in his native country. However, when asked about his role as a catalyst for the Australian guitar scene, he preferred to focus on the efforts of Timothy Kain:

I don't know about that. I think the Australian guitar scene is very strong and there's been some really good music written. I suppose I've been a part of that and maybe the work with Peter Sculthorpe has had an impact on some of the others. However, in reality I think it's just a good scene. Tim Kain has done a lot of good work encouraging people to write for guitar. I think initially, my work was with Peter and then subsequently with Nigel Westlake and then Ross Edwards. The Ross Edwards piece was a Darwin Festival Commission. Things have been good there for a long time.<sup>426</sup>

Despite this modest appraisal, it is clear that Williams has been extremely active in his homeland, and his *From Australia* album was a watershed recording in every sense of the word.

## 5.2 Takemitsu

In 1991 John Williams released the album *To the Edge of Dream*, an album featuring the guitar works of the Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu. This was the first complete album of Takemitsu's guitar works and although it did not cover his entire oeuvre for the instrument, it gave an extremely comprehensive overview of his career both from the standpoint of his wide range of influences, to the different compositional phases of his career.

The album features Takemitsu's one movement concerto-style work *To the Edge of Dream* (1983) for guitar and orchestra and also contains the world premiere recording of *Vers, l'arc-en-ciel, Palma* (1984), for oboe d'amore, guitar and orchestra. In fact, according to Yukiko Sawabe, *Vers, l'arc-en-ciel* 'combines

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<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*

with *To the Edge of Dream* to form a unit.<sup>427</sup> Williams initially performed the world premiere of *Vers, l'arc-de-ciel, Palma* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Simon Rattle. He and Rattle had wished to do the recording together but an agreement between their respective record companies was not forthcoming. Therefore, the London Sinfonia, with Esa Pekka Salonen conducting, was used as an alternative and in addition to the two orchestral works, the recording features *Toward the Sea*, for alto flute and guitar (this piece belongs to a series of Takemitsu pieces that pertain to water) along with Takemitsu's earliest guitar solo piece *Folios* (1974), and four of Takemitsu's *12 Songs for Guitar* (1977); *Here, There and Everywhere* (Paul McCartney), *What a Friend* (Charles Converse), *Amours Perdues* (Joseph Kosma) and *Summertime* (George Gershwin).

With this project, Williams again found himself seemingly in conflict with the ubiquitous perception that he was not a performer who actively supported modern music. Although it has been said many times, that Williams is more interested in what might be termed 'commercially accessible' music, there is no doubt that in general, Takemitsu falls outside that definition. This is the type of album that might be more closely associated with Bream, but Williams has in fact, been performing Takemitsu's music since the early 1970s, a long time before any of his contemporary guitarists. It is probable that many commentators make assumptions based on Williams' associations with Cleo Laine, Sky and Inti Illimani, and simply fail to acknowledge his work with Takemitsu, Dodgson, Brouwer, Sculthorpe and many others. However, in truth it should be unsurprising that Takemitsu and Williams collaborated successfully as they share much common musical ground. For example, both have always tended to make very positive statements about the guitar, Takemitsu once stating that it was his favourite instrument for which to write and Williams constantly extolling the virtues of the guitar, rather than indulging in the habit of many guitarists, who often admire their own achievements, in spite of the limitations of their

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<sup>427</sup> Sawabe, Yukiko: Notes from 'Takemitsu: To the Edge of Dream. John Williams-Esa Pekka Salonen', SK46720, (Sony, Sony Classics, 1992).

instrument.<sup>428</sup> Both men (like Brouwer) also share a fascination with popular music and Takemitsu's popular arrangements are a vivid example of this, as James Tosone notes:

A recording devoted to the music of composer Tōru Takemitsu has been long overdue. This recording by John Williams is likely to remain the definitive recording of these works for some time to come. It is fitting that Takemitsu and Williams should find each other. Both share an interest in musical styles ranging from classical to folk, jazz to pop. These influences are most overtly observed in Williams' performances of four of the *12 Songs for Guitar* that were transcribed for guitar by Takemitsu.<sup>429</sup>

Like Williams, Takemitsu preferred to focus on the vast array of opportunities presented by the various technological advances of his age. He saw the drawing together of diverse cultures as a great artistic challenge and one that was central to artistic relevance at the end of the twentieth century. In fact, David Tanenbaum summarises Takemitsu's contribution to the guitar repertoire as follows:

The repertoire Takemitsu left us represents one of our instrument's strongest, a music that uses silence and colour, particularly exploiting the darker range of the spectrum. Takemitsu uniquely blended Western and Eastern influences, and as he aged his music included more pop influences. His pioneering sense of cross-cultural fusion was ahead of its time, and in the guitar he found a perfect vehicle to express his world.<sup>430</sup>

Josinaldo Costa quotes the composer himself who stated that 'the aeroplane era laid a new cosmic egg in the nest of everyday reality, integrating all the previously separate civilizations.'<sup>431</sup> In a way Williams' career has been the embodiment of the sentiments of Takemitsu as there is no other classical guitarist whose performances have comprehensively covered the music of the five continents, to the same extent.

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<sup>428</sup> Tanenbaum, David: *The Classical Guitar in the Twentieth Century*, 'The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar', ed. Victor Anand Coelho, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 193.

<sup>429</sup> Tosone, James: *Conversations – Classical Guitarists*, (North Carolina, London: MacFarlane & Co., 2000), 170.

<sup>430</sup> Tanenbaum, 193.

<sup>431</sup> Costa, Josinaldo: 'Tradition and Modernity, East and West: The Guitar Works of Tōru Takemitsu', *Soundboard*, Vol. 42, No 3, (2016), 8.

Williams has always insisted that there was very little actual collaboration with Takemitsu in terms of how the music should be prepared and played. It is clear from his descriptions of Takemitsu that he is not attempting to criticise the composer or imply that he was inflexible, but merely to point out that the aesthetic sought by Takemitsu was very specific. This extract from a master class review, gives a good illustration of both Takemitsu's approach to music and Williams' interpretation of the composer's intentions:

Matthew Rohde took the stage next to play Wainscot Pond, a contemporary work by the late Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu that was dedicated to Williams. Rohde rendered the piece capably. Williams, who has played a lot of Takemitsu and recorded an entire CD of his music, shared insights about the composer. "Takemitsu was a romantic despite the modern sound of his harmonies," said Williams. 'He was always very sure of what he wanted in terms volume and tonal shading. He played the guitar himself and experimented with its sounds. When he calls for a G-sharp harmonic and marks that it should be fretted on the third string and struck with the right hand, he knew exactly what sound that would produce. Playing the same note as a natural harmonic at the ninth fret of the sixth string produces a completely different sound. One reason is that it is an artificial harmonic on the third string and therefore in equal temperament. Played in the other location, the natural harmonic is in mean temperament. So both the pitch and the timbre are slightly different.' [...] Time and again, Williams stressed that guitarists should not pass by any notes lightly, but always understand their function in the piece as a whole and seek to express the composer's ideas.<sup>432</sup>

This description is interesting in that it illustrates Williams' approach to the music and also highlights how particular Takemitsu was about the performance of his music. The section where Williams advises the student to play a harmonic exactly where the composer indicates as an artificial harmonic instead of as a natural harmonic, is indicative of the precise nature of Takemitsu's score. It is clear that this care and attention to detail is another trait which both Williams and Takemitsu share and it can be argued that there are very few other guitarists with the technical ability to fully realise this music. The depth of care with which Williams approaches this music is apparent throughout the recording and the

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<sup>432</sup> Small, Mark: Accessed 5 January, 2017. This description is taken from the website of guitarist Mark Small. [www.marksmallguitar.com/Page\\_2\\_Yale\\_Master\\_Class.html](http://www.marksmallguitar.com/Page_2_Yale_Master_Class.html).

importance of rests, silences and pauses being observed just as the composer wishes seems to be paramount. The guitarist Renaud Côté-Giguère notes the paradoxical state that presents in Takemitsu's work where the performer must follow very specific instructions in order to 'evoke a natural spontaneity.'<sup>433</sup>

All of the works featured on this disc are from the period in Takemitsu's life where he had rediscovered his Japanese heritage and certain aspects of the performances, such as the importance of silence, are very important because of his adherence to this unique 'Japanese' aesthetic. There seemed to be reviewers who did not fully appreciate the stillness at certain points of the performance, such as John Duarte, writing for *Gramophone*:

The other compositions date from the 1980s. *Toward the Sea* takes risks in combining alto flute and guitar, the music often seeming too small scale and intuned for its own good. Though it is performed with the utmost refinement, the many pauses and silences almost come to seem more essential than the actual sounds. *Vers, l'Arc-en-ciel*, Palma is another mood piece; languid but not wholly soft-centred. There is a brilliant account of the oboe d'amore cadenza from Gareth Hulse, and no denying the skill with which Takemitsu himself sketches the outlines of a satisfying form on a canvas inspired by the paintings of Joan Miro.<sup>434</sup>

Although Duarte does go on to complement the composer and the recording, it is clear that he is missing the central point that in fact the silences *are* every bit as essential as the sounds. Williams has explained his own perspective which is that there 'is a spaciousness to it also, that makes his silences as expressive as his notes.'<sup>435</sup> Côté-Giguère explains the context for this approach by discussing the *ma aesthetic*, which is fundamental to Japanese art and is an important force in Takemitsu's music:

Allowing the guitar's resonances to die away and fully experiencing the depth of silence between each attack is therefore crucial to a convincing performance of this music. Indeed silence is profound

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<sup>433</sup> Côté-Giguère, Renaud: 'Toward a Better Understanding of Tōru Takemitsu', *Soundboard*, Vol. 42, No.3, (2016), 16.

<sup>434</sup> Duarte John: Takemitsu. Orchestral, Chamber and Instrumental Works', *Gramophone*, Vol. 69 No. 824, (1992), 63.

<sup>435</sup> Williams, John: Notes for 'The Mantis and the Moon', SK 46720, (Sony, Sony Classical, 1996).

and full in the composer's mind: a "soundless sound." It possesses a meditative character that the player must pass through to the audience; otherwise, the music will be missed, the *ma* unspoken.<sup>436</sup>

Thus Takemitsu held a great appreciation of the guitar, a fascination for popular music but also had tendency to be misunderstood at times. This album became a touchstone recording for those interested in the composer and Williams would again play his music on his guitar duet album *The Mantis and the Moon* with Timothy Kain in 1996, the year of Takemitsu's death. On this occasion the piece was a transcription of the film tune *Bad Boy*. To prove his admiration for the instrument, Takemitsu's last work was *In the Woods*, which is really three short pieces for solo guitar. Interestingly, he dedicated each piece to a different guitarist: *Wainscot Pond* is the first and is dedicated to John Williams, *Rosedale* is the second and is dedicated to the Japanese guitarist Kiyoshi Shomura, and finally, *Miur Woods* is dedicated to Julian Bream. In fact, the world premiere of *Wainscot Pond* was played at his funeral on February 29, 1996 in Tokyo. Takemitsu's legacy is indelibly linked to the guitar and Williams was one of the first western guitarists to perform his music regularly and encourage him to further engage with the instrument.

### 5.3 Dodgson

One of the most fruitful collaborations of John Williams' career has been with the English composer Stephen Dodgson (1924-2013), who taught at the Royal Academy in London when Williams began his studies there in 1956. Dodgson had initially been encouraged to write for the guitar by Julian Bream. However, he produced the work *Prelude, Nocturne and Toccata* which by the composer's own admission was a very difficult piece to perform owing to his lack of familiarity with the guitar. Again at Bream's behest, Dodgson wrote his first guitar concerto, a work that again contains moments of great difficulty, arising out of the composer's 'state of happy ignorance' about guitar writing.<sup>437</sup> Bream

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<sup>436</sup> Côté-Giguère, 16.

<sup>437</sup> Dodgson, Stephen: Notes for 'John Williams-Castelnuovo-Tedesco: Guitar Concerto, Op.99 Dodgson: Guitar Concerto No. 2 Arnold: Serenade for Strings', English Chamber Orchestra, Sir Charles Groves, (Sony, Sony Classical, 1977), M35172.

was unable to perform at the premiere, so John Williams stood in as soloist although he was just seventeen years old. Thus began a period of sustained collaboration, fuelled by mutual admiration. Williams' first request of Dodgson was that he would write a work for him to perform with the tenor Wilfred Brown. The resulting piece was *Four Poems of John Clare*, which, as John MacKenzie states, Dodgson considered 'to be the first of his guitar works in which he demonstrates that he has really come to terms with the guitar idiom.'<sup>438</sup> His *First Partita for Solo Guitar* was written in 1963 and shows a further illustration of the composer's improved understanding of the guitar. The piece is written in four short movements and is a fine example of Dodgson's rhythmic style, which is explained by the composer as follows:

[I think] of the rhythm as the most important function of [a] piece. When the music is fast and physical in feeling, I've tried to think through the rhythm. And the rhythm is the most primitive constructive power for me. I will often think of rhythmic shapes before I consider their constituent notes.<sup>439</sup>

Dodgson was generous in praising his young muse and impressed by his musicianship:

He's as quick as a knife with music. He'll take in music at a terrific speed and of course he can put it on the fingerboard of the guitar like nobody I've ever met. I've never met a reader like him. Nearly all my guitar music I've written at his suggestion. Seldom a year has gone by that I haven't written something for him. This new concerto [The second concerto] – the first movement is a real presto – goes at tremendous speed. I had just written it out in rough, in pencil and difficult to read [...] John sits straight down and most of it's there. He'll just stop and say 'what's that? – a D, yes.' It's quite incredible.<sup>440</sup>

Unlike other guitar collaborations with well-known composers, which have frequently produced only one significant work, the Williams-Dodgson partnership produced a wide range of diverse repertoire over the years that

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<sup>438</sup> MacKenzie, John Lawrence: 'The Guitar Works of Stephen Dodgson', (PhD dissertation, Leeds: The University of Leeds School of Music, 2006), 11.

<sup>439</sup> Crowthers, 'Composers of Today', 28. Cited in MacKenzie, 39.

<sup>440</sup> Biberian, Gilbert: 'In Conversation with Stephen Dodgson', *Guitar*, Vol.1 No.8, (March 1973), 20-22. Cited in MacKenzie, 11.



followed. These included another three solo partitas, and the popular solo piece *Fantasy Divisions* (1973), another concerto, the *Duo Concertante* (1968) for harpsichord and guitar, and an arrangement of songs by Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis, which featured on the *Songs of Freedom* album with Maria Farandouri in 1971. John MacKenzie makes the point that Dodgson was acutely aware of the benefit of Williams' continuing support and faith in him as a composer:

And John Williams turned out to be a prime stimulus to Stephen Dodgson not only in respect of his guitar writing. 'In fact he's been a great source of inspiration to me altogether. With his interest in what I write and his desire to promote it, I owe him a great deal.'<sup>441</sup>

However, despite Dodgson's gratitude and admiration, their collaboration did not involve the type of process that has been spoken of in relation to non-guitarist composers writing at the behest of well-known guitarists. The involvement of Segovia in the guitar works of Ponce, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Torroba and others has been well-documented and Bream was also said to have been very influential on the compositional process Britten and Walton, while they were writing their guitar works.<sup>442</sup> Williams has likened Dodgson to Takemitsu as a composer who was very particular about the exact sounds he wanted:

Stephen Dodgson always knew exactly what he wanted. I worked on the fingerings, which helped to achieve certain sounds but I've never changed a note of Stephen's. Takemitsu was also very particular and had a great understanding of the instrument.<sup>443</sup>

It seems that while working on Dodgson's arrangements of the Theodorakis songs, for once Williams felt the need to change some parts of the score, preferring to simplify the arrangements at times:

With the Maria Farandouri project, the music was all written by Theodorakis, and Stephen Dodgson created all the guitar accompaniments. Although when I worked with Maria, we had to

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<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>442</sup> Dwyer, Benjamin: *Britten and the Guitar: Critical Perspectives for Performers*, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2016), 242-243. In these pages, Dwyer illustrates the depth of collaboration between Bream and Britten by referencing detailed letters sent by Britten to Bream while the latter was on tour.

