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Douze Cordes Performs For The Washington Guitar Society's July Meeting

Douze Cordes
Michael Bard and Corey Whitehead Tour the Middle East

By Kevin Vigil



Before the story begins, I'd like to mention that **Douze Cordes** will be performing for the Washington Guitar Society's July meeting. Please see the calendar of events for details.

On Sunday, May 13, I sat down with Michael Bard and Corey Whitehead at the Kabob Palace in Crystal City to discuss their recent State Department tour of the Middle East. We began by looking at dozens of photos taken on their tour of six countries (Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan and Bahrain).

They performed 20 concerts, gave 3 master classes, made 2 television appearances, 1 radio show, and appeared in enough newspapers to be considered stars. In fact, Michael said that they were treated like rock stars. They stayed at 5 star hotels, were wine and dined at the finest restaurants, they were chauffeured in bullet proof Embassy vehicles, sold and signed hundreds of CDs and Corey was even given a \$2,000 oud by the director of the National Conservatory of Music of Morocco in Casablanca. All of their expenses were covered and they were well paid.

Here's how the story begins....

Shortly after moving to the area, Corey did a performance for the Washington Guitar Society (February 17, 2000). Michael was there. They hit it off immediately; it is almost as simple as that! In mid June 2000 they played together as a duo for the first time performing background music for a reception. Since then they have performed for festivals that keep leading to performances at other festivals, including one this June in Imperia, Italy.

Now let me back track a bit... Corey gave a performance at the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage on October 18, 2000. In the audience was a representative from the State Department who invited him to do a tour of the Middle East right there on the spot. Corey told the representative about his duo with Michael and that sealed the deal. Corey told me that "it was just dumb luck", but luck or not, he played well and received the right kind of attention.

One of the highlights of their tour was a concert at the National Conservatory of Casablanca. The auditorium (Salle Betou) had a seating capacity of 400. All the seats were full and people were standing in the isles to see them play. They were even turning people away at the doors. They crowd cheered for them as if it were a rock concert. This, however, was no ordinary crowd. Their audience was made up of guitarists, oud players and professors. What a great compliment to their achievements as a duo.

So what has made Douze Cordes such a hit? Perhaps it's their concert repertoire. At a Douze Cordes performance you will hear classical, flamenco, gypsy rumba, Brazilian, American jazz and blues. Also, depending on the mood of the concert, you might hear *Stairway to Heaven* or something from an Andrew Lloyd Weber musical. Corey and Michael have recorded a CD entitled *Douze Cordes Improv from Spain to the Americas*. It demonstrates their variety of styles and is available at www.michaelbard.com and at www.coreywhitehead.com.

The success of this guitar duo certainly makes a magical and poetic story. And to think it all started at a WGS meeting. That may be inspiration for all you readers to attend meetings more regularly!

The following is a list of their concerts on this tour of the Middle East.

The Bahrain Music Institute, Manama, Bahrain, April 10th, 2001.

The University of Bahrain, Manama, Bahrain, April 10th, 2001.

The Bahrain National Museum, Arts Center, Manama, Bahrain, "Douze Cordes" with the Bahrain Flamenco Band, April 9th, 2001.

The American Embassy of Bahrain, Ambassador's Residence, April 8th, 2001.

Vingrette Jazz Club, Amman, Jordan, Presented by the National Music Conservatory of Jordan, The Noor Al Hussein Foundation, and The American Center, April 5th, 2001.

SOS Village, Concert for 600 SOS Orphans, Amman, Jordan, April 5th, 2001.

Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan, April 4th, 2001.

Featured Artists "Douze Cordes" VI Festival International des Cordes Pincées, Rabat, Morocco, March 30th and 31st, 2001.

The National Conservatory of Music, Casablanca, Morocco, March 29th 2001.

The American Legation Museum, *Tangier, Morocco*, March 27th, 2001.

The American Embassy of Morocco, *Public Affairs Officer's Residence, Rabat, Morocco*, March 24th, 2001.

The American Embassy of Saudi Arabia, *Consulate's Residence, Daharan*, March 21st, 2001.

