

## March 2020 NEWSLETTER

### February meeting

The ensemble began working on the very atmospheric *Tepuyes* by Alfonso Montes, half of the Montes-Kircher Duo with Irina Kircher. The *tepuyes* are the table-top mountains found in South America and Venezuela in particular. If the end result sounds anything like the Montes-Kircher recording on YouTube it will indeed be something to look forward to!



After the usual coffee, tea and (this time) chocolate digestives break, the evening's performances began with Penny Candlin playing a charming *Waltz* by Carcassi – one of the group of composers and performers, along with Carulli, Aguado and Sor (but not Giuliani, who lived in Vienna) prominent in Paris in the early nineteenth century whose output will have helped most of us learning the guitar at some time or other. Next, Mick Bryant offered his own arrangements of two familiar numbers: the Catalan folk song *El Testament d'Amèlia* and *Greensleeves*. Also employing some of his own invention, Tim Rushworth then played a version of Bach's first *Prelude*: not so much a transcription as a re-writing to get it to fit on the guitar, and very successful. After this, Peter Whalley played the lively gavotte *Maria* by Tàrrega, with its slides, slurs and harmonics: you can almost imagine Tàrrega enjoying the humour as he entertained his friends!

It was now time for the regular Brian & Dave Duo spot: Brian Tait and Dave Rawlinson took the stage with a Bach *Invention* (No. 13 in C) followed by John Dowland's *My Lord Willoughby's Welcome Home*, both pieces flawlessly performed. As solos Dave then played pieces of a very different flavour, first the tango *Milonga for Three* by the Argentinian Astor Piazzolla, and then a more relaxed piece called *Lazy Boy* from the *Palm Court Romantics* by (SCGS member) Roland Chadwick. Finally, Martin Slater closed proceedings with an almain *The Night Watch* by Anthony Holborne (much admired by contemporaries including John Dowland – who may have envied the former's employment at the Elizabethan Court), and the *Nordic Dance No.3* from the collection of National Dances by Mauro Giuliani. At this point the meeting ran out of performers and so was brought to a slightly earlier-than-usual close.

## Roland Chadwick

The above-mentioned local guitarist, composer and all-round musical character will be performing one of his **Half Man/ Half Guitar** gigs at the Platform Tavern, Town Quay, Southampton on Saturday 4 April from 9:00pm. Venue contact: 023 8033 7232.

## Sean Shibe Concert

This was the latest in SCGS' guitar performance series in what is proving to be a very successful partnership with Southampton University's Turner Sims Concert Hall.

The performer on this occasion was Sean Shibe (pron. Sheeba) who has the relatively exotic parentage of Japanese mother and English father (Cheam in Surrey). His father was 7 years old when he moved to Edinburgh and Sean was born there in 1992. In an interview with Gerald Garcia in 2017 he was asked if he was in any way influenced by his Japanese heritage or did he feel particularly Scottish; the answer he gave was quite revealing, saying that he was questioned a lot whilst growing up as to what it was like to not actually be 'white'! So he felt (at least at that time) that he was from Edinburgh but not actually Scottish. The short speech Sean gave us at the mid-point of the second half of this concert did leave the audience thinking his Scottish feelings have grown considerably since then; personally I think he has some hot Japanese Samurai blood too! Such feelings almost certainly influenced his choice of repertoire for this concert, together with an apparently fervent religious belief.

The programme began with a piece entitled *Rosewood* by the Irish born composer David Fennessy (b.1976, Maynooth, Co.Kildare). Now, mention rosewood to any classical guitarist and they will undoubtedly say it is often used in the construction of their instruments and this is, indeed, the source of this composer's title; apparently, the aroma of its use on fingerboards was particularly inspirational. The other guiding light to this composition was the composer's knowledge that the piece was to be premiered in the 'Italian Chapel' on the Orkney Island of Lamb Holm. In the composer's words:

The knowledge that this piece would be premiered at the Italian Chapel and my vivid memories of visiting there a few years ago guided me during the composition of *rosewood*. Without wishing to somehow create a musical evocation of the place, notions of calm, reflection, open spaces, echoes and resonances permeate the music.

It was interesting to see Sean perform this piece and the method used by Fennessy to achieve his stated objectives. A capo was used first in the 7<sup>th</sup> and then successively in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> positions on the fretboard before finally being removed entirely. A creative way of consistently

changing the tonality of the instrument. If only Sean had given us some background to this fascinating composition beforehand I think listeners would have been able to experience it with greater understanding! At the conclusion of *Rosewood* Sean gave us the opportunity to show appreciation but it was apparently not in his plan for the rest of the concert.

The second piece to be played was *Toccata & Serenade* by Sofia Gubaidulina (b.1931, Christopol, Tatarstan, Russia). Although the title of her work here suggests relative conventionality, her guiding aesthetic is one of deep religious belief - a link, perhaps, to the Italian Chapel connection to *Rosewood* :

For Gubaidulina, music was an escape from the socio-political atmosphere of Soviet Russia. For this reason, she associated music with human transcendence and mystical spiritualism, which manifests itself as a longing inside the soul of humanity to locate its true being, a longing she continually tries to capture in her works. These abstract religious and mystical associations are concretized in Gubaidulina's compositions in various ways. Gubaidulina is a devout member of the Russian Orthodox church.

Sean, in his later comments, highlighted this by stating that Gubaidulina actually experienced the presence of Jesus Christ in her very early years. Nevertheless, at the conclusion of this relatively conventional piece there was barely a pause before Sean commenced J.S.Bach's *Suite in E minor* (BWV996). It actually took a 'knowing ear' to recognise that this had actually happened, which was obviously intentional. With the Bach being a more standard repertoire piece, we could begin to make comparisons with other performers. In this, Sean is certainly up there with the best, demonstrating an assured technique and colouristic dynamics and tonalities. Sustained applause ensued at its conclusion, with the feeling that the Gubaidulina had somehow been a 'prelude' to the Bach - an interesting concept if intentional!

The second half demands far less investigation, consisting of eight brief transcriptions from Scottish Lute manuscripts which, similarly to the first half, seemed to serve as a prelude to the selection of more familiar pieces by John Dowland (1563-1626). When the final piece in the programme is Benjamin Britten's *Nocturnal*, then the Dowland connection becomes obvious. Sean's interpretation of this piece was more restrained than some I have heard but, as he stated, it has now been informed more deeply from repeated performances. I am confident that Mr Julian Bream would have joined in the enthusiastic applause at its conclusion. An encore was Peter Maxwell-Davies' *Farewell to Stromness*, another Orkney connection. Since his time as a BBC New Generation artist 2015-17, Sean is evidently trying to 'spice up' traditional concert expectations, so I am sure we all wish him well in this innovative enterprise!

*Martin Slater*

\*[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian\\_Chapel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Chapel)

## Flamenco Guitar Course



A flamenco guitar 3-day residential or non-residential course led by Tomás Jiménez will take place at the Benslow Music Trust, Hertfordshire 13-16 March.

For details see

<https://benslowmusic.org/>, and to learn more about Tomás and to hear him play go to [www.flamencotomas.co.uk](http://www.flamencotomas.co.uk) .

## West Dean 2020

A reminder that booking is still open for the **West Dean International Classical Guitar Festival 2020** with Alison Bendy, Andrew Gough, David Leisner, Gerald Garcia, Helen Sanderson, Jan Depreter, Mark Ashford and Zoran Dukic. For details see <https://www.westdean.org.uk/study/short-courses> and search under Music.

**Next meeting: 7:30pm Wed 25 March at St Boniface.**

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