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# Washington Guitar Society

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## President's Soap Box WGS Past Present and Future

Dear Washington Guitar Community,

Elections for the new president and vice president of the Washington Guitar Society will take place on Saturday, September 13 at 1 pm at the Washington Conservatory of Music, 5144 Massachusetts Ave., Bethesda, MD. This will precede my stepping down recital "*Kevin Vigil and Friends*", at 2 pm - a performance that I am dedicating to the WGS. Please make plans to attend as this will be a pivotal step for the future of the Washington Guitar Society.

As I will be stepping down soon, I thought it might be an appropriate time to review something of the past history of the classical guitar in the Washington, D.C. area. Then, following a survey of the present, we may be in a better situation to envision how to go about assuring an active, vital future for our instrument in our community.

Given my relatively recent arrival on the scene, I asked Larry Snitzler, who first began studying with Sophocles Papas in 1960, to bring us up to the present.

### **The Past**

*written by Larry Snitzler*

Washington, D. C. began developing into a center of guitar activity in 1922, when **Sophocles Papas** founded the Guitar Shop (the same business currently run by Steve Spellman at 1216 Connecticut Ave., NW.) Mr. Papas immigrated to New York City from the Middle East just as World War I broke out. So it was that he spent the first few years in this country assembling machine guns for the war effort. Following the war, however, he was once again able to direct his manual dexterity toward more peaceful pursuits and resumed his musical activities in the New York area, where he remained for two or three years, before moving south to the nation's capital. Once arrived here, he began to play extensively around the Washington area as a soloist, and in chamber music ensembles, and even directed a fretted instrument orchestra for a number of years. (A photograph of this orchestra with Mr. Papas at the head was displayed in the Hall of Musical Instruments at the Smithsonian Institution for many years.) Papas gained in popularity and stature when he developed his own radio program where he played the classical guitar, along with other instruments, every week

for many years. He also founded **Columbia Music Company**, a publishing enterprise which developed a wide-ranging catalog of popular teaching pieces along with more advanced works from the concert repertoire. In addition to this, Mr. Papas wrote regularly about the classical guitar for highly respected music journals which were distributed throughout the United States. He also knew how to cultivate acquaintances - and generate students! - among the members of the diplomatic and political circles of Washington, D.C. He became a respected musical figure in town and was regularly mentioned in, or the subject of, many newspaper articles throughout the years. Finally, after Sophocles Papas and Andrés Segovia met following the Spanish Maestro's New York debut in 1928, Segovia would regularly refer students to "Mr. Papas, of Washington, D. C."

The first incarnation of the Washington Guitar Society was as **The Segovia Society**, which saw the light of day toward the late 1930s. Papas and several other admirers of Segovia's artistry would get together regularly to play the classical guitar for each other and listen to recordings of the Spanish Master. Segovia had not, as yet, played in Washington. When he finally did come for his debut here, he asked that the name of the society be changed to something that would promote the classical guitar as an instrument, rather than his own name and career alone.

At the end of World War II, the GI Bill set loose a number of young people in search of an education and with some money in their pockets to pay for it. Columbia Music expanded so as to be able to offer accredited courses in music theory, history and guitar. All of this was in the late 1940s, long before any university in the United States would have considered offering courses in the classical guitar. During this time the now renamed **Washington Guitar Society** continued its regular meetings at the Guitar Shop or, just as often, at some local restaurant where the playing, the wining and dining, the singing and the schmoozing would go on till the late hours of the evening, (or the early hours of the morning)! There are still pictures from those gatherings which make very clear why the city was the place to live, work and love in those days.

During the 1950s a number of people whose names will still be known to Washington area guitarists came to study with Sophocles Papas. Among them: **Charlie Byrd, Bill Harris, Alvino Rey, Regis Ferruzza, John Marlow and Aaron Shearer.**

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In 1960, following an intense campaign by Sophocles Papas and others in the Washington musical community, American University became the first university in the United States to offer a degree in classical guitar performance. Sophocles Papas was appointed the head of the guitar department. By the mid 1960s Papas' former student, John Marlow was head of the AU Guitar Department. A number of talented students were attracted by John's reputation as an exceptional performer, teacher and all around good guy. Among these were lutanist **Howard Bass**, and NPR Cultural Affairs Producer **Tom Cole**, who has hosted the weekly guitar program, *G-String*, on WPFW-FM for nearly twenty years.

