

TO: EDITOR SOUNDBOARD MAGAZINE

Dear Friends,

I would like to commend Soundboard for publishing Eduardo Miranda's very stimulating article on "Bringing the Classical Guitar to America's Public Schools". This article addresses a very important issue in an organized and intelligent way, and I hope Mr. Miranda will allow me to continue the discussion he has so rightfully launched.

Our instrument is indeed one that attracts those who in Thoreau's words, "march to a different drummer". As does Mr. Miranda I'd like to see the schools of higher education produce a few more "drum majors for righteousness" who are truly prepared for the type of revolutionary activity that we need to bring the guitar into America's public schools and into other avenues of everyday life as lived by our fellow citizens.

Mr. Miranda is not alone in sounding the call to action. A short list of some of my own heroes in this field would include two of my own former students, Edward Grigassy, whose guitar program in the Houston public schools is a huge success; Leo Garcia, the inventor of the exciting new "Kindergitar" method, and the intrepid Scott Morris, who has taken the classical guitar into the legendary Compton area of Los Angeles.

The work of these and many others like them is important not just to secure the future of our beloved instrument but to revitalize the art of music itself and in so doing to begin the process of re-humanizing the society in which we live.

There is no doubt that knowledge and skills essential to the ordered study of art music are among those modern society is so often lacking. The ability to create "win - win" scenarios which encourage cooperation instead of cutthroat competitiveness is fundamental to music performance. Sensitivity to other people's opinions and emotions again is a sine qua non of music making. Inevitably one confronts as well the entire continuum of human civilization across the arc of many hundreds of years time, a tradition in which are embodied the noblest thoughts of which our species is capable.

I agree with Mr. Miranda that the figure of Segovia is a wonderful point of reference. Mr. Miranda is however dead wrong when he says that "Segovia ruled the world of the guitar with an iron hand". Quite the contrary! Segovia's messianic power was derived from the love he inspired in millions of people all over the world. His absolute purity as an artist and a musician, his integrity as a human being were borne out over a long life during which he gave constantly to other people... not just inside the world of music or to his public but to all sorts of people.

If you read old letters of Segovia, you will see that he was constantly preoccupied with earning money not for himself but in order to be able to support "mi gente" as he once put it. I personally saw this continued into the last years of his fabulous journey on this earth. At his hotel Segovia would tip countless doormen and hotel personnel with a generosity way beyond the value of the services rendered to him. When Segovia passed away, his widow found that he had secretly been supporting untold numbers of people, who often took advantage of his generosity.

In my own case, when I as a boy of 19 met Segovia, he was 81. Nonetheless he took me into his life and was a loving and caring presence to me in the first years of my career and the final years of his. To this day I still have numerous letters from Segovia, letters personally signed by him and written to a young man who could give him in return nothing more than a reflection of his own love for music and the guitar.

In fact, I would argue that when the classical guitar has drifted into irrelevance, it has been not when we have been held back by Segovia's shortcomings but rather when we as a community have turned our backs on the fundamentals of Segovia's wisdom...when we have forgotten his gift of poetry, when we have put calculation and premeditated caution ahead of passionate romanticism, when we have excluded the human for the sake of the merely superficial and technical and allowed the merely gaudy to replace the noble lustre engendered by dedication and discipline.

Rather the universality of Segovia's art offers an example that needs to be reinvented in 21st century terms. Of course it will not be the work of one man any more but of each and all of us, men and women, "in dubious battle on the plains of heaven" as Milton might have it. So I join Mr. Miranda in arguing for a new romanticism, a new idealism, a new poetry and a new repertoire that can bridge the information and spiritual gap between the great American cultural desert and the oasis that we celebrate in the classical guitar and its myriad possibilities.

Eliot Fisk
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