<sup>443</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

change certain bits of it because some of it was a bit notey and fussy. In the end, we simplified certain aspects of the arrangements. Sometimes you just need to strum a chord!<sup>444</sup>

In this context Williams seems to have felt it necessary to question Dodgson's methods, presumably because of the folk music context and the fact that it was not actually Dodgson's own music. It is interesting that in all of their work together, that example is the only time he felt the need to alter what Dodgson presented. Perhaps he felt more comfortable editing this because it was not in fact an original work. However, the pair usually worked seamlessly together, with Williams deciding on the best fingerings for the pieces, but by his own admission not changing a note, and with Dodgson learning the art of guitar composition to the point where he had a more intuitive sense of what would work:

The guitar does not readily accept ideas imposed on it that have been conceived in the abstract, but is responsive to musical ideas that evolve from within. I've always imagined that the reason that I've found myself, for example, writing so much guitar music isn't because of what I said through it; but because I was prepared, eager, insistent that the message would look after itself if I only cared for the medium enough. It is definitely a mistake to think of the guitar (as many do, apparently) as first and foremost a harmonic instrument; a mistake, because it leads the innocent into writing too many notes. More and more I've come to think of the guitar as a melody instrument.<sup>445</sup>

This insistence on the guitar being primarily a melodic instrument has led Dodgson to a strongly lyrical modern style, in some ways similar to the music of Lennox Berkley's *Sonatina for Guitar*, where the harmonies fit easily around the melodies, which are typically incisive and rhythmic throughout. In fact the composer positioned himself strongly against music lacking that rhythmic edge:

[C]ontemporary music often does seem tending to rhythmic inanimation; so that pieces which are full of interesting detail make overall a dreary and feeble effect; almost as though they dared not risk motion in any direction in case it proves a wrong one. I feel cheated by music which lacks a rhythmic undercurrent, because rhythm is to me so much a natural attribute of life itself, that I never really feel happy with music in which I can't readily perceive it

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<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>445</sup> Talk given at Cheltenham Festival July 15, 1987. Cited in MacKenzie, 60.

thereto.<sup>446</sup>

From the 1970s onwards, Dodgson explored other aspects of the guitar, working with Hector Quine on technical studies for the instrument and also working with the guitarist Richard Wright to try and fill gaps in the area of suitable children's pieces for examination boards. His work has been unique among the post-Segovia repertoire of the guitar, in that although he produced such a large volume of work for the instrument. He still approached it as a non-guitarist, a distinction which he felt was important, declaring that 'It would be nothing but a disadvantage to me to try to learn to play the guitar. I'm sure it would have inhibited me from writing freely for it.'<sup>447</sup> Indeed MacKenzie makes the point that a guitarist/composer might be so familiar with the clichés and technical traits of the instrument that it might be difficult to write anything fresh:

The other is that there is a debit side to that familiarity – it comes at the cost of conditioning. As a guitarist learns the repertoire and studies the literature, he is inculcated with a 'programme of expectation,' which is reinforced by his teacher and peers. Certain types of patterns are expected, as is the exploitation of certain tonal characteristics, and his thoughts are skewed and channeled in a predictable direction. Dodgson never studied the literature. What knowledge of it he has, has been acquired by attending guitar recitals, and he is only aware of it to the extent of an educated concert-goer. Hence the trap of merely imitating what has been done before was avoided, appropriately so, for a composer at the beginning of a new tradition, since the characteristics of that pre-existent material belong to a different age.<sup>448</sup>

Dodgson's last guitar solo work was a vibrant piece from 1994, *The Midst of Life*, which Williams played at a memorial concert for him and recorded on his *Stepping Stones* album in 2014. This memorable piece forms a suitable bookend to a professional and personal relationship that had begun 55 years previously, with Williams' BBC broadcast of Dodgson's first guitar concerto. Dodgson's contribution to the guitar is immense and probably deserves more attention today than it receives, tending to be overshadowed by singular solo contributions of

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<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>447</sup> Biberian, Gilbert: 'In conversation with Stephen Dodgson', *Guitar*, Vol. 1 No.8, (March 1973), 20-22. Cited in MacKenzie 61.

<sup>448</sup> MacKenzie, 61.

other British composers such as Tippett, Britten and Walton. It may be that because some of Dodgson's music is technically difficult, fewer guitarists have taken to it than might otherwise have been the case. MacKenzie speculates as to whether Dodgson fully grasped difficulty of his own works, because he had been presenting them to such a gifted interpreter:

Their association had the incidental effect that Dodgson was spoiled, at least to some extent, by John Williams' ability, being inadvertently misled in respect of what the limitations are for most guitarists.<sup>449</sup>

Nonetheless, Dodgson's collaborations with Williams and the resultant works make up a uniquely significant contribution to the repertoire, one of the few times when a contemporary non-guitarist/composer repeatedly returned to the guitar, and developed a specific and mature voice on the instrument.

#### **5.4 Performing with Julian Bream**

John Williams has frequently collaborated with other artists in various duets. Notable projects of this type include Williams' duet recordings with high-profile performers such as Itzhak Perlman and Jaqueline du Pré. The role of the guitar in these recordings was largely to replace the classical piano as an accompaniment to the solo instrument. It is notable, particularly in the works of Manuel de Falla, performed with du Pré, that the guitar, with its capacity for energetic strumming patterns as well as more intricate passages, is arguably more suited to the wild abandon of Spanish folk music than the piano. The recording with Perlman features music by Paganini and Giuliani and one notable aspect is the relative ease with which the two musicians came together. Williams recalls that they did not have much time to rehearse because of touring commitments and simply got together and recorded the album in a short timeframe. Williams felt that they shared an understanding of technique, rhythm and phrasing which made the process very easy: 'It's just the way you begin and end phrases and Perlman and I were like that.'<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>450</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

His guitar duet performances with Julian Bream culminated in two studio albums in the early 1970s and a live album following an extensive tour. This project was destined to be successful, bringing together the two most recognisable young guitarists in the world. What made the Bream/Williams duet all the more attractive was the fact that the two artists had always been perceived as very different characters. David Tanenbaum has written: ‘For decades, Bream and Williams would be mentioned in the same breath, as a sort of Apollonian (Williams)-Dionysian (Bream) entity which contained the full reach of the guitar.’<sup>451</sup> Tanenbaum’s description accurately portrays the perception of Williams’ unflappable technique as a contrast to Bream’s animated performance style. In one sense Bream epitomises the modern classical guitarist, largely self-taught and resolutely forcing his technique to bend to both the will of his own charismatic personality and the difficulty of the music he interprets. The showmanship and sensitivity of his playing are presented as a refined art form under the graceful veneer of a traditional classical virtuoso, conforming to the dinner-jacket dress code traditionally associated with the concert platform. Williams regards this formal presentation as a generational difference, arguing that ‘although he’s only eight years older than me, Julian has a more traditional approach to presentation. In fact, he is much more informal at heart, but I suppose he likes to retain that formality about how he presents himself.’<sup>452</sup>

Throughout his career, Bream endeavoured to encourage a number of prominent British and European composers to write for the guitar. He succeeded spectacularly in this objective, commissioning works from Benjamin Britten, William Walton, Lennox Berkley, Hanz Werner Henze and many others. Williams on the other hand adopts a casual approach to presentation, trying to appear more accessible to the general public. He concentrated less on commissioning new works for the guitar and more on becoming involved with whatever music was around him. Williams feels strongly about this and outlines his approach as follows:

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<sup>451</sup> Tanenbaum, 191.

<sup>452</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

The great thing that the guitar can do is to get in ‘with both feet’ to the music that is going on in our and almost anybody else’s society: and in a way that belongs to the spirit of what almost all people feel in music.’<sup>453</sup>

This relaxed approach and appearance belies another marked difference between Williams and Bream, in that the former possesses a superior technique that Tanenbaum describes as being ‘so powerful that he is known, justifiably, as the greatest player of our time.’<sup>454</sup> This comment emanates from an acclaimed professional guitarist of the generation that followed Williams and is a good example of widely held opinion relating to Williams’ technique. Bream, for all his musicality was given to technical lapses that occasionally marred his performances. As Paul Fowles of *Classical Guitar* magazine wrote in a concert review in 1996:

I would like to take part in a standing ovation at a Julian Bream concert. After all, how else can I pay tribute to one of the guitar’s living legends? Sadly, over a period of years, I only managed to be there on nights where the noble artistic intentions were held partly at bay by minor memory lapses and momentary losses of technical control.<sup>455</sup>

Although it should also be remembered that Bream’s performing career was littered with standing ovations, it could be argued that Fowles’ comments are designed to paint Bream as a flawed but gifted performer.

Given the apparent flawlessness of his own technique, it is somewhat ironic that it is Williams who rallies against so many classical conventions. It must be noted that while Bream and Williams inspire enormous debate among various commentators because of their radically different approaches to the instrument, they retain a mutual admiration to the present day. The two performers are clearly very different personalities and it is the combination of their contrasting performance styles that made their duet performances so compelling. This led to

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<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.* 195.

<sup>454</sup> Tanenbaum, 196. Also this sentiment is echoed by James Tosone, who in 2000 referred to Williams as ‘the most technically proficient classical guitarist that ever lived’ in Tosone, James: *Classical Guitarists – Conversations*, (North Carolina, London: McFarland, 2000), 150.

<sup>455</sup> Fowles, Paul: ‘Julian Bream, Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, 25, January, 1996’, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Volume 14, No. 9, (May, 1996), 47.

the pair receiving a Grammy award in 1973 for their album *Julian and John* (1972). Richard Rodney Bennett spoke about the differences between their two styles in an interview in 2000, where he compared the way both performers played his own concerto:

Julian does some things in the Guitar Concerto that are not in the score [...] But he likes the idea of playing it his way and he was determined to do it [...] Julian's performance may be eccentric, but it has depth and poetry. John Williams played the concerto extraordinarily, with no difficulty at all. He is a marvellous player and I even hesitate to say this but John's performance didn't have the poetry of Julian's.<sup>456</sup>

John Duarte wrote an article in 1991 that assessed the relative strengths of both players along with an acknowledgement that guitarists and guitar audiences, had long been obsessed with comparing the two players:

In the 1950s, it became obvious that a new generation of great guitarists was on the point of emerging, and it seemed that the day would dawn when a New Segovia would be hailed. It started with the emergence of Julian Bream and continued with John Williams, and with it began the argument: "Who is the greater guitarist – Bream or Williams?" In the '60s, the guitar world had already divided into two camps, both of which still exist, side by side, with a third faction – those who recognise that it's a stupid question.<sup>457</sup>

Bream has stated that both he and Williams regarded their duet as a way of putting an end to the whole argument over which of them was the better guitarist, but nonetheless, the debate continued, and is an unresolvable matter because of subjective opinion.<sup>458</sup> Tanenbaum summarises the impact of the two players by describing their collaboration as 'a kind of attraction of opposites that led to endless discussions, which in turn led to high record sales, concert ticket purchases, and an increased awareness of the guitar.'<sup>459</sup> One notable aspect about the recordings is the type of repertoire featured. Both these performers became renowned for performing very specific repertoire: Bream for playing and commissioning dissonant modern music, mainly by British composers, and

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<sup>456</sup> Tosone, 70.

<sup>457</sup> Duarte, John: 'Aims and Standards', *Soundboard*, Vol. 18, No.2, (1991), 40.

<sup>458</sup> King-Dabbs, Andy: 'John Williams at the BBC Classical Guitar 2016 Documentary', Accessed 26 March, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VctU0oBUoX8&sns=fb>

<sup>459</sup> Tanenbaum, 191.

Williams for exploring folk and popular styles and performing cross-genre collaborations. However, for this project they concentrated on the works of classical guitar composers such as Sor and Carulli, as well as transcriptions of popular works by Debussy, Falla, Lawes and Granados. It could be argued that they eschewed more specialised areas of interest, in favour of a less controversial ‘middle-ground’.

In 1996, Williams again formed a guitar duet, this time with fellow Australian guitarist Timothy Kain. They recorded the album *The Mantis and the Moon*, and toured successfully throughout 1996. The duet grew out of a larger ensemble known as *Attaca*. Williams had formed this ensemble with musicians from London and Australia but it did not prosper for logistical reasons. Williams and Kain decided to explore the idea of touring together and it is clear that Williams was apprehensive as to how this might be received, given the popularity of the Bream/Williams duet:

Both of us realised that there was a kind of inhibition in a way in the background, because of the records I’ve done with Julian, and neither of us wanted to be seen in any way to be competing, or even making it seem as if in a way I was being disloyal [...] The things I did with Julian were very special and in a way I wouldn’t want to touch that repertoire.<sup>460</sup>

The repertoire included some pieces by the Australian composers Phillip Houghton and Nigel Westlake, and pieces from various different continents are added to give the album a truly global sound. James Tosone began a review of the album with the statement: ‘Welcome to world music, Williams style.’<sup>461</sup> Somewhat inevitably, Tosone compared the duet with the Bream-Williams combination and noted that Kain and Williams were ‘more rhythmically straight’ than the previous pairing.<sup>462</sup> The recording features a vast array of diverse repertoire and a real edge to the playing, allied with an instinctive sense of timing as opposed to the looser sense of ensemble and more conservative tastes

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<sup>460</sup> Kilvington, Chris: ‘New Ways of Looking at Things’, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol.14, No. 6 (1996), 11.

