



Guitar

Guitar at the Cleveland Institute of Music

by Jason Vanselow

Although the classical guitar has had a wonderful and devoted following throughout the twentieth century, it can be still difficult to find schools that offer quality undergraduate or graduate degree programs. Even among the schools that have a good reputation, it can be hard to discern what will be the best situation for any given student from a quick tour through the campus or a paragraph in a course catalog. In the fall of 1998, I found myself entering the great cement block that is the Cleveland Institute of Music as a first year graduate student. It was not where I had expected to find myself. However, out of the places where I had looked and auditioned, it ended up being the best place for me. Below is a quick overview of what CIM and its guitar faculty have to offer.

To begin with, there are the two full time faculty members, John Holmquist and Jason Vieaux. John Holmquist is a native of Minneapolis and a legend in the guitar community. He toured actively throughout the 1980's and continues to perform internationally on a smaller scale. He also has a fruitful recording catalog, most recently recording the music of Gerald Garcia and Fernando Sor on discs released by the Naxos label. Jason Vieaux is a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music where he studied with Holmquist and while there, he won the 1992 Guitar Federation of America Competition. He keeps an active touring schedule including a great number of concerts and demonstrations in elementary and high schools. These two instructors together offer a unique look at two different generations of players.

In John, a student gets to see the experienced traveler, a teacher who can

share a multitude of experiences and approaches to situations. His emphasis as a teacher is that technique only exists to serve music and his philosophy has been shaped by many years of performing. A student of John's will spend a great deal of time breaking down a piece of music into its basic components, learning the purpose of the components, and then building it back up again to form a whole.

In Jason, a student gets to see both the practical process of bringing a piece of music from the sight-reading stage to the performance stage and the exuberance of someone who is consistently discovering new things about music and about playing. Jason is constantly learning new music and, because he is still so young, his approach to learning and refining his own repertoire is fresh and immediate. A student of Jason's has an opportunity not only to work out the mechanics of a piece, but also has a guide for getting a piece ready for performance.

Between the two teachers, there are generally 10-15 players in a given year. It's a small group, but the range of players and personalities is vast. During my time at CIM there were players from Sweden, South Africa, St. Louis, Atlanta, Southern Texas, and New Jersey, as well as Cleveland. Not only were they a diverse group geographically, but almost all of them had very distinct musical sounds. One player specialized in Latin American music and was at CIM to broaden his palate; one player was technically adventurous but needed help in phrasing and dynamics; one player was working in jazz clubs for a living and brought a certain elastic phrasing to his playing. Because the department is so small, it is easy to find and learn from

the strengths of a diverse group.

As a whole, CIM is an orchestral school. They draw talented string and wind players from all over the world and one of the most beautiful things I found was to walk down the halls of practice rooms and to hear snatches of three hundred years worth of music. Opportunities for chamber ensembles with guitar exist. However, because CIM does not include guitar in its chamber music program, ensembles are set up and organized by guitar players on an extra-curricular basis.

Another benefit of the CIM guitar program is that there is a good alumni base who live in Cleveland who are willing to pass on students and gigs and keep an ear to the ground for opportunities. They are a tight knit group who occasionally will get together and perform for each other. In this midst of all this is Armin Kelly, the head of Guitars International, who is dedicated not only to bringing wonderful guitars to his shop, but also to bringing quality performers to the area. Mr. Kelly has sponsored concerts and masterclasses by Jason Vieaux, Antigoni Goni, and Paul Galbraith.

The guitar community and the program at CIM offer a concentrated study of guitar with a focus on technique and mechanics serving a musical purpose in an environment that encourages musical and personal growth in the school and in the community.

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