

scholarship during the final concert. “When I was a student, I wanted a better guitar, or the chance to study overseas, but I did not have the resources. I want to provide the opportunity for current students of the University of Akron to have some financial support.” The idea came to fruition on Saturday, April 28, when the “James Stroud Classical Guitar Endowed Scholarship Competition” yielded three winners: Steve Sloan (first prize), Jonathan Gangi (second prize), and Kimberly Fox (third prize).

Speaking with the many other alumni provided insight into the long history of the guitar program at the University of Akron. The feelings of appreciation for the long-lasting positive impact of the Akron experience was echoed by everyone present. Aron keeps in regular contact with his alumni; in my case, he has continued to help me find college teaching positions, performance opportunities, and offers general career advice. I feel humble and privileged to be part of this extraordinary family. Thank you, Stephen Aron, for all that you do.

—*Adam Sarata*

BRNO 2007

XVITH INTERNATIONAL GUITAR FESTIVAL

IMPRESSIONS OF BRNO

Historically, Brno dates back to 1091, later emerging as the capital city of the southern Moravian district. Like many European cities that began in the Middle Ages, Brno’s early history started with a large castle or fort strategically built on the highest points of the land, with the resulting effect that the city, over the centuries, gradually spread down the mountain side as the population grew. So, today the beautiful Špilberk Castle that occupies the highest point in Brno is followed by the magnificent thirteenth century Gothic St. Peter and Paul Cathedral built atop Petrov hill. From the cathedral, a series of cascading streets, squares and alleyways seem to tumble down to the newer parts of the city, so that now the old city seamlessly greets the new.

The city planners have done an excellent job of preserving the rich architectural and ancient cultural past while at the same time maintaining and upgrading the newer parts of the city. Thus, today Brno is a trendy, romantic and a very people oriented place, with shops, restaurants and outdoor cafés that are spread throughout the entire city. In the evenings, live music from the cafés can be heard throughout the city, providing

an accompaniment to the gentle evening breezes.

Since this was my first visit to Brno, it took a few days for me to become oriented to the city’s wiggly-waggle streets and myriad of shops and buildings. Initially, the city teases and entices; you wonder, where does this street go? What’s down this row of shops? As you gradually become familiar with the unfamiliar, Brno begins to flirt with you. This little restaurant has great food, or this gift shop offers interesting gift items to take home. Finally, the city’s old world European charm and warm friendly people seduce you; indeed, you become hooked on what is one of the truly charming cities in Europe!

THE COMPETITION

The competition called “Guitar Talent” is comprised of two categories: Part I for younger performers (born after August 1994), Part II for performers born after 1990. Performers in the first round were required to play works by Czech composers plus a free choice for a total of six minutes. For the older group, the same requirements applied except the maximum was seven minutes. Those who made it to the second round in both categories had to perform a work from the Classical Era plus a free choice.

The combined categories had some seventeen participants representing nine countries. Category I participants from the Czech Republic— Matěj Drahoukoupil, Vit Dvořáč, Nikola Matoušková, and Antonin Růžika were joined by Attila Korney (Hungary) and Olena Tibrkowa (Ukraine). Category II participants were Jana Ihnatoljová, Jaroslav Rendl, Kateřina Rybářá, Markéta Vavřinová and Michaela Zajacová from the Czech Republic, along with Pavel Boyko and Kostly Shumilin (Belarus), Kubličkas Jonas (Lithuania), Stela Maria Schletterer (Austria), Anástasija Vilchinska (Ukraine), and Dorian Westenberger (Germany).

The winners in Category I were Korney (first place), Dvořáč (second), and Drahoukoupil (third). The first place prize was a new case, and all of the winners received generous supply of Savarez and D’Addario strings. The winners in Category II were Schletterer (first), Boyko (second), and Rendl (third). Schletterer was awarded a new Schneider guitar; all the winners received Savarez and D’Addario strings, guitar supports by EEL, glass nails files by Sofit, and CDs and music scores by Vladislav Bláha.

On a personal note, I must say that all the competitors were exceptional players. They exhibited maturity, strong performing technique, and a love for the guitar that could only have developed from their excellent teachers and training. The Judges were Milan Tesař (President of the Jury), Vladislav

Bláha, and Vladislav Petrášek (Czech Republic); Melodie Dickerson, Jim Skinger, and Rex Willis (U.S.A.); Gabriel Guillén (Venezuela/Austria); Laurentiu Ganea (Romania/Austria); Maria Isabel Siewers (Argentina/Austria); Igor Shoshin (Belarus); and Luciano Tortorelli (Italy). The Brno festival was well attended with some 170 artists, students, pedagogues, composers, and competitors present.

THE PERFORMANCES

The setting for the opening concert was held in the new town hall, which is a beautifully restored Baroque building with wonderful acoustics. The opening concert was called “Argentina Guitar Night,” and it was, by any standard, a most extraordinary evening. In attendance was the Ambassador of Argentina to the Czech Republic Juan Edward Flemming, the Mayor of Brno Roman Onderka, and Festival Director Vladislav Bláha. Each gave welcoming speeches, followed by a warm reception from the audience.