<sup>461</sup> Tosone, 165.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*



exhibited in the recordings of Bream-Williams. However, Tosone comments about the similarity in style of Kain and Williams in a way which almost sounds like a criticism and highlights his own emotional response to Bream-Williams: ‘While the Bream-Williams duo was a study in contrasting musical styles, the Williams-Kain duo sounds more like a twenty-fingered John Williams playing on twelve strings.’<sup>463</sup>

While some may have eulogised the pairing of such perceived opposites as Williams and Bream, the relative brevity of their duet is perhaps an indication that it is not always easy to accommodate such different artists in one ensemble. The two men speak very differently about both music and the guitar. Williams tends to be optimistic about the inclusivity of the guitar, highlighting its role in breaking down the social barriers often constructed around classical music. In 2000, he made the following statement:

It is ironic for us in the guitar world because much of our recent history has been to try and become part of that European classical tradition. But this is such an exciting age for anyone that’s interested in the world, culturally, to be associated with the guitar – because of its links to so many different cultures.<sup>464</sup>

This revealed an enthusiasm for the guitar and for current changes in musical direction. Speaking in an interview during the same year, Bream seemed to view the possibilities of cross-cultural exchanges to which Williams referred with suspicion, saying that: ‘At this point in Western musical history, materialism and commercialism have crept into our lives by stealth.’<sup>465</sup> Bream sees his role in the story of the guitar as being similar to that of Segovia, and he has described himself as a ‘pioneer’ and someone who ‘was passionate about the guitar and getting it accepted as a normal classical instrument.’<sup>466</sup> The use of the words ‘normal’ and ‘classical’ in succession are telling here, portraying an opinion that the role of the guitar in other styles somehow diminishes its perceived ‘normality’

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<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.* 160.

<sup>465</sup> Panting, Tim: ‘Julian Bream Interview’, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 18 No.11, (2000), 16.

<sup>466</sup> Baker, Emma: ‘Fingers on the Strings’, *Gramophone*, Vol. 84, No. 1014, (2007), 47.

in comparison to other instruments in the classical tradition. By contrast, Williams seeks to act as a reminder of the guitar's folk origins and does not seek acceptance for the instrument, from any quarter. Bream also frequently paints himself as more of a musician than a guitarist, and does not always express a fondness for other guitarists or the instrument in general. Asked in 2000, about any guitarists who had impressed him over the past fifteen years, he replied:

I can't think of anybody. There are some players that I admire very much as guitar players. I don't think I've ever been touched by a performance; I don't think I've sat in a corner and cried. Whereas I have done that, say, listening to a string quartet.<sup>467</sup>

With two very different personalities, contrasting techniques and almost contradictory tastes in music, Bream and Williams achieved a great deal by creating three albums, winning a Grammy award and completing a number of successful tours, which had an enormous effect on the popularity of their instrument. In fact, with such contrasting attitudes to music it may seem inevitable that the pair did not continue playing together from the early 1980s onwards. However, Williams has explained that individual circumstances led to the end of the duet:

We did the two albums and then the double live album, so I suppose that brought our exploration of those particular works to an end, unless we were going work out a whole new repertoire. We did two studio albums and the live one, which is a lot of repertoire in itself. We did some stuff which has only come to light recently like the Schubert quartet which Julian arranged and we recorded for the BBC. Then Julian had an arm accident, which was in the early 1980s and seemed to be slowing down a lot after that. We had to wait for a bit after the accident and then we did the Schubert. Julian was cutting down on his activity as I said, but I don't think we consciously decided not to play together.<sup>468</sup>

From that point onwards (and indeed for the duration of their work together) they have travelled in opposite directions, one evoking old-world values and the other collaborating with various popular and folk ensembles. Bream sums up their ensemble in a typically self-deprecating fashion: 'We were never a great duo as

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<sup>467</sup> Panting, 16.

<sup>468</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

such: we were just rather good players who played well together. I liked the difference of our approach; well, it's no good playing table-tennis if you've got no competition, and I liked the spontaneity.<sup>469</sup> This remark illustrates the informal nature of their ensemble. Amused by Bream's assessment, Williams has added:

I would go a little bit further than Julian. I think we were a great duo because we amalgamated our different styles without losing our own identity and I find that duo playing (and I don't want to mention any names) where both players play exactly the same is just pointless. I would think that this applies to any duos: if both parties play in the same way its just giving more notes and why would anyone want more notes? One note can be enough! If there's a slight difference and obviously if you're both hopefully playing together, the whole point of it is that you have a slightly different way of performing the same material. Not totally different but different enough that you have both personalities coming through.<sup>470</sup>

These two reflections provide an indication of the differences that made their performances so appealing: Williams open and positive, while the older Bream retained a humorous and mischievous cynicism. Many people view the duet as a meeting of two very different techniques, but it is surely this basic difference in their personalities that made the Bream and Williams duet so engaging.

## 5.5 Richard Harvey

Many of the more recent duet collaborations featuring John Williams have evolved directly from the *Magic Box* project, which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, since the 1970s he has worked many times with multi-instrumentalist and composer Richard Harvey, and since the turn of the twenty-first century, has completed many successful tours and recordings with both Harvey and John Etheridge. Harvey was drafted in as an arranger and instrumentalist for some of Williams' work with Stanley Myers in the 1970s, and in the 1980s he was a member of the John Williams and Friends ensemble that completed many successful tours. Harvey is a BAFTA-winning film composer

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<sup>469</sup> King-Dabbs, Andy: 'John Williams at the BBC Classical Guitar 2016 Documentary', Accessed 26 March, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VctU0oBUoX8&sns=fb>

<sup>470</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

and orchestrator, and wrote an oratorio *Plague and the Moonflower* in 1989, in which Williams appeared as a soloist, further cementing their working relationship.

One of Harvey's most renowned works is *Concerto Antico*, a guitar concerto written for Williams in 1995, which featured on Williams' *Guitar Concerto* (1996) recording for Sony and is, as the name suggests of the work based on early music dance forms. The concerto is tonal and accessible, much like Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*. The opening movement *Alborada*, begins with an extended and tense crescendo section during which the guitar arpeggiates simple chords, before breaking into a more conventional episodic concerto format of the soloist being answered by the orchestra. Harvey uses lavish orchestration throughout the work, clearly writing for amplified classical guitar. The third movement is very much the focal point: a beautiful piece featuring poignant major second dissonances in the string section and illustrating Williams' gift for playing slow expressive melodies on the guitar in a charming yet understated manner. Initially, Harvey explores the guitar in combination with different groupings in this movement as the violoncello takes the theme, but soon the guitar is left alone to play wistfully before woodwinds enter. The movement concludes as it began with strings and soloist.

The fifth movement is a tour de force, beginning with Stravinsky-esque orchestral stabs, before the guitar enters, strumming. Harvey displays a real knowledge of the instrument with virtuosic and idiomatic writing in the manner of Villa-Lobos or Brouwer. Following a tender echo of the third movement the piece draws to a rousing climax. John Schneider made the following remarks in his review of the piece in 1997:

Cast in five movements, the Harvey Concerto is a barnstorming knucklebuster that will have audiences singing its tunes, swooning over its many moments of filmic grandeur, and thrilled to their fingertips by an exhilarating finale guaranteed to bring them to their feet.<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Schneider, John: 'Harvey Gray: Concertos John Williams, guitar, London Symphony Orchestra, Paul Daniel', *Soundboard*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (1997), 79.

The concerto has been a very popular piece on Classic FM since its release and in 2012, was voted onto the ‘Classic FM Hall of Fame’. Harvey again appeared on the *Magic Box* album in 2001 and the pair began playing concerts as a duo soon after this. Williams reveals that he and Harvey are instinctively similar in their approach to music and that this has led to an easier ensemble situation than his work with Julian Bream:

We’ve been working together for a long time and you get very used to the way someone plays a note and the attack of the notes they use when playing a scale or even their sense of pulse and rhythm in all its guises. Richard is someone I’ve learned a lot from and is definitely someone that I’ve found it easy to work with. Sometimes you’ve got to work very hard, for example with Julian and I. We had to work very hard because we had a different feeling for pulse and rhythm and that’s fine: it’s just a different way of expressing things and with Richard everything works very well.<sup>472</sup>

Harvey and Williams embarked on a ‘World Tour’ in 2005, the use of the word ‘World’ referring to the different styles of music covered rather than any defined plan to traverse the globe giving concerts. They played together at ‘EXPO 2005’ in Aichi, Japan, and in 2009, released a DVD recording of that event. The video recording is appropriate as an indicator of Williams’ philosophy about the myriad of different avenues open to guitarists because of the instrument’s integration into so many contrasting cultures. It contains music from Europe, Asia and Africa as well as North and South America. Harvey plays a dizzying array of instruments during the concert and the ease of mutual understanding felt by the two performers, is clearly evident. He has also featured on Williams’ *Concerto* album in 2014 performing as a soloist alongside Williams and Horacio Duran (charango) in Haracio Salinas’ *Danzas Peregrinas*. On this recording Harvey again shows his versatility, playing clarinet, kena, sicus, mandolin and recorder.

Harvey’s album notes for the *Concerto Antico* give a good indication as to the common ground shared by these two musicians:

I draw freely and unrepentantly on any style that is appropriate, including elements from archaic, folk and ethnic sources,

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<sup>472</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

particularly when associated with the guitar or other fretted instruments. I am fascinated by the guitar's place in many different folk and popular traditions and by its ability to give joy at many different levels. If the *Concerto Antico* can draw on those traditions to give pleasure in unexpected ways, it will be because the guitar is simply the most accessible and adaptable of instruments.<sup>473</sup>

While Williams' collaboration with Harvey has been one of his most productive to date, his own compositions for solo guitar have become an important part of his repertoire in the latter stages of his career. In fact, his compositions have often reflected the huge diversity of his work as performer over the past six decades, incorporating influences from Africa, Australia, America and Europe.

### 5.6 Williams' own compositions

John Williams is highly critical and even dismissive of himself as a composer. Whenever he speaks of himself composing music he often uses phrases such as '...just something I made up...' to describe his work. Nonetheless, as he enters the later stage of his career he seems more compelled than ever to write for the instrument. His first recorded composition is *El Tuno* from his cross-over album *The Height Below*, which was released in 1973 and Williams regards this as 'nothing more than a little ditty.'<sup>474</sup> Later, he wrote *The Aeolian Suite*, a twelve-minute work for guitar and string orchestra, which featured on his 1998 album *The Guitarist*. It is in four movements and is a very interesting exploration of medieval music that contains well-written string parts. Williams is typically self-effacing:

'I have to say I think it's really nice and fun, but although I was encouraged by the experience of writing it — I was pleased with the way I edited myself and kept myself within limits — I'm not', he confesses, 'a composer!'<sup>475</sup>

He composed two pieces for *The Magic Box* (2001): *Mushi Musiki* and *Malinke Guitars*. *Mushi Musiki* is a very interesting rhythmic study, which also features

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<sup>473</sup> Harvey, Richard: 'Notes on Harvey. Gray: Guitar Concertos', SK68337 (Sony: Sony Classical, 1996).

<sup>474</sup> Wingate, Jonathan: Notes for 'Cavatina – The John Williams Collection – The Complete Fly and Cube Recordings', Salvo, SALVODCD215 (2010).

<sup>475</sup> Quinn, Michael: 'Heading off to Greece', *Gramophone*, Vol. 26 (1998), 29.

some improvisation from John Etheridge. It was discussed earlier in this thesis in Chapter Four and the rapidly repeating rhythms upon single notes, gives the piece a pulse-like minimalist sound reminiscent of Reich.

However, it was not until his album *From a Bird* (2008), that Williams made a strong artistic statement about himself as a composer. It may be significant that this freedom to focus strongly on his own works has coincided with his decision to record outside of the Sony umbrella. He credits the director of Sony Classical, Peter Gelb, with helping him achieve so much with that label but states that when Gelb left to take over the management of the Metropolitan Opera in New York ‘it was only a question of when, not if, I started my own label.’<sup>476</sup> With *From a Bird*, Williams’ own works make up most of the album, with the addition of some arrangements Irish traditional music. The first piece on *From a Bird* is *Hello Francis*, and is arguably the most popular of Williams’ compositions. It is a tribute to Francis Bebey, written after his death in 2001 and is an example of a makossa, an upbeat dance from Cameroon that had achieved widespread popularity during the 1960s and 1970s. Williams uses a right hand technique similar to the ‘palm wine’ finger-style playing which became popular in Western and Central Africa during the twentieth century. Banning Eyre describes this as follows:

The two-finger guitar picking technique is nearly universal in western and central Africa, and to some extent throughout the continent [...] The opposition of thumb and forefinger allows the player to juxtapose two distinct rhythms and melodies, a fundamental feature of much African guitar music.<sup>477</sup>

The first four bars of the piece provide a clear example of this style of playing (see Ex.5.6.1) and although Williams’ classical technique allows him to use more than two fingers of the right hand, the piece could ostensibly be easily played using this style.

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<sup>476</sup> Travis Guy: ‘Interview with John Williams’ *Soundboard*, Vol.40, No.3, (2015), 48.

<sup>477</sup> Eyre, 47.

Ex. 5.6.1 *Hello Francis*, John Williams, 1-4



There is a certain lilting feel to the piece, brought about by the gentle syncopations between the bass (thumb) and melody (index finger) and the upper line evokes the piece *O Bia*, written by Bebey and also featured on the *Magic Box* album. This technique can be heard to combine with Williams' knowledge of the upper range of the instrument in bar 26, where he uses the very highest register of the guitar in combination with open first and second strings to striking effect (see Ex.5.6.2).

Ex. 5.6.2 *Hello Francis*, John Williams, 26-30



This technique is reminiscent of the remarkable fingerings of Barrios and Brouwer that combine open treble strings and high-registered notes played on lower-pitched strings to such great effect.

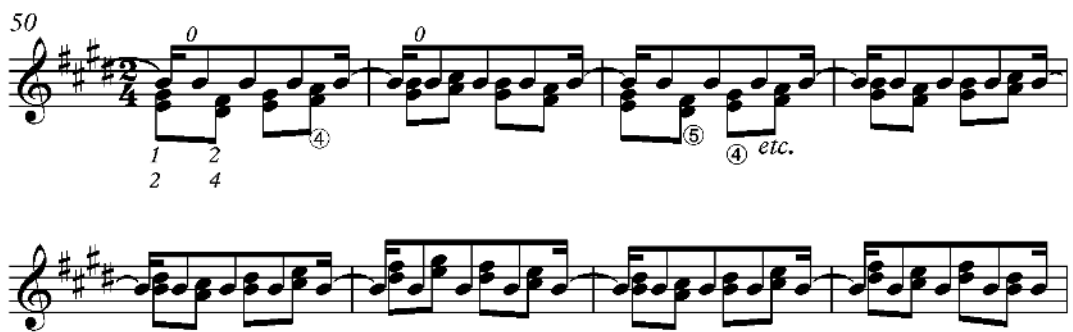
At bar 36, Williams borrows the main rhythm from Bebey's song *Magic Box*, for a theme which progresses through a circle of fifths sequence (see Ex. 5.6.3) until reaching an episodic section which uses an open b-string pedal and a progression, which although in a major key, is a quotation from Bach's Fugue in g minor (see Ex. 5.6.4 i and ii).



Ex 5.6.3 *Hello Francis*, John Williams, 36-41



Ex. 5.6.4 i *Hello Francis*, John Williams, 50-57



Ex. 5.6.4 ii *BWV 1000, Fugue in A minor*, JS Bach, 40-43



Williams has said that he used this quotation because Bebey had always expressed such admiration for Bach and it certainly helps to establish a vivid picture, not only of Bebey's colourful and broad-ranging life but also of Williams' own diverse approach to his chosen instrument.