**Aaron Shearer** first arrived in Washington to study with Sophocles Papas because Andrés Segovia told him Papas was the teacher for him. At first, it was a veritable love-fest between the two of them. Shearer was a serious, dedicated student, and Papas was delighted to have such a person to work with and was even considering some important forms of future collaboration once his protégé was sufficiently developed.

After a while, though, Mr. Shearer reluctantly concluded that, despite what Segovia had said, Mr. Papas was not the teacher for him and the student communicated his disappointment to his teacher. Mr. Papas (understandably) did not appreciate being criticized by one of his star pupils. But when Mr. Shearer, in his method - published *before* Mr. Papas' own - implied that Segovia did not know what he was doing and advised people *not* to follow the master's example, that was the last straw. There was a complete rupture. Those of us who were enthralled with Segovia's playing and were students of Mr. Papas sided, naturally, with him. Mr. Shearer, who has always been a thoughtful, gifted teacher, began to generate a following of his own. Neither man was really happy with the situation, nor were their students, grouped into hostile camps and isolated from each other despite their mutual love for the guitar. After a good deal of discussion on the part of various students, and diplomatic missions by mutual friends, a meeting was arranged at Mr. Papas' studio. (Note that it was Mr. Shearer who made the generous concession to Mr. Papas' senior standing and came to his premises.) I was present at the "historic occasion", as were two or three more students from either "side". It was awkward at first: feelings ran high. After all, both men felt disappointed in, betrayed even, by the other. It's been a long time now, but I do remember an intense exchange over whether the instrument should be referred to as the "classic" guitar or the "classical" guitar. Tables were pounded, words were hissed, and dictionaries consulted. If you find all this a bit extreme, consider the extended, embittered religious debates over how many angels could fit on the head of a pin. Among musicians, fine musical points can inflame the passions just as much as religious matters. (For what it's worth, I finally came around to the Shearer point of view in that regard and believe that the correct term is: "classical" guitar. Look it up, you'll see what I mean.) Though no one experienced a "conversion" to the other camp's point of view, every one left that evening relieved that we could all gather together in one room, or encounter each other at a concert

without further social awkwardness.

Toward the mid 1960s, another schism developed in the Washington guitar community. Running a guitar society is no easy task, and if someone keeps at it for any period of time there must be personal rewards of some kind. In the case of Mr. Papas, who owned a guitar store, a publishing company, and was a guitar teacher, the rewards are rather obvious. He also liked being in charge of things. I say that without rancor, it's a simple fact. And Mrs. Papas provided some of the best Greek food you can imagine! (Not to mention doing all the book work for the society.) The two of them were good at running a guitar society and did so for several decades. Nonetheless, by the early 1960s there was a whole bunch of young, enthusiastic students that Mr. Papas had collected around him, and we began to want a say in how things were done. Mr. Papas wanted to continue his time-honored form of benevolent dictatorship. We "young'uns" weren't going to put up with that, not even from our teacher, so we left and formed the *National Society for the Classical Guitar*. It had a successful run of several years during which we presented a number of important young guitarists of the time, including such people as Oscar Ghiglia, José Tomás and others. Mr. Papas, of course, didn't just fold up his tent and slink off into the night. *The Washington Guitar Society* continued full speed ahead, presenting its own roster of artists. We went to their concerts, they came to ours, some people were even members of BOTH societies. The Shearer faction wasn't really of much relevance at this point, since Mr. Shearer had previously moved to Baltimore, where he was teaching at the Peabody Conservatory. Although, I'd like to point out that the mending of the relationship between these two seminal guitar figures held and the two men remained cordial, though no longer friends, until Mr. Papas died in 1986.