The American Embassy of Saudi Arabia, *Riyadh*, March 20th,

The American Embassy of Saudi Arabia, *Consulate's Residence, Jeddah*, March 19th, 2001.

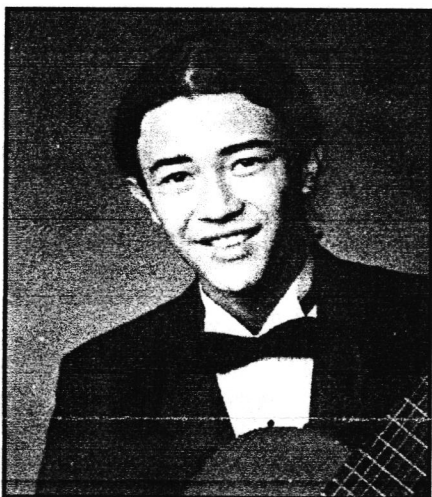
The Saudi-American International School, *Jeddah, Saudi Arabia*, March 19th, 2001.

Yemen Television, *Satellite Broadcast Throughout the Middle East*, March, 18th, 2001.

The Yemen-American Language Institute, *Sanaa, Yemen*, March 14th, 2001.

The American Embassy of Yemen, *Ambassador's Residence, Sanaa, Yemen*, March 13th, 2001.

Mischa Wagner Performs for WGS Friday, August 31



Mischa Wagner began playing the electric guitar when he was fourteen. After attending a summer music program at the Berklee School of music, he developed an interest in the classical guitar. He began his studies, at the age of sixteen, with Kevin Vigil, an active soloist and member of the Duo Con Brio. Through his instruction, Mischa auditioned for, and was accepted to the Indiana University School of Music, the Eastman School of Music, the New England Conservatory of Music, the University of Southern California's School of Music, and the Peabody Conservatory of Music. Mischa is currently completing his BM at the Peabody Conservatory where he is the student of Julian Gray of the Pearl/Gray Duo. His performance for the Washington Guitar Society will feature the program he will perform for his degree recital in September.

Guitar Society Email List

The Washington Guitar Society has recently setup an email list to announce its events and concerts. If you would like to receive email announcements and reminders for Guitar Society events, then please sign up for our email list by sending an email to wash_guitar_subscribe@yahoo.com or by visiting http://groups.yahoo.com/group/wash_guitar

Eric Waters to be published with Mel Bay

Local guitarist Eric Waters will soon be published with Mel Bay Publications. His book features the music of composer Alonso Mudarra and is titled Guitar Music from Tres Libros de Música (1546). The New Harvard Dictionary refers to this music as "the earliest printed music" for the guitar.

Eric Waters graduated magna cum laude from George Mason University, receiving a Bachelor of Music Degree with a concentration in Classical Guitar Performance. Since 1972 he has performed professionally, in a variety of styles, on electric, classical and steel-string acoustic guitars. He has toured extensively in over two-thirds of the United States and portions of Canada. His performing experiences range from working with such notables as the legendary Chuck Berry to classical master classes with Brazilian virtuoso Carlos Barbosa-Lima. Mr. Waters' vocal and instrumental compositions have received prizes in both regional and national competitions causing him to be nominated and serve as a judge in the Mid-Atlantic Song Contests. Selected by the Virginia Commission for the Arts, he was included among the candidates for the Virginia State Community College Artist Residency Program. He has contributed as an author to *Guitar Player Magazine* and made appearances on local radio and television. Presently an Adjunct Instructor of Guitar in the Music Department of the George Washington University, he performs as a soloist and free-lances as an accompanist in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.



On the Road With the Lake Braddock Guitar Ensemble

Every year, the Lake Braddock Guitar Ensemble, directed by John Graham, goes on a trip. Just about every year, I travel with them. Last year it was Philadelphia, the year before that Boston. This year it was Toronto.

The central focus of the trip was a clinic with Jeffrey McFadden at the Royal Conservatory of Music and a performance in the lobby of the conservatory. Jeff began the clinic by performing a short recital for the students. He was technically and musically sound and truly inspired many of these young musicians.