If Bebey can be said to have been the inspiration and the subject of *Hello Francis*, then it is clear that the holistic approach of Peter Sculthorpe may have inspired Williams to compose the *From a Bird* suite, which is a collection of four

short movements based upon a bird song which he heard while visiting Australia. Williams was asked to compose the music for the Australian film *Emma's War* in the 1980s, starring Lee Remick and Sam Neill. The main theme for this project was the song of a honeyeater bird that he had heard and promptly dictated while visiting a relative in Melbourne. Later he used the same theme as the basis for the *From a Bird* suite and, having initially written seven short pieces, he refined the suite down to four movements with which he was pleased.<sup>478</sup> One of the most remarkable pieces on the album is *Open End*, which makes very effective use of the high open e-string and is notable for the virtuosic tailpieces which are juxtaposed onto the ends of each longer phrase, whereupon Williams utilises rapid descending slurs in triplets to reach the low d, before continuing with a steady quaver movement as before. These fast triplets use cross string fingering to great effect and are reminiscent of some of the guitar writing of Brouwer, particularly from the first movement of his *Sonata* (1990) and *El Decameron Negro* (1981).

In his album *Stepping Stones*, from 2013, Williams includes two of his own pieces, the title track and a work called *Odd Numbers*, which utilises rapidly changing time signatures and weaves an intricate stream of harmonics and natural notes with great skill. *Stepping Stones* itself is a piece that contrasts a slow evocative opening with a dynamically powerful second section.

Although Williams does not express any great desire to produce any particular style of work, he is continually intrigued by what is idiomatic and suitable for the guitar:

I have made up little pieces going back to the seventies, which in the beginning were very amateurish and not very good. However, I've had that urge to explore the sound of the guitar coupled with a desire to express the kind of music I like listening to and the kind of harmonies in music that I like. I try to combine all of these things with the resonances of guitar. I'm interested in things that sound good on guitar, which wouldn't sound good on piano. An obvious example is Villa Lobos' first Prelude. It would sound very trite to play those endless repeated notes on the piano, while the melody

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<sup>478</sup> Wassily Saba, Therese: 'John Williams', *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol.28, no. 1, (2009), 12.

appears in the bass, but on the guitar it sounds natural – now you can extrapolate that endlessly, whereby certain sounds on guitar can be fantastic. Dissonances such as minor ninths, which are common to the music of Rachmaninov: I like that sound a lot and I apply that to guitar.<sup>479</sup>

Although his experience as a performer has been helpful in exploring the sonic possibilities of the guitar, Williams has also received important advice from composers such as Peter Sculthorpe. In fact, he credits Sculthorpe with being both an inspiration and a practical advisor:

A particular composer that I've learned from is Sculthorpe. I like his musical language: the way he's written so totally within the language he likes. He's never become a musical whore and he's stuck to a particular sound and texture. Also he's very sparing with the forces he employs. Stephen Dodgson and Leo Brouwer are what I would call very 'notey' composers but Sculthorpe is much more spare: quite different and I do admire that quality [...] He's helped me with a couple of pieces I've written. For example, in *Song without Words*, there's this little minor section and I wanted to add in a little harmony on the beat to keep things moving. It never quite worked for me and then Peter was visiting London and suggested I place this harmony half a beat later on the offbeat and it worked much better. I believe that is a perfect example of his instincts.<sup>480</sup>

In 2017, he released *On The Wing*, which features five new compositions for solo guitar. Notable among these is the title track, where cross-string right-hand semiquaver movement pushes the melody forward. The piece contains a soaring melody that belies the relatively narrow range of the instrument. *Homage to Rafael* is a large-scale work that has formal similarities to some of Benjamin Britten's 'reverse' theme and variation works. The piece is based on *Toda mi Vida*, a song by the sixteenth-century Spanish composer Luis Milan. Although the song is in a major key, Williams begins the piece with an arrangement in A minor, and this is followed by an extended rhapsodic exploration of the thematic material, using the full dynamic and melodic range of the guitar until finally the original tune is revealed in E major with simple accompaniment. Williams penned this piece as a tribute to Rafael Puyana, the great Colombian harpsichordist who died in 2016. Williams frequently played and recorded with

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<sup>479</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*

Puyana and regards him as a huge influence upon his own views about early music. The piece is a suitable tribute and builds to a forceful climax before the tension finally dissipates with the simple presentation of the theme. *Sleeping Dog* is an exciting exploration of minimalist techniques and again displays Williams' understanding of the guitar to great effect. The self-penned works on this album show a more daring and refined sense of structure than earlier compositions and reveal the same desire for development and improvement that has driven Williams' performance career over the past six decades.

Although his compositions for guitar are by no means his most significant contribution to the instrument, they do represent an idiomatic and colourful addition to the repertoire, and works such as *Hello Francis* reflect their composer's wide variety of disparate musical influences. His compositions have featured prominently in his concerts over the past fifteen years and are indicative of his diverse approach to programming.

### **5.7 Programme choices**

Like any musician with a high profile, Williams is a performer who has the potential to change the career trajectory of a composer by simply playing their works. In addition to the unusual directions and decisions he has made which lie outside the sphere of classical guitar music, he has frequently chosen repertoire that reflects engagement with world-music as well as the fact that he does not always identify with the language of much modern contemporary art music. One composer championed by Williams is Carlo Domeniconi, an Italian guitarist-composer who has lived much of his life in Turkey and retains a strong eastern folk-music influence in his music. In relation to his own music, Domeniconi remarked:

All over the world, we have to mix up East and West. And North and South – in order to develop a musical language which is the language of the earth. Not losing our individuality, but trying to learn from one another and being able to use everything that mankind does and has done in a good way.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Cooper, Colin: 'Carlo Domeniconi: A Force from Italy', *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol.7, No.8, (1989), 16.

This statement could be seen as a very relevant quotation in terms of John Williams' own choices of modern repertoire. He seems to be driven by the desire to find new ways of expressing his art by borrowing from other cultures. In 1999, he outlined his opinion in an interview with *BBC Music Magazine*:

It's a little bit like saying building a spaceship is cleverer than inventing the wheel. It's a misunderstanding of complexity and progress and technology as applied to music. It's assuming that something more complex in abstract structure is automatically more developed or better. I don't believe you can separate culture and cultural meaning from content. This has infected the whole development of European classical music to such a degree that internally its own development is automatically seen as progress, when in reality it is searching round for a language, say, through the avant-garde, (or) through minimalism, to extend its life-scale. It has run out of a cultural language of its own.<sup>482</sup>

In this context, Williams has over the years, favoured the works of composers such as Peter Sculthorpe, Andrew York, Carlo Domeniconi, Richard Harvey and Leo Brouwer, to name but a few. While explaining his views, he refers to the distinction between contemporary music and modern music:

Well, my main point is to play music that I like. In my contemporary programme there's a great contrast in styles, including some pieces that some people may think are not actually contemporary [...] But I absolutely do not subscribe to the view that contemporary has to mean experimental and avant-garde. Contemporary means it's happening now. I think the experimental and so-called avant-garde are part of contemporary music life, but are not the soul of it.<sup>483</sup>

In a review of a recording of Williams performing works by Domeniconi, Theodorakis, Satie, Houghton and the performer himself, Robert Maycock notes that his choice of repertoire is very deliberate in this case. Maycock remarks that when choosing contemporary music to perform, Williams 'always gives the impression of searching' and implies that with this recording, he has found at

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<sup>482</sup> Shmith, Michael: 'Return of the Native', *BBC Music Magazine*, (May, 1999), 28.

<sup>483</sup> Tosone, 159.

least a partially representative voice of his own musical vision.<sup>484</sup> Maycock describes this music as follows:

Strongly melodic, the music favours modality rather than tonality and enters a world in which old music from the Christian and Muslim Mediterranean shares features with traditional and Renaissance strains from northern Europe and with compositions that adopt these idioms. In a word, it's rooted.<sup>485</sup>

This description does indeed go some way to describe the type of music favoured by Williams and the presence of folk idioms and melodies should be of no surprise, given his extensive work with Inti Illimani, Paco Peña, Maria Farandouri and many others. Although he has performed a wide range of modern music by composers such as Schoenberg, Boulez, Dodgson, Petrassi and Takemitsu, it is clear that he exhibits a preference for music that reflects vibrant popular and folk cultures. The musicologist Jonathan Paget describes him as follows:

Williams could be considered to have somewhat conservative tastes in comparison to others of his generation. Despite being the leading player of his generation, Williams has premiered or recorded few works that could be considered avant-garde.<sup>486</sup>

In an interview with *Soundboard* in 2015, Williams revealed much about his reasons for avoiding certain repertoire and deals with the issue as follows:

There was a myth around from time to time, that 'Williams doesn't do new music.' In the sense that it was expressed at the time, it was partly true, in that I'm not interested in every little piece that someone writes for the guitar. For me a lot of it either falls into the trap of 'the guitar needs a repertoire' or the 1960s avant-garde which is not so much 'avant' but 'passe.' But I was playing modern music before a lot of people who were criticising me were even born! I gave the first performance of Stephen Dodgson's first concerto in 1959, played in the premiere of Tippett's *King Priam* (1963), the first performances of Henze's opera *Elegy for Young*

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<sup>484</sup> Maycock, Robert: 'Theodorakis, Domeniconi, Satie, Houghton and John Williams', Submitted on 20 January, 2012. Accessed 28 August, 2015. [www.m.classical-music.com](http://www.m.classical-music.com)

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>486</sup> Paget, 14.

*Lovers* and was involved in Boulez's recordings of the complete Webern, for example.<sup>487</sup>

The quotation suggests that he is a performer who does not believe in playing music out of a misplaced sense of duty. Apart from those works listed above by the performer himself, there are many other examples of Williams playing new music by major composers such as Takemitsu, Sculthorpe, Brouwer and even Frank Zappa, whose musical film *200 Motels* from 1971 (in which Williams played) could most definitely be described as avant-garde. Goffredo Petrassi (1904-2003) is an example of a composer whose dissonant music found favour with Williams and he has performed the piece *Nunc* throughout his career, referring to it as 'one of the greatest modern pieces written for the guitar'.<sup>488</sup> Nonetheless, Paget's comment is clearly reflective of a common perception among guitarists and guitar journalists that he is unsupportive of some of the latest modern compositional trends. However, the English researcher Guy Traviss points out that Williams has always supported music that he loves and he gives the following example:

A previous collaboration with composer Stephen Goss is a case in point: *The Flower of Cities*, although commissioned for the fiftieth anniversary of the City of London Festival, was in fact initiated and funded by John himself. This example sheds an enormously positive light on John's involvement with new music.<sup>489</sup>

*The Flower of Cities* was personally commissioned by Williams and the temptation could have been to insist that the piece might highlight the guitar (in this case a guitar duo) in the role of featured soloist. Many guitarists could be forgiven for demanding this because every project of this nature is seen as an opportunity to further the cause of their instrument. However, despite the fact that both guitars do feature as soloists at times, they regularly play as harmonic support for the violin and indeed the climax of the work features the guitars in that supporting role. Williams illustrates how the process worked by way of example:

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<sup>487</sup> Traviss, Guy: 'Interview with John Williams – Concerto: John Williams on his New Self-released Disc', *Soundboard*, Vol. 40 No. 3, (2014), 50.

<sup>488</sup> Wager-Schneider, John: 'Goffredo Petrassi', *Soundboard*, Vol.08, No.2, (1981), 94.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

It was totally up to Steve. I commissioned him to write a piece for the City of London Festival and he just asked me how long did I want it to be. So I said I wanted it to be a full substantial work and he set about doing it. The movements are all based on places in London. The only thing we discussed really was the instrumentation – I had questioned that maybe a clarinet might work well instead of the violin. But Steve quite rightly heard violin for all sorts of reasons: not just because he envisaged it like that but also because I think he had an idea of the actual violinist [Max Bailie] who would perform it in his mind. Steve knew that this particular violinist is terrific, and could play in the type of ways that would suit the work. The violin worked so well all through the piece and you know, sometimes you just discuss things like this – and you're wrong! (Laughs).<sup>490</sup>

The resultant piece is a joyous eleven-movement exploration of various London landmarks, which moves unselfconsciously through a myriad of different musical styles and instrumental combinations to great effect.

Andrew York, the American composer and guitarist, came to widespread public attention when Williams began performing his work *Sunburst* in 1986. The piece has become very popular since it appeared on Williams' 1988 recording *Spirit of the Guitar – Music of the Americas* and has become a mainstay of the guitarist's repertoire. The piece explores American folk music, even using an alternative string tuning to great effect and draws on finger-style guitar techniques usually associated with steel-stringed acoustic players as well as a virtuosic middle-section, which utilises slurs in a way reminiscent of the electric guitar pyrotechnics of rock music legend Eddie Van Halen.<sup>491</sup> It is a good example of the type of work favoured by Williams and is an important work because it established a bridge between classical guitar playing and other styles of guitar. These elements helped to open up new possibilities for guitarists and composers who wished to combine their skill-sets with other traditions. York sees himself as something of a revolutionary in this process and acknowledges that there has been some resistance to his music, which is sometimes perceived as populist and

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<sup>490</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>491</sup> The tuning used from the bass string upwards is DADGBD.



‘musical pandering.’<sup>492</sup> However, he counters this by remarking that he does not believe that ‘musical accessibility denotes inferiority’.<sup>493</sup> York justifies his own creative journey with the following: ‘Williams has never been afraid to go way out of the box. A lot of the really cool artists are not purists – they’re just artists.’<sup>494</sup>

Williams’ performance of the *Koyunbaba Suite* by Carlo Domeniconi on his *The Guitarist* CD in 1998, had a similar effect on the popularity of the piece as did his recording of the work of Andrew York. *Koyunbaba* has gone on to be performed extensively and has introduced a new type of harmonic language to the classical guitar. This was another piece that achieved enormous success and captured the public’s imagination and Domeniconi uses an unusual tuning system, which creates a very ‘middle-eastern’ atmosphere, as hypnotic and repetitive melodies are played over insistent drones.<sup>495</sup> Because of the composer’s reliance on these techniques, the work has not been without its critics, as is evidenced by John Duarte’s *Gramophone* review, where he states that the work ‘can seem interminable – and in many hands it does, but Williams’ performance of it is heartfelt, not contrived...’<sup>496</sup> Although the piece is frequently referred to as being inspired by Turkey, Domeniconi describes it’s origin more in terms of its geographical location and proximity to the Aegean Sea:

Turkish is nothing. Turkish doesn’t mean anything. Turkish is a political border and nothing else [...] *Koyunbaba*, for example is [...] more music [from] the southwest of Turkey, [and] belongs geographically to the Greek islands. So it’s Aegean music, which is different.<sup>497</sup>

In this respect the work was very well suited to the *Guitarist* album, alongside music by Theodorakis and the Greek inspired *Stele* (1989), by the Australian composer Philip Houghton. Houghton’s work was premiered by Williams in 1990

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<sup>492</sup> Crowe, Julia: ‘Andrew York’ *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 26, No. 4, (2007), 16.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

<sup>495</sup> The tuning from the lowest string upwards is C#G#C#G#C#E – an open c# minor chord.

<sup>496</sup> Duarte, John: ‘The Guitarist John Williams (gtr)’, *Gramophone*, Vol. 76, No. 908, November, (1998), 87.

