The Duality of the Composer-Performer

by

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The duality of the composer-performer

A portfolio of original compositions, with a supplementary dissertation ‘Interviews Project: Thirteen Composers on Writing for the Guitar’.

Abstract

The main focus of this submission is the composition portfolio which consists of four pieces, each composed several times over for different combinations of instruments. The purpose of this PhD composition portfolio is threefold. Firstly, it is to contribute to the expansion of the classical guitar repertoire. Secondly, it is to defy the limits imposed by the technical facilities of the physical instrument and bring novelty to its playability. Third and most importantly, it is to overcome the challenges of being a guitarist-composer. Due to a high degree of familiarity with the traditional guitar repertoire, and possessing intimate knowledge of the instrument, it is often difficult for me as a guitarist-composer to depart from habitual tendencies to compose truly innovative works for the instrument. I have thus created a compositional approach whereby I separated my role as a composer from my role as a guitarist in an attempt to overcome this challenge. I called it the ‘dual-role’ approach, comprising four key strategies that I devised which involves (1) borrowing ‘New Music’ practices to defy traditionalist guitar tendencies which are often conservative and insular; (2) adapting compositional materials to different instrumentations; and expanding on (3) the guitar technique as well as; (4) the guitar’s inventory of extended techniques. A detailed account of these strategies and how I utilised them to construct my portfolio have been relayed in the critical commentary.

The supplementary dissertation, on the other hand, displays empirical research of a non-musical nature, offering personal interviews with thirteen accomplished living composers – both guitarists and non-guitarists – who have made significant contributions to the classical guitar repertoire. An introductory chapter precedes a full display of the interviews whereby each composer is introduced in turn, highlighting their relationship with,
and significant contributions to the guitar. An overview of the topics that were covered in the interviews, as well as an outline of the themes that emerged from the analysis have also been supplied. A discussion of how the findings contribute to a better understanding of how to write successfully for the guitar and furthering the guitar repertoire concludes the chapter. Several of the themes coincide with my own devised approach that could help guitarist-composers avoid conventional and predictable styles of writing. This therefore forms the most important contribution that this PhD portfolio can offer: providing recommendations that combine tried and tested strategies with the collective knowledge of significant guitar composers to assist future guitarist-composers avoid the habitual pitfalls when writing for the guitar.
Acknowledgements

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who have made this PhD possible.

To Tom Armstrong and Karen Short, thank you for making sure the administrative side of things are kept in check.

I’d like to also thank all the composers who took part in my interviews project and for taking the time and effort to answer my questions. The project could not have been possible without you.

Also thank you to Michal Stanikowski, Andrzej Bauer, and Sylvia Sze-hua Jen for taking the time and effort to learn, rehearse, play, and record my compositions for this portfolio project. Thank you for your friendship, companionship, ideas, and support.
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**Portfolio (80% of PhD)**

Critical Commentary

Includes YouTube links to video recordings of all portfolio compositions
Includes full list of compositions completed during PhD 2012-2015 in the appendix

Music Scores (with programme notes)

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**Dissertation (20% of PhD)**

Interviews Project: Thirteen composers on Writing for the Guitar

Bibliography
The duality of the composer-performer

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of
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INTRODUCTION

Compared to many of the classical instruments available today, the repertoire for the six-string classical guitar is minimal and dates back no earlier than the 19th century. This is due to the fact that the modern guitar itself was not available until the 19th century, which undoubtedly forms a major reason for why the guitar repertoire has been so limited. The purpose of this composition portfolio is to contribute towards expanding that repertoire. For practical reason, this project will only be focusing on the six-string classical guitar, rather than including other types of guitars e.g. electric or classical guitars with more strings i.e. 7, 8, 10, or 12-string. The six-string guitar is the most commonly used out of all the different guitars in the classical music genre. All classical guitarists will be trained first and foremost on the six-string guitar, while a small number will specialise on one or more of the other guitars. Writing for the six-string guitar, rather than a more obscure one, will therefore allow more opportunities for my compositions to be played.

DEFINING THE CHALLENGE

One of the greatest concerns when it comes to writing new compositions for any instrument is the issue of balance between idiom and innovation. On the one hand there is the struggle of breaking free from standard or typical practices of the instrument, and on the other is the matter of playability to contemplate. For the classical six-string guitar, this is especially problematic due to the complex structuring of the instrument. Its layout means that not all chords are possible, and certain chord-shapes fall more easily under the hand than others. Texture is limited by the existence of only four right-hand plucking fingers, and harmony is limited by the existence of only four left-hand stopping fingers. However, the guitar is also a

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3 See also the enclosed dissertation ‘Interviews Project’
4 See for example Andrew York’s interview in the enclosed dissertation ‘Interviews project’
treasure trove of unique timbres and tone-colours, which can give unlimited scope to an imaginative mind.

Often with guitarist-composers, there is a high sense of familiarity with the instrument resulting in a general tendency towards relying on habitual techniques that facilitate ease of playing. This type of approach to composing can inhibit truly innovative creations. Non-guitarist composers, on the other hand, do not usually have the luxury of familiarity with the instrument, and therefore their compositional ideas are often atypical of the instrument. This can result in either non-playability or a revolutionary transformation of graphistic capabilities. It cannot be forgotten, however, that there are also guitarist-composers who have brought novel ideas to the guitar repertory, and non-guitarist composers who – in an attempt to write idiomatically for the guitar – end up conforming to its standard practices e.g. the use of standard tunings, open strings, and ‘comfortable’ keys such as E, A, and D.

Nevertheless, the general perception is that non-guitarist composers may be more adept at composing truly ground-breaking, significant works. This can be attested through a historical perspective e.g. some of the most noteworthy and revolutionary works in the guitar repertoire have been composed by non-guitarists such as Rodrigo, Ginastera, Manual de Falla, Britten, Takemitsu and Nicolas Maw. From a more current perspective, some contemporary guitarists have also expressed their belief that non-guitarist composers may be more likely than guitarist-composers to make genuinely innovative contributions to the guitar repertoire. I then, as an

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9 Torres and Ferreira-Lopes.
essentially guitarist-composer, am thus faced with a dilemma, which forms the basis of my research question:

*How can I break free of the guitarist-composer constriction and make a genuinely innovative contribution to the guitar repertoire?*

In search of an answer, I looked toward other composers for some ideas on how to proceed. Prominent guitarist-composers of today such as Roland Dyens and Carlo Domeniconi unreeled to the borders the possibilities of the guitar through colouristic and technical innovations e.g. retuning, preparing, taking special techniques from the electric guitar etc. Exploring new possibilities for developing the guitar technique as well as expanding on the guitar’s extended techniques are thus two potential ways forward. The following sub-questions therefore spring to mind:

1. Can I make an innovative contribution by developing further the guitar technique, and if so how?
2. Can I make an innovative contribution by adding to the guitar’s extended techniques, and if so how?

Looking at some modern-day non-guitarist composer-performers e.g. Heinz Holliger, Vinko Globokar, and Philip Glass, it is clear that each of these three composer-performers are all well-versed in the art of composition. Fully trained and immersed in the contemporary art or classical ‘New Music’ tradition, they often compose, if not more often, for instruments other

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14 In this thesis, ‘New Music’ is taken to refer to the Western contemporary art music styles of the 20th and 21st centuries that stemmed from the avant-garde philosophies and intellectualisms first established at the turn of the 20th century. This includes Modernism, Post-modernism, and High-modernism. It does not include ‘New Music’ from the popular music stream; Bjorn Heile, ed., *The Modernist Legacy: Essays on New Music* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009).
than their own specialism. This is rather different from many guitarist-composers who very rarely write for instruments other than the guitar or without involving the guitar in some way. Few are also trained in or highly involved in the ‘New Music’ tradition\textsuperscript{15}. A rare example of a guitarist-composer who was simultaneously a great performer and composer of ‘New Music’, and also successfully introduced 20th century aesthetics into the guitar repertoire was Leo Brouwer\textsuperscript{16, 17}. This thus made me wonder about the following sub-question:

3. Can I draw from the ‘New Music’ tradition to make an innovative contribution to the guitar repertoire, and if so how?

Turning towards non-guitarist composers, who often do not have intimate guitar knowledge that interfere with their compositional imagination, I ponder a final sub-question which is perhaps the most difficult and most crucial to overcome:

4. Can I isolate my compositional methods from being influenced by my guitar knowledge, and if so how?

The following section outline the strategies that I had constructed throughout my PhD journey in order to answer the questions above.

\textsuperscript{15} See for example the enclosed dissertation ‘Interviews Project’
\textsuperscript{16} Taylor Jonathon Greene, ‘Julian Bream’s “20th Century Guitar”: An Album’s Influence on the Modern Guitar Repertoire’ (University of California Riverside, 2011).
\textsuperscript{17} Pablo José Gómez Cano, ‘Modern Guitar Techniques; a View of History, Convergence of Musical Traditions and Contemporary Works (A Guide for Composers and Guitarists)’ (University of California, San Diego, 2016).
Admitting the impossibility of ever being classified as a non-guitarist composer, I realised there may yet be a way to escape the common pitfalls of habitual tendencies and familiarity when it comes to writing for my own instrument. In an attempt to shed my quintessential guitarist-composer constraint, I adopted what I termed the ‘dual-role’ approach. That is, I deliberately separated the guitarist and composer parts of myself. Essentially, I designated certain responsibilities to either the guitarist or composer parts of me, acting as a collaboration between a non-guitarist composer and a guitarist-performer, but all within one person. This was inspired by the fact that some of the most prominent works by non-guitarists had been the product of collaborations between composer and guitarist. For example, Hans Werner Henze – on the long and challenging road of composing for his *Royal Winter Music* (1976), he said:

“I tried to imagine what would be possible and what wouldn’t, without exact knowledge. Even now I haven’t got such knowledge, unfortunately. But I wrote what I thought was possible and then showed it to him (Julian Bream); later when the sketches were impossible to do or were possible but he was able to suggest a better way to bring out the effect that I had had in mind.”

Taking heed of the fact that the composition material is produced away from the instrument and later adapted to its idiom, I devised four key strategies for my ‘dual-role’ approach based on this notion. Each of the strategies also correlate with each of the four sub-questions previously mentioned. Two of the strategies are assigned to my composer half, and the other two to the guitarist half, as illustrated below:

For the composer:

1) Hommáge to non-guitarist composers – in order to think and write more like non-guitarist composers, it will be imperative that I study and adopt their

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methods into my own compositional process. This correlates with sub-question 3 to draw from the traditions of ‘New Music’.

2) Adaptable materials – in a deliberate attempt to not write with the guitar in mind, the idea is to come up with abstract compositional materials that would later be adapted to suit various instrumentation including the guitar. This correlates with sub-question 4 to isolate my compositional methods from the influence of my guitar knowledge.

For the guitarist:

When adapting compositional materials to reflect the idiom of the guitar, it will be important not to fall into the trap of favouring comfort and ease. The following two strategies were particularly put in place to safeguard against this:

3) Extending technique – this refers to the use of new or unusual techniques that may be hard, but not impossible, for a guitarist to play, which correlates with sub-question 1 to further develop the guitar technique.

4) Extended techniques – this refers, on the other hand, to the use of new or unusual techniques that deal with expanding the colouristic possibilities of the guitar\(^\text{19}\), which correlates with sub-question 2 to expand on the guitar’s inventory of extended techniques.

The above strategies were not applied in any sort of order, but were kept in mind at all times and utilised as appropriate to the moment and task at hand. The ‘dual-role’ concept in itself was a work in progress throughout the PhD, evolving and refining as I developed the compositions over time. To illustrate how I have implemented the above strategies in my compositional process, each of the four strategies will now be explored separately in more

\(^{19}\) see for example R. A. Lunn, ‘Extended Techniques for the Classical Guitar: A Guide for Composers’ (Doctoral Thesis, Ohio State University, USA, 2010); and Seth F. Josel and Ming Tsao, The Techniques of Guitar Playing (Kassel: Barenreiter-Verlag, 2014) for up-to-date examples of guitar extended techniques.
detail. A selection of compositions written between 2012 and 2014 have been chosen to guide this illustration (see Appendix B for a full list of compositions completed during my PhD period).

Extracts from the chosen portfolio pieces (see below) along with video demonstrations, photographs of hand positions, and other appropriate musical materials will accompany a written account of the development of the ‘dual-role’ compositional approach. Full video recordings of the portfolio compositions have been uploaded on YouTube and the access links have been provided in Appendix A. Alternatively, both the video and audio recordings are also available in hardcopy on the USB stick that accompanied this portfolio submission.

**List of portfolio compositions**

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**2.1. HOMMÁGE TO NON-GUITARIST COMPOSERS**

The musical ‘hommáge’ is a composition written by one composer that consciously pays tribute to another composer that they respect, usually from the past. Several techniques have been used throughout history in hommáges including: (1) quoting materials from the earlier
composer; (2) borrowing their compositional techniques or style; and (3) using or creating materials based on ideas or music associated with that composer\(^\text{20}\).

Each of my PhD portfolio compositions is an hommage to a non-guitarist composer, specifically Toru Takemitsu, Witold Lutoslawski, and Arvo Pärt. For these pieces I have employed all the techniques described above in various combinations, transforming borrowed techniques and ideas to make them my own e.g. replacing the word ‘SEA’ with the letter ‘C’ as my personal rendition of Takemitsu’s ‘sea of tonality’ concept. At the end of the section, I also reflect on how my attempts to transform the borrowed materials have progressed toward moving beyond them to begin creating my own.

2.1.1. Takemitsu

Two of my compositions are hommages to Takemitsu, namely *The Go-Dai Concerto* and *Anamnesis*. The latter piece, as its title suggests, was a ‘recall’ of the former when I revisited the guitar tuning system I had used for *The Go-Dai Concerto* i.e. E♭-A-D-G- B♭-E. This tuning is based on the Japanese *Miyako-Bushi* scale\(^\text{21}\), equivalent to a hemitonic scale – containing two semitones with an added ninth (e natural = E open string):

![Japanese Miyako-Bushi scale](image)

*Figure 1. Japanese Miyako-Bushi scale.*

The first element of hommage present in these two pieces is therefore the reference to Japan, the birth country of Takemitsu.

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Another Japanese feature which I drew from, especially for *The Go-Dai Concerto*, was the Japanese philosophy of the ‘Five Great’ elements (earth, water, fire, wind, and void/spirit), known as the ‘Go Dai’ in Japanese\(^\text{22}\), from which the title of the concerto was derived. The reason for drawing on this elemental Japanese philosophy is closely linked to Takemitsu’s own compositional style, which has always been highly influenced by nature, especially in connection with the Japanese garden. For example, in his lecture given on May 1st, 1984 at Studio 200 in Tokyo\(^\text{23}\), Takemitsu referred to the garden in explaining the colouristic effects he wished to gain from the orchestra:

‘...we can think of the orchestra as a garden...the popular Japanese landscape garden that has a variety of aspects, all in harmony without a single detail overly assertive. This is the aesthetic I wish to capture in music...In such a garden, things sparkle in the sunlight, become somber when it is cloudy, change color in rain, and change form in the wind. That is the way I wish my orchestra to be.’

For *The Go-Dai Concerto*, I was very much influenced by his ‘quasi’ concerto for five percussionists *From me flows what you call Time* (1992) where Takemitsu himself alluded to the Five Elements philosophy from the Tibetan Buddhism tradition\(^\text{24}\). Instead of copying his idea directly, I decided to make reference to him by combining three influences into one embodying concept i.e. the ‘Go Dai’ philosophy which encompasses (1) the notion of Japanese tradition; (2) points to the five elements; and (3) is connected to the philosophy of the Japanese Zen Garden.