It was then LBGS' turn to play for Jeff. They performed the *Introduction et Fandango* by Luigi Boccherini and followed that with an amazing and demanding piece called *Cumba Quin* by C. Rafael-Rivera. Jeff was simply amazed at the level of playing coming from this ensemble of high school students. He commented that they were playing extremely well as an ensemble and then he worked with them on some of the more refined details of playing in an ensemble. It was a good session with many helpful suggestions. Mr. McFadden was mostly impressed with their playing of *Cumba-Quin*. This piece has meter changes every few measures and is extremely challenging not only for the ensemble but for the conductor as well. Often in a piece of this nature, if someone loses his/her place they have a hard time coming back in. That was certainly not the case here... as I watched them play when one would lose their place he/she would smile, look at the conductor (John Graham) and get right back in. Very impressive!!!!

This ensemble is not made up of guitar virtuosos. Probably about 1/3 of the students take private instruction. The rest have learned merely from the Guitar 1 and Guitar 2 classes at Lake Braddock Secondary School. This says volumes about the program that John Graham is running. I was watching all 21 players in this group. Most do not have a great right or left hand technique, yet somehow they are able to do things as an ensemble unachievable by even some professional players. I believe it is the experience of constantly working with a conductor and playing with other people that makes the difference.

I told John, that he has certainly learned how to play his instrument. Being the director of this type of a group is more than standing in front waving the baton. It is educating these students to think on their own, to solve problems and listen to each other. These things have been well instilled into these young musicians.

Perhaps one of the other unifying elements of this ensemble is the way they get along with one another. Mr. Graham has somehow developed an amazing balance of the personalities in this group. I've seen many ensembles and classes even made of the best students and this is rarely achieved. All the students seem to have a mutual respect of each other, no matter what level of a player they are.

This trip also involved more than playing the guitar; the itinerary was packed with sight seeing activities. We visited Niagara Falls, the Canadian National Tower, and the Guinness World of Records Museum, saw Agatha Christie's play *The Mousetrap* and did a fair amount of shopping. In every activity, these students were exemplary. Is it just that this is a great group of kids? Or does their work together as an ensemble under the leadership of John Graham go beyond the classroom? Perhaps it's both.

The Lake Braddock Guitar Ensemble has performed for audiences in Toronto, Boston, Philadelphia, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Orlando, New York City and in the Northern Virginia. They have performed in master classes for Benjamin Verdery, David Leisner, Julian Gray, Ron Pearl, Jeffrey McFadden, Robert Paul Sullivan, Larry Baione, Kevin Vigil, Michael Nicollella and Allen Krantz. They were one of only two high school groups invited to perform at the 1997 "Guitar Extravaganza II" at Yale University and recently in April 2001, they performed at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto. The group performs a diverse repertoire that encompasses new compositions for guitar ensemble, arrangements from the classical literature, jazz and folk music from around the world. -Kevin Vigil



LBGE has clinic with Jeffrey McFadden (conducting), John Graham observes (right)

Amplifying a Classical Guitar

I heard classical guitar played for the first time in 1984. It was John Stover (my first teacher) performing the Villa-Lobos *Concerto for Guitar* with the Germantown Symphony (Tennessee). John's guitar was amplified by means of a microphone broadcasting over the house P.A. system. Of course! What else could be done to hear a guitar with the orchestra?

Some take it for granted that this is the only way to hear a guitar in an environment where other instruments like the piano can play without amplification. There are two basic problems with this approach to amplifying a guitar. First is that the sound of the instrument is altered by the P.A. system and secondly the sound is not coming from the stage, but from the sides of the stage.

The initials "P.A." stand for Public Address. P.A. systems are designed to amplify and project sound to the masses. In theory that seems fine, but the sound is altered as the speakers are designed for their projection and high power more than they are for the quality of the sound. As with any amplification set up, the sound is only as good as the weakest link in the chain. If you have a low quality microphone with a great amplifier and speakers, the sound will be that of a low quality microphone. If there is a high quality microphone with a low quality amplifier and speakers, the sound will be that of the low quality amplifier and speakers. Even with high quality links, a typical P.A. system is not sensitive enough to give a natural sound to the classical guitar. Why have a great instrument, if it's sound will be altered by the P.A. system anyway?