<sup>497</sup> Martinez, Joe: ‘The Guitar Music of Carlo Domeniconi’, *Soundboard*, Vol.35, No. 2, (2009), 34.

and is also a fine composition, but one that has not had the universal impact of *Koyunbaba*. David Grimes describes *Stele* as follows:

The music is sonorous and evocative, serious in tone but never dry or academic. The style is clearly modern but conservative enough to sit well with most audiences. (It might be described as reminiscent to a cross between Koshkin and Johanson, if that can be imagined) Like the music of those composers, the piece is written very effectively for the instrument, giving the guitar a chance to sound full and rich [...] It is precisely the type of substantial, effective and playable music that guitarists are always seeking.<sup>498</sup>

Although criticisms remain centred on his reluctance to play works by some of the more avant-garde composers, it is nonetheless true that Williams has supported, performed and commissioned new music throughout his career to an extent that has few parallels in the history of the guitar. Furthermore, the fact that a great deal of the ‘new music’ with which he has been involved, emanates from Australia, South America, Africa and Asia, should not render it less valuable than, for example, Benjamin Britten’s *Nocturnal* (1963) or a work by Henze. In conversation with Joe Martinez in 2009, Domeniconi seemed to echo Williams’ own sentiments about what the guitar needs from its composers in the modern era:

[Martinez:] Much of my conversation with Domeniconi centred upon the craft and state of guitar composition. (Really, what should one talk about with a guitar composer?) He spoke of the need to discover the true power of the guitar in the same fashion that other instruments have had music that specifically exploits their strengths. He says that the guitar is in need of not so much a Renaissance but rather composers such as Chopin or Rachmaninoff for the piano.

[Domeniconi:] ‘Find the energy of the guitar. Where is the guitar really powerful? This is a question; I don’t have the answer. I have many answers for myself in my music, but I cannot say, “Look at me I have it.” I can say, now, I did my best [...] and I think in the moment that twenty other people [are doing] something similar, we [are creating] something around the guitar, an energy.’<sup>499</sup>

Williams has been instrumental in launching the careers of many composers such as Domeniconi. In his choice of modern repertoire he has, in contrast to Segovia

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<sup>498</sup> Grimes, David: ‘Houghton, Phillip: *Stele*’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (1994), 98.

<sup>499</sup> Martinez, 36.

and Bream, focused less on composers of high repute and more on those who understand the sonority of the guitar. Someone who understands this sonority better than any other modern composer is the great Cuban composer/guitarist Leo Brouwer, with whom Williams has worked since the 1970s.

### 5.8 Leo Brouwer

John Williams recorded Leo Brouwer's first guitar concerto in 1978, on an album, which also included Malcolm Arnold's concerto. Although the piece was not written for him (as an active guitarist it was natural for Brouwer to compose for himself), this was the first recording of a Brouwer concerto on a major record label, six years after the piece had been written. Although composers who perform their own works often struggle to have other performers play their music, the fact that Williams recorded this piece on Columbia Records must have been of considerable benefit to Brouwer. Indeed, he had up to that point been established for many years as a major figure in the Cuban musical establishment, but his career in Europe and North America certainly maintained an upward trajectory following the recording. Although Williams has often been criticised for a perceived lack of support for contemporary guitar music it is interesting to note that he was responsible for introducing a large audience to the work of Brouwer, who is now celebrated as arguably the most important guitar composer of his generation. With the benefit of hindsight, it is interesting to note the sentiments of John Tanno in his review of Williams' recording of the first concerto for *Soundboard*:

It is an avant-garde piece but entirely listenable and from a guitaristic point of view, a challenging and intriguing work. John Williams may well be the most adventuresome of the small cadre of internationally acclaimed guitarists, particularly when it comes to recording contemporary works for the guitar.<sup>500</sup>

Although it is true that other guitarists such as Bream, Elliot Fisk and David Tanenbaum have become more closely associated with performing 'challenging' modern works over the succeeding years, it is important to remember Williams'

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<sup>500</sup> Tanno, John W.: 'John Williams, Malcolm Arnold Guitar Concerto, Op. 67. Leo Brouwer, Guitar Concerto, London Sinfonietta,' *Soundboard*, (Vol. 8, No.2, 1981), 111.

role in popularising and supporting figures such as Brouwer. This concerto is indeed experimental, with Brouwer contrasting the various different methods of sounding strings, not only on the guitar but also on the orchestral stringed instruments. In a similar way to his solo guitar work *Elogio de la Danza* (1964), the composer utilises every aspect of the guitar's range of sounds and extended techniques, to achieve rapid changes of colour and tone. Brouwer also shows his skill as an orchestrator, at times using vibes and plucked strings to create a bed of sound over which the guitar can be easily heard. Brass instruments enter in response to the guitar rather than being set against it. In the second movement, there is a very inventive section involving slurs and dampened strings on the guitar that produce flurries of indeterminate notes against quite random percussion sounds that seem to almost evoke African dance.

The first concerto is a late example of Brouwer's middle period of compositions. Having initially been a very nationalistic composer, often using Cuban folk melodies as his inspiration, he altered his style during the 1960s, under the influence of the European avant-garde. However during the late 1970s, Brouwer felt a need to move away from this style as he explains:

In time, I became saturated with the language of the so-called old avant-garde, this contemporary music that everybody has made and that still is being created by many composers. What happened was that the atomised, crisp and "tensional" language of this kind suffered, and still suffers today, a defect related to the essence of compositional balance, a concept that is present in history: Movement, tension, with its consequent rest, relaxation. This "law of opposing forces" – day-night, man-woman, ying-yang, time to love-time to hate – exists within all circumstances of mankind. Palestrina said: if a section is moving the other is not and vice versa; if someone talks, the other listens. The avant-garde lacked the relaxation of all tensions. There is no living entity that doesn't rest. This was one of the things I discovered in my completely self-taught analysis. In this way, I made a kind of regression that moves toward the simplification of the compositional materials. That is what I consider my last period which I call "New Simplicity". This New Simplicity encompasses the essential elements from popular

music, from classical music and from the avant-garde itself. They help me to give contrast to big tensions.<sup>501</sup>

Although not all of Brouwer's opinions about the 'old avant-garde' would draw universal agreement, it is clear that he had become disenchanted and sought new musical ideals. Many critics have described this third phase as neo-Romantic, although Brouwer prefers the term 'Hyper-Romantic' or the above-mentioned 'New Simplicity'. David Tannenbaum implies that the reaction to this move towards tonality has not been universally positive, when he states that many guitarists 'regard works from this period [the avant-garde phase] such as *Canticum and Eternal Espiral* as his strongest.'<sup>502</sup> In his review of a performance of the *Toronto Concerto*, Colin Cooper also referenced the adverse reaction among some guitarists to Brouwer's shift towards tonality:

Here is a composer who not only knows how to write for the guitar, but how to write for an orchestra. Those two skills make him the most sought-after guitar composer of our time. It also makes him an easy target for those who want to shoot down anyone who doesn't quite fit in with their conception of what a guitar composer ought to be. But that is the price of fame. If Brouwer had not already made such an impact during his avant-garde period, there would not be so much criticism of his work now. It is true that the fourth concerto, like the second, has a number of 'popular' elements that may dismay some who have not yet accepted the new Brouwer, the 'neo-romanticist', for want of a better term.<sup>503</sup>

Cooper spends much of this review musing on the acceptance, or lack of acceptance, of Brouwer's music. It becomes clear that the reviewer himself seems to be battling the urge to criticise the composer (a person he clearly admires) and his conclusion seems to be that Brouwer should be allowed to write in this style, even if it is not as successful as earlier works. Later, he rather feebly describes the piece as 'a guitar concerto with some pretty good music in it.'<sup>504</sup> Beyond that, much of the review focuses on Williams' incredible technique and Brouwer's skill as a conductor. However, in reality, Brouwer's third phase of composition

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<sup>501</sup> Betancourt, Rodolpho: 'A Close Encounter with Leo Brouwer', Originally published in *Guitar Review*, Spring Issue #113, (1998), Accessed 13 January, 2017.

<http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/Strasse/8309/brouwer.html>

<sup>502</sup> Tanenbaum, 197.

<sup>503</sup> Cooper, Colin: 'A Meeting of Talents,' *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol.7, No.4, (1988), 12.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*

has produced guitar works that have had an enormous appeal both to the public and a younger generation of guitarists, who are drawn to the popular influences and minimalist undertones that pervade, in conjunction with his trademark guitaristic style. The composer explains his style as follows:

Unlike the homophonic style, the style that Segovia liked most and that induced the creation of works by Torroba, Ponce, Rodrigo and so forth, my way of composing is close to what I call the “Guitar-Harp”. The guitar harp is a guitar-orchestra in which all the orchestral compositional elements are closer to the orchestra than to the traditional guitar clichés. I always use the “Guitar-Harp”, a resonant guitar. I try to avoid the percussive or melodic guitar. The basic harmonies I use, when they are simple chords, are chords that rest obeying the “law of opposing forces”. These harmonies involve small – I could say even miserable – thematic materials. Four foolish notes give me the pretext to compose a work of big dimensions. The melody was the queen of music for a long time, a thing that doesn't happen now. My harmonic language is based in the extensive use of the sound spectrum in the same way as Ravel, Debussy or Charles Koechlin. These composers used to orchestrate departing from a harmonic phenomena [sic]: open low pitches, close medium pitches and very close high pitches.<sup>505</sup>

Tanenbaum sums up the appeal of his music by stating that ‘part of the secret to Brouwer’s success is how playable his music is; the music works so well on the instrument, that, contrary to most of the repertoire, Brouwer’s music sounds harder than it is.’<sup>506</sup> Regardless of the exact reasons and methods, Brouwer’s third phase created an aesthetic well matched to that of John Williams and his *Concerto Toronto* (Guitar Concerto No. 4), dedicated to Williams and composed in 1987, represents a vigorous exploration of the composer’s vision. The piece is a particularly effervescent example of Brouwer’s ‘New Simplicity’ and a triumphant showcase for Williams’ pristine technique. In contrast to the first concerto, the piece is written with amplified guitar in mind and this facilitates a more expansive orchestration, allowing Brouwer to achieve a broader palette of colours than in previous works. In addition to his reputation as a guitar composer, Brouwer has composed music for more than sixty Cuban feature films and this is very much in evidence in the *Toronto Concerto*. The first movement involves

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<sup>505</sup> Betancourt, Rodolpho: ‘A Close Encounter with Leo Brouwer’, Originally published in *Guitar Review*, Spring issue #113, (1998), Accessed 13 January, 2017.

<http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/Strasse/8309/brouwer.html>

<sup>506</sup> Tanenbaum, 197.

some repeated rhythmic cells, which alternate between the guitar and orchestral parts. A flowing cadenza gives way to more interplay between soloist and orchestra, which brings the movement to an abrupt end.

The second movement is an impressive theme and variations, using a filmic slow theme, and four variations, that serve to develop the thematic material as well as moving the piece towards the third movement finale. Highlights include the virtuosic first variation and the calm, sonorous fourth variation, which ushers in the third movement. This movement begins with a short cadenza before the orchestra enters and soon after, the listener is re-introduced to the famous rhythmic theme from the last movement of *El Decameron Negro*, Brouwer's epic solo piece from 1981, which heralded the onset of his third compositional phase. The theme initially enters in the brass section and soon emerges in the guitar part, dominating the work from that point to the end of the work.

Although it is viewed by many as a prime example of the music of his third period, Brouwer feels that the piece contains elements from all of the different phases of his career:

In a way, the *Toronto Concerto* (No. 4) is a compendium of my writing. You can perceive elements used in the *Decameron Negro* and in a 1958 quintet for guitar, flute, oboe, clarinet, and cello, which was never published or performed. The harmonic tension in the *Fourth Concerto* can also be found in *Parábola* and *Elogio de la Danza*. So there's a basic language. I'm talking about semantics, the highest point of organised language. My language has been almost the same for thirty years. I've followed something like arc structure, which I love. I started with folklore and national roots. I gradually developed into abstraction. I arrived at almost total abstraction in the '70s. And then I came back gradually to national roots through a sophisticated romantic feeling. Let's call it hyper-romantic, because what I'm using is an obvious cliché. It doesn't have the feeling of a late Romantic like Barrios Mangoré or a pure Romantic like Mahler. This is not only a quotation of style, this is a necessity, a rediscovery of style, in the same way that some composers are using elements like the gamelan from Indonesia, and rhythms from Africa, and converting them into a new thing called minimal music. I am taking this Neoromantic style, which is not "neo" but "hyper." The *Concierto Elegíaco* is built in this way, as are some sections of

the *Fourth Concerto*.<sup>507</sup>

Williams went on to record a complete album of Brouwer's music in 1997, entitled *The Black Decameron*, which, along with the earlier recording of the first concerto, gives a good overview of the composer's stylistic changes throughout his career. The fact that these two figures have worked so closely together throughout their careers is quite fitting, because there are a number of striking similarities between them. They both initially forged careers because of their technical excellence within the accepted parameters of contemporary classical music, and they have both courted controversy by veering away from the course along which most people expected them to travel. Both men also share an appreciation for European popular music, and while Williams' various fusion projects have been well documented, Brouwer has made numerous arrangements of Beatles songs along with an extended theme and variations on a theme by Django Reinhardt. However, most importantly, both these men have shared the belief that the guitar's role in the popular music of Latin America is of crucial importance to the instrument. They have rallied against the Euro-centric views of Segovia and have done more than most to change the public perception of Latin American guitar music. There is certainly a huge deal of mutual appreciation between these two huge figures, and in 2000, Brouwer was quoted at a press conference in Cuba, naming Williams as 'the most important guitarist of the century.'<sup>508</sup> He has also referred to Williams as 'one of the few "champions" in guitar history.'<sup>509</sup> This tribute possibly relates to Williams' role in popularising Latin American guitar music, and Williams has in turn stated that the *Concerto Toronto* was 'musically the most challenging and rewarding, dynamic and beautiful of any concerto I knew.'<sup>510</sup> John Duarte agreed with that assessment in his review for *Gramophone*:

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<sup>507</sup> McKenna, Caroline: 'Interview with Leo Brouwer', Accessed 14 January, 2017. [www.angelfire.com/in/eimaj/interviews/leo.brouwer.html](http://www.angelfire.com/in/eimaj/interviews/leo.brouwer.html)

<sup>508</sup> Reynolds, David: diary entry from 15 May, 2000 Havana, Cuba. Accessed 03 January, 2017. [www.colombia.guitarstudio.com](http://www.colombia.guitarstudio.com)

<sup>509</sup> Brouwer, Leo: 'Notes for *The Black Decameron – The Guitar Music of Leo Brouwer*,' Williams, London Sinfonietta, Mercurio, SK63173, (Sony, Sony Classics, 1997).

<sup>510</sup> Williams, John: 'Notes for *The Black Decameron – The Guitar Music of Leo Brouwer*,' Williams, London Sinfonietta, Mercurio, SK63173, (Sony, Sony Classics, 1997).