Apart from these philosophical underpinnings, I also borrowed two compositional techniques particular to Takemitsu: namely the ‘sea of tonality’ and an atypical manner of approaching the concerto form\(^\text{25}\). All these together had shaped the orchestration techniques and form which I adopted for my concerto as I shall further explain.

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\(^{24}\) Conti.

Since nature had been the primary inspiration for the colouristic effects exploited in Takemitsu’s *From me flows what you call Time*, so too was the nature aspects of the five elements an impact on the colouring of my orchestration. For example in the third movement, which is based on the Water element, the sound of water droplets has been represented by utilising ‘cold orchestration’ i.e. celesta, crotales, marimba, harp - high register, ‘con legno’ in the string section (bars 253-259):

![Figure 2. Extract from The Go-Dai Concerto (for guitar and orchestra), (full score: page 37, bars 253-256), (incomplete score extract)](image)

Also in the third movement was Takemitsu’s ‘sea of tonality’ concept applied (due to its elemental connection to water), although not exactly as it was originally intended. Takemitsu’s ‘sea of tonality’ concept involved centering the tonal focus on the notes E-flat (pronounced Es in German), E and A which together spelt the word S-E-A\(^\text{26}\). Again not wishing to copy him directly, I replaced the word ‘SEA’ with the letter ‘C’ and thus made the note C into the tonal focus of the third movement of my concerto. For example the note C first appears as a pedal point, giving a sense of time and pulse to the movement (bars 248 – 256):

\(^{26}\) Takemitsu.
It later appears as a central note throughout the entire guitar solo (bars 263 – 269):

Finally, Takemitsu’s atypical approach to the concerto form informed the entire structuring of my concerto. Again during the lecture on May 1, 1984 he gave the following opinion on what the concerto means to him27:

‘When writing for orchestra I often use a solo instrument- piano, cello or violin, for example, or different groups of instruments against the orchestra. This is usually referred to as a concerto idea, but in my case it is not a concerto in the sense of a competition or contrast between soloist and orchestra.’

He then referred specifically to From me flows what you call Time to explain his concerto concept further:

‘The orchestra, similar to the infinite quality in nature, envelops us, at which point the five soloists transform into the finite elements of earth, wind, water, and fire. These, in turn, dissolve back into nature.’

27 Conti.
To me, his explanation gives the impression of coherence, where individual timbral voices complement each other rather than being used to set instruments apart, including the solo instrument. I went with this idea, treating the guitar as part of the orchestral colours I envisaged to depict the natural forces of the five elements. To further enforce the sense of coherence, the essentially three-movement work is unified through ‘musical bridges’ that have been inserted between the movements to be performed “attacca”, resulting in one cohesive arch-form.

In sharp contrast to the hommage techniques I used in The Go-Dai Concerto, Anamnesis does not involve any borrowing of techniques from Takemitsu. Instead, it is based on a direct quote of a figure from the harp solo in the opening bars of Takemitsu’s And then I knew ’twas wind:

![Figure 5. Extract from Takemitsu’s And then I knew ’twas wind (for flute, viola and harp, Schott SJ1071) (page 1, bar 1) (incomplete score extract)](image)

The above figure is quoted in full at the end of Anamnesis (bar 86 in solo guitar version):

![Figure 6. Extract from Anamnesis (for solo guitar) (page 8, bar 86)](image)
Using quotation as an hommage technique did nevertheless stem from Takemitsu’s own use of the method in *And then I knew ’twas wind* where he quoted a figure from Debussy’s *Sonata No. 2 for flute, viola, and harp* (1915), and literally pointed it out in his score:

![Figure 7. Extract from Takemitsu’s *And then I knew ’twas wind* (full score: page 2, bars 23-24)](image1)

The quote had been taken from the opening bar of Debussy’s *Sonata No. 2 for flute, viola and harp*:

![Figure 8. Extract from Debussy’s *Sonata No. 2 for Flute, Viola, and Harp* (Pastorale, bar 1)](image2)

Apart from this connection, the manipulation of the quoted figure in *Anamnesis*, intertwined with the notion of recall as suggested by the title of the piece, was my own design (please refer
to the programme notes for more details). A recall of The Go-Dai Concerto stops at the reference to Japan through the tuning of the guitar as mentioned earlier, leading to the return of Takemitsu as a pillar of inspiration for my new work. However, the way this inspiration manifested itself in Anamnesis was far different from how it had been in The Go-Dai Concerto. Rather than consciously applying certain borrowed techniques or ideas, I turned to incorporating a hint of Takemitsu’s stylistic signatures as a way to suggest and pay tribute to the origin of my influences. The progression towards this stark difference in compositional approach may perhaps be attributed to my learning evolution over time. This will be reflected upon more fully in section 2.1.4.

2.1.2. Lutosławski

The point of departure for writing the hommage Lutosławski: In Memoriam was to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Lutosławski’s birth. I was inspired by three different pieces by Lutosławski, each correlating with one of the movements of my piece, resulting in a three-movement work. All three movements have tendencies of borrowing loosely from specific techniques and ideas used by Lutosławski. Only the last movement is based strictly on a quote. The compositional techniques which I borrowed specifically were (1) Lutosławski’s ‘controlled aleatorism’ and ‘chain-form’\(^{28}\); (2) Schoenberg’s ‘Klangfarbenmelodie’ (sound colour melody) and ‘developing variation’ which Lutosławski himself used\(^{29}\); and (3) the fugal and serialism structures that were present in two of the pieces I drew from.

Beginning with the first borrowed technique, controlled aleatorism was devised by Lutosławski to invite ‘chance’ into the equation of his compositions whereby he would allow the performer the freedom to choose the tempo at which to play a certain passage. All other musical aspects (rhythm, pitch, dynamics etc.) were however to be performed exactly as specified (in essence controlled). The ‘chance’ factor would take place when two or more

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instruments were playing at once, which were intended not to ‘sync’ due to their individual choices of tempo. As my piece Lutoslawski: In Memoriam was initially envisioned for a solo instrument, the exact importation of the technique would be impossible. I however attempted to construct the illusion of ‘tempo freedom’ by introducing an incessantly changing sense of time through the use and constant adjustments of irregular time signatures. This altered take on controlled aleatorism can be spotted in both the first and third movements of Lutoslawski: In Memoriam. The following example is an extract from the first movement showing changes of time signatures in every bar (bars 1-8 in solo guitar version):

![Figure 9. Extract from Lutoslawski: In Memoriam (for solo guitar), 1st movement (page 1, bars 1-8).](image)

In terms of chain-form, it was this technique, along with the fugal ending of Lutoslawski’s Symphonic Variations (1938) that inspired the second movement of Lutoslawski: In Memoriam, entitled Fugato. The structure of Fugato is a fusion between a fugue, a canon, and Lutoslawski’s chain-form. Most of the fugue’s features are retained except for the use of a transposed ‘answer’ to the subject and countersubject. In this sense, it is more like the simple canon in which the same melody is repeated over and over again in different voices, each overlapping with the

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30 Stucky.
previous voice. The chain-form is similar to the canon whereby one melody overlaps another; although they are dissimilar in that in chain-form, the overlapped melodies are different, even contrasting at times. The end result is a fugue-like treatment of two non-transposing melodies (subject and countersubject) interlinked with other materials that are often presented in an overlapping manner:

![Figure 10. Extract from Lutosławski: In Memoriam, 2nd movement (page 3, bars 40-45 in solo guitar version).](image)

As for Schoenberg’s ‘Klangfarbenmelodie’ and ‘developing variation’, Lutosławski had used them in a combined way in his *Symphonic Variations*. Both the rhythmic and melodic elements of his theme had been subject to constant variation as a developmental approach, including changes in timbral qualities (reminiscent of Takemitsu’s ‘colour variation’). Unlike Lutosławski’s application of this method to an orchestral setting, my piece operates within the limits of the solo guitar to explore the rhythmic, melodic, as well as timbral changes of thematic materials. This is especially evident in the third movement, although it is also present in the second. However, the combination of this variation method with the fugal-canonic-chain-form-like structure of the second movement meant that extreme colouristic exploitations (as in the third

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31 Stucky.
movement) were not possible. Nevertheless, timbral variations have been suggested through (1) placing the subject or segments of the subject in different registers; or (2) making use of a diverse range of fingering positions and harmonics to evoke timbral differences in the same register. The two extracts below provide respective examples for each of the two methods mentioned above:

Example 1: Timbral changes through use of different registers.

![Example 1](image1.png)

*Figure 11. Extract from Lutosławski: In Memoriam, 2nd movement (page 6, bars 69-72 in solo guitar version).*

Example 2: Timbral changes of same register.

![Example 2](image2.png)

*Figure 12. Extract from Lutosławski: In Memoriam, 2nd movement (page 7, bars 84-86 in solo guitar version).*
Finally, the idea of using serialism sprang from Lutosławski’s *Sacher Variation* (1976) for solo cello (based on the twelve-tone method), which formed the inspiration for the third movement of my piece. The *Sacher Variation* was Lutosławski’s tribute to Swiss conductor Paul Sacher to celebrate his 70th birthday. In light of this commonality of paying tribute, I decided to quote the six notes Lutosławski used to represent Sacher’s name i.e. E-flat (Es/S) – A – C – B (H in German) – E – D (Re):

![Figure 13. Extract from Lutosławski’s Sacher Variation (for cello solo), (page 4, first line; PWM 8194 (1976) edition)](image)

While Lutosławski presented these six notes in this precise order periodically (intermittent the other six notes of the twelve-tone) I have based the third movement of *Lutosławski: In Memoriam* entirely on these six notes alone. In this sense, there is an element of serialism present; however the six notes are only occasionally appearing in the same precise order as shown in the example below:

![Figure 14. Extract from Lutosławski: In Memoriam, 3rd movement (page 10, bar 123 in solo guitar version).](image)

As mentioned earlier, this six note theme has also been subject to melodic, rhythmic, and timbral variations. In particular, the melodic variation prompted a reordering of the sequence,

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and the timbral variation sees the use of a particular note to be inserted at any given time for the sake of exploiting colouristic effects. Thus, it can be said that this six note theme has been treated in a quasi-serialist way.

2.1.3. Pärt

The inspiration for writing an hommage to Arvo Pärt sprang from my previous encounters with arranging his music for the guitar. The sacred minimalistic style of his late period was the main influence on my hommage *Scintilla*, which features an altered interpretation of Pärt’s self-invented ‘tintinnabuli’ compositional technique\(^3\). Stemming from the Latin word ‘tintinnabulum’ (which also happens to be a bell used in the Roman Catholic Basilica), here I found the connection through which I can tie my Catholic faith to my music. To this end, bell-like resonances predominate in capturing the divine character I wish to impart in *Scintilla*. Not straying too far from Pärt’s own use of the technique however, two triads (A-flat/G-sharp major and G major) form the unifying factor between the three movements of *Scintilla*, which coincides with the central figure that ‘the triad’ plays in Pärt’s tintinnabular music\(^4\). Furthermore, I took the idea of writing different voices on different staves from Pärt’s first work that introduced the tintinnabular style: *Für Alina* (1976):

![Figure 15. Extract from Pärt’s Für Alina (for solo piano) (bars 1-2)](image)

---

The following example from the opening bars of *Scintilla* shows the splitting of voices across three staves, which is unusual particularly for a solo guitar score:

![Figure 16. Extract from Scintilla (page 1, bars 1-3 of solo guitar version).](image)

Apart from borrowing his tintinnabular style, I also quoted the main theme as introduced by the men’s voices in Pärt’s *De Profundis* (1980):
De Profundis is set to Psalm 129, from which I derived the title Psalm for the second movement of Scintilla. This derivation further enhances the association of Scintilla to the divine. Unlike the
direct quotes I used in Lutosławski: In Memorium and Anamnesis, the De Profundis quote was transposed to a different key in Scintilla, as illustrated in the example below:

**Figure 18. Extract from Psalm, second movement of Scintilla (page 3, bars 18-22 of solo guitar version).**

The reason for this transposition was to keep in line with the two central triads (A-flat/G-sharp major and G major) underlying the tonal focal points that unify the three movements of Scintilla.

### 2.1.4. Evidence of Progress

As alluded to when pointing out the differences in compositional approach between The Go-Dai Concerto and Anamnesis even though both were hommáges to Takemitsu, a gradual progressive advancement in learning can be observed throughout the development of my practice to produce this PhD portfolio. Two of the earlier works (i.e. The Go-Dai Concerto and Lutosławski: In Memorium) contain traces of attempting to learn from the non-guitarist composers’ ways by borrowing specific techniques and ideas that they used, modifying them in some way to become my own. The two works that came later however (i.e. Scintilla and Anamnesis), sees a diminishing reliance on borrowing compositional techniques and ideas. Instead, I felt an increased independence to develop my own techniques and ideas in manipulating quoted materials, combined with hinting at recognizable styles of the composers. I have no doubt nevertheless that this progression resulted from an internalization of the skills and knowledge I had gained by studying their works.
2.2. ADAPTABLE MATERIALS

The idea behind writing adaptable materials is to check the compositional integrity of the said materials, so that regardless of which instrumentation the materials are presented in, the composition itself will still hold value. I therefore knew that I would be rewriting my compositions over a few times with different instrumentation to test the materials. Nevertheless, my starting point would always be to compose away from the instrument and sometimes at the piano to make sure that the musical materials are abstract and not associated with the idiom of the guitar. It was only later that I would adapt the materials appropriately for the guitar, or for duo with guitar. On adapting to solo guitar, it would usually be a simple reworking based on idiomatic matters. On adjusting to the duo versions however, I not only had to make modifications according to idiomatic possibilities, but also found myself introducing new materials layered on top of the original, thus akin to a ‘palimpsest’ approach. The following two sub-sections offer more detailed examples of these two methods of adaptation.

2.2.1. Idiomatic adjustments

Example 1: Lutoslawski: In Memoriam

The duo guitar version was adapted directly from the completed piano version, where the materials were almost exactly exported (R.H. → Guitar I and L.H. → Guitar II) with minor idiomatic adjustments:

- **Solo piano** (idiom: extended scales, extended register, left hand cluster chord)

Figure 19. Extract from Lutoslawski: In Memoriam (page 2-3, bars 24-25, solo piano version).
• **Duo guitar** (idiom: full rasgueado chord, unison notes – open strings)

![Diagram of Duo guitar](image)

Figure 20. Extract from Lutosławski: In Memoriam (page 2-3, bars 23-24 duo guitar version).

**Example 2: Anamnesis**

Here, the solo guitar version has almost exactly the same notes as the piano version. However, the main idiomatic change was made to accommodate the limited range of the guitar:

• **Solo piano (extended range)**

![Diagram of Solo piano](image)

Figure 21. Extract from Anamnesis (bars 1-2; solo piano version)
• Solo guitar (limited range)

Figure 22. Extract from Anamnesis (bars 1-2; solo guitar version)

2.2.2. Palimpsest

Palimpsest is a practice from ancient times whereby parchments were re-used by scraping off old texts to make way for the new. However, beneath the new layer of text, traces of the old can still be distinguished\(^\text{35}\). Carrying this idea forward to musical composition, it translates to layering new materials on top of a pre-existing composition. While no changes are made to the original material, the new layer does transform and obscure the original composition\(^\text{36}\). This adaptation method was used when I felt it necessary to add new materials to fully take advantage of the idiomatic possibilities of the new instrumentation.