Shortly after his death, five former students of Mr. Papas, (Charlie Byrd, John Marlow, Jeffrey Meyerriecks, Myrna Sisen and myself), formed the **Washington Guitar Quintet** to honor his memory. We remain active to this day, and issued our second CD and celebrated our Tenth Anniversary Concert at Lisner Auditorium, in March, 1996.

Mr. and Mrs. Papas died within a year of each other during the mid 1980s. Obviously, this was a great loss for the Washington guitar community. The **Washington Guitar Society** limped on for a few years before fading out altogether. After sixty-five years of effort, **Sophocles Papas** left a strong and vital guitar community in Washington, which included a number of active teachers and performers. But after years of involvement at varying degrees of responsibility with two guitar societies and facing demanding professional and practice schedules, none of us who remained was willing to wear the mantle of leadership which Mr. Papas had so cheerfully assumed (and jealously guarded!) for so many years.

At this point, I leave you to the capable hands of Kevin Vigil, who takes up the narrative.

Larry Snitzler

### Since I Moved Here

*written by Kevin Vigil*

When I first moved here in 1990, there was no guitar society. I thought this to be very strange as this is the nation's capital. There was, however, the D'Addario Series which presented a group of concert guitarists in a tour of 3 cities (San Francisco, Washington, DC and New York). Fortunately, Washington, DC was one of the cities. Unfortunately, the series died very soon after as D'Addario was having a hard time making any money (especially in New York). After this there was very little guitar activity in the Washington, DC area with the exception of concerts given by John Williams and Christopher Parkening (once a year at best).

In 1992, an amateur guitarist and student of the guitar named Morey Rothberg started a new organization called **The Classical Guitar Society of Washington DC**. In two years time he was able to build the membership to about 50 and a bank account of about \$500. The activities of this society were monthly meetings in the public library system of Montgomery County and publishing a newsletter. The meetings featured local performers giving recitals or workshops to all in attendance. They were free and open to the public. I only went to a few of these activities because I was teaching on the days that they met. After giving a workshop\* for the society, Morey approached me about being the new president as he was ready to step down. My first thought was to say "no". Later in the week one of the members, Cathy Fleming, called and encouraged me to consider being president. After careful consideration I decided to run for president. I knew it would be a lot of work to obtain the kind of results and goals that I wanted.

I had been a member of the **Connecticut Classical Guitar Society** which had several hundred members and presented artists like Manuel Barrueco, Ben Verdery, David Tannenbaum, Kazuhito Yamashita and many others. This was my example and vision of a guitar society as well as continuing the format that Morey had already established.

The first thing that I did was to get our organization incorporated in the state of Virginia and change the name to the **Washington Guitar Society** (not quite as wordy as the previous name). My next goal was to start a concert series. This is difficult to do if you have no money!

I decided to take a risk and started presenting concerts for the 1994-95 season at the Reid Foundation Building Ballroom in Washington. Our first season featured Jay Kaufman, Ivan Rijos, The Avalon Chamber Players and Jad Azkoul. After rent, programs and a small honorarium for the artists, we would need about 50 people in attendance to break even for each performance. We broke even on all but one concert of that season.

After I had already made commitments to the 1994-95 artists as well as the hall, I got a call from Tim Healy who is president of the International Conservatory of Music. He along with Regis Ferruzza (artistic director) and Wade Dunn were getting ready to

begin a new guitar series as well. It was to be named after a very loved Washington guitarist who had passed away. This series was named the **John E. Marlow Guitar Series**. Please see the article pertaining to this series on page 5.

Both series went on as planned. I thought it very important to show support for the Marlow series by publishing their events in our newsletter and encouraging people to attend, even though we were presenting a series of our own.

