

FINGERSTYLE GUITAR JOURNAL



Francisco Buazzoni

ISSUE 8

Feature Stories

Francesco Buzzurro 5

Nir Hermelin 19

Brian Farrell 35

Katalin Koltai 47

25th Long Island Guitar Festival 63

Workshops

Steve Herberman 109

Tim Lerch 81

Sylvain Courtney 87

Walter Rodgiues Jr. 105

Roger Hudson 93

Troy Gifford 101

Eric Lugosch 71

Bill Piburn 117

Dylan Ryche 125

Departments

Editor's Letter 3

Dream Guitar Gallery 131

Sight and Sound 133



Katalin Koltai was born in Budapest, where she began to play classical guitar at the age of seven. She pursued her studies at the Béla Bartók Conservatory and in the classes of József Eötvös at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest. She gained her Masters degree in 2007 summa cum laude as a classical guitar soloist. Katalin has also studied with Antigoni Goni at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, and with Carlo Marchione at the Conservatorium Maastricht in the Netherlands where she obtained a post-graduate degree in 2009.

I thought we could just talk so I can get to know you better. Questions will come out of that. So, tell me about yourself.

Tonight as I was having dinner I was thinking. How can I introduce myself to someone who does not know me and tell you about myself as a guitarist? Where do I start?

You know, it's interesting because when I was a graduate student I felt that the classical guitar world was too closed. I felt that it was all about playing the same pieces. I thought it's a pity I didn't become a violinist.

I first graduated from the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest and did my Post Master's degree in the Netherlands. I did a lot of different projects, played a lot of chamber music and arranged a lot of music for chamber groups and solo playing. I also worked a lot in theater projects and with composers who wrote music for me. The language I use on the instrument became wide and interesting for me. Now I feel there are so many possibilities as a guitarist. Today I am so happy that I play the guitar.

These days I work a lot on my classical flute

and guitar project with Noemi Gyori. We play a lot of Mozart and Haydn. I love it! I really enjoy doing the transcriptions, which are now published by Doblinger. Noemi and I are planning to record in September.

While doing these transcriptions a lot of questions came up. Generally about ties, articulation, etc. You ask yourself, what would this theme need if played on a bowed instrument or if it's played on a plucked instrument. How can it work? I find the complexities of the music so interesting.

I have a colorful life as a guitarist because I experience so much diversity and input from the other musicians I work with. For example I am playing in an early music project in a couple weeks. We play fourteenth century music so it's total different from other music I play. A week later I am playing contemporary music of a Hungarian composer, very complex music for eight string guitar. Again music that is very different in every way. So, my life as a classical guitarist is so different than what I thought it would be as a graduate student. It's not just a small space in a tiny box. Now I think, wow it's the whole universe!

I understand what a challenge it would be to play so much music from so many periods and composers.

It's difficult but on the other hand I think all these experience help each other. Somehow in the end it all comes together. It would be difficult for me to choose one over another. I couldn't stay with just one style for my entire life.

Playing only solo can be a lonely approach to music.

Yeah, I need these collaborations. I get a lot of inspiration from other musicians. After having the experiences of playing with others it makes me more secure and sure of myself as a musician.

I have two children who are still very small, a son who is four years old and a daughter who is one. So I am very busy! For some time now I have pushed my solo playing less because of being pregnant and giving birth to two children. Somehow it was easier for me to collaborate than play solo. Though my children are still very young they are becoming more independent and my love of solo playing is returning so strongly. As a matter of fact this coming Sunday I am recording a video of two Barrios pieces. I am really enjoying playing solo again and plan to return to solo concerts soon. My feeling about solo playing is not only about my family life but also because I've gained so much strength through my collaborations with other artists. All these inspirations are now inside my soul. It's a nice feeling. I am working hard on my solo playing and enjoying it more now than ever.

Anytime you can increase your passion over the years that's a good thing.

Absolutely!

Can you tell me about something you have learned from working with other artist?

One thing that is very important is your presence on stage. Many musicians, even if they play perfectly, somehow are not psychologically there. Also their posture is not harmonic and not giving energy but closed inside. I would say that many solo players are closed off from the audience. If you work with ac-

tors and dancers you learn about that. Doing a concert is also a kind of theater. It a visual thing as well and you cannot forget about that.

A few years ago I attended a classical guitar concert at Vanderbilt University. The playing was amazing yet the musician did not say a word to the audience. It felt odd to me and impersonal. I'm sure others felt the same.

This doesn't work in the 21st century. You have to engage the audience or they get bored. We're living in a world of iPads and smartphones. Attention spans have diminished. My own concentration has changed in the last few years.

Another thing I've learned from working with singers is that you have to project the music out to the audience. Guitarists tend to close themselves off. The instrument already has a small voice and we spend so much time playing for ourselves in our practice room. You have to learn to send the music out to the audience. I was once a very introverted player but now I feel very free and open when I'm on the stage.

Would you agree that playing music with other musicians requires another level of listening?

Yes! You must listen close in order to respond to their dynamics and phrasing. It's a great way to open up.