Example 1: *Scintilla*

In the duo guitar version, *Guitar I* holds the same unchanged material as the version for solo guitar (which is also virtually identical to the solo piano version save some minor idiomatic


adjustments). *Guitar II* however was ‘layered’ on, presenting new compositional materials which changed the entire harmonic skeleton of the piece.

The solo piano and solo guitar versions are virtually identical.

- **Solo piano**

![Figure 23. Extract from Scintilla (page 6, bars 73-76 solo piano version)](image)

- **Solo guitar**

![Figure 24. Extract from Scintilla (adapted from three-stave version) (page 6, bars 73-76 solo guitar version)](image)

However, in the duo guitar version, *Guitar I* has the exact same material as the solo guitar version, while *Guitar II* carries new compositional materials.

- **Duo guitar**

![Figure 25. Extract from Scintilla (page 6, bars 73-76 duo guitar version)](image)
Example 2: Anamnesis

Again, here the solo piano and solo guitar versions are very nearly duplicated with minor idiomatic alterations. The version for cello and guitar, however, has \textit{‘extended ‘compositional materials} layered on:

- \textit{Solo piano vs Solo guitar}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example2}
\caption{Extract from Scintilla (page 4, bar 31 in solo piano and page 3, bar 31 solo guitar version)}
\end{figure}

- \textit{Cello and guitar} (the cello part offers new materials, acting as an extension of the original material in the guitar part)

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example3}
\caption{Extract from Anamnesis (page 5, bar 52 cello and guitar version)}
\end{figure}
2.3. EXTENDING TECHNIQUE

Moving away from the strategies set for my composer half and onto those for my performer half, the idea of extending technique is for two reasons: (1) to challenge the technical limits imposed by the physical layout of the guitar and initiate new virtuosic possibilities; and (2) to not resort to comfortable or common practices when adapting materials to the guitar idiom. The following sub-sections provide examples to some of the extreme techniques exercised in bringing the abstract compositional materials to life on the guitar.

2.3.1. Stretching and left hand thumb

Example 1: Anamnesis (solo guitar version)

Beginning with stretching, the extracts below offer some illustrations of extreme left hand stretches. According to Leathwood\(^{37}\) in his guidance notes for composing on the guitar, he stated that ‘the left hand has a stretch of five to seven frets, depending on the position on the fingerboard’ (p. 17). However, in Anamnesis I have made use of stretches of eight frets:

Bar 1 – extreme eight frets stretch, high position, with ‘broken’ barre

Bar 83 – extreme eight frets stretch, high position

![Figure 29. Extract from Anamnesis (page 8, bar 83 solo guitar version) with photo example of stretch](image)

**Example 2: Anamnesis (solo guitar version)**

In the lowest position, eight fret stretches cannot be achieved. However, in *Anamnesis* a challenging six fret stretch is used in the lowest position by extending both the index finger and the little finger. This technique has been advised against by Blatter\(^\text{38}\) where he exclaimed ‘a performer cannot do both extensions at the same time’ (p. 445) in the guitar fingerings appendix to his orchestration book.

Bar 60 – extreme six frets stretch, lowest position

![Figure 30. Extract from Anamnesis (page 6, bar 60 solo guitar version) with photo example of stretch](image)

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Example 3: *Go-Dai Concerto* (for guitar and orchestra):

In addition to stretching, I have also brought the thumb in to stop notes in the *Go-Dai Concerto*, making use of all five left hand fingers as illustrated in the example below. Again according to Leathwood, he noted that ‘this technique is almost unknown but may become more common as guitar technique evolves’\(^{39}\). Although not a completely new technique in itself, it is still highly uncommon in classical guitar repertoire, where the thumb usually sits behind the neck. At times, the thumb has been known to be brought over the top of the guitar neck to stop the 6\(^{th}\) or 5\(^{th}\) strings. More rarely, however, the thumb is brought to the front of the fretboard to stop notes, similar to how it is employed on the cello\(^{40}\). The example shown below positions the thumb at the front of the fretboard on the 1\(^{st}\) string, which is to my knowledge the first example of its kind.

Bar 290 – left hand cello-like thumb position

![Figure 31. Extract from Go-Dai Concerto (page 24, bar 290 guitar and piano reduction score) with photo example](image)

2.3.2. ‘Jumps’ (extreme position change)

Jumps in this instance refers to a ‘leap from one extreme of register to another’\(^{41}\). A good example of such a jump in historical guitar repertoire can be found in *Etude no. 2* (1928) by Heitor Villa-Lobos:

\(^{39}\) Leathwood. (p.22)  
\(^{40}\) Josel and Tsao.  
\(^{41}\) Leathwood. (p.9)
The above passage extends across ten positions, that being difficult enough to be classed as etude-worthy material. In the following examples, extracts from Anamnesis, Scintilla, Lutoslawski: In Memoriam, and Go-Dai Concerto provide illustrations of jumps that are bigger than ten positions, which to my knowledge are extremely rare due to the difficulties in executing the technique accurately and comfortably:

Example 1: Anamnesis (cello and guitar version)

Bars 71-73 (guitar cadenza) – extreme fifteen positions jump

Example 2: Scintilla (solo guitar version)

Bars 97-99 – extreme eighteen positions jump of over four octaves

---

42 Please double click to open video. For the paper submission, the video examples have been provided on the USB stick.
Example 3: Lutosławski: *In Memoriam* (solo guitar version)

Bars 70-75 – extreme sixteen positions jump and fast register changes: highest - lowest - middle - lowest - highest
Example 4: *Go-Dai Concerto* (for guitar and orchestra)

Bars 17-18 – changing between the extreme registers: highest – lowest – highest, covering the whole range of the guitar (nineteen positions)

![Figure 36. Extract from Go-Dai Concerto (page 3, bars 17-18 guitar and piano reduction)](image)

2.3.3. Extensive use of existing techniques

Example 1: *Go-Dai Concerto* (for guitar and orchestra):

In this example, a variety of idiomatic guitar techniques for both right and left hands have been used within a very short space of time (within 10 bars). These standard techniques have also been combined with the more extreme techniques that I have introduced earlier i.e. extreme jumps and stretches (high register barre chords).

2.4. EXTENDED TECHNIQUES

The last of the four strategies covers the use of new colouristic or sonoristic effects to produce the sounds or tone characteristics envisioned in the abstract musical ideas. Most often when adapting to the guitar idiom, the problems encountered involves the limited range of the guitar. To extend this range, or at least to give an impression of an extended range, I searched for new harmonics and re-tuning possibilities. Other ways in which I have exploited extended techniques is to imitate sounds of other instruments and natural elements, and to achieve a sense of space and resonance. Examples of these experimental exploitations are presented in the sub-sections below.
2.4.1. Extended harmonics

On the guitar, there are two typical types of harmonics i.e. natural and artificial\textsuperscript{43}. With the artificial harmonics, the trigger is commonly executed at the octave node with the right hand, which is favoured by composers and guitarists because of its reliability to produce a strong harmonic\textsuperscript{44}. However, it is possible to produce artificial harmonics by lightly touching smaller intervals above the fretted note with the left hand, although it is very rarely used and not customarily known as conventional guitar artificial harmonics. This technique is more similar to how artificial harmonics are produced on other stringed instruments e.g. violin and cello, by stretching out the little finger on the left hand to the desired interval. I have called this the extended harmonics to reflect the extension made by the little finger.

Example 1: \textit{Anamnesis} (solo guitar version):

This example shows two instances where I have used the extended harmonics in combination with other techniques:

Bar 49 – extended left-hand barre harmonics; Bar 7 - extended left-hand harmonics and natural harmonics

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{music.png}
\caption{Extract from Anamnesis (page 5, bar 49 and page 1, bar 7 solo guitar version) with video example}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{43} Leathwood; Blatter.\textsuperscript{44} Josel and Tsao.
2.4.2. Re-tuning, glissando, and bending

Example 1: *Anamnesis* (cello and guitar version):

Re-tuning here does not refer to scordatura where the guitar standard tuning is altered. Rather re-tuning is used during performance, firstly to extend the range of pitches available, and second for effectuating the pitch slide effect akin to glissando.

Bars 147-151 – re-tuning during performance

![Retuning Example 1.MP4](Retuning Example 1.MP4)

*Figure 38. Extract from Anamnesis (page 14, bars 147-151 cello and guitar version) with video example*

Example 2: *Go-Dai Concerto* (for guitar and piano):

In this second example, the normal glissando can be observed together with bending and the use of quarter tones to imitate the sound of the Japanese flute.
Bar 230 (opening) – glissando, bending, quarter tones, played in unison with alto flute (in orchestral version)

Figure 39. Extract from Go-Dai Concerto (page 23, bar 230 guitar and piano reduction) with video example

2.4.3. Unison note-campanella

The campanella on guitar is a fingering ‘idea of playing a passage that could be played with multiple notes on a string across several strings’\(^{45}\). This gives a ‘harp-like effect full of overlapping resonances’\(^{46}\). Instead of applying this technique to disperse several different notes across various strings, I applied it to the repeated single note allowing the pitch to resonate while the same pitch is played elsewhere.

Example 1: Lutosławski: In Memoriam (solo guitar version)

Bar 124 – combined extensive harp arpeggio with unison note campanella (doubling open string)

---


\(^{46}\) Leathwood. (p.9)
Example 2: Scintilla (solo guitar version)

Bars 1-2 – unison notes stretching over six positions (exact note on three different strings including one open string)

Bar 15 – unison notes, different articulation (on two strings)
CONCLUSION

Throughout this critical commentary, I have provided examples to illustrate how I have implemented each of the four strategies I set out to overcome the challenges of being a guitarist-composer:

1. Hommage to non-guitarist composers
2. Adaptable materials
3. Extending technique
4. Extended techniques

These strategies together form the ‘dual-role’ approach whereby I separate my composer role from my guitarist role. This concept was formulated as my solution to break free from the guitarist-composer constraint in order to contribute innovative new works of substance to the guitar repertoire. The PhD portfolio was my experimental ground to test and refine these strategies. Examples that illustrate how I had tackled these strategies have been summarised in the table below:

Table 1. Summary of examples illustrating my strategy approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer role</th>
<th>Adaptable materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hommage to non-guitarist composers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quoted materials, borrowed techniques and styles,</td>
<td>• Idiomatic adjustments – exact export of compositional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and used ideas associated with the</td>
<td>• Palimpsest – new compositional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>following three composers:</td>
<td>• changes made to accommodate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Takemitsu</td>
<td>• materials layered on top of old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lutoslawski</td>
<td>• unchanged materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pärt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Guitarist role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Extend-ing technique</strong></th>
<th><strong>Extend-ed techniques</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Stretching and left hand thumb – up to eight fret stretches, extending both index and little fingers at times, combined with broken barre and use of thumb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ‘Jumps’ (extreme position change) – up to nineteen positions covering the whole range of the guitar at fast speeds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extensive use of existing techniques – combining conventional idiomatic techniques with extreme techniques in quick succession</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extended harmonics – use of left hand artificial harmonics in combination with other types of harmonics and barre technique</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Re-tuning, glissando, and bending – re-tuning during performance and imitating non-guitar sounds that have less structured pitch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unison note-campanella – dispersing a repeated single note across different strings to achieve greater resonance giving a sense of space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through the process of experimentation, I have accomplished (1) learning and adopting the compositional methods of non-guitarist composers; (2) improving my ability to construct my own compositional techniques; (3) training my capacity to compose abstract materials separate from idiomatic context; (4) expanding the idiomatic possibilities of the guitar to solve problems associated with adapting abstract materials to the guitar; (5) pushing my own virtuosic technical facility; and (6) discovering new colouristic and sonoristic extended techniques on the guitar.

These accomplishments have given me the confidence to deem the four strategies of my dual-role approach to be effective in helping me to overcome the constraints of being a guitarist-composer and contribute something innovative to the guitar repertoire. It has offered me assurance that the label of being a guitarist-composer does not necessarily have to equate to drawing from guitaristic tendencies as the primary source of composing.
REFERENCES

Music scores


APPENDIX A: YOUTUBE LINKS TO FULL VIDEO RECORDINGS

THE GO-DAI CONCERTO ‘Takemitsu: In Memoriam’
For guitar and orchestra https://youtu.be/HpiGZgvakFg

LUTOSŁAWSKI: In Memoriam
For solo guitar https://youtu.be/sOO_3mksCnQ
For solo piano https://youtu.be/jJ5anvopjAQ
For duo guitar https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqfJNOnpqNU

SCINTILLA: After Arvo Pärt
For solo piano https://youtu.be/F6vhrYPyBAs
For solo guitar https://youtu.be/hUjeFlB0HoU
For duo guitar https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeEkKL_x6nY

ANAMNESIS: After Tôru Takemitsu
For solo piano https://youtu.be/woUZzxxFVW4
For solo guitar https://youtu.be/SNqzmyRmWfs
For guitar and cello https://youtu.be/zjsNR0YFdZo
APPENDIX B: FULL LIST OF COMPOSITIONS COMPLETED DURING PHD 2012-2015

2015

- NEO VARIATIONS | for guitar solo; Intro-Theme-I-VI Variations-Finale
- POLISH SKETCHES | version for cello and guitar
- FINIS AUTEM PRINCIPIUM EST (‘The End Is the Beginning’) epitaphium quoque Sir John Tavener (epitaph on Sir John Tavener) | for solo guitar; I. ITINER (‘The Path’) II. LUCIDUS (‘The Light’)

2014

- ANAMNESIS for cello and guitar; I. Sp鲲ously II. Slightly faster III. With more movement
- POLISH IMPRESSIONS | 12 EASY MINIATURES FOR TWO GUITARS; UMARŁ MACIEK, UMARŁ | DIED, MACIEK HAS DIED, II. SZALALĄ, SZALALĄ | RAGED SHE, RAGED, III. UŚNIJĘ, MI USNIJ | SLEEP NOW, SLEEP, IV. JADĄ GOŚCIE, JADĄ | THE GUESTS ARE COMING, THEY’RE COMING, V. Czerwone Jabłuszko | THE RED APPLE, VI. W Murowanej Piwnicy | IN THE BRICK BASEMENT, VII W Moim OgródeczkU | IN MY LITTLE GARDEN, VIII. GAIK | THE GROVE, IX. Cichy Zapada Zmrok | THE DUSK FALLS SILENTLY, X. HEJ, OD Krakowa Jadę | HEY, I COME FROM CRACOV, XI. W Polu LiPEńka | THE LIME TREE IN THE FIELD, XII. Impresje Polskie | POLISH IMPRESSIONS
- ‘CONCERTO: THE DOUBLE PORTRAIT’ – concerto for two guitars and symphonic orchestra; I. Fanfara (rondo-variations; based on the bugle call of the city of Zielona Góra), II. Adagio, III. Moto Perpetuo (based on folk melody of Górale Czadeczcy titled ‘Powiadamaj Ludzie’), IV. Cadenza- FINALE

2013

- ANAMNESIS | After Toru Takemitsu | version for solo guitar
- ANAMNESIS | After Toru Takemitsu | for solo piano
• AFTER BRAD’S VARIATIONS | theme and 10 variations for solo guitar

• SCINTILLA | AFTER ARVO PäRT version for two guitars

• SPIFFY for solo guitar

• SPIFFY for two guitars

• LUTOSŁAWSKI : IN MEMORIAM | version for two guitars

• THE 五大GO-DAI CONCERTO version for guitar and piano (piano reduction)