As the following season was soon approaching, I got a call from the great guitarist Scott Tennant. He was going to be performing in Baltimore and was looking for another concert while he was in the area. I told him we didn't have much money, but he seemed to be more interested in having a warm-up performance before he played in Baltimore. I knew I couldn't turn down Scott Tennant, so I started planning yet another season of performances. In addition to Scott, we had Ignacio Rodes (Spain), Jason Vieaux, William Feasley (local), the Alexandria Guitar Quartet (local), Duo Firenze (Robert Trent, *guitar* and Pamela Swensen-Trent, *fortepiano*) and Elliot Frank. This season was presented at the Dorchester Tower Apartments in Arlington, VA and was very successful.

Running with that success, I stepped things up a bit more and moved our series to the Lyceum Museum in Old Town Alexandria, VA. The 1996-97 season featured Michael Nicolella, Michael Bard & Kevin Vigil in a fund raiser, Larry Snitzler, the Concordia Trio (Kevin Dolan, *guitar*, Susan Deaver, *flute* and Tim Schultz, *oboe*), Phil Candelaria, John Stover and the Alexandria Guitar Quartet (fund raiser). Of special notice, 12 year old Nicki Lehrer opened up for two of these concerts. With the expenses of the Lyceum and a higher honorarium for the artists, this season only broke even with the help of the two fund raisers.

Keep in mind that in addition to the concerts I've been describing for the past few paragraphs, the WGS has continued to present monthly meetings at the Washington Conservatory of Music in addition to publishing our bi-monthly newsletter. Also keep in mind that the John E. Marlow Guitar Series has continued to grow and is presenting world-class performers as well as supporting performances presented by other established series (like the presentation of Julian Bream by the George Mason Center for the Arts).

### The Present

Five years ago there was almost no guitar activity in Washington. Now, there is an abundance of activity due to the efforts of the **WGS** and the **John E. Marlow Guitar Series**. I have decided not to present a WGS concert series for the 1997-98 season because I think that it's time for our two organizations to merge our efforts toward an even stronger guitar scene.

The WGS currently has about 150 members and an average of \$1,500 in the bank. That's not too bad, especially when you consider that we don't even have a phone number in the phone book. The WGS continues to hold its monthly meetings

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\* clarification: the workshop was given by Kevin.

presenting performances of local pros and events which offer performance and learning opportunities to students and hobbyists of all levels. The WGS also continues to publish one of the best guitar society newsletters in the country. I know this because we currently exchange newsletters with several other guitar societies. Many have written to me personally to tell me what a fine job we're doing with our newsletter.

The Marlow series is able to attract a larger audience and pay the artists more of what they are worth than the small honorariums we were giving. While the WGS concerts may have been a little more intimate, we were struggling to stay afloat. The Marlow series is run by professionals who are paid for and from their efforts. It's not enough to live on, but this allows them to put more time and energy toward its success. There are many volunteers with the board of directors and the advisory committee, but without Tim and Regis, the series simply would not happen. I've been lucky to get some help from volunteers and I put every spare ounce of time I had into the WGS series, but it's still not enough to do the job right.

I have been maintaining a dialogue with Tim Healy and Regis Ferruzza who organize the Marlow Series. I fully realize their need for money and support. There are many expenses in presenting a concert: artist fees, room rental, reception, sound and light rental, advertisement, programs, flyers, letters, 1099s, etc... If we want a successful and lasting guitar series with great concert artists in Washington, we must support this series with more than good wishes. We need to back our support with dollars. This is an opportunity that we should not miss out on. We can be a part of revitalizing the guitar in Washington.

Here is the deal that Tim, Regis and I think is the way to make this cooperation work. As it stands now our dues are possibly the lowest in the country at \$15 per year. This covers our newsletter expenses and little else. If we raise our dues to \$25 per year, \$10 of that will go directly to the **John E. Marlow Guitar Series**. In return, WGS members will get a 15% discount to the Marlow Series (not individual concerts, but the series) as well as a free set of D'Addario strings from The Guitar Shop. The strings alone are a \$10 value and the discount on the series is at least another \$15. Therefore, if you are a member of the WGS and you buy the series:

- You *will* enjoy and be inspired by a season of great guitar concerts.
- You *will* get a 15% discount to the series.
- You *will* get a free set of D'Addario strings.
- You *will* be helping the concert series grow and prosper.
- Your support for this series *will* attract more interest in the WGS.
- You *will* meet others with your similar interests (other guitar friends) and enjoy their company on a regular basis.
- You *will* be giving the WGS exposure by your attendance and this will attract more members to the WGS.
- Most of all you *will* be a part of regenerating a unified guitar scene here in Washington.