Head above parapet, I venture to suggest that, though its appeal is less ‘popular’ than that of Rodrigo’s ubiquitous *Concierto de Aranjuez*, this is the finest guitar concerto to be written in this century – and spectacular with it. Likewise, Williams’s intense performances of the oft-recorded *Elogio de la Danza* and *El Decameron Negro* and the clearly ‘fingerprinted’ and previously unrecorded *Hika* are those of an artist at the height of his musical maturity and technical power.<sup>511</sup>

During an interview in 2016, Williams mentioned Brouwer’s capacity for adaptability during the process of creating the *Toronto Concerto*. He references composers such as Patrick Gowens and Toru Takemitsu, who were quite inflexible for different reasons with their own music, but gives an example of Brouwer being extremely accommodating. Williams described an extended guitar and marimba section that had originally been included at the beginning of the final movement. He mentioned that he felt that although the writing was of great quality, he felt it was probably much too long and Brouwer responded by agreeing and ‘putting his pen through it and that was that!’<sup>512</sup>

In 1977, Williams stated that Agustin Barrios Mangoré was the greatest guitar composer in the history of the instrument. However, he has since revisited this statement since at that time Brouwer had yet to write some of his greatest music and was in fact still a relatively young composer. Furthermore, Williams now feels that Brouwer is probably a greater figure in the history of the guitar than even Barrios:

At that time I really meant what I said about Barrios [...] I suppose that rings a bit hollow now, which shouldn’t totally devalue it. Leo is probably the only other composer to be in the same bracket and it is possible that all things considered Leo is probably a more significant composer than Barrios. At the time I said that Barrios was the greatest guitar composer in the history of the instrument, it must be remembered that Leo was a very young man – he had written just one concerto, which I had recorded. It’s an aleatoric piece from 1972 and he’d also written some interesting pieces in the 1960s like *Canticum* and *Elogio de la Danza*. He hadn’t written *El Decameron Negro* yet. So, I suppose at that point he’d written many

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<sup>511</sup> Duarte, John W. : *The Black Decameron – The Guitar Music of Leo Brouwer*, Accessed 3 January, 2017. [www.gramophone.co.uk](http://www.gramophone.co.uk).

<sup>512</sup> Kayath, Marcelo: ‘John Williams interview’, This interview features John Williams talking to Stephen Goss and Marcelo Kayath, Accessed 3 January, 2017. [www.guitarcoop.com](http://www.guitarcoop.com)

pieces, which I thought were interesting but not great and Barrios was for me, a larger figure. However, as he's developed and I've gotten to know him better I think that he may have become a greater figure than even Barrios.<sup>513</sup>

Clearly, the relative significance of these two huge figures in the history of the guitar is a subjective matter, but it is certainly worthwhile to note the opinion of the man who did so much to bring their music to the public. Williams has had a significant impact on the career of Leo Brouwer, but his role in exposing guitar audiences to the works of Agustin Barrios Mangoré, has been of critical importance.

### 5.9 Agustin Barrios Mangoré

In 1995, John Duarte assesses John Williams' contribution to the legacy of Agustin Barrios Mangoré for *Gramophone* stating:

John Williams was by no means the first to play Barrios's music in the post-war years but he was the first to draw sustained attention to it and, from his position of authority, to ensure its place in the limelight and a popularity that would probably have amazed and gratified Barrios himself.<sup>514</sup>

Perhaps Williams' greatest contribution to the standard classical guitar repertoire was his championing of the music of the great Paraguayan guitarist Agustin Barrios Mangoré (1885-1944). One of the most inexplicable aspects of Segovia's career was his continuing dismissal of the music of Barrios. For whatever reason, as Segovia rose to prominence, he did not perform Barrios' work and Williams recalled in 2012, that he sought to discourage his students from playing it whenever possible.<sup>515</sup> Williams became aware of the music through his association with Venezuelan guitarist Alirio Diaz at the Academia Musicale Chigiana in Sienna.

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<sup>513</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>514</sup> Duarte, John: 'John Williams – The Great Paraguayan', *Gramophone*, Vol. 73, No. 868, (September 1995), 81.

<sup>515</sup> Starling, 321.

Starling describes the process whereby Williams met Carlos Payet, a young medical student originally from El Salvador, where Barrios had spent his last years teaching at the National Conservatory of Music. Payet, who happened to be studying in Spain, brought a selection of Barrios' unpublished scores to a concert and presented it to Williams, who received them enthusiastically, inviting Payet to bring his entire collection to his London home. Williams began working on the music and collaborated with fellow guitarists Robert Tucker, Jason Waldron and Richard Stover to produce accurate transcriptions which would be reflective of both scores and recorded performances by the composer, eventually resulting in the release of the album *John Williams plays Barrios* (1977). Williams acknowledges the great work undertaken by Richard Stover, whose editions of the music, as well as scholarly research into Barrios' life helped increase awareness of the composer. He remembers that he and Stover had a difficult start to their relationship, but soon became firm friends:

Around the early 1970s, I had mentioned in an interview somewhere that I was going to record a Barrios album and Richard Stover wrote to me and started making some suggestions about what I should put on it and so on [...] I wrote him a very stiff letter back saying: 'its nice of you but I'm the one who should be deciding what I'll play', and he wrote a nice letter back apologising for being so presumptuous. We became good friends and he's a very nice man. He's crazy and he just loves it so much so he wrote the book about Barrios [Six Silver Moonbeams], and did a really good job.<sup>516</sup>

This was in many ways a watershed album for the classical guitar, although John Schneider has noted that it was entirely predictable that it would be Williams who introduced the music of Barrios to a wider audience:

So for John Williams to record an all-Barrios album in 1977 after already working with the rock band Sky and delving into both the electric guitar and jazz was not revolutionary but evolutionary. He was the first influential European performer to "re-discover" this obscure artist whose own Bohemian background two generations before had not differentiated between such artificial levels of culture – for Barrios, all music was in the highest service of "Art", a truly romantic sentiment.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>516</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

<sup>517</sup> Schneider, John: 'Stover, Richard D.: Six Silver Moonbeams', *Soundboard*, Vol.21, No. 2, (1994), 85.

Schneider's timeline is somewhat skewed, as Sky were formed more than a year after the Barrios album was released, but the sentiment is nonetheless clear.

Williams and his collaborators had some difficulties arriving at accurate and dependable editions of the music owing firstly to the composer's careless notation of his work, and secondly to the fact that some of the pieces were only available to them on record. Williams describes the difficulties they faced in his insert notes:

Transcribing from those old records is no easy task, as I found out myself when doing *Aconquija* and generally checking and editing all the music: to the usual difficulties of crackles, pops and scratches are sometimes added the lack of clarity which arises from Barrios' own spontaneous playing.<sup>518</sup>

Barrios also experimented with the range of the guitar, lowering the bottom two bass-strings down a tone for his extended tremolo study, *Sueno en la Floresta*, which also uses a high c note (which could be achieved on Barrios' own guitar) in the upper range of the instrument, a semitone above the highest note achievable on many guitars. Over time more and more guitars have been constructed to include a high c but for his first recording Williams reveals that 'I stuck a bit of matchstick to the fingerboard for that top note!'<sup>519</sup>

In 1995, Williams went back into the studio to make a second complete Barrios recording. He repeated many of the same works as in the 1977 album and his reasoning for returning with the same repertoire was that he wanted the chance to utilise the available superior technology, and to co-produce the album with his favourite engineer Mike Stavrou. For his second recording of *Sueno en la Floresta*, Williams did not need the use of a matchstick to achieve the high 'c' (his Smallman guitar also did not have this note) but rather recorded the bar with his guitar tuned a semitone higher and spliced it into the piece.<sup>520</sup> In addition to the technology, Williams must have felt compelled to repeat his interpretations of

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<sup>518</sup> Williams, John: Notes on 'Latin American Guitar Music by Barrios and Ponce', SBK47669AAD, (Sony, Sony Essential Classics, 1991).

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>520</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

Barrios given that by the time of the second recording, he was using guitars by Greg Smallman, giving a wide palette of tone colours. Colin Cooper remarks:

The sound of John Williams' guitar [on the 1995 Barrios recording] is magnificently reproduced. He has the advantage of Sony's hi-tech at his command – '20 bits for high definition sound' boasts the cover...Well, it works.<sup>521</sup>

The sonic improvements allowed for a greater sense of intimacy in the second recording and if his 1977 effort triggered a tidal wave of interest in Barrios, then it could be argued that this later one marked a musical and technical benchmark to which others can aspire. John Schneider described it as 'simply superb: relaxed, witty and emotive', and despite being often one of Williams' harsher critics, claimed that this record 'revealed a more playful side which, when coupled with his astounding technique, has produced his best solo recording ever.'<sup>522</sup> The third movement of the piece *La Catedral* (1921) offers an example of the contrast between these two recordings with the later one sounding far more energetic because of the 'closeness' of the recording and also because it is played at a slightly faster tempo, giving a greater sense of urgency. Williams acknowledges the differences between the two recordings but does not feel that he was motivated to make the second recording by any desire to re-interpret the work and feels the contrasts between both albums are fairly natural, despite what has been written about the 1995 album:

I wanted to do it again. The sound is so different on that second recording but it wasn't in my head to play the pieces differently. I just played the pieces without trying to do anything wildly different – I'm sure there are differences but I suppose I would change my interpretations of the pieces from year to year without really thinking too much about it.<sup>523</sup>

*Vilancico de Navidad* also benefits greatly from the sonic improvements of the second recording, where in contrast to Williams' earlier interpretation, it is performed at a much slower and more leisurely pace. Colin Cooper muses upon

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<sup>521</sup> Cooper, Colin: 'Agustin Barrios', *Classical Guitar Magazine*, Vol. 14, no. 5, (1996), 42.

<sup>522</sup> Schneider, John: 'From the Jungles of Paraguay: John Williams plays Barrios', *Soundboard*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (1996), 72.

<sup>523</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

the personal nature of these recordings as he comments on the performance of *Aconquija* from the 1995 album, stating that: ‘Williams’s love of the music shines through and he gives a performance that glows with feeling and in which the rubato and ritenuti are perfectly judged.’<sup>524</sup> John Duarte referred to the 1995 recording as ‘a touchstone recording, essential to all gramophilic guitarists and lovers of the instrument.’<sup>525</sup>

This recognition and attention is in stark contrast with the rejection that the composer felt during his own lifetime. During his career, Barrios had contact with Segovia a number of times and had requested that the Spanish virtuoso might play one of his works, particularly *La Catedral*.<sup>526</sup> According to Barrios, it was a piece that Segovia had shown a great deal of interest in playing and given his profile, the mere fact that he might perform it would have been of enormous assistance to the embattled Paraguayan composer.<sup>527</sup> Barrios endured a very difficult career, filled with disappointments and problems and eventually died in 1944 in El Salvador, to all intents and purposes an abject failure at his chosen profession. At one point Barrios, in desperation at his own lack of success, adopted the stage persona of ‘Chief Nitsuga Mangoré’, the fictional tribal leader of the native Guarani race of Paraguay. Chief Nitsuga (‘Agustin’ spelt backwards) would play in full Amerindian costume complete with feathers. While Richard Stover described this character in a *Guitar Review* article from 1995 as both ‘uplifting’ and a ‘startling image to many Latin Americans’, it is hard not to view the whole episode as little more than an embarrassing publicity stunt of very poor taste.<sup>528</sup> Following this episode, the Paraguayan ambassador to Mexico, Tomas Salomoni became a great admirer of Barrios, advised him to drop the native costume and invited the guitarist to accompany him and his family to Europe. This presented Barrios with a longed-for opportunity to establish himself outside of South America, but in keeping with other disastrous episodes in his

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<sup>524</sup> Cooper, 42.

<sup>525</sup> Duarte John, ‘The Great Paraguayan’, *Gramophone*, Vol. 73, No. 868, (September 1995), 81.

<sup>526</sup> Turner, Zane: ‘Why Did Segovia Ignore the Music of Agustin Barrios in His Concerts and Recordings?’, May, 30, 2011. Accessed 3 August, 2015. [www.barriosworldwide.com](http://www.barriosworldwide.com)

<sup>527</sup> Turner, Accessed 3 August 2015. [www.barriosworldwide.com](http://www.barriosworldwide.com)

<sup>528</sup> Stover, Richard: ‘Agustin Barrios Mangoré – His Life and Music/ Part III Cacique Nitsuga Mangoré’, *Guitar Review*, No. 100, (1995), 19.

life, the Paraguayan found himself stranded in Berlin for fifteen months under the rule of the Nazis with no concerts and no prospects.<sup>529</sup>

Many scholars and performers over the past thirty years have speculated as to why Segovia chose not to help his struggling contemporary. Williams has put forward the idea that it was because of a sort of colonial snobbery which afflicted European musicians of the day when approaching the music of previously colonised lands.<sup>530</sup> However, this theory does not explain his close friendship and working relationship with both Manuel Ponce (Mexico) and Heitor Villa-Lobos (Brazil). Zane Turner offered a balanced argument in 2011, where he refuted most of the reasons offered from different sources as to why Segovia chose to ignore Barrios.<sup>531</sup> It could be that the sophisticated and urbane Segovia simply disliked Barrios, who was a very unconventional character and it is possible that too much has been made of the relationship between these two men. Segovia was in no way obliged to help Barrios and cannot be held responsible for his failure. Segovia seemed drawn to the works of a very specific type of composer: one who did not play the guitar and was not so renowned as to renege on his technical advice. Segovia liked to add his own input to the process of composition, which led to a strained relationship with Villa-Lobos and it is probable that Barrios would have been an even poorer collaborator. Another reason, that Stover advances is that the fact that Barrios was a skilled performer would have meant that in playing his compositions, Segovia would in fact have been advancing the cause of a rival guitarist, something he was understandably loathe to do.<sup>532</sup> Stover also attests to the fact that he was present at a 1982 masterclass, when Segovia claimed that Barrios was ‘not a good composer for the guitar’ and it is possible that he simply did not like the Paraguayan’s music. The fact remains that while Segovia enjoyed fame, and global recognition during his lifetime, Barrios was destined to achieve the same, albeit a long time after his own death. It is important to understand that Segovia’s success in no way inhibited the prospects

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<sup>529</sup> Erwich, Chris: ‘Barrios on German Radio in 1935’, *Soundboard*, Vol. 37, No. 3, (2011), 19-23.

<sup>530</sup> Turner. Accessed 3 August 2015.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>532</sup> Stover, 70.

of Barrios. The two men lived in entirely different worlds and both can be said to have created their own fortune. Writing in 2011 about a recently discovered piece by the composer, Robert W. Bailey lays blame for the Barrios' misfortunes squarely on the composer's shoulders:

But, more importantly, it draws an association between the unusual style in which he conducted his professional career, for in hindsight it is now evident that the greatest obstacle between Barrios and the international recognition he deserved during his life was himself. Let us explore the areas where Barrios failed to develop the commercial exposure that lifted Segovia and many of his contemporaries to fame – specifically, his 'old fashioned' compositional style, passive attitude towards publishing, the lifelong absence of an influential manager, and his subsequent failure to expand his audience outside of Latin America.<sup>533</sup>

It is irrelevant as to what Segovia's reasoning was for snubbing his South American compatriot, but when Williams released his album in 1977, interest in the forgotten virtuoso was reignited and the music of Barrios has since come to be considered as a cornerstone of the modern classical guitar repertoire. As Graham Wade has argued:

The difference in the world's awareness of Barrios over the course of the 1970s was brought about by the work of John Williams, whose wholehearted advocacy of the composer gave authority and meaning to new perspectives of twentieth-century developments.<sup>534</sup>

Over a hundred of his works have now been published and today, guitarists perform Barrios in every part of the world.<sup>535</sup> It has filled a gap in the repertoire of the instrument for neo-Romantic music and inspired performers and audiences alike. Barrios' intuitive understanding of the instrument helps him achieve harmonies and technical effects which are unmatched by other composers and Williams recordings are extraordinary in their rhythmic vitality and expressive tone. Although Europeans often regard the work of Barrios as being reflective of Romantic, nineteenth-century European styles, Williams opts to emphasise the

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<sup>533</sup> Bailey, Robert W.: 'El Guitarrista Feo: A Critical Investigation of Barrios' Career', *Soundboard*, Vol. 37, No. 3, (2011), 7.