• EIGHT POLISH LANDSCAPES suite for two guitars | Kielce 2013 | Poland;
  Landscape I – Kotuszów (from Kurczwyki) (based on melody „Sumiał Gaj”),
  Landscape II – Solec (from Stopnica) (based on melody „Ojże moja ojże”),
  Landscape III – Młociany, Łomianki (from Warsaw) (based on melody „Nie pójdę ja grabić siana”),
  Landscape IV – Zarudzie (from Zamoyskie) (based on melody „W polu lipejka”),
  Landscape V – Grojec (from Głochów) (based on melody „Sieczka nie owiec Marysiu”),
  Landscape VI – Sumin (from Zamoyskie) (based on melody „Już nam posiwiało gdzie zasiadłaś miało”),
  Landscape VII – Kielce (based on melody „Kielce, Kielce, moje Kielce”),
  Landscape VIII – Grojec (from Worów) (based on melody „Za górkę zaszła”)

• SIX FOLK MELODIES (version for guitar and oboe /w. english horn) I. ‘A tam kolo mlyna rosnie jarzebina’/’Up there near the mill rowan grows’, II. ‘Pod zielono miedzo ptaszki owis jedzo’/’On the green boundary strip birds eat oats’, III. ‘Na suchej topoli ptaszek glowke zwiesił’/’On the dry poplar a bird sat down’, IV. ‘A tam w polu przy drodze rosli jagody’/’In the field grew berries’, V. ‘Oj lolszy mi si kołysz kolibejko lipowa’/’Oh swing swing linden cradle’, VI. Polka ‘Wsciekła’/’The Furious Polka’

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2012

• SCINTILLA | AFTER ARVO PÄRT version for piano

• SCINTILLA | AFTER ARVO PÄRT for solo guitar; I.PART ONE | II. PART TWO ‘POEM’ (Inspired by De Profundis ‘Psalm 129’ by Arvo Pärt) | III. PART THREE
• ‘DESEJO’ for solo guitar | dedicated to Odair ASSAD

• SONATA FOR VIOLA SOLO “THE JEWISH” (commissioned and dedicated to Katarzyna Bryła); I. Moderato, molto espressivo, II. Doloroso, tranquillo moltissimo, III. Ardente vivace con accentuado

• THE 五大GO-DAI CONCERTO | KONCERT 五大GO-DAI (Toru Takemitsu: in memoriam | Toru Takemitsu: ku pamięci); concerto for guitar and orchestra; I. Earth – the beginning of life | I. Ziemia – początek życia, II. Spirit of Fire | II. Duch Ognia, III. Whispers of Droplets | III. Szepty opadających kropel

• SAKURA NO HANA VARIATIONS for two guitars (“Cherry blossom Variations”) in five movements

• LUTOSŁAWSKI: IN MEMORIAM | version for piano solo

• LUTOSŁAWSKI: IN MEMORIAM for solo guitar; I. POEM Inspired by W. LUTOSŁAWSKI’S 3rd poem “REPOS DANS LE MALHEUR” from the cycle “TROIS POEMES D’HENRI MICHAUX”, II. FUGATO Inspired by W. LUTOSŁAWSKI’S “SYMPHONIC VARIATIONS”, III. eS-A-C-H-E-Re IMPRESSION Inspired and based on “SACHER VARIATIONS”

• CONCERTO CHACONNE (prelude and chaconne in XXII variations) for guitar and string quartet: commissioned and dedicated to Cezary Strokosz to celebrate “The 15th Anniversary of International Music Guitar Festival in Trzęsacz, Poland”
Interviews Project:
Thirteen Composers on Writing for the Guitar

by
Marek Pasieczny

Submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Music Composition

Department of Music and Media, School of Arts
University of Surrey
July, 2016
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Introducing the Interviews Project

Outline of Chapter

This project sets out to explore the approaches composers take to writing for the guitar, whether they are guitarists or non-guitarists. Thirteen established living composers who have written for the guitar have agreed to be interviewed for this project. The upcoming text will introduce in turn each composer and their relationship to the guitar. This will be followed by specifying the coverage and origins of the interview questions. A brief discussion of the most important themes that emerged from the interviews will then follow. Consideration of how the findings can contribute to a better understanding of how to write successfully for the guitar and furthering the guitar repertoire will bring a close to this introductory chapter.

The Thirteen Composers

Each of the thirteen composers interviewed are established living composers who have contributed richly to the classical guitar repertoire. They were chosen based on the fact that their works are, for the most part, widely performed and known. Most of the composers are guitarists, with a small number being non-guitarists, and one being an ex-guitarist. The unbalanced proportion is reflective of the fact that more guitarists write for the guitar than non-guitarists, and also that more works written by guitarist-composers are better known and being played (see section on the discussion of observed themes for further details). The non-guitarist group will be introduced first (which will include the ex-guitarist), followed by the longer list of guitarist-composers. Brief biographical information has been provided for each composer alongside their relationship and contribution to the guitar.

Non-guitarist composers

Three of the thirteen interviewed composers do not play the guitar, out of which two were never trained as guitarists, while one had formerly been trained but no longer plays the
instrument. Each, however, are established composers who have written for various instruments, voices, and ensemble types.

The first to be introduced is Clarice Assad (b. February 9, 1978) who is a Brazilian-born classical and jazz pianist, vocalist, composer, and arranger. Clarice studied in the USA, first obtaining a Bachelor of Music from the Roosevelt University in Chicago, IL, then a Master’s degree in Composition from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. As a trained composer, Clarice has written for voice, large and small ensembles, and various instruments including the guitar. Though not a guitarist herself, Clarice is able to write successfully for the instrument, undoubtedly due to her intimate knowledge of the instrument through her familial connections. Clarice’s father and uncle form the legendary guitar duo ‘The Assad Brothers’ who have been hailed by Washington Post as ‘...the best two-guitar team in existence, maybe even in history...’1. Clarice had begun her composition journey by writing pieces for the duo2, and continues to collaborate with them, along with other famed guitar ensembles such as the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, on compositional projects for the guitar. She has written for guitar solo, guitar duo, and guitar quartet, and her work Danças Nativas (2008) commissioned by the Aquarelle Guitar Quartet was nominated for a Latin Grammy for Best Contemporary Composition in 20093.

The second non-guitarist composer to be introduced is Nigel Westlake (b. September 6, 1958), an Australian composer, performer, and conductor who had recently been awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Music by the University of New South Wales in 2012. Nigel is well-known as a film composer, best known for his film score Babe (1995) which brought him international fame, and won him an APRA Music Award for best film score in 1996. Apart from film, Nigel’s compositions cover a wide range of genres including theatre, television, radio, orchestra and various ensembles, as well as solo instrumental works4, despite having had very little training as a composer (he only briefly studied composition in the Netherlands in 1983). As a non-guitarist composer, Nigel managed to compose successfully for the guitar even with little knowledge of it. He had a close

relationship with guitarist John Williams, who had invited Nigel in 1992 to tour with him around UK and Australia as a performer and composer in his group Attacca. John Williams commissioned several works from Nigel, along with many other guitarists. As a result, Nigel accrued a number of guitar compositions under his belt including works for guitar solo, guitar duo, guitar trio, guitar quartet, guitar(s) with other instrument ensembles, and guitar concertos. His piece Six Fish (2003), commissioned and performed by Saffire Guitar Quartet, was awarded Instrumental Work of the Year (2005) by APRA-AMC Classical Music Awards. However, his most well-known guitar piece is most likely Antarctica (1992), a guitar concerto requested by John Williams to be reworked from its original score from the IMAX movie Antarctica (1991).

The last composer to be introduced in this section is Irish composer and teacher David Fennessy (b. 1976). David had originally studied classical guitar at the Dublin College of Music, but is no longer a performing guitarist due to an injury. He has since solely devoted his career to being a composer, first studying composition at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (now Royal Conservatoire of Scotland) with James MacMillan in 1998, and later holding a teaching post there from 2005 in the composition faculty. Acknowledging his accomplishments as an established composer, Universal Edition began publishing his music in 2004. Although started off as a guitarist, David poses a very rare example of a composer who is an ex-guitarist. He does, however, still possess great knowledge of the guitar, but rarely composes for it. When he does compose for the guitar, he does not tie himself down with the limits of his knowledge for the instrument in order to avoid falling into clichés. David has composed three solo guitar pieces: ...sting like a bee (1998), Security Blanket (2005), and rosewood (2010). Additionally, he has written a few ensemble pieces with guitar or electric guitar. Many of his compositions dabble in electronics or electronically amplified instruments and unusual instrumentation, which follow the modern-day aesthetic traditions of contemporary art music.

8 John Feeley, ed., Contemporary Irish Music for Classic Guitar Solo (Mel Bay, 2009).
Guitarist composers

A total of ten guitarist composers were interviewed, six of which had formally been trained in composition and four had not. The list will therefore be divided into two groups, introducing first those who had formal training in composition, followed by the group who had not, with each group listed in alphabetical order according to surname.

i. With formal composition training

The first guitarist composer to be introduced, who also had formal composition training, is Dušan Bogdanović (b. 1955), a Serbian-born composer and classical guitarist who currently teaches at the Geneva Conservatory. Dušan studied composition and orchestration with Pierre Wissmer and Alberto Ginastera, and guitar performance with Maria Livia São Marcos at the Geneva Conservatory. He is a great and skilled guitarist having won first prize at the Geneva Competition, and also debuted at Carnegie Hall, New York. He is also a prolific composer and recording artist, publishing over fifty compositions, and recorded over twenty albums. Dušan has an immense passion for the element of rhythm in composition and a fascination with indigenous music, which often serve as guiding elements for many of his compositions, exploring and combining classical, jazz, and ethnic influences in his music.

His immense knowledge in this respect is displayed in the form of three published books: the first covering Polyrhythmic and Polymetric Studies, the second covering three-voice counterpoint and improvisation in the Renaissance style, and his latest book - Ex Ovo - includes chapters on Baroque and Jazz improvisation, species counterpoint, music aesthetics, and motivic transformations. Dušan has composed for guitar solo, duo, trio, quartet, guitar with other instrument ensembles, guitar and voice, prepared guitar, and guitar concertos. His most well-known pieces are perhaps Jazz Sonata (1982) and Six Balkan Miniatures (1991). He also wrote for other instruments including piano, percussion, vocal, and various ensemble and orchestral combinations.

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The next guitarist composer with formal composition training to be noted is Carlo Domeniconi (b. 1947), an Italian guitarist and composer, considered to be one of the most renowned and important contemporary composers for the guitar. Carlo began studying the guitar with Carmen Lenzi-Mozzani at the age of 13. In 1966, he left Italy for West Berlin, where he studied composition at the University of Music (later The Berlin University of the Arts) with Heinz-Friedrich Hartig. He further worked at the university until 1992 as a professor. With over 150 compositions to his name, Carlo has made priceless contributions to the development of the modern guitar repertoire. One of the defining features of his music is its exploration of various national styles, including Turkish, Indian, Far East, and various South American styles. One of his pieces inspired by Turkish music, the Koyunbaba suite (1985–86), has become his most well-known piece to date, frequently programmed in concerts and recorded by guitarists to this day. Another key feature of his music is the continuous exploration of the guitar, which established Carlo as one of the pioneers of guitar sonorism (all kind of effects, extended techniques, timbre). His music is extremely idiomatic, with most of his pieces written for guitar. He has however written some music that does not feature the guitar, including for orchestra, various solo instruments and ensemble combinations. The majority of his output nevertheless involves the guitar in some way.

Tunisian classical guitarist, composer, and arranger, Roland Dyens (b. October 19, 1955) is another example of a guitarist composer who had formal composition training. Roland studied guitar with Spanish master Alberto Ponce, and composition with Désiré Dondeyne. He currently teaches at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris, where he is Professor of Guitar, a position once held by his teacher Ponce. Roland has been hailed as a leading figure in guitar as a performer, improviser, composer, and arranger.

15 Enrique Robichaud and Graham Wade, Guitar’s Top 100: Classical Guitar’s Most Recorded Music (Enrique Robichaud, 2012).
He has also been ranked no. 1 out of the six living composers appearing in the “Top 100” list of original guitar works that have been recorded the most worldwide, according to Canadian musicologist Enrique Robichaud as written in his book “Guitar’s Top 100: Classical Guitar’s Most Recorded Music.” As a keen arranger, Roland invented many new guitar techniques in order to capture sound effects originally foreign to the guitar. His guitar music draws on many elements of folk, jazz, rock, and pop music which is very popular among modern-day players. *Tango en Skaï* (1985) is one of his best-known pieces, along with *Libra Sonatine* (1986). Similar to Carlo Domeniconi, Roland wrote extensively and almost exclusively for the guitar. The majority of his works are for guitar solo or guitar ensembles. When writing for other instruments, they will mainly be found to be written in combination with the guitar.

The next guitarist composer with compositional training to be introduced is Welsh composer and guitarist, **Stephen Goss** (b. February 2, 1964). Steve completed his studies in both guitar performance and composition, studying first at the Royal Academy of Music and then at the Universities of Bristol and London, where he completed his Doctorate in Composition. Steve is a member of the Tetra Guitar Quartet, and is currently Professor of Composition and Director of Research at The University of Surrey (Guildford), as well as a Visiting Professor of Guitar at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Steve is a rare example of a guitarist who completed a PhD in composition, and yet has remained an active guitarist (founder and member of Tetra Guitar Quartet). He is an established composer outside the classical guitar world, yet also with a firm footing inside, bridging the two worlds. Recent works without guitar have included a piano concerto, orchestral and choral works as well as mixed chamber ensembles. Steve has been commissioned by some of today’s most prominent guitarists i.e. John Williams (who recorded his *Guitar Concerto* (2015), the chamber piece *The Flower of Cities* (2012) and *Marylebone Elegy* (2012) for solo guitar), David Russell (*El Llanto de los Suenos* (2007) and *Cantigas de Santiago* (2014)), and Xuefei Yang.

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20 Robichaud and Wade.
21 Vincens.
(several solo and chamber pieces, and the *Albeniz Concerto* (2009)). His most written about piece is *Oxen of the Sun* (2003-4), a piece commissioned by Jonathan Leathwood for six-string guitar and ten-string guitar to be played simultaneously.  

The American classical guitarist and composer **Bryan Johanson** (b. 1951) is next to be introduced. Bryan studied guitar with Christopher Parkening, Alirio Diaz, and Michael Lorimer; and composition with Charles Jones and ‘Pulitzer Prize-winning’ composer William Bolcom. He is a member of the Oregon Guitar Quartet, and is currently a Professor of Music at Portland State University and chair of the music department. Contributing to the vibrant guitar scene in Portland, Bryan established the Portland Guitar Festival in 1991, which has been organised annually since. Not only active in the guitar world, Bryan is one of the few guitarist composers who also writes music for instruments other than the guitar. He has composed over eighty works which include three symphonies, concertos for violin, cello and piano, several chamber works, song cycles and choral works, as well as pieces for solo instruments, for which some have received major awards from the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Aspen Music Festival, The Kennedy Center, UCLA and the Esztergom International Guitar Festival. In terms of notable guitar works, his critically acclaimed guitar piece *Open Up Your Ears* (1997) was recorded on David Starobin's Grammy Award nominated *Newdance* (1998); while his *Pluck, Strum and Hammer* (2004) and *Let's Be Frank* (2004) appeared on the Grammy Award winning album *Guitar Heroes* (2004) recorded by the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet.