I was very impressed when I saw John Williams perform for the first time (1989). He was playing at Avery-Fischer Hall in New York. This is a large concert hall, yet he was able to fill the hall with a very natural sound. Instead of using a typical P.A. system, he used recording equipment. He had an AKG 414 large diaphragm condenser microphone set 4-6 feet away from him and recording studio monitors on the stage pointing inward (not toward the audience). The level of the sound coming from the studio monitors was just high enough to use the stage to project the sound (as it was designed to do). Therefore there was no P.A. system pushing sound to people, instead the naturally great acoustics of the stage and room carried the slightly elevated amplitude of the guitar and studio monitors into the hall. The sound was very natural and subtle in the same way that good recordings are. It makes a lot of sense.

Also in 1989, I attended a concert by Per-Olaf Johnson (recently deceased) at the Yale Historic Musical Instrument Collection. My view of Mr. Johnson was obstructed as he was performing from the same level as the audience and my seat was toward the back. I remember thinking how big of a sound he had. I was curious about his instrument and his technical approach to emit such a big, beautiful sound.

After the concert I went up to shake his hand and I noticed something that appeared to be the lower bout of a guitar sitting on a stand and I asked him about it. It was a Tone-Generator designed by the luthier that built his guitar. It was made from the same woods as his instrument as well. Here's how it worked... there were two piezo pick-ups placed on the soundboard of the guitar. These pickups were plugged into an amplifier and the amplifier was plugged into the half-guitar sitting on the stand. Instead of vibrating a typical speaker with the signal from the amplifier, the Tone-Generator was vibrating the soundboard of this satellite instrument. It was the most natural sound I had ever heard coming from an amplifier as the sound was actually coming from a piece of wood as opposed to that of a typical speaker.

Mr. Johnson and I hit it off right away. He was at Yale to do research on early music. Being that he was staying about a mile's walk away from the library, he let me keep the Tone-Generator in my dorm room. He let me use it as if it were my own. It was great for chamber music! When he was headed back to Sweden, he offered to sell it to me as he could get another one upon his return. Unfortunately, I didn't have \$2,000 and I had to part with this incredible contraption.

It was also in 1989, that Benjamin Verdery got his first guitar by Greg Smallman. The sound was so incredible that there was no need for amplification in chamber music situations. It was then that I ordered my Smallman and began my eight-year wait. I absolutely love my Smallman and it is perfect for most situations for which I perform, but there are still times when amplification is necessary.

Over the past 10 years, there has been an increased demand for a natural amplified sound by acoustic and classical guitarists. Many companies now make amplifiers specifically designed to give a natural acoustic sound. There are a variety of ways in which guitarists are using these amplifiers. Some are simply using a high quality condenser microphone and running directly into the amplifier. The only problem with that is feedback will occur if the amp is nearby at even a moderate volume. Other guitarists have pick-ups under the saddle that plug directly into the amp. There is less feedback problem, but the sound is not natural enough. Then there are others who use a combination of a pick-up under the saddle and an internal microphone (the microphone is inside the body of the guitar). The goal is to use as much signal from the microphone as possible without feedback and then to support that signal with the pick-up for volume. The internal microphone itself gives a hollow sound... the best placement for a microphone is externally. Most who have this combination use mostly the pick-up signal and blend just a little bit of the microphone. It is still not ideal.

A little over a year ago, I was reading *Fingerstyle Guitar* magazine. There was an article on a new guitar by Paul McGill (Nashville, TN). It is called the Super Ace. It received a glowing review from Peter White (soft-jazz artist) saying that for the first time he can sound on stage the way he sounds in the studio. The basic claims were that this guitar sounded like a classical guitar when it was plugged into a regular amplifier and that there was no problem with feedback. After I read the article, I gave Paul a call to find out