<sup>534</sup> Wade, Graham: 'How Barrios Was Rescued from Obscurity', Accessed 3 October, 2015. [www.egta.co.uk/content/barrios](http://www.egta.co.uk/content/barrios)

<sup>535</sup> Starling, 317.



folk and dance elements of the compositions, not always taking the same rhythmic liberties as many of his contemporaries. This is despite the fact that the performer himself has referred to Barrios as the ‘Chopin of the Guitar’. Colin Cooper dismisses this label, saying ‘it diminishes both composers.’<sup>536</sup> Williams clarifies the precise meaning of this as being more related to how both Chopin and Barrios are perceived in relation to their respective instruments:

His music is obviously very guitaristic, very like Chopin is for the piano. In this way he has filled that need of every instrument to have its composer who “belonged” to the instrument and at the same time wrote great music.<sup>537</sup>

Speaking to William Starling in 2012, the Paraguayan guitarist Berta Rojas recalled her reaction on hearing Williams’ recording of Barrios’ music, soon after its release:

I will never forget how amazed I was to hear Barrios’ music (our own Barrios) played so beautifully. John brought the music of Barrios to the attention of the whole world. As a Paraguayan myself, I will always be grateful that a legend like John would take the chance to explore this music with his perfect technique and unique musicianship and make these pieces sound as the masterpieces that they are.<sup>538</sup>

Rojas touches on the point that makes the discovery and rejuvenation of Barrios all the more interesting. Of the works published, a huge number are now considered masterpieces and dominate the repertoire of modern guitarists in a way even Williams could scarcely have imagined, let alone the beleaguered composer himself. Wade refers to an ‘avalanche of recordings of the music of Barrios’ which has occurred following Williams’ initial offering.<sup>539</sup> Tom Moon, writing on Washington’s NPR website, notes that ‘Williams renders these pieces with no extra fanfare. He makes sure that even in the most technically dazzling

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<sup>536</sup> Cooper, 42.

<sup>537</sup> Stover, 179.

<sup>538</sup> Starling, 318.

<sup>539</sup> Wade, Graham: ‘How Barrios Was Rescued from Obscurity’, Accessed 4 August, 2015. [www.egta.co.uk/content/barrios](http://www.egta.co.uk/content/barrios)

moments, the spotlight remains on the tender and intricate music of an unjustly overlooked composer.<sup>540</sup>

The effect of Williams on the rehabilitation of Barrios' reputation can be easily deciphered by reading various descriptions of the composer, which have changed considerably in tone over the passage of time since Williams' first recording. The following description of Barrios' music dates from 1977, the same year as Williams released his album:

Barrios wrote over one hundred pieces for guitar, few of which have yet been published. He wrote virtuoso guitar music in the earlier nineteenth-century tradition of Sor, Giuliani and Paganini...It [his music] appears exciting and attractive (and is often extremely difficult to play well), but is ultimately 'salon' music.<sup>541</sup>

As well as being dismissive of both Barrios and the concept of salon music, this opinion reflects a very questionable perception that Barrios' music is similar to that of Sor and Giuliani (both Classical composers), which does not accurately reflect the impact of Latin American folk music and the European Romantic tradition, now widely acknowledged as being the strongest influences on his work. This judgement, emanating as it does from a book that is exhaustively researched and comprehensive, illustrates more than anything, an understandable lack of familiarity with the work of Barrios. Comparing the above with David Tanenbaum's (2003) description of Barrios, shows a distinct change in the reception of his music:

The most significant achievement for the guitar in the first part of the [twentieth] century outside of Segovia's influence is found in the life and works of Agustin Barrios Mangoré (1885-1944), regarded by many as the greatest guitarist-composer of all time [...] he was a remarkable guitarist and composer of striking originality and spirit.<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> Moon, Tom: 'Reflecting and Transcending Paraguayan Tradition', May 23, 2007, Accessed 4 August, 2015. [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org)

<sup>541</sup> Evans, 215.

<sup>542</sup> Tanenbaum, 188.

Tanenbaum goes on to describe pieces within Barrios' oeuvre in glowing terms, comparing them to great literature of South America and reflecting on their place in the canon of classical guitar repertoire:

His music has the earthiness and sadness of much Latin American literature. His *Un Sueno en la Floresta*, which extends the guitar's range downward with scordatura and upward with a high C, is beginning to rival Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* as the most popular tremolo piece.<sup>543</sup>

It is often said that Barrios did not enjoy a successful career because his music was 'old-fashioned' but Bailey (2011) concludes that his own lack of business acumen was more central to his problems:

The popular rejection of Romanticism, however, cannot completely explain why Barrios' music failed to reach a larger audience. Andrés Segovia played in a highly romanticised style throughout his career, and the Russian pianist-composer Sergei Rachmaninoff carried the late-romantic tradition – to great acclaim – well into the twentieth century. Thus we cannot decisively conclude that Barrios' music failed to appeal based on its stylistic traits alone; rather it seems likely that a passive attitude toward music publishing and proper representation prevented a greater dissemination of his work to the international guitar community.<sup>544</sup>

Leo Brouwer dismissed criticism that Barrios' work was less worthy because of its Romantic language:

Barrios' mind and the structure of his thought were romantic. Just as Bach continued to write superb Baroque music up to the year of his death (1750), well after the high baroque period had come to an end, Barrios was writing exquisite romantic music long after its passing in Europe.<sup>545</sup>

Brouwer continues however, to make an important distinction between Barrios and other Romantic composers, citing that his music contains 'a certain kind of innovation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century harmonic language which can only be done from a point later in time, "out of period"'"<sup>546</sup>. John Williams offers another point of view

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<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.* 189.

<sup>544</sup> Bailey, 9.

<sup>545</sup> Stover, 178.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*

about Barrios, citing Latin-American stylistic features and idiomatic guitar writing as defining characteristics of his music:

[A] very typical example of this Latin American “style”, whether it’s folk playing or the music of Barrios, is to take a tune and “hang” the harmony around it. You don’t have so much formal position playing, which is more the European tradition – you might have a tune on the third string, a favourite of Barrios, and use open strings or any notes above or below to fill out the harmony. You tend to play up and down the fingerboard like a string player, and it’s more expressive than the “block harmony” of the “keyboard” style of writing. I think that’s the main reason I really enjoy playing Barrios, in addition to thinking it great music.<sup>547</sup>

The reverence with which Barrios is now held is evident from the above discussion and is in stark contrast to the dismissive tone of Tom Evans and Mary Evans, or indeed, of Segovia. Williams’ sensitive interpretations of this music elevated it to the extent where it is now seen as a core element of the guitar repertoire. When asked about his own impact upon the reception of Barrios’ music Williams focuses on the fact that because of his high profile, he has been able to reach out beyond the confines of the usual classical guitar audiences, which he believes exposed Barrios to a wider public. He believes that the way in which Barrios writes for the instrument resonates with those who are familiar with the work of great composers on other instruments:

Well I think Richard Stover had already embarked on his research into Barrios so I think it would have been appreciated in time. I suppose that because I played in big halls with amplification or all the popular Ralph McTell or Val Doonican appearances, my audience is not just a guitar audience. The fact that I’m playing Barrios to all these different non-guitar audiences probably helped. I mean other musicians who are not guitarists – for example string players – really identify with some of Barrios’ writing. One or two string-playing friends of mine used to listen to me playing in Ronnie Scott’s and they heard me playing *Un Sueno en la Floresta* the big tremolo piece. They were just blown away by the piece and so you see that instrumentalists on violin or cello can identify with Barrios’ style because of the melodic flow and the way he constructs melody and harmony on the instrument.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.* 179-180.

<sup>548</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.

Ultimately, the poignant and tragic tale of the posthumous rehabilitation of the work of Agustin Barrios Mangoré is one of the great stories of the modern classical guitar. Bailey concludes that since Williams' intervention, and following on from the work of a number of eminent scholars, Barrios has become a towering figure in the history of the instrument:

His stature in the modern guitar chronicle now overshadows his contemporaries, including Segovia, and many of his compositions have become standards in the instrument's repertoire. The re-publication of his complete works and biography has inspired international awareness, and the release of a multi-disc compilation of his entire recorded output now gives the modern enthusiast an opportunity to experience his virtuosity firsthand. We are left to speculate on the implications such publicity may have had on Barrios during his lifetime. In comparing the artistic similarities between Segovia and Barrios, it seems logical to surmise that, had Barrios secured proper management and established a significant published repertoire, such extrinsic musical value would have been recognised by a larger population. And although many contemporary critics may have viewed Barrios' opus as an outdated entity, perhaps it was just the opposite, the perfection of a Romantic style whose audience had moved on to new aesthetic curiosities, and only with the distancing of time came back to appreciate the beauty of Paraguay's *guitarrista feo*.<sup>549</sup>

Bailey's assertions about Barrios seem well judged and it is true that the audience for Barrios work grew after the passage of time. However, it was the crusading work of John Williams that helped to bring about this sea change in public opinion, and it must be regarded as arguably the greatest achievement of his career. Stover, who has dedicated his entire career to this subject, asserts that Williams has 'set right the lack of recognition that beset Barrios not only during his life but for decades following his death.'<sup>550</sup>

### 5.10 Summary

This chapter set out to examine various aspects of John Williams' career that contributed significantly to what could be termed *standard* classical guitar culture. The various sections of this chapter focus either on cultural shifts brought about by Williams' activities (such as his impact on the reception of Barrios) or

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<sup>549</sup> Bailey, 13.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*

significant contributions to existing and established practices (for example the duet with Julian Bream and his work with Brouwer, Dodgson and Takemitsu). Williams' commissioning of Peter Sculthorpe and his significant role in the development of Australian guitar music, to some extent mirrors Julian Bream's achievements in attracting major British and European composers to write for guitar. Sculthorpe's work for the guitar is definitive and introduced a new influential style to the instrument. These Australian guitar works provide a good example of the type of expansion of guitar repertoire associated with Williams. They are new, and perhaps almost 'exotic' to Europeans and lie well outside the chosen musical range of both Segovia and Bream. Academics such as Benjamin Dwyer have tended to focus on the efforts of Segovia and Bream when discussing guitarists who contributed to the repertoire of the instrument. However, as shown in this study, John Williams career has also brought much new music into focus for classical guitarists and his contribution in this area deserves to be more widely acknowledged.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to guitar research on two levels. Primarily, it deals with the impact of John Williams upon the culture of classical guitar performance and practice. Secondly, and as a consequence of the primary subject, it adds to the field of guitar studies, which has been growing since the turn of this century. It is no coincidence that research into Williams' career should produce a work of this nature because of the diverse range of music contained within for example his recorded output. Although he has frequently been portrayed as the rebellious protégé of Segovia, Williams was often, in truth, merely observing traditions that were older than those established by his mentor. Therefore, while the study maintains a focus on Williams, it also documents shifts in opinion around guitar culture relating to music from outside the sphere of Western classical music. It is fair to say that Williams' career has up to now fallen outside the scope of the work of guitar scholars who have tended to focus heavily upon Segovia's contributions and what Benjamin Dwyer refers to as Bream's "school" of guitar composition'.<sup>551</sup> Figures such as Sculthorpe, Brouwer, Takemitsu, Lauro, Dodgson and Barrios feature strongly in this discussion, which is an important development, in the light of their respective contributions to the culture of classical guitar. Because this study represents the first attempt to assess Williams' career in a scholarly fashion, it charts the classical guitar's interaction with styles such as jazz, pop and rock music and with 'modern' notions of guitar design, sound and amplification. These issues are crucially important as they pertain to the future of the instrument.

### **Legacy: broadening the repertoire and appeal of the classical guitar**

In 2003, David Tanenbaum wrote that Williams' 'enduring legacy is the standard of technical excellence he has maintained with such remarkable consistency through more than forty years of high-level concerts'.<sup>552</sup> This statement provides a fitting tribute to Williams' career, which has included much recent activity,

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<sup>551</sup> Dwyer, Benjamin: *Britten and the Guitar: Critical Perspectives for Performers*, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2016), 13.

<sup>552</sup> Tanenbaum, David: 'The Classical Guitar in the Twentieth Century', *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed. Victor Anand Coelho, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 195.

despite the 2013 announcement of his retirement.<sup>553</sup> Tanenbaum argues that by raising the bar for what classical guitarists could achieve technically, Williams has done a great service for the instrument.

However, this study has established that it is not only *how* Williams played but *what* he played which constitutes his true legacy to the guitar. Williams' extensive recordings and performances of the complete lute works of J.S. Bach as well as standard guitar repertoire by composers such as Mudarra, Sanz, Weiss, Giuliani, Sor, Carulli, Tárrega, Villa-Lobos, Rodrigo, Ponce, Turina and Moreno Torroba have not featured prominently in this study. Similarly, his performances and arrangements of the much-transcribed works by Albéniz, Falla and Granados have not been addressed and his recordings of almost all of the standard guitar concertos from Bach, Handel and Vivaldi transcriptions to modern orchestral works by Arnold, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Villa-Lobos and Joaquín Rodrigo are not central to this particular examination. By recording almost the entire standard repertoire for classical guitar, Williams provided a valuable source of reference for performers and teachers alike. Instead, of more concern to this research project are the less conventional decisions, which brought Williams into unfamiliar genres and thereby helped to change the parameters of classical guitar repertoire, inviting other guitarists to follow his example. When questioned about his *Magic Box* album, Williams reveals that one of his primary motivations for the project was educational: he felt that by exploring the traditional role of the guitar in African folk music, he might have opened up a new fertile area for other guitarists to plough. In Chapter Five, it was revealed that he expressed disappointment that more have not followed his example, concluding that maybe guitarists were simply not as interested in this area as he had hoped.<sup>554</sup> Nonetheless, the aspiration behind the project gives a very clear indication of what motivates John Williams. His desire to find new directions for classical

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<sup>553</sup> In truth Williams has merely retired from travelling but still records, composes and performs in Britain. Indeed 2018 will see him release two new albums: a Baroque album and an ensemble recording of works by Phillip Houghton and Stephen Goss.