The last guitarist composer to be introduced who also had formal composition training is **Annette Kruisbrink** (b. 1958), a classical guitarist and composer from the Netherlands. Annette studied guitar with Pieter van der Staak and composition with Alex Manassen at the Conservatory of Zwolle. From 2000 to 2010 she taught contemporary music and ethnomusicology at the Conservatory of Music in Zwolle, although now she is currently Director and Professor at the Anido Guitar School. Annette is an active guitarist and also

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24 Goss.  

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an extremely prolific composer. She composed over 300 compositions that were published in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, Canada, and the United States. She writes in a variety of styles from tonal miniatures for beginners, to complex avant-garde compositions, mainly for guitar or guitar combined with other instruments. She has won several prizes for her compositions, one of which had been for chamber orchestra, while three were for guitar compositions. Her most well-known solo guitar piece is *Homenaje a Andrés Segovia* (1993) for which she won first prize in 1994 at the composition competition organised by SACEM and CMAC in Fort de France, Martinique (France). She is also very proud of *60+* (1988), a piece in minimalistic style which introduced a new playing technique as well as high rhythmic complexity due to her combining two existing guitar techniques – hammer on/pull off with right hand arpeggios.

### ii. Without formal composition training

The following four guitarist composers to be introduced had not receive any formal composition training, although a few had received some informal instructions. The Italian classical guitarist and composer, **Simone Iannarelli** (b. 1970) is such an example. Simone studied guitar with Massimo Delle Cese at the Conservatory “A. Casella” in L’Aquila, after which he moved to Paris, France in order to study privately with Roland Dyens. He had later enrolled at the Conservatoire de La Courneve (Paris) to study orchestration with Guillaume Cornesson. Simone is an example of a successful guitarist from the younger generation, who actively performs and teaches guitar, presently holding a position as Professor of Guitar at the University of Colima’s Faculty of Fine Arts Music Department, Mexico. As a composer, Simone has no formal qualifications, though his orchestration classes and lessons with Roland Dyens would have contributed informally to his composition knowledge and skills. The vast majority of his works are for the guitar, either as solo or chamber music. They are widely performed by guitarists, published internationally, and have been highly acclaimed by other guitarist-composers. For example, Carlo Domeniconi described his *Trois Préludes* as

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29 Annette Kruisbrink, ‘60+ (Minimal Music for Guitar)’, 2009 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5gMkXV-IEI>.
“beautiful music which brings new colours and new aspects to the guitar”. 31 His most popular piece is likely to be Italian Coffee (2000), which comprises a series of twelve short pieces each depicting a separate image, story, or emotion.

Another guitarist composer who had brief instructions in composition is the American classical guitarist, composer, and teacher, David Leisner (b. December 22, 1953). A graduate of Wesleyan University, he informally studied guitar with John Duarte, David Starobin and Angelo Gilardino; and composition with Richard Winslow, Virgil Thomson, Charles Turner and David Del Tredici. David previously taught at the New England Conservatory for 22 years, but is now co-chairman of the guitar department at the Manhattan School of Music. 32 David has contributed greatly to the classical guitar repertoire not only through composing and arranging, but also through his research and historical discoveries, and by commissioning works from other composers. David is largely responsible for the revival of works by Johann Kaspar Mertz (1806-1856) and Wenzeslaus Matiegka (1773-1830), and has commissioned new works by contemporary composers such as Peter Sculthorpe and Philip Glass. His own works are not limited to guitar compositions, but also include orchestral, chamber, and vocal works, which have been published, recorded, and performed worldwide. David has also received several grants for his compositions including from the Aaron Copland Fund for Music. His composition, Dances in the Madhouse (1982), in both its original version (for violin and guitar) and as an orchestral arrangement, is his most popular work which has received many performances to date. 33

Next to be introduced is a fellow American classical guitarist and composer, Benjamin Verdery (b. 1955). Ben began formal classical guitar lessons with Phillip de Fremery, then went on to study with guitarist/composer Frederick Hand. Since the 1980s, he has been an active performing artist, and from 1985, he has been teaching guitar at Yale University School of Music. Also a great contributor to the vibrancy of the guitar scene in America, Ben is artistic director of the Yale Guitar Extravaganza as well as the 92nd Street Y’s Art of the Guitar series, and holds an Annual International Master Class on the Island of Maui.

31 Iannarelli.
Ben is an exceptional example of a guitarist-composer who also enthusiastically collaborates with other composers. He has given premieres of pieces by composers such as Ezra Laderman, Martin Bresnick, John Anthony Lennon, Anthony Newman, Roberto Sierra, Van Stiefel and Jack Vees. As a composer, he has written solo and ensemble pieces for various types of guitars (classical, acoustic, electric, etc.), which are published by Doberman-Yppan, and have been performed by such artists as John Williams, Sergio and Odair Assad, David Russell, and the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet. Popular works include *Now and Ever* (2009, for David Russell), *Peace, Love and Guitars* (2006, for John Williams and John Etheridge), and *Capitola* (1992, for John Williams). Ben's *Scenes from Ellis Island* (1999) for guitar orchestra, has been widely broadcast and performed at universities and festivals in the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Europe. The Los Angeles Guitar Quartet also included it on their CD, *Air and Ground* (2000).

The last guitarist composer to be introduced is another American classical guitarist and composer, **Andrew York** (b. 1958), who received a Bachelor of Music in Classical Guitar Performance in 1980 at James Madison University, and completed his Master of Music at the University of Southern California (USC) in 1986. During his time at the USC, he had also played lute in their Early Music Ensemble. Andrew was a performer with the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet (LAGQ) for 16 years, frequently composing and arranging for the group. The LAGQ is a world-class guitar quartet ensemble who had won a Grammy award in 2005 for their CD ‘*Guitar Heroes*’. Although having composed for many years, Andrew had no formal training in composition and provides an excellent example of a composer who is an autodidactic. He has published over 50 works for the guitar in various combinations including solo, duo, trio, quartet, and ensemble. He also has a strong background in jazz, sharing his knowledge by publishing a three-volume work on in-depth jazz study for classical guitarists. Andrew’s compositions have been featured on Grammy-winning CD’s, firstly on Jason Vieaux’s entitled *Play* (2015), which includes Andrew’s iconic composition *Sunburst* (1989), and secondly on Sharon Isbin’s entitled *Journey to the New World* (2010) which includes Andrew’s *Andecy* (2000). Andrew’s compositions have also been recorded by

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distinguished guitarists John Williams and Christopher Parkening, and generations of young guitarists have made his music a staple of their performance repertoire\textsuperscript{38}.

All thirteen composers have now been briefly introduced. The table below summarises each composer’s basic demographic information, as well as whether they are a guitarist or non-guitarist composer, and if they possess formal qualifications in composition or not. The ensuing section will proceed with outlining the basic topics of inquiry posed in the interviews.

Table 1. Summary of the interviewed composers’ demographic information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Guitarist</th>
<th>Composition Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assad, Clarice</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogdanovic, Dusan</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Serbian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domeniconi, Carlo</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyens, Roland</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Tunisian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fennessy, David</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>Yes – no longer active</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goss, Stephen</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iannarelli, Simone</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No – some informal training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johanson, Bryan</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kruisbrink, Annette</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisner, David</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No – some informal training</td>
</tr>
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<td>Verdery, Benjamin</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westlake, Nigel</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No – some informal training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York, Andrew</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview Questions: Coverage and Origins**

This interviews project is intent on gaining a greater understanding of the approaches and perspectives of contemporary composers who write for the guitar. Particular topics covered concern the composers’ perspectives on (1) their compositional process and style, and (2)

\textsuperscript{38} York.
music of the 21st century. Both the aspects of composing in general, as well as writing specifically for the guitar are covered in these interviews. In terms of more specific questions that deal with composing in general, topics pertaining to the composers’ inspirations and influences; the role of improvisation and formal structuring in their compositional process; how they begin their compositional process; their definitions of personal style vs. self-repetition; their approaches to notation; and their opinions on the value of formal composition training were particularly queried. Topics dealing with composing for the guitar, on the other hand, are concerned with their approaches to writing for the guitar vs. other instruments, as well as their approaches to the use of extended techniques on the guitar. Regarding music of the 21st century, the composers were asked to elaborate on their purpose for creating new compositions and the characteristics that music of this century possesses or should possess. More specifically about the guitar, their beliefs about the future of guitar music and how to encourage more interest in it were also gathered.

An interview guide was constructed on the basis of ensuring topic coverage for all composers, with eighteen base questions drawn up (please see Appendix A for the full interview questions). Most of the questions compiled were based on my own experiences as a guitarist and composer, and my curiosity to find out whether other composers shared or differed in their compositional approaches and perspectives to my own. Some questions, however, were inspired or borrowed from the following sources:

**Books:**

- Three questions for sixty-five composers39
- Lutoslawski: about himself (originally in Polish)40
- The Pat Metheny Interviews41
- On writing – A Memoir of the Craft42
- Composer to Composer: Conversations about Contemporary Music43

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Interview Articles:

- Interview: Stephen Goss, Composer\textsuperscript{44}
- Philip Glass: Creativity Conversation at Emory University\textsuperscript{45}
- Genius and muse - interview with Krzysztof Penderecki and his wife (originally in Polish)\textsuperscript{46}

Each of these above sources were either interviews with, or memoirs of, several celebrated 20th century composers (not limited to classical music) and writers regarding their compositional processes and perspectives. The topics that appeared in the sources were considered as relevant and important to the discussion in hand and therefore included e.g. Varga’s (2011) three questions to contemporary composers (from the first book listed above) dealt with inspiration, influences, and personal style, which corresponded well with the purpose of trying to understand different composers’ compositional processes and styles.

Discussion of Observed Themes

Having now covered the content of the interview questions, this section will briefly highlight and discuss important themes that were observed in the composers’ answers, which deal mainly with the future direction and creation of classical guitar repertoire. Two pieces of specific advice, one each for non-guitarist and guitarist composers, can be noted regarding how to write successfully for the guitar. For non-guitarist composers, the recommendation is to collaborate with guitarists in order to produce playable materials. While it has been acknowledged that non-guitarists often bring novelty to writing for the instrument, it needs to be balanced with adequate guitar knowledge for the ideas to work, as Andrew York put it:

\begin{quote}
Have you ever heard a good guitar piece written by a non-guitarist who didn’t work with the guitarist in his composition? I have not. Maybe you’ve been lucky but I haven’t. Every successful piece I know has a guitarist involved somewhere. The reason is quite simple because the guitar is the most complex instrument in terms of geometry. There is no other instrument that has two dimensional geometric field of creation. (Andrew York)
\end{quote}

For guitarist composers, the advice is not to fall into habitual, repetitive, and guitaristic ways of writing for the guitar, which can be compositionally inhibiting, as Stephen Goss pointed out:

If you’re a composer and a guitarist then you tend to know the dark secrets of the instrument, but there is a danger that you depend too much on familiar formulas and pre-conceived ideas of the instrument’s boundaries. (Stephen Goss)

In order to help avoid this, the following measures can be taken, derived from the themes drawn from the composers own compositional processes:

a) **Write away from the guitar.** Make use of the piano or computer to aid in the composition process.

When I was younger I tended to always work with guitar and that brought some amount of guitar clichés in my compositions. These days, I work with piano a lot and that is because the lines wind up clearer and sometimes I come up with things that are not very intuitive on the instrument, but very well integrated on the compositional level. (Dusan Bogdanovic)

b) **Write for other instruments, not just the guitar.**

I believe that it is EXTREMELY (original emphasis) important, if not essential, that composers write for instruments other than the one(s) they play. If they don’t, their work may become very narrow and solipsistic. And composing for other instruments can only bring a greater breadth to writing for the guitar when one returns to it. (David Leisner)

c) **Try rearranging written piece with different instrumentation without losing the integrity of the compositional materials.**

I always compose with clear voice leading and in general my music is very contrapuntal, so my compositions are relatively easily transplantable from one instrument to the other. (Dusan Bogdanovic)

d) **Study significant guitar compositions written by established non-guitarist composers.**

Studying great guitar compositions by non-guitar composers: Britten, Takemitsu, Ginastera, Espere, Berio, Linberg, Martin, Reich, Marshall, Walton, to name a few, can be illuminating and help as a guide to thinking-composing outside the guitar box as it were. (Ben Verdery)

e) **Using extended techniques should be a natural and integral component of the composition, not simply for its own sake.**
I don’t enjoy either creating or listening to sound effects for their own sake. They need to have a musical reason for being. While there might be fewer examples in my work than in some others, there have been a good number of times when I felt the musical urge or necessity to use some “extended techniques”. They all felt like natural extensions of the musical idea. (David Leisner)

This list of measures corresponds with and justifies the strategies that I have used in my own composition portfolio, which in turn validates their effectiveness to avoid the pitfalls of composing for the guitar as a guitarist-composer.

In terms of how the guitar repertoire can be further expanded, there are a number of directions in which the interviewed composers believe this can occur. There is general optimism that more can still be explored in terms of both solo and chamber music, for example:

The future of the guitar is incredibly bright. We are living in an age where the guitar is building a vast and varied repertoire of solo and chamber music. There is so much good and great new repertoire for the guitar that a single player cannot master it. What the piano experienced in the nineteenth century, the guitar is experiencing right now. (Bryan Johanson)

The involvement of the electric guitar and non-six-string guitar have also been indicated, together with combining the standard six-string guitar with a variety of different instruments or technologies, or in all-guitar ensembles, for example:

I think it will be many directions. One will increase strings. More bass, treble strings. Some people are playing on 7 or 19 string guitars. (Carlo Domeniconi)

The electric guitar is still a chronically underused resource in contemporary compositions in my opinion, as it has a potentially endless range of colours and sounds available. Perhaps the greatest challenge when writing for it in a group situation is to blend with other, purely acoustic instruments. (David Fennessy)

The main outlook to take heed is that there should be a balance between pushing the compositional boundaries and remaining true to human sentiments. A key theme that emerged from the interviews is that any music created should not only connect intellectually with people, but also emotionally:

The problem is that there is a serious case of disconnect of the composers and performers of contemporary music from their own psychological balance and consequently, from the audience. (...) What was initially freedom became a new set of commandments forbidding anything centered on traditionally based perceptual and emotional art axioms. Intellect and emotion, which were in a
“culturally arranged marriage” for centuries, suddenly became divorced in the XX century to create very separate and unbalanced artistic works. (Dusan Bogdanovic)

Caution is therefore suggested to be exercised when weighing the advantages and disadvantages of working within the languages of modernism and post-modernism etc., but also with technology, for example:

There are composers who I teach now who have never made a sound on an instrument or sung in a choir or played music of any kind. Their interface with music making has been exclusively through the computer. I will say that the experience of having played music, especially in a group situation, has a profound impact on the way a composer thinks about how he writes for instruments. (David Fennessy)

This can somewhat be related to Huber’s notion of critical composition\(^\text{47}\) where he posits that the ‘arrogance of both avant-gardism and elitist Marxism is no longer affordable in the face of true insight into lived reality’\(^\text{48}\). Instead, he argues that the focus of ‘New Music’ should lie ‘not in material, technology, or anything else, but in the human being and society’\(^\text{49}\), and therefore the human should be made the epicentre of compositional practice.

