



GUITAR

The Classical Guitar Ensemble in the High School

by Grant Wilcox

The performing ensemble

For the casual observer, the function of any music group in the high school is to perform. As teachers we know that each of our ensembles serve and fill a variety of needs. Important to most of us is that these ensemble classes provide many students with the impetus to learn to play an instrument and a reason to practice for mastery. As important, these classes develop a system for students to work together in both a competitive and cooperative environment to learn interdependently with others based on common interest. For me these classes come alive at every level as we stress fundamentals of competent playing and as these mastered skills color, shape and draw the line in the music that we perform. It is then the performance experience and the quality of music that ultimately brings us together to play in ensembles.

Classical guitars playing together

The reasons for the classical guitar ensemble in the public school are the very same as for any instrument or for any ensemble. Students in these classes will come alive as we stress fundamentals of competent playing as we study our world's greatest music to build musicianship that leads to fine ensemble performance.

Of humble beginnings

The earliest origins of the Spanish or classical guitar arrives from many continents dating from about 1000 AD. The first known treatise on the classical guitar originates from Italy in the year of 1586. Until the late 1800s and the music of guitarist Francisco Tárrega, the guitar was thought by most musicians to be an instrument of accompaniment for songs and serenades.

The most popular instrument in the world was invented before pop music

Andres Segovia spent his entire life laboring to raise the guitar from

the street, gutter and brothel. From the age of 14 he did just that. Debussy said, "Thanks to Segovia the guitar took a place in the concert halls of the entire world." Segovia performed in public until his death; in fact he performed a solo concert in our Minnesota Orchestra Hall within the last two weeks of his life. I was in the hall at that concert and I watched as a younger man of fifty or sixty walked him to center stage and another man walked his instrument out to him. I will never forget the sound and the moment ninety some year old Segovia walked onto the stage of Orchestra Hall. The sound was deafening; it went on long after he was helped onto his artist bench. Pop music is not the reason we have guitars, just as *Chop Sticks* is not the reason we have pianos.

A life long instrument and a life long skill

The literature for the classical guitar, like for the violin, cello or piano, will not be exhausted by any player in his or her life time. The guitar is an instrument that plays well with others in any number, yet does not need other instruments to be complete.

The classical guitar is not just an instrument of accompaniment, but is a singing instrument capable of melody and counterpoint. Perhaps more important is the fact that it is a relatively inexpensive instrument that is mobile and offers a physical longevity of performing life played simply alone and with others in very delicate acoustic ensembles.

Grant Wilcox teaches orchestral music at Brainerd High School. This past year he offered: an early bird String Quartet class, Chamber Orchestra, three sections of Classical Guitar I, one section of Classical Guitar II, one section of Classical Guitar Ensemble, First Orchestra and Sinfonia Orchestra. His guitar ensemble performs between orchestras at each of his orchestra concerts. Grant's ensembles have performed twice at the ASTA National Orchestra Festival, five times at MMEA State Conference, four times at the MNSOTA Tier 2 Festival in Orchestra Hall, and at the MENC National Convention. †