The opening concert began with René González and Rafael Padrón performing Astor Piazzolla’s Andante from *Tango Suite* and a piece by Anselmo Aieta entitled *Corralera*. Both works were performed with expert attention to the rhythms and dynamics. Padrón followed with a beautiful performance of Leo Brouwer’s arrangement of Astor Piazzolla’s *La Muerte del ángel*. María Isabel Siewers played next, performing three compositions by Maria Luisa Anido—*El Misachico*, *Mar* and *Aire norteño*. I have heard Siewers perform these works before but never better than this evening. Jorge Morel was the fourth performer, playing his own composition *Pampero*, and a second work by Aníbal Triolo called *La Trampera*. Both were performed with great flair and buoyancy.

After the intermission, Jorge Cardoso performed three compositions: Fernando Bustamante’s *Misionera*, followed by his own *Milonga* and *Preludio y danza* by Eduardo Falú. I think we all felt this performer’s deep commitment to the

music of his native country; the audiences’ response was very enthusiastic. Gabriel Guillén performed one of the finest interpretations I have ever heard of Jorge Morel’s popular *Danza brasileira*. I don’t mean that he just hit the notes and played at a fast tempo; it was so much more. It was the way he connected the various phrases with a subtle use of rubato and rhythms to delineate the various sections, while maintaining the rhythmic character of the piece throughout. Melodie Dickerson (soprano) and Rex Willis (guitar) were next, performing Miguel Sandoval’s *Sin tu amor*. Melodie not only has a beautiful voice but was able to convey the meaning of the text with appropriate gestures that greatly heightened the dramatic flow of the music. Rex’s accompaniment expertly added just the right touch.

There could not be an Argentinean evening without Astor Piazzolla’s music and the accordion. Bláha (guitar) and Jaromir Zámečník (accordion) gave an outstanding performance of Piazzolla’s Night Club (from *Histoire du tango*) and *Libertango*. The duo performed with such a brilliant ensemble “feel” that the music left the audience spellbound, wanting more. All of the above mentioned performers also gave solo performances throughout the week. Suffice it to say, they are all top notch professionals who, each in their individual styles, gave outstanding concerts.



Above, from left to right: Jim Skinger, Jorge Morel, ??; Below, left to right: ??, Skinber, Vladislav Bláha, Jorge Morel, ??, and ??



There were several additional concerts during the week. The duo 360 Degrees—François Laurent and Stefano Palamidessi—dished up a wonderful confection of George Gershwin's *Fascinating Rhythm*, *Summertime*, and *I Got Rhythm*, along with such timeless Beatles hits, including *When I'm Sixty-Four*, *She's Leaving Home*, and *Lady Madonna*. The several arrangements they performed of Baden Powell's music—*Samba and Prelude* and *Berimbau*—were a big surprise and a particular favorite of mine. Powell is arguably one of Brazil's most important guitarists/composers.

A Friday afternoon concert was presented by the members of the festival orchestra, ably conducted by Alois Menšík. The highlight of the concert was Vivaldi's Concerto in A, with the three movements performed by soloists Palamidessi, Laurent, and Luciano Dosso.

The final concert of the week, fully attended by both festival participants and local visitors, was an evening of Flamenco held in the courtyard of the beautiful Špilberk Castle. All of the performers were native Andalusians, including El Macareño (guitar), Nuria López (flute), Juan Masana (bass guitar), Juan Antonio Claus (vocals), Luis Fernández (percussion), and Jorge del Pino (dance). There were the *nuevo* elements, influences of jazz, and new scale forms—whole and diminished scales and the occasional blues scale—applied to the *falsetas*, but something even more came through that evening: an indescribable and deeply felt *duende* which was very much in evidence for those of us lucky enough to be there.



There were two exceptional concerts held in the afternoon on Thursday and Friday. Petra Polacecva of Hungary, winner of the Kutná Hora competition, and Pavel Kukhta of Belarus, winner of the Rust competition in Austria, gave excellent performances that made it clear just how high the standards have now become.

Saturday morning we were treated to a lecture by my old friend, Juan Monroy. Juan spoke to many of the younger students, performers, and competitors about the necessity of understanding how to approach the creation of concerts, promotional requirements, and the myriad details that lead to a successful performance career. Following Juan's presentation, Igor Shoshyn gave a performance demonstration of the music from his composer competition series. Also on hand was Jiří Kulka, a specialist in the understanding of mental influences on musical interpretation and the associated problems.

The vendors in attendance this year included Miro's Guitar Nails, a complete system of nail care for guitarists whose table attracted long lines. Michael Macmeeken of Chanterelle Verlag and partner Petra Freyer were there to serve us all with ample supplies of music and accessories. A display of Schneider guitars was on hand, including the guitar won by Stela Maria Schletterer in the competition.

As exciting and musically rewarding as this event was, it is, of course, the people who attend and those whom one meets there that ultimately add so much to the week. For me, it was a chance to meet old friends and to make new ones. Clearly, there was an abundance of talent at this event and to both my old and newly met friends, I wish you all great success. Next year's Brno festival is scheduled for August 3-9, 2008.

—Jim Skinger