This projection or openness to the audience is more than mere volume I assume.

It can generally be about the volume but once you have achieved a connection with



the audience you can also play very softly. Of course it's difficult to describe.

I've often seen performances that were far from perfect yet the audience went away entertained and sometimes moved.

You can view music in many ways with different focuses. If someone is going for technical perfection this is fine. Ideally everything you focus on should be perfect but it's never like that. In my life music is a language. I want to

communicate with that language to my audience and everyone I play music with.

Stress can disconnect you from the music. You can totally forget what the music is all about. I think it happens to all of us. You have to avoid this but it can be difficult to do.

In the classical guitar world there can be a lot pressure on guitarists to win competitions. I'm sure most of them do not enjoy this but also feel it's a necessary evil.

What are your feelings about this?

In general I think it can be a destructive thing but of course there are players that can survive it. Competitions have destroyed many players who could have been great if they had taken a different path. I would be very happy if this changed.

Are you saying the focus should be more on the music?

Yes the music, the communication and creativity. I respect all the people who go into competitions and of course the winners of the competitions. At one time I entered competitions but I couldn't stand the whole thing. I thought what the hell! I don't have to compete with anyone. I couldn't connect with the other people because everyone was talking to each other in a different manner than the way we are now - it was disturbing. I give my respect but I do not take part.

I understand you attended the Béla Bartók conservatory in Budapest. Tell me about this school.

It's a secondary school so it was when I was fourteen until I was eighteen. My guitar teacher there was Sándor SzilvÁgyi. It's a specialized school for young people who want to become professional musicians. After the age of eighteen you take an entrance exam for the Liszt Ference Music Academy (Franz Liszt Academy of Music), which is the university level.

Who was your guitar instructor at the Liszt Academy?

Jozsef Eötvös, he is world famous for his

transcription of Bach's Goldberg Variation for solo guitar. The most influential part of studying with him was his wide knowledge of transcribing music and his open mindedness on widening the guitar repertoire. I am grateful to him because he encouraged me to keep experimenting and searching to find my own way.

Were the classes at the Bartók conservatory all music classes or were they balanced with general education?

General education until noon or one and music studies for the rest of the day.

Were auditions required for entrance into this school?

Yes absolutely and very strict.

How did the guitar come into your life before entering the Bartók conservatory?

As a young child my parents took me to a lot of concerts and I loved it. I knew I wanted to become a musician. My parents chose the guitar because there was the possibility to study at the music school. My dream of becoming a professional musician did not change once I started playing. I went on to take the entrance exam into the Béla Bartók conservatory and my dream continued.

Are your parents musicians?

No, they are both electrical engineers but they love music, theater, lecture and art. I received an education that was very rich in that sense. They exposed me to all this at an early age. They also taught me the joy of learning other languages.

Who has been one of the most influential teachers in your life?

During my teenage years the teacher who had a great influence on me was a Hungarian composer named Iván Madarász. He taught me a lot about music theory and how to read figured bass parts, which became so useful in my arranging. He was very demanding and hard on me. I cried many times after my lessons but I am immensely grateful to him. The other students in his class were pianists but I asked if I could join them instead of going with the other guitarists. We had to play a lot on the piano, which was difficult for me being a guitarist. However I must say that my whole approach to music today has its foundation from his teaching.

Please tell me a little about your study with Antogini Goni.

Antigoni is a very supportive teacher, a great artist. For me it was also important to study with a female guitarist. I think the guitar world is very dominated by men. I don't only mean the number of men and women on stage but the way of interpretation that dominates the concert life. I think force and speed is overrated while sensibility, fragility and color is not appreciated enough.

I also studied with Raphaella Smits that year in Brussels. She is an amazing teacher. I spent my last two years of study in the amazing class of Carlo Marchione at the Conservatorium Maastricht in the Netherlands. I also attended several masterclasses with Jose Maria Gallardo del Rey from whom I learned a lot about rhythm, techniques and concentration.

Guitarists seems to form a special bond

with their instrument. Maybe partly because they hold it and take it where they go. It becomes an extension of them in a way.

Yes that is true. The guitar has great advantages. For example when I work with composers who have never written for the guitar I always sit down with them and tell them how I see my instrument. I always tell them about the color and poetry of the guitar. There is no other instrument in the world as colorful and poetic as the guitar.

Do you think that the guitar is finally gaining equal respect with orchestral instruments?

No, it has not. Actually I had a conversation recently with a program organizer for a very important hall in Europe and he said, "Oh come on, we will not let guitar into this hall. People are not interested in that." (laughter) I thought oh my god I can't believe this! It's true Bartók, Stravinsky and Brahms did not write for the guitar and there are no Mozart concertos for the guitar. But the guitar has come a long way especially in how well it's played today.

To be perfectly sincere there were times that I felt sorry that I play the guitar because of the narrow repertoire we have. I had to search for it but now as I've said, I have found my way and feel that I am living a very full and colorful life as a guitarist.

<http://www.katalinkoltai.com>

<https://youtu.be/i6pYCErchf4>

www.classicalfluteandguitar.com