The interviewed composers further highlighted the freedom to express in a manner or style fit to communicate their ideas and emotions in order to connect with audiences:

There is more artistic diversity now than at any time in the past and artists can write in whatever style they want to. (Stephen Goss)

I think there is a mistake in trying to keep a separation between “serious” music and other styles, because it simply alienates non-musicians who are never introduced to modern/avant garde or classical music of any kind. They feel they cannot connect with it, and this happens because of this separation. (Clarice Assad)

Influences from which the composers drew their inspirations include the people in their lives, the surroundings within which they find themselves, and different types and styles of music. For example, Dušan Bogdanović often incorporated stylistic elements from folk and ethnic music, particularly from his Balkan background, in order to reconnect his music with the self and audiences on a humanistic level:

\(^{48}\) Huber. 566.
\(^{49}\) Huber. 566
I still think that ethnic or folk music is the fundament of perhaps most, if not all music. (...) Western artists tend to get "lost" a bit in intellectualism and abstraction; the folk music brings us back to what is deeply human. (Dusan Bogdanovic)

This is, however, quite different from other streams of ‘New Music’ philosophies, which might impose certain restrictions on what can or cannot be done to be considered ‘New Music’. From the position of high-modernistic styles, dabbing in popular, folk, ethnic or classical/romantic elements can be considered as conservative, or even backward. Indeed, the high-modernist ideology to ‘innovate radically, to exclude all 'decadence' and to start from scratch’ often led to the interpretation of a ‘rejection of all associations with tradition’. Furthermore, performer-composers that never venture out of the comfort zone of composing for their own instrument may not be considered true composers, particularly in the Western high art culture. The concept of the ‘composer-specialist’ in Western culture, whose works carry an experimental nature consistent with avant-garde trends, philosophies, and intellectualisms, are often judged as more elite and respectable – an ideology exemplified by the influential writings of Theodore Adorno on musical aesthetics in the 20th century. Guitar compositions produced by composers following in such traditions e.g. Nicholas Maw, Elliott Carter, Helmut Lachenmann, Julian Anderson, Harrison Birtwistle, James Dillon, Brian Ferneyhough etc. have been upheld as significant and noteworthy. However, they are less popular in terms of appearance in programmes and recordings than works produced by composers not following in those traditions e.g. Joaquin Rodrigo, Federico Moreno Torroba, and Astor Piazzola, who were all 20th century composers with nationalist and romantic notions, and their works have become staples in modern guitar repertoire. Perhaps the level of difficulty in playability and listenability of high-modernist compositions may play a significant role in this regard, especially when performers and audiences are particularly prone to conservatism, as is often the case in the classical guitar world. This is primarily due to the legacy of Andreas Segovia, a champion of the classical

50 Arnold Whittall, ‘1909 and after: High Modernism and “New Music”’, Musical Times, 150 (2009), 5–18. 5
51 Whittall. 5
54 Theodor W Adorno, Philosophy of New Music, ed. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
55 Robichaud and Wade.
guitar who had ‘virtually single-handedly raised the guitar to the level of a serious concert instrument’\textsuperscript{56}. Segovia had very singular tastes in music, often excluding modernist and highly dissonant music from his repertoire. He thus created a rather insular and conservative tradition that still greatly influences the repertory preferences of present day performers and audiences\textsuperscript{57}. Additionally, perhaps a reliance on other performers to perform works by composer-specialists also restricts the circulation of their compositions on a wider level. Performer-composers would naturally be able to perform their own works, thus bringing it to audiences more readily and more often.

To conclude, the high-modernist, avant-garde way of prescribing what it means to be a composer of ‘New Music’ can perhaps be viewed as just one and certainly not the only or definite way to approach the art of composing in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. The theme drawn from the interviews where the composers value the freedom to express in any manner or style one wishes, but always striving to connect intellectually and emotionally with the audience can be taken as an alternative approach. However, while free to choose the way in which to compose, care is advised to be taken that not the same methods always get chosen, or it can become confined to a ghettoized manner of composing. This reflects back to the advice for guitarist-composers to avoid a habitualised way of composing, which incidentally coincides with more modernist philosophies.

**Final word**

Having now introduced the interviews project, including the composers involved, the topics that were covered, as well as providing a summarised interpretation of the most important points that have arisen from it, the full interviews of all thirteen composers will now follow suit. The interviews appear in alphabetical order according to surname.


\textsuperscript{57} Greene.
Interviews with Thirteen Composers

Clarice ASSAD (email interview)

Top 5 Influences:

It’s a huge list but let’s narrow it down …

- My dad and Odair (without them there’d be nothing for me) :)
- Egberto Gismonti (composer, pianist/ guitaris)
- Herbie Hancock (jazz pianist, composer)
- Bobby McFerrin (singer)
- Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg (violinist)

1. Stephen King compares the art of writing to “diggings”: the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be “obtained”, to be cleaned from “superfluous settlings”. Pat Metheny talks about a “great broadcasting station in the sky” to which every composer has a built-in “receiver set”. He is not “composing” but is simply writing down already-existing music which he “receives”. Witold Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He “wipes out” empty spaces on the music staves “uncovering” an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

I too have a similar feeling in the sense that I never feel that I have anything to do with the music I create. I think of myself as a ‘channel’ and I am somehow able to attune myself to the realm of sound. It is a very intuitive process for me.

2. Being a composer, pianist and vocalist– what is the most challenging for you in writing for the guitar?

The fact that I don’t play the instrument can be challenging. I usually like to write idiomatically for the instruments and not playing the guitar can make my life a little bit more difficult in that sense.
3. Are you working closely with guitarists while you compose? Are you using their advice? Do you like to involve guitarists/performers in your compositional process?

I love collaborating and if I am writing a piece for any musician in particularly, I always want to know what it is that makes them excited to play. Ultimately, these will be the musicians playing, performing and conveying your music to an audience and they need to own the music. So yes, I love to involve performers in my compositional process.

4. As a pianist / vocalist and performer - you seem to have strong roots in jazz / improvisation (you studied with Leandro Braga). Your pieces like Bluezilian, Brasileirinhas or Flutuante (just to name few) are great examples of the jazz influence. I have always felt every time I’m studying or playing from your scores that there is a large percentage of (written down) improvisation. Yet you always manage to find the right form /structure / balance for your pieces. What is your source of inspiration? Where do you start when you write a new composition: with improvisation or with structure?

I write music in an intuitive way, so improvisation is a big element in my creative process. I start with ideas, free concepts and then move on to structured forms.

5. Following the last question - many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. Could you tell me more about your beliefs and process of ‘creating’ new works? How do you balance improvisation and structure?

I think everyone is different and has a unique approach to music. I don’t tend to over analyze or rationalize what I do– The only constant for me is the commitment I have with every project I do. So I guess that is my method...Also, I believe in structured improvisations as well. I like the idea of shape, dynamic and contrast in my improvisations - And where they lead to, emotionally. To me it's all about how successfully can I be expressive of my musical thoughts? And whatever most natural process I have to go through in order to get there, I will follow.
6. Almost every composition of yours I encounter I very much are “soaked” in traditional Brazilian music. Why is the influence of indigenous folk music of your country so important to you? What are your thoughts on nationalism/patriotism in music (e.g. like Bartok and Chopin)?

It’s a combination of things... I am from Brazil and over the years I have been associated with being a “Brazilian composer”, which has led me to write music (especially commissioned works) based on elements that drawn from the culture of Brazil. Another reason is that you would be surprised by how many people do NOT know the music from Brazil. In the US, for example, very little is known about other types of music beyond the music of Villa Lobos and Jobim. Maybe I feel that it is my job to bring awareness to the fact that there is so much in that music and so little of it is exported to the rest of the world – Whatever it is, it is not really rooted in nationalism, as it is almost never a conscious decision, but rather something that happens organically.

7. Are you composing for the guitar(s) using the piano (then adapting the material for the guitar) or do you compose thinking very specifically for the guitar? Do you think differently when writing for other instruments?

I like to use the guitar to check on my progress, even though I don’t play the instrument. I do it in slow motion, to make sure it’s playable. I tend to think idiomatically for every instrument I write for. Most importantly, I like to think of interesting parts for every musician to play – even if they are not playing a vital role in a particular piece.

8. Do you think that by not being a classically trained guitarist helps to write better for the guitar or does it cause problems instead? Does not knowing guitar-specific patterns, tricks, “comfortable” positions and chords, “good and easy” fingering etc. allow you to be more free or does it hinder your compositional process? What are your thoughts about this?
9. **Witold Lutoslawski heard John Cage’s Second Piano Concerto on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period.**

*Have you ever had this kind of experience?*

I have this kind of experience every time I hear something that moves me. It has not changed and I hope it will never change. Of course some moments have been stronger than others, but I am very open to a lot of music and there is a lot of great music out there… But there was a critical moment in my life, when I was a very young child and heard the sound of a symphony orchestra for the first time. It was a very famous piece, but I can't really remember if it was Ravel's arrangement of Pictures at an Exhibition or Mahler’s 1st. It might have been both... I knew that I had to pursue orchestral writing from that point on. Even though I had no idea what that really was at the time. My whole life after that was a quest for writing orchestrally, and I can say it is still one of my biggest passions to date. I don’t think this will ever change. I love orchestrating.

10. **Swedish musicologist Trygve Nordwall noticed that Krzysztof Penderecki composed his “Polymorphii” using electroencephalogram. (He plugged one person to electroencephalogram (EEG) and played his „Threnody of the Victims of Hiroshima“ simultaneously recording results from (EEG). That became the starting point for a new composition.)** Your works seems to be very much in roots of jazz and Brazilian music – all musicians know that it’s just nearly impossible to “notate” swing; pulse of bossa-nova etc. Is that traditional natation is finished? Not enough (to writing down your new music ideas using our traditional notation)? Have you ever encounter problems with notating your music?

Music is a language. The earlier we are introduced to a certain kind of music, the more fluent we might be at it – I grew up hearing syncopation and complicated rhythmic patterns which
became second nature to me. It may feel “easier or more organic” to play Brazilian music or jazz for people who are natives to this type of language, since they don’t have to think too much about it, they just ‘feel it.’ To answer your question, I like to keep notation fairly simple, knowing that no matter how complicated the notation, if the ‘feel’ isn’t there, a notated score won’t be doing the trick. This must be accomplished by listening, trying to reproduce that sound and style. I have found that singing helps a lot. Even dancing to a beat and getting a feel (in one’s body) of where the strong vs. weak beats are, help more than notated accents over a passage of 16th notes. There are subtleties that are practically impossible to reproduce in notation.

11. **Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable.** Some of your works are completely different from each other but I can still “hear” Clarice Assad in each of them and you seem to have your special language (beautiful mixture between classical, jazz and Brazilian influences). At the same time composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on of self-repetition?

First of all thank you for the generous compliment. I can only speak for myself... I am always looking for something new and fresh and exciting, and I think that the search for a ‘voice’ will never really end in my case because I can’t really chose a personality I want to become. I feel so many different things at once. It’s complex... Why should I limit myself to have only ‘one’ voice? I want to throw it all in the pot and have fun with it. I want to try a little bit of everything that sparks my interest and be able to be versatile...

12. **There doesn’t seem to be much interest amongst the greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative.** What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important
What is your advice to young composers?

First of all, to write music from their heart, music they want to write and must write. But to also keep in mind that if they are writing a piece for an ensemble or soloist, it is up to the ensemble and soloist to convey their music to an audience. They are the ones who will be delivering the emotional content of this work, and so they must somehow resonate with what they are playing. It is a good idea to get to know who you’re writing for, and connect with them.

13. There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists (like me) “is the worst possible combination” when it comes to writing significant works for guitar. According to this “theory” Chopin or Liszt will be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What do you think of composers writing for their own instruments?

This really never ever crossed my mind :) Who cares what they play or don’t play as long as the music is good?

14. Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde and at the same time tonal, fresh, new, creative OR should we push ourselves and players to the limits?

I think there is a tendency to always move forwards and be creative in some way, in any type of art form... We’re living today and so we want to invent fresh sounds, drawing from all of the references we have, and keep our creative/inventive spirit alive in any way we can. This is how we progress. I am not sure about balancing one’s compositional language in that sense because I chose not to think of any boundaries between the music of this world. I think we use what we resonate with, and hopefully what we chose will also resonate with others... I think there is a mistake in trying to keep a separation between "serious' music and other styles, because it simply alienates non-musicians who are never introduced to modern/avant
garde or classical music of any kind. They feel they cannot connect with it, and this happens because of this separation. In the meantime, orchestras are closing down, classical music is becoming the least interesting genre of music in the country I live in and kids this generation are horrified of the idea of having to go to a concert hall. People are losing interest and that is really what composers should be worried about...connecting with people in general.

15. You are coming from musically world famous family. Can you tell positive (or negative) aspects of being surrounded by such great musicians from the very beginning?

The positive... They have given me the gift of music :) The negative, they have been traveling most of our lives, and I wish I have had more time with them.

16. Do you consider contemporary audiences when writing your compositions or do you create music for future generations?

I create music for the moment. And for the people I am writing for, or for the project I am involved with...

17. Music of the twenty-first century is beginning to have its own distinct style. Historicism (looking back) and following the styles of the past seem to be the trend. I have noticed characteristic synthesis of different genres and styles (like collage / patchwork) in today's compositions. Also composers are tending (and expected) to be more capable of composing well in very different genres, styles. How do you see the evolvement of music composition in the twenty-first century?

I think that the music of today is more and more associated with visual imagery than ever before. Think of all the commercial music out there for movies, video games, commercials, music videos, or incidental music for the theater, music for musical theater or opera, etc... Then you add communication technology into the mix: internet, email, the speed of which we receive and process information. Not only we have easy access to all of the recorded
music in the world, in our fingertips, we receive huge amounts of information from all over the world in very little time, and they are usually packed with images, images, images... So, more and more, we associate sound with images or stories/concepts than before.

I see a tendency in composers to write this way. You can tell by the title of the compositions. They have some kind of imagery suggestion to go with it; and they 'tell' the listener to imagine something even before they listen to a single note being played. I don't think it's either good or bad, I just notice that this has been happening for some time now, and growing in importance over the years.

18. Following the last question: this freedom sounds liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left?

(Are you talking about 'new sounds' or concepts?) If it is concept: In particular, there will almost certainly be taboos around subjects like politics, war, sex, religion, racism... If a piece of music is associated with any of these (and other elements) ... (BUT I am not sure I understand/or addressed the question)

19. Final question: what in your opinion is the future of classical guitar compositions in general? Should guitar remain mainly as a solo instrument? Or maybe guitar can become more of a chamber instrument? As a composer – what would you encourage young composers to explore if they would like to write for guitar?

I think what you are doing, for example, is incredible and necessary! All possibilities should be explored and encouraged ... We just need to remember to have balance... I think finding the balance between the 'new' and the 'old' in the sense of what works for most people, is important, in order to connect. Connecting is usually the most difficult part.

Dusan BOGDANOVIC (email interview)

Top 5 Influences:
1. Certainly Bach's Passacaglia in C minor for organ, because it made me dedicate my life to music.

2. Balkan folk music as well as Indian and African Pygmy music for the inspiration of musical roots.

3. Listening to Julian Bream made me want to play classical guitar.

4. F. Canova da Milano, Debussy, Stravinsky and Ligeti.

5. Playing improvisational stuff with the great jazz pianist Milcho Leviev and flutist James Newton in Los Angeles in the 80s.