<sup>554</sup> John Williams: Interview with the Author, London, 21 October, 2017.



guitar has often left him open to harsh criticism and even ridicule. Paul Fowles (2009) gave the following assessment of the African project:

At the turn of the millennium, the seemingly endless capacity of John Williams for crossover experiments re-emerged with *The Magic Box*, a celebration of his devotion to the African folk musician and autor Francis Bebey (1929-2001). The other featured musician was recorder virtuoso and multi-instrumentalist Richard Harvey, whose ground-breaking work with the pioneering medieval rock band Gryphon had ploughed its own furrow throughout the early 70s [...] Sadly and yet somehow inevitably, Harvey's performances with Williams, complete with back-slapping on-stage camaraderie, prompted the usual cringes.<sup>555</sup>

However, despite Fowles' verdict, the album and its resultant tours were enormously successful, a fact borne out by the positive reviews which were also addressed in Chapter Five. Nonetheless, Fowles' opinions highlight the risks which a performer takes when they veer off the path for their chosen instrument and present themselves to the public in a different light. For a celebrity musician such as Williams, these moves present the opportunity to add a new audience to the one which already exists, while at the same time exposing his current audience to new ideas and cultures. However, there is also the possibility of alienating the performer's present audience as well as being seen as 'inauthentic' by purists who argue that a musical style has been appropriated. Throughout his career, or more accurately from about the mid-1960s to the present day, Williams has attempted to make connections between the classical guitar and various folk idioms. Even his successful advocacy of the music of Barrios can be viewed in this context, and the result was a paradigm shift in opinions about a previously neglected composer.

In order to assess Williams' contribution to guitar culture it has been necessary to explore the idea that the focus of both Segovia and indeed Bream was quite Euro-centric and that Williams' approach to many of the projects discussed in this study has expanded the parameters of classical guitar culture. Chapter Two explored attitudinal differences between Williams and Segovia, covering their

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<sup>555</sup> Fowles, Paul: *A Concise History of Rock Music*, (Pacific Missouri: Mel Bay, 2009), 270-271.

contrasting views on such topics as popular music, folk music and politics. Chapter Three dealt with the impact of Williams on various aspects of guitar culture such as performance, ensemble, amplification, guitar design and education. What is striking about these areas is the novelty and innovation behind Williams' approaches, in contrast to many of his contemporaries. The final two chapters of the study related to projects and recordings that exposed the public to either new or previously untapped aspects of the classical guitar's heritage. They again highlight the uniqueness of his approach and draw together elements from the music of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and America. Williams' career also blends the contrasting styles of jazz, rock, folk and classical music on an instrument that is often central to these individual genres. Furthermore, this study illustrates that Williams' has also exerted a considerable influence upon guitar culture outside the area of repertoire. His thoughts on amplification, performance, musicality, guitar construction, ensemble playing, recording and politics have been documented and assessed with particular regard to how these ideas impacted upon the practice of playing classical guitar.

In his preface to *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, Victor Anand Coelho established the strength of connection that is felt by guitarists across their respective genres:

Almost every guitar style – even classical – contains some element of fusion, and this is why the instrument is a nexus for so many different approaches. Guitarists are generally respectful toward one another regardless of their own stylistic orientation or training, and guitar technique in the professional world is usually a combination of self-study, apprenticeship, and reconciliation. Much of this mutual respect is the result of the hybrid training that has come to be expected of players. The stylistic base of guitarists becomes wider by the day: rock guitar is now a bona-fide “tradition” with its own pedagogy, transcriptions, and academic curricula; contemporary classical guitar repertory calls for techniques that go far beyond the Segovia method, incorporating popular styles; and we are experiencing at present an enormous revival of interest in flamenco, Celtic, rural American, and world music styles. For many players, all of these traditions are valuable and enriching, and they form the basis for the eclecticism that is accepted as the stylistic template among guitar players today. In short, by its inclusion of guitar styles and study of players in the rock, country, world music, jazz, classical, and blues genres, this book promotes the idea that

history is also created by players and builders, not just by composers.<sup>556</sup>

This resonates with many of John Williams' cross-over projects to the extent that contemporary reviews questioning his motivation and implying a betrayal of Segovia's principles can seem somewhat out-dated. In the work of musicologists such as Coelho, the guitar is viewed as a multi-cultural phenomenon that has benefitted from being embedded in a vast number of societies and cultures over the past five centuries. This cultural history of the guitar is a relatively recent development, with *Guitar Cultures* (2001) by Dawe and Bennett being the earliest example.<sup>557</sup> Because of the myriad of genres into which Williams has delved, this examination of his career contributes to this body of work and although Coelho stated that many players such as Williams were ahead of the academic trends in this regard, he acknowledged that certain classical players were among the most reactionary and conservative influences upon their own particular culture.<sup>558</sup> Coelho also questioned the obsession that many classical guitarists have had with having 'great' composers write for their instrument. While this practice has obviously been beneficial for the guitar, it is also true that it has led to the consistent production of a particular type of work during the past century. Indeed Leon Botstein suggests that the search for great works is something that has adversely affected the accuracy and reliability of music history in general, since the mid-eighteenth century:

The history of reception and so-called canon formation does little more than document the process of aesthetic selection over time and verify the erosion of memory. A persistent "great composer" and "great work" fetish distorts much scholarship that purports to understand music in the larger framework of history or history through music – writing that uses music as a defining constituent of the cultural past.<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Coelho, Victor Anand: 'Preface and Acknowledgements', *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xi-xii.

<sup>557</sup> Dawe, Kevin and Bennett, Andy: *Guitar Cultures*, (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

<sup>558</sup> Coelho, Victor Anand: 'Picking through Cultures: a Guitarist's Music History', *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3-12.

<sup>559</sup> Botstein, Leon: 'The Eye of a Needle', *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music*, ed. Jane F. Fulcher, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 524.

Botstein also argues that the practice of focussing on so-called great works and great personalities ‘has conspired to block a fuller understanding of the history of musical life and its place and significance in culture and society.’<sup>560</sup> Despite these assertions it is clear that Segovia and Bream attempted to commission and perform guitar works that according to Tanenbaum, would ‘validate it in the classical world.’<sup>561</sup> This ‘classical world’ to which Tanenbaum refers is quite narrow in its range of influences and in exploring the music of various cultures, Williams departed quite radically from the course set out by Segovia and followed by Bream.

Therefore, the inclusion of sociological and cultural approaches in musicology from the late twentieth century has facilitated a change in how the guitar’s history can be interpreted and the final two chapters of this study illustrate that a crucial difference between Williams’ career and other contemporaries is his desire to *find* the guitar in other cultures and explore the instrument’s wide-ranging traditions. It is clear that he has not repeatedly delved into various folk, rock and popular traditions in search of a masterpiece to elevate the cause of classical guitar. Instead, he has done so because the guitar has already established a presence in these cultures. The driving force behind certain projects has been Williams’ own enthusiasm for the culture of guitar playing and not the desire to discover one particularly significant work:

I like playing Takemitsu at home and I love it even more if someone shares that enjoyment with me when I play it on the concert platform. I also love playing Barrios, and if someone passes me an arrangement of *The Man I Love* [a 1927 George Gershwin hit], I’ll enjoy playing that too. A lot of opportunities for doing interesting musical things are continually arising. It’s not a question of looking for something significant to do. There are hundreds of alternatives all the time and you select the things that get you enthusiastic.<sup>562</sup>

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<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>561</sup> Tanenbaum, 185.

<sup>562</sup> Tosone, James: *Classical Guitarists – Conversations*, (North Carolina, London: McFarland & Co., 2000), 160.

This comment highlights Williams' views about the music he performs and illuminates some of the choices he has made. Michael Shmith (1999) sums up his approach as follows:

John Williams is an adventurer. Not so much in the physical sense: he isn't a natural traveller and divides his time between short blocks of touring and staying at home in North London, reading and researching. His sense of adventure comes from music that is new to him, from unexplored regions and challenging directions.<sup>563</sup>

In terms of twentieth century repertoire, Segovia's policy of engaging non-guitarist composers to write music for guitar was followed by Julian Bream's desire to have a less Hispanic and higher profile version of the same approach. This policy could have arguably resulted in the works of guitarist/composers being undervalued and also seemed to be very Euro-centric in nature. Although the South American composers Ponce and Villa-Lobos were among those whose works were regularly performed by Segovia, they were both composers who wrote in a predominantly European style. For Bream's part he certainly favoured European music, despite his work with Takemitsu and Brouwer, who also wrote under a European influence. What Williams has brought to the classical guitar, along with his supreme technique, is a much more universal and inclusive sense of repertoire than that of either Bream or Segovia. He has opened up the classical guitar and moved it away from the confines of modern classical music, and towards the myriad of popular and world music styles that feature the instrument in one form or another. Many of his recordings of the music of Venezuela, Paraguay, Chile, Greece, Africa and North America, focus on guitar music that reflects popular music traditions in those places and he has used his profile to introduce classical guitarists to these styles. He also championed the performance of works by guitarist/composers such as Barrios, Brouwer, York, Domeniconi and Koshkin. Indeed it could be argued that given Segovia's and Bream's predilection for non-guitarist composers, these performer/composers may have struggled for recognition had it not been for Williams' intervention. Although his contribution to guitar culture has often been viewed by many as being in reaction

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<sup>563</sup> Shmith, Michael: 'Return of the Native', *BBC Music Magazine*, May, (1999), 26.

to Segovia's methods, it could more accurately be described as a complementary approach. Williams has provided a global context for the modern classical guitar and filled many gaps left in the wake of Segovia's achievements.

### **John Williams: reception**

As this study has shown, Williams has not been above criticism during his career. Indeed Elliot Fisk has accused both Bream and Williams of a lack of professional camaraderie and generosity towards the generation of guitarists which followed:

My rebellion in truth is against Bream and Williams; because I have to confess I'm a bit disappointed in both of them. From time immemorial, it has been the practice of one generation to pass on to the next what it learned. But my generation had no guitar fathers. Ghiglia and Diaz taught and were accessible, but Bream and Williams were not [...] They've both given immensely. But growing up, I was saddened by their inaccessibility.<sup>564</sup>

Bream's remark from 1982, when asked about the enormous numbers of young people playing his instrument, does resonate a little with Fisk's appraisal.

Yes, there were literally hundreds of these young aspiring guitar players. Sometimes there were so many of them that I wished I'd taken up the ukelele. After all, when you do something which formerly very few people did, it does give you a rather special feeling, even if nobody wants to hear you. You're an individual, at least you're breaking new ground.<sup>565</sup>

However, Bream's comment was most likely intended as humorous and Tanenbaum responds to Fisk's opinion as follows:

As always, there is another side. Bream once told me that what he felt he brought to the table was freshness, which comes from his ability to actually pull away from the guitar from time to time and recharge his batteries. I think that the same can be said of Williams, who has been careful not to let himself become overexposed. For many years, even at the height of his career as a Columbia artist, he chose to appear only rarely in the United States, largely because of his political convictions. But his reputation through recordings only seemed to grow in America during that time, and consequently each rare performance became magnified. I do not wish to defend inaccessibility, but in the case of Bream and Williams what was disappointing to guitarists may also have made them, paradoxically, better artists.<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> Tosone, 50-51.

<sup>565</sup> Palmer, Tony: *Julian Bream – A Life on the Road*, (London: Macdonald & Co, 1982), 186.

<sup>566</sup> Tanenbaum, 196-197.

Fisk is probably correct to accuse Williams and Bream of a certain level of inaccessibility toward younger guitarists but is also guilty of over-simplification. One point worth remembering is that from 1959 until 1973, Williams held a teaching post at the Royal College of Music in London, during which time he was extremely accessible to students and faculty members alike. Williams has also frequently criticised Segovia's approach to teaching, preferring not to impose his own personal views upon young guitarists, hoping instead that they will form their own opinions and personalities. Bream, as a largely self-taught player, admitted that he was reluctant 'to perpetrate my faults on others'.<sup>567</sup> Williams' open-minded approach to the guitar as well as his various political stances, have helped him make a special connection with his audience throughout a career spanning six decades. He has rallied against Segovia's cultural elitism in terms of musical style, dress code, presentation, amplification and repertoire and has maintained a huge following in the process. His American manager, Harold Shaw, alludes to the unique connection between Williams and the general public when he remarks:

Interestingly I first heard of John Williams in London when he was around eleven or twelve years old. I thought he was very talented. Then I didn't see him again for quite some time. When he was around twenty-one, we brought him over. John is the kind of performer who can walk on stage and the audience is immediately with him, from the moment his foot comes out on the platform. When John walks on stage, sometimes you even hear people yelling from the balcony, "We love you John."<sup>568</sup>

This echoes the account of Benjamin Verdery who also recalls an audience member shouting 'We love you John', at a recital at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall in New York.<sup>569</sup> These outbursts illustrate the level of audience engagement and informality exhibited at Williams' concerts, as opposed to the more austere atmosphere generated by Segovia when he admonished audience members for making the slightest noise. Williams has endeavoured to package his remarkable

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<sup>567</sup> Palmer, 180.

<sup>568</sup> Tosone, 140-141.

<sup>569</sup> Verdery, 10.

facility on the guitar in such a way as to make it appear more accessible and approachable.

### **Summary**

When Segovia decreed him to be the ‘prince’ of a generation of classical guitarists, he imposed a great deal of responsibility upon the young shoulders of John Williams. Indeed, the Spaniard privately and publicly expressed his dismay at the way in which his protégé carried out that responsibility, but he arguably selected the most appropriate figure imaginable to coax the classical guitar successfully into the twenty-first century. Since the death of Segovia in 1987, Williams has been the most recognisable classical guitarist in the world at a time when the instrument has enjoyed widespread growth and popularity. There are many more students of the instrument at third level and the technical standard of performance has risen, with young virtuosi emerging from across the globe. Artists such as John Williams, Sharon Isbin, Manuel Barrueco and the LA Guitar Quartet have collaborated with popular forms of music and media to great effect, increasing the visibility of the instrument. At the present time, the internet, and *YouTube* in particular, allows for mass accessibility and appreciation of what the instrument can achieve. As fascination with all forms of guitar continues to grow, the classical model can justifiably claim a sort of parental role in the evolutionary process with its links back into antiquity. Kevin Dawe offers the following evidence of the guitar’s popularity:

Moreover, out of 3,800 musicians attending the Berklee College of Music in Boston in 2004 – the largest music conservatoire in the world – 1,100 were guitarists. Not only has the college fifty guitar teachers in its guitar faculty (five of them women), but it has also another 2,000 students registered online.<sup>570</sup>

Although his vision was in sharp contrast to that of Segovia, and equally in opposition to the classical modernist trends of the European avant-garde, Williams has nonetheless been visionary. Verdery remarks that Williams ‘was making World Music before the term existed, and he’s still making it now’.<sup>571</sup> As

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<sup>570</sup> Dawe, Kevin: *The New Guitarscape in Critical Theory, Cultural Practice and Music Performance*, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 27-28.

<sup>571</sup> Verdery, 10.



recording, media, technology and eventually the internet have come to dominate the music business over the last half-century, John Williams has enabled guitarists to make sense of new possibilities and has filtered those same possibilities into work which reflects the ancient traditions and exciting future of what has arguably become the world's most popular musical instrument. The multifarious threads of his long career covering approximately sixty years, have formed a singular and unique contribution to classical guitar culture.

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