In addition, officers of the Washington Guitar Society will get

VIP seating at the concerts as well as be invited to an after concert dinner with the artist and other VIPs.

All major concert series and major orchestras depend on contributions to cover the expenses of presenting concerts. When you purchase a ticket for the National Symphony at the Kennedy Center, you are only covering 40% of that seats expenses. In an ideal world a concert series would be self supporting, but that's not the reality. Our potential contribution along with others who contribute to the Marlow Series (like the D'Addario String Company) will help to keep the economics of the series above water.

### The Future

The aforementioned possibilities for the future will be determined by **you** as a member of the **Washington Guitar Society**. Enclosed in this newsletter is a **questionnaire**. It asks many questions about what your interests are pertaining to the guitar society. It covers everything from meeting time and place to newsletter format to our potential cooperation with the **John E. Marlow Guitar Series**. Please fill out this questionnaire and return it as soon as possible. It will tell your future officers what it is that you would like your guitar society to be. Send it to: Washington Guitar Society, c/o Kevin Vigil, PO Box 3120, Arlington, VA 22203... **OR EVEN BETTER**, bring it to the next meeting on August 9.

### In Closing


I had to do some serious thinking about everything written above. While it was **my** initial idea to give funds to the Marlow Series in this manner, I can see where some people may not like it. Some think that people should organize events for free, but organizing is a full time job and these people are doing this in addition to their jobs. **The tickets to the Marlow series have been very reasonably priced at under \$20 per concert which includes a nice wine and cheese meet-the-artist reception. In addition there is free parking. Try getting all that from any other presenter's ticket.** I think this proposal is the easiest and strongest way to show our support. We would not have to be involved in organizing anything or setting up receptions. I think it is a very attractive arrangement. Some people may think that we should stand back and watch the ball bounce. I'd rather make sure that it will continue to bounce. **It is time for us as a guitar community to work together!**

So far, one person has stepped forward to be nominated as a candidate for president of the Washington Guitar Society. I certainly appreciate this person's willingness and readiness, but he can't do it alone. We still need more candidates! I would encourage anyone with an interest in being part of something great to step forward for the available offices of President and Vice-President. If you are interested, just give me a call at (703) 644-1659.

With all confusion in Washington's guitar past, I am thrilled to see the healthy atmosphere that exists and continues to develop

today (the WGS and the Marlow Series)! Maybe, just maybe, we can all work together *now* to *maintain* a healthy guitar scene.

Sincerely,



Kevin Vigil  
President, WGS

## The John E. Marlow Guitar Series Its Conception and Realization

**John E. Marlow** was one of Washington's great guitarists. He taught at American University, performed extensively as a soloist and chamber musician and as a member of the Washington Guitar Quintet. In addition, he made several hundred arrangements for solo guitar and guitar with other instruments.

Though I only met him a few times, he was always generous with his time and very helpful. I actually met him when the two of us showed up to play for the same gig. It was an error made by an agent. We decided to take turns playing. As we were playing in a large lobby of a hotel, we both used amplification. He walked around the room and listened so he could give me feedback on my sound in the room. This was extremely helpful as one never knows what things sound like "out there." I share this story as I am sure it was typical of John. He was well liked and respected in the Washington guitar community.