1. Stephen King compares the art of writing to "digging": the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be "obtained", to be cleaned from “superfluous settlings". Pat Metheny talks about a "great broadcasting station in the sky" to which every composer has a built-in "receiver set". He is not “composing” but is simply writing down already-existing music which he “receives". Witold Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He "wipes out" empty spaces on the music staves "uncovering" an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

“The great broadcasting station in the sky” is a somewhat updated version the old idea of the shaman/artist as a privileged being who has a direct connection to God, or in a slightly humbler variant, it points to a link that an artist has to some sort of pool of Platonic musical ideas. In my experience, the more one writes a completely established system or a type of form that is cliché, the easier and the more predictable the process is. If everything we do is preordained or determined, why bother learning anything? Just copyright 500 000 melodies that spontaneously come to your mind and call it a work of art. If one, however, deals with a multitude of possibilities, one is always faced with the process of both discovery and construction and one is forced to make a continuous evaluation of one's work.

As the computer people say: “garbage in, garbage out”. If we only rely on intuition, we are mostly faced with similar solutions and similar results even if we are very inspired. On the other hand, if we only rely on construction, we are left with a very boring and dry result at worst and an impressive but lifeless architecture at best. So, I don’t think that there is any “easy ride on the creative highway” unless one closes the doors to the exploration and effort.
Everything that I possess comes into being when I compose, but experiment, learning new techniques or exploring the unknown and what I do not possess, is equally a part of the process.

2. **Your theoretical works include three-voice counterpoint and Renaissance improvisation for guitar.** It is indeed a very important ability for performers and also composers to have. But many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. During my conversation with Krzysztof Penderecki - his “best advice for young composers” is the one word “FORM”. However, successful guitar composers like Andrew York, Roland Dyens or Carlo Domeniconi use improvisation almost entirely during the process of creation. You proved many times that a balance between improvisation and form can be greatly captured (Jazz Sonata). **How do you balance improvisation and structure (form)? What comes first during your compositional process, form or improvised materials? How important is form to you?**

I would have to agree that the form is the most important thing in composition and in improvisation as well, and that is because all the rest is so easy! To continue a bit on what I’ve said in the previous section, in both improvisation and composition, the Inspiration is a given, but that does not necessarily guarantee anything, because one person’s inspiration might be another person’s depression, so apart from psychological integrity of a person we are also dealing with the material, formal solutions, consistency of development, originality of thought, etc. Like Stravinsky said- the fact that one’s work is sincere is neither here nor there, since, as he put it: “there are many bad sincere works, and some pretty good insincere ones”.

In conclusion, improvisation, if it’s really good, should also have high formal standards, and composition, if it’s really successful, should have the spontaneity and freshness of an improvisation. Actually, in composition one has the luck to “freeze the time”, which is otherwise lost in the unrepeatable nature of the improvisation. That is why I so happily rely on both. In composition, one is forced to repeat the attained perfection and in the improvisation one is forced to accept the accident and mediocre solutions. They are both
outlets as well as limitations and complement each other greatly. My work on improvising in the Renaissance style is just such an attempt at combining both fixed forms and spontaneous flux and there are more and more of these combinations these days: it doesn’t make sense to repeat music compositions to death in the style (Baroque and Renaissance, for example) which required musicians to be able to extemporize. Of course, jazz or world music are great examples of this balance.

3. **Without any doubt you are one of the most interesting guitar-composers in terms of using complex rhythms (which many other guitar-composers tend to forget/ignore).** You wrote: "There is nothing in the history of Western art music that can compare to the polyrhythmic complexity of the African". Your ‘Polyrhythmic and Polymetric Studies’, ‘Six Balkan Miniatures’, and ‘Three African Sketches’ (especially no 1 and 3) are great examples of this. Where does this fascination with rhythm (especially that of African rhythms) come from? How important are elements like harmony, melody and rhythm to you?

Well, everything is important, but I do admit that I have a particular interest in rhythm. It probably comes from my background: asymmetric meter is an integral part of Balkan folk music and so what might seem exotic to some people, comes to me pretty naturally. Of course, my work with polyrhythms was an extension of that and I spent a lot of time researching this and my *Polyrhythmic and Polymetric Studies* are a result of that research. Like anything else, once you reach a certain level, it becomes a new ground on which to build other levels. Perhaps a good way of looking at this is to think about this is how lots of non-musicians perceive relatively simple meters such as, say 4/4 or 3/4 as natural. Other, different or more complex rhythmical and metric patterns appear to them as counterintuitive or just not perceivable. This can be generalized to other rhythmic systems like, say Indian *tala*, where complex cycles become integrated on reflex level and function like an interior metronome.

African polyrhythms and Pygmy music in particular have had a big fascination for me since my teens and I have done a lot of experimentation with it. As a matter of fact, a few years ago I invited the great expert on African polyphony Simha Arom, to the Geneva HEM where I
teach and he gave fascinating talks about Pygmy polyphony, which is really extraordinary in its organization and sophistication of rhythmic structures. These lectures have been a great eye-opener for most musicians present, myself included, of course.

4. “All art in its origin reflects its ethnic sources (...) Ethnic art is an integrative part of the tribal reality”. This quote of yours shows your other fascination and influence – indigenous folk music. Many of your solo pieces (or chamber music: for instance, your recording with harpist Georgia Kelly) are “soaked” in traditional music. Why is the influence of indigenous folk music so important to you? What are your thoughts on nationalism/patriotism in music (e.g. like Bartok and Chopin)?

Yes, I still think that ethnic or folk music is the fundament of perhaps most, if not all music. Even the great music of Bach, to take an obvious example, despite its apparent abstractness and sophistication shows it basis in West European folk music. What would Bach’s music be like if it were based on Pygmy polyrhythmic structure? What would Mozart’s music be like if it were based on Balkan asymmetric meter or Persian microtonal modes?

My point is that the folk music remains integral to the works created in a particular region and period, whether we are aware of it or not. Surely, some composers accentuate that aspect and somebody like Bartok has extensively drawn from the traditional East European folk music. On the other hand, some ethnic music like West African, influence many styles and periods and it show up every now and then as a great and rich musical source for new syntheses. Jazz, blues, gospel, salsa, Afro-Cuban, Brazilian, as well as newer styles such as Steve Reich’s music or rap, all draw from the great African sources.

Ultimately, for me, the original folk music is the music that comes from the ground level of a culture and it remains an eternal source of inspiration and material. I see oscillation between the roots folk music and its stylization as one of the basic historical movements in the arts and if we Western artists tend to get “lost” a bit in intellectualism and abstraction, the folk music brings us back to what is deeply human. All this has nothing to do with nationalism/patriotism, which is a completely different political issue. I see the music of the world (in contrast to world music) as transnational and trans-aesthetic phenomena, which is cosmopolitan and inclusive.
5. Following the last thought: Many contemporary and academically trained composers consciously reject traditional folk music. They are only interested in creating new sounds that are “neutral” to the culture they are coming from. What do you think about that attitude?

I think that it is not possible to really be “neutral” to the culture that one is coming from. In this case, it might be more a result of avoidance or a negation of a culture, which is just another cultural phenomena coming from a specific aesthetic ideal. Despite Schoenberg’s “democratic dodecaphonic system” where dissonance became emancipated and all the intervals became equal, there is an all-too-apparent avoidance of consonant harmonies or triads or traditionally constructed melodies. Similarly, “neutral” composers, whoever they are, remain like religious fundamentalists bound to their particular vision blindfolded to larger areas of cultural interest. It is a choice though and it contributes in some way to an aesthetically rich and diverse world.

6. Some composers – like Villa-Lobos or Annette Kruisbrink - are extremely prolific with their writing (can produce a large amount of works in a short time). I noticed you like to extend the time of your compositional process. What role does time have in the process of composition for you?

If everything goes well, I don’t tend to spend an excessive amount of time on composing. On the other hand, some problems show up sooner or later and it takes a while, if one is serious, to find the right answer. The whole process is not really very controllable, so sometimes it takes very little (when the broadcast switch is “on”), sometimes a lot. Predictably, miniatures or prelude-sort of forms take little time but longer or cyclical forms take a lot. Also certain kinds of languages require more effort than others.

7. All your compositions are very well (idiomatically) written for guitar. Do you always compose guitar pieces using the guitar only? Do you sometimes use the piano (if yes, why)? How do you compose for other instruments? Is it different from composing for the guitar?
When I was younger I tended to always work with guitar and that brought some amount of guitar clichés in my compositions. These days, I work with piano a lot and that is because the lines wind up clearer and sometimes I come up with things that are not very intuitive on the instrument, but very well integrated on the compositional level. Also, piano is a very technically transparent instrument while guitar remains very quirky in its natural limitations. I always compose with clear voice leading and in general my music is very contrapuntal, so my compositions are relatively easily transplantable from one instrument to the other. Of course, I usually have to consult orchestration books or, even better, try the music out with live performers. Occasionally I bought instruments, such as violin or percussions and that has helped a lot.

8. You completed your studies in composition and orchestration at the Geneva Conservatory. You are one of a very few examples of formally trained and active guitarists with a degree in composition as well. What, in your opinion, are the positive and/or negative effects of formal composition education?

I think that my work on orchestration was of big use to me, but the composition has always been solitary work. Actually when I was a student of composition in Geneva, I had a lot of freedom to do pretty much as I pleased. Surely, there was a tendency towards academism and at that point I thought that what was considered the last word of contemporary composing-primarily IRCAM and Darmstadt “schools”- was the only option. That seems to be as much of a problem these days if not more, especially in Europe, though U.S. has its own set of aesthetical, financial and other tyrannies. It took long time to open up myself to various schools of thought and orientations and that included improvisation, playing in jazz clubs, teaming up with Indian players or getting involved in mix-media events with visual artists and choreographers.

As a result of these experiences, I have installed last year (2012) a Master’s level program at the HEM (Haute Ecole de Musique) in Geneva, for composers/performers. Besides individual lessons in guitar and composition, the students have subjects typically designed for composes, such as orchestration, XX century styles and forms, as well as a pool of interesting subjects such as Indian rhythmics, improvisation and various subjects in ethnomusicology.
Students have the opportunity to write for solo guitar as well as guitar in various chamber groups and orchestral setting. When I was a student I would have been thrilled to have an opportunity like this and this has been my prime “engine” for creating this program. The school’s direction has been enormously helpful in making this program come to life. Obviously, this is pioneering work and I certainly hope that this program will last as a means for creating a new generation of interested and similarly minded students, but you never know.

9. Continuing from the last question: being a skilled guitarist like you might have some positive and/or negative consequences when it comes to writing for your own instrument. Is it an advantage to be a guitarist – having the knowledge of tricks and patterns – when writing for guitar or is it rather a curse? Where is the balance and how do you achieve it?

Since we are talking about a highly idiosyncratic instrument that remains an enigma to most composers, I think that we, the guitarists, have a little advantage over non-guitarist composers, at least in theory. Regondi’s works remain exclusive products of guitar virtuosity, and, in my opinion, he can be compared to that of F. Chopin in his use of sophisticated harmony and sense of melodic lyricism. The same goes for early music lute virtuosos such as J. Dowland or F. C. da Milano, who can obviously stand on their own as grand representatives of the music of the period. It is more difficult to talk about the modern music and perhaps the most difficult about the contemporary.

The right balance in writing for guitar is really a very individual thing and I would think that everybody has their own kind of balance that fits their personality and life style. I don’t think that it is really possible to quantify this sort of thing and it is better to leave it at that.

10. Following the last question: being a composer – what is the most challenging for you in writing for the guitar?

To put it simply: the most challenging in writing for guitar is how to stay honest to the demands of good composition in face of a very limited and difficult instrument, as well as a
very conservative and not so greatly musically educated audience for the instrument. On the good side, it is an audience that is relatively open to genre crossover, so that gives you more open space at least in terms of idioms and styles.

11. Have you ever consider or had desire to change / re-compose old composition(s) of yours? Or do you consider finished pieces “untouchable” and never go back to them?

I have arranged many of my works for different ensembles. As I explained earlier, since my music is mostly contrapuntal, it is relatively easily transplantable from one instrument or group to another. I have just finished an arrangement of a piece originally written for solo guitar “Hymn to the Muse” for flute, guitar and viola trio. J. S. Bach, to take a very typical example, routinely made arrangements of his music: his fugue winds up in solo violin version (BWV 1001, 2), lute version (BWV 1000) and organ version (BWV 539), to name just a few. The idea of the “authentic work” is pretty modern and I think that most working composers do whatever “gets them through the night”, to put it anecdotally. Music is there in flux and it’s always available in its various guises. Surely, you don’t always feel like fiddling with everything you’ve written: it depends on the piece, occasion, inspiration etc.

12. You also wrote pieces for other instruments e.g. your Quatre Pieces Intimes, Balkan Mosaic, and Codex XV. Do you collaborate with other instrumentalists when writing for their instruments? If yes - at what stage? If not – why not?

I have always collaborated with other performers and many of my works are written for other instruments and ensembles. Also, I have recorded many different things, from Bach’s Trio Sonatas with guitar and harpsichord to music for jazz ensembles as well as various orchestral groups. In general, I always collaborate with “other” instrumentalists as well as visual artists and dancers as well.

13. There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists “is the worst possible combination” when it comes
to writing significant works for guitar. According to this “theory” Chopin or Liszt will be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What do you think of composers writing for their own instruments?

Well, this kind of opinion would not only get rid of Liszt and Chopin, but also of Bach, Mozart, Dowland, most jazz musicians and many others. I think that this opinion is the result of high specialization and of course, you would expect the international prizewinners to be an epitome of this mentality: there are specialists in performance, there are specialists in composition, and anything less than that is not up to the highest athletic Olympic standards. As we know, Bach was a brilliant performer and improver on keyboard instruments and it certainly did not stop him from being a great composer for these instruments too. Surely, it’s easy to say that that was Bach and that the only representations of his greatness are these fantastic performers -mouthpieces for his genius, but is this accurate? As Morton Feldman said: “We want Bach, but Bach himself is not invited to dinner”.

Similarly, we the contemporary composers/performers are not invited to dinner. So, in conclusion, there are many diverse people of different backgrounds, different life priorities, different ideals and different capacities and talents, and so it is to be expected that they will bring a variety of results as well.

14. Contemporary guitar-composers very often make use of extended techniques (re-tuning, all sorts of percussion effects, borrowing techniques from acoustic and electric guitar like hammering, tapping, playing “on the other side of string” etc.) in their compositions. Your "No Feathers on this Frog", “Three African Sketches” are great examples of that. What is your view and approach to the use of extended techniques on the guitar? How do you see the future of developing further or more techniques?

Cage developed his prepared piano music quite some years ago and that, in my opinion, was a cornerstone for many similar adventures in sound research. Guitar has a great potential for much variety in timbre and effects and some composers has used it to great advantage; I think that the 60s and 70s were the most interesting in terms of sound experimentation and many different guitar effects and techniques came from that period. M. Ohana is a good
example of this, 10-string guitar notwithstanding, as well as A. Company, who came up in the 70s with his extraordinary piece *Las Seis Cuerdas* in which each string was given a separate staff system. Compared to this, my experiments with prepared guitar, percussive effects etc. are pretty moderate. Though it has not been a great preoccupation, I have found it enriching to use some effects here and there in my music, but it has been primarily as an orchestration tool.

I can’t help feeling that time will tell and that out of this present verbiage of techniques and “tricks” something will remain as valid tools for genuine musical creativity, but this is yet to be seen.

15. Witold Lutoslawski heard *John Cage’s Second Piano Concerto* on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period. Have you ever had this kind of experience?

Perhaps the most important experience of this kind was listening for the first time to Bach’s Passacaglia in C minor for organ. I was so touched by this music that I decided to become a musician.

16. Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. Composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on self-repetition? Is it bad, in your opinion, to be recognizable? Where do the lines cross between self-repetition and personal style?