After John's death in the Fall of 1992, the International Conservatory of Music (ICM) organized a benefit and tribute concert to raise scholarship money for John's son Richy. The concert, which took place in April of 1993, was a *huge* success. There were over 25 performers and an audience of over 500 for this guitar marathon that started at 2 pm with a recording of John Marlow playing the *Prelude Fugue and Allegro* by J.S. Bach and finishing three and a half hours later with John's son Richy playing guitar. People stayed around just to talk until 10 or 11 pm. This concert represented not only everyone's admiration for John but it was also a reunion of the guitar community in Washington. Organizers of this event included Tom Cole, Howard Bass, Larry Snitzler, Regis Ferruzza, Steve Spellman and Tim Healy along with help from Allison Hampton (reception), Bob Bensal (sound) and a TV crew from Fairfax Channel 10.

The large success of this concert was the driving inspiration behind starting the *John E. Marlow Guitar Series*. Tim Healy (president, ICM), Regis Ferruzza (artistic director) and the late Wade Dunn formed the team that got this series off the ground.

Both Tim and Regis have extensive musical backgrounds which feed their passion to make the Marlow series a success. **Tim Healy** holds a bachelors degree in business from Georgetown University as well as a bachelor of music (with a focus in classical guitar) from the New England Conservatory. He taught at the All Newton Music School from 1972-80 as well as at the

Cape Cod Conservatory from 1977-80. In 1980 he and his family moved to Washington to start the International Conservatory of Music. The ICM presented classes on musics of the world drawing upon the ethnic diversity of the Washington area. The ICM became dormant until the tribute concert for John Marlow in 1993. Since then, Tim's role as president of the ICM has given leadership and direction to the *John E. Marlow Guitar Series*.

**Regis Ferruzza** used to play guitar in his father's barber shop in Pittsburgh. He and his brother were performing professionally when they were quite young and all through high school. When he heard Segovia play, his focus turned to the classical guitar. He began studying with Sophocles Papas and within one month, Papas was referring students to Regis. He later went to Santiago de Compostela in Spain to study with Andres Segovia (early 1960's). Regis' career has seen him as a guitarist in the United States Army Band for 12 years and as a faculty member at the American University, George Washington University and George Mason University. He also spent four years touring as part of the North Carolina Visiting Artist Program. Together with John Marlow, he helped to develop a method of teaching classical guitar. It is his love for the instrument that has committed Regis to the success of the Marlow Series.

In its first season (1994-95), the *John E. Marlow Guitar Series* presented Charlie Byrd, Carlos Barbosa-Lima, Myrna Sisen, Jeffery Meyerriecks, Berta Rojas and Jorge Morel. In the 1995-96 season, it presented Manuel Barrueco, Paco de Malaga and Anna Martinez, Aldo Lagrutta, David Perry and Berta Rojas. In its 1996-97 season, its artists were Georgi Vassilev, Lily Afshar, Roland Dyens and John Holmquist (substituting for Ricardo Cobo). In addition they helped support the George Mason Center for the Arts in presenting Julian Bream as well as the National Chamber Orchestra's performance featuring Manuel Barrueco.

For the 1997-98 season, the line up is:

**Berta Rojas** - Fri., Sept. 12 at 8 pm at Woman's Club of Chevy Chase (WCCC), 7931 Connecticut Ave. Chevy Chase, MD.

**Fabio Zanon** (1996 GFA International Guitar Competition Winner) - Sun., Oct. 12 at 3 pm at WCCC.

**Roland Dyens** - Fri., Feb 13 at 8 pm at WCCC.

**Roland Dyens master class** - Sat., Feb 14 at 1pm. Location TBA.

**Regis Ferruzza & Larry Snitzler with the Sunrise String Quartet** - Fri., Mar. 13 at 8 pm at WCCC.

**David Russell** - Fri., Apr 3 at 8 pm at Annunciation Church, 3810 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington DC.

In addition the Marlow Guitar will be supporting guitar in Washington by selling prime seats for **Sharon Isbin** with the **National Symphony Orchestra** with **Elizabeth Schultz** conducting on Wednesday, Nov. 26. You can bet I'll buy a series!

For further information on this exciting season call Tim Healy (301) 654-6874 or Regis Ferruzza (202) 265-3915.

Kevin Vigil