A propos Philippe Glass, his long-time colleague Lamonte Young answered the question about what was Glass’s biggest contribution to music with “record sales”. This is perhaps the best answer one can give about self-repetition. After all, it is difficult to compete with one’s own success and many composers choose to play the safe stock. Some, on the other hand, find it necessary to change style or language all the time. Two persons that have made tremendous changes in their work are Picasso in the visual arts and Stravinsky in music and
though many people blame them for that, I think that these changes showed an openness of spirit and a lot of courage on their parts.

Personal style is not self-repetition—it is the backbone of an artist's work and it is recognizable even if the artist changes idioms or languages, as in the cases of Picasso and Stravinsky. The self-repetition, on the other hand, is often a business tactic but it also means a limitation of one's personal and/or artistic working space. You have to choose your priorities.

17. Back to the guitar world: There doesn't seem to be much interest amongst the greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative. What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important guitarists choose other new music to perform? What is your advice to young composers?

My answer is still the same as the previous one: most established “living legends” etc. have made their career out of self-repetition of the already repeated “safe” works, which represent the safe stock. It is all very transparent and most performers as well as organizers choose to do this for various personal reasons including financial, family, successful career etc. Is this wrong? I don’t know since everyone has their life to live and their price to pay, but to me it seems a very boring solution and that is why in general I avoid these kinds of people, if possible.

What can you tell young composers? Mostly, they already know the situation and are all armed with web sites, portfolios, CDs, DVDs, references, opinions of “great” artists, and what not. I still think that if you do something you really like doing, you will draw great satisfaction from that which, in turn, will give you enough energy and persistence to survive on an otherwise very difficult and often very discouraging artistic road. High visions are all very well, but your composing has to survive on a day-to-day basis.
18. There is a famous line by Arnold Schoenberg: "If it is art, it is not for all and if it is for all, it is not art." Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde or should we push ourselves, audience and players to the limits?

Composers are always very fond of telling people what to do and Schoenberg was particularly fond of big statements. In my opinion, the problem is not that the avant-garde music is pushing the audience to the limit, the problem is that there is a serious case of disconnect of the composers and performers of contemporary music from their own psychological balance and consequently, from the audience. In its heroic early years modernist paradigm brought genuinely new spaces out in the open, partially as a reaction to the late Romantic style, and partially as a revolutionary movement towards an open-ended aesthetical universe. We have, however, thrown the proverbial baby with the bath water. What was initially freedom became a new set of commandments forbidding anything centered on traditionally based perceptual and emotional art axioms. Intellect and emotion, which were in a “culturally arranged marriage” for centuries, suddenly became divorced in the XX century to create very separate and unbalanced artistic works.

Nothing wrong in pushing the audience to the limit, but do we want this kind of experience to become our only modus vivendi for the rest of our lives? Question: “Do you want to listen to Wozzeck every Sunday afternoon?”

19. Do you consider contemporary audiences when writing your compositions or do you create music for future generations?

That assumes that there are only two answers to this question. I don’t think that I am all that different from other people and I assume that sooner or later there will be artists interested in what I have to offer. It is not my concern whether future generations might appreciate my music or not and I am not completely concerned about the appreciation of the present audience for my music, though, of course, it would be nice if either one, or both, were the case.
Music of the twenty-first century is beginning to have its own distinct style. Historicism (looking back) and following the styles of the past seem to be the trend. I have noticed characteristic synthesis of different genres and styles (like collage / patchwork) in today’s compositions. Also composers are tending (and expected) to be more capable of composing well in very different genres, styles. How do you see the evolvement of music composition in the twenty-first century?

I would mention first that I do not believe in any sort of evolvement or evolution in the arts! This is not science where things get better; in arts things transform and perhaps become more or less adapted to a particular cultural environment. We know that there could be nothing more evolved about music by Debussy than, say that of F. C. da Milano. That said, of course, it is very apparent that there is much collaged music today, but I would like to make a distinction here. In contrast to postmodern art, which indiscriminately mixes apples and oranges, there is another movement, which lacking other terms, I would call “multiverse art”. This “multiverse art” acknowledges a multitude of aesthetics, languages and genres, but remains dedicated to the music work as a structural and stylistic unity. This means that we cannot just randomly mix things from various cultures and/or periods, but can produce syntheses with care towards integrity and history of these cultural entities. For example, Britten has based his Nocturnal on Dowland, but took great care in building his compositional edifice with logic and coherence.

I am not sure that it is totally accurate, but I would like to put myself into the “multiverse” category, especially since I got involved in various aesthetics and genres throughout my life, but remained faithful to the idea of coherence and structural unity. It might seem at first sight that the line between one and the other is very thin, but if we look more carefully, we can see a tremendous chasm between these approaches. The history teaches us that most predictions don’t work and just a few decades ago at that point a serial composer (P. Boulez) thought that any composer not involved in this kind of technique “was of no use”. We don’t look at it that way anymore. And perhaps we’ve also had enough messianic movements already and we should do our personal work in peace and quiet instead!
21. Following the last question: in the 20th century we have reached the height of complexity in tonal harmony, through the atonal language of high modernism. There are no limits in music. Some compositions can be “awful”, “unbearable to listen to” for one audience and “fresh”, “thrilling”, “inventive” for another. This freedom sounds liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left?

Artist Damian Hirst relatively recently exposed dissected cows at his exhibition; Jimmy Hendrix played electric guitar with his teeth some time ago; in his 1960 piece 0:00 Cage made a performance out of the amplified sounds of his drinking of vegetable juices; in her 1964 collection Yoko Ono gave the following directions for the performance of her “Blood Piece”: “Use your blood to paint. Keep painting until you faint. (a)/ Keep painting until you die. (b)”. How can you possibly get more shock value out of “art” than that? It is just that the classical guitar world remains an essentially small, conservative milieu where playing a jazz standard alongside F. Tarrega presents an outrage. My opinion is that at this point it is all a part of human experience, but to exclusively focus on things of shocking value presents a business move rather than an aesthetical one. I would say: “use whatever material you want as long as it is intended as work of art with an aesthetical integrity and meaning”. It is up to the artist and the audience to judge what this means and how successful it is.

22. Final question: what in your opinion is the future of classical guitar compositions in general? Should guitar remain mainly as a solo instrument? Or maybe guitar can become more of a chamber instrument? As a composer – what would you encourage young composers to explore if they would like to write for the guitar?

Future of the classical guitar is not in maintaining the classical guitar world. I think that the classical guitar will be integrated in a more diverse world (or previously mentioned musical “multiverse”) of interpretational/improvisational/compositional events that would include solo as well as ensemble, orchestra or mix-media events. This is already the case at many concerts and events and it’s only the stubbornness and narrow-mindedness of some classical guitar enthusiasts, organizers and performers that is maintaining the “classical guitar ghetto”.
As far as my own work, I am already writing what I want for the guitar as a solo instrument and in the context of various chamber and orchestral groups including written-out as well as improvised music and all I can hope for are young composers interested in the same kind of endeavor and having success at it.

Carlo DOMENICONI (personal interview)

Top 5 Influences:

Debussy
Prokofiev
Ud
Indian Music
Music from the Andes

MAREK PASIECZNY (M.P.): Stephen King compares the art of writing to “diggings”: the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be “obtained”, to be cleaned from “superfluous settlings”. Pat Metheny talks about a “great broadcasting station in the sky” to which every composer has a built-in “receiver set”. He is not “composing” but is simply writing down already-existing music which he “receives”. Witold Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He "wipes out" empty spaces on the music staves "uncovering" an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

CARLO DOMENICONI (C.D.): (about the fossil) This is an old sentence from Michael di Angelo. The idea is on the one side and the reality on the other side. The fact is that sometimes we are getting ideas; we can learn to smell them. The job of the composer is to put together things. Example: take 2nd class composer and give him the main theme (the idea) from Beethoven’s 5th let’s see what will happen. There is idea and there is technique. If Beethoven wouldn’t have technique to develop the idea (of the theme) we wouldn’t have the 5th symphony. In his case, he had much, much more than I have ever had; his eyes were much more open than mine. But also we can observe (Beethoven) was not sure until the end of the piece. He was correcting particular compositions ‘til the very end.
Mozart was different. There are two types of composers. The one’s who open the new era and the ones who close it. For example Bach. After Bach the baroque is really squeezed out. He brought the baroque to the highest possible point. Beethoven had to find something new like Debussy.

On the other side you have composers like Haydn. He was getting wiser towards the end of his life. His piano sonatas are even more interesting than Mozart’s. Basically I would like to not dream too much. The possibility the get the idea it’s a gift. We can talk years about from where this gift is coming: religion, philosophy etc.

M.P: What about the commission (special request on special instrument/form/length) and opposite to that – normal composing (free choice)?

C.D: When I’m getting commission for instance for organ solo but I had just before an idea for new piece for violin solo I’m trying to adopt it. At the moment of the commission request I can immediately say yes or no. Then after that how easy it comes (the idea) that’s different, it can be different.

M.P: All your compositions are very well constructed for guitar. It’s almost impossible to imagine your written guitar piece performed on any other instrument. Do you compose guitar pieces always using guitar?

C.D: Well, I’m very practical musician. I always start from the sound. If I don’t have the guitar in my hands I can have sometimes the sound in my head, but mostly I do have guitar in my hands. I don’t need to compose with but I love to have an instrument in my hands. It’s better. It’s a good feeling.

M.P: Are you using sometimes piano? How do you compose for other orchestral instruments?

C.D: Many years now I don’t think I’m able to compose for anything else so I stay with my guitar. I know this instrument.

M.P: But you are writing for voice or cello?
C.D: I know a bit about it, especially about cello. My son is playing cello. I have some ideas. But still is not the same. When I'm writing for guitar everything is together. The possibility to be able to produce exactly what I want is included because I know all (about the guitar).

Good guitar players and same time guitar composers are not very much liked by other guitarists. You are writing down exactly what you wanted and that's the reason why this piece is there. So somebody comes and thinks to make an interpretation and changes the reason – the main reason why this piece came to existence.

M.P: Your work-list on your website is finishing in 2009. But I came across your fairly new piece GITA II. It's half an hour piece...

C.D: Yes it's the 2nd version of the GITA piece. For me this piece is on the line of the composition which works differently. One type of compositions is like the ones you must respect the score, what’s written and the other type – pieces like Koyunbaba, Trilogie, Gita. You have a strong idea about parts, about how long the piece has to be, the style but after that you are free.

I'm trying to develop certain kind of music which is possible to play differently. If you are able to respect the piece like that it's great. But you must be able to understand the style. For instance in Koyunbaba nobody knows the style (people dividing music as oriental and non-oriental music). It's absurd. It's like saying all people from East speaks the same language (no matter if they are Russian, Polish or from Ukraine). Or Spanish, Portuguese, Spanish are the same. No it’s not the same. Similar, but not the same.

M.P: GITA is not published... I was wondering how much is written down material and how much is improvised material?

C.D: Yes it’s not published because it’s one of those pieces you cannot write down. I think the most important, best ideas you cannot write down. (Carlo is taking guitar and starting to play) I can record it, and then start to write it down. It will be insane. If you’re clever you will write it down in extremely complex but detailed way (like 8 against 13) but how are you going to work it out? The speed of the left hand and the right hand is completely different. It’s a reaction. Reaction one hand (left) to the other (right). I only know I can control it from
one point. The people will cry if they will have 8 against 13 because there is no way to enter this reason physically although it is only a physical thing. So it’s much better and simpler to **EXPLAIN** what kind of body delay you’re supposed to have.

**M.P:** So that’s why you wrote me earlier you have problems with writing down your music?

**C.D:** Yes. For instance instead of writing down notes and crescendo sign below you can make notes from smaller to bigger. Graphically it looks like its growing (as it should be)... make notes closer, further to each other *(Carlo is showing examples on guitar)* ...all those smallest noises, percussive also... so if you explain rather the write down... It’s better.

M.P: Does that mean you trust the guitarist’s own improvisation skills? Do you have big faith in their possibility to be creative after just explaining what kind of noise/sound you want?

**C.D:** Yeah...the problem is if they can... Alvaro (Pierri) told me to record this piece *(GITA)* on two cameras so then you have the sound, score and the picture.

**M.P:** So it guides how to most truthfully perform these particular pieces?

**C.D:** Yes. I’ve got now three-four guitar students. It’s like mouth to mouth knowledge before writing it down to notes. You have to be in the music from the first second. In the spirit of the piece. How you can be in the spirit if you cannot enter (to understand) the piece? This is a new problem. When we read the compositions of past composers we can understand the style they’ve been writing *(Carlo is singing the dotted rhythm of Bouree)* imagine we will play the rhythm exactly as it’s written but without the style...

**M.P:** You are using lots of special effects for many years. In Italy you told me you are more interested in the sound and sonorism of the guitar rather than the form of compositional materials. What’s the future of the guitar? The future of compositions for guitar?

**C.D:** I think it will be many directions. One will increase strings. More bass, treble strings. Some people are playing on 7 or 19 string guitars. Some people spend their life with guitars
with 3 or 2 strings. I’ve been ask to write for 13 string guitar but I don’t like the sound of that instrument. The rhythm, clarity is very important to me.

**M.P:** Then is 6 strings enough?

**C.D:** In the moment I need more I would take more, but it doesn’t look like it. My expression I want to have now, that 6 strings are more than I need.

**M.P:** So the sound / sonorism of the guitar is really important to you?

**C.D:** The sound is only one part of the pieces. I want also to hear a reason why the sound exists. Sometimes when orchestra is tuning you have an incredible sound. So what? What’s then the real value of the sound?

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**M.P:** Witold Lutoslawski heard *John Cage’s Second Piano Concerto* on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period. Have you ever had this kind of experience?

**C.D:** Yes, but you can say that from the point of Lutoslawski. He was a real composer who accepted a lot of tradition; John Cage said “throw out all tradition and do what you like”. And this is valid ‘til a certain point. I love John Cage but I don’t need to listen to him. Because what he does it’s not music. He himself said that. He said “if you want to call it something else – call it”.

**M.P:** Back to question, so you did have turning point experience(s) in your musical life?

**C.D:** Yes, many not only once. For instance after going to India I saw people dying on the street, being born on the street, being tortured I started to examined myself. Back in that time the highest music for me was Webern and composers like that. I started to listen different kinds of music and see what the music does with me. For example I will have a breakfest and put some music (that’s what at least people do which I never do) and will see what happens. I can put Webern or Prokofiev’s 2nd piano concerto. Both are great music. For the first one you have to be in that mood special mood. If you are not in the mood the music won’t take you inside. Prokofiev’s piano – after three minutes you have enough (again the same piece of music). I thought it’s interesting. It’s not the public it’s me. I like to have music
which I cannot describe but it attracts me and without much thinking my soul is flowing with
the music. We feel well together.

**M.P:** You also told me yesterday you at one point threw out all guitar repertoire and
started from scratch, from blank. Do you think every young composer needs to have
this kind of experience?

**C.D:** I don’t know. It’s my point of view. I decided to become a guitar player throwing
everything in my life, school etc then I did it again throwing out all classical (guitar)
repertoire. These experiences made from me somebody who was finally able to write a piece
like SINDBAD. Its shows I’m really home with the guitar. This piece has many directions,
styles (if you want) inside like classical, romantic, baroque, everything is inside etc.

I just want to do something nice for the guitar. Not more. I’m not even saying I’m a
composer. I’m really not. Composer for me is something which maybe doesn’t exist anymore.
Maybe this profession doesn’t exist anymore. I don’t know one piece which I can say “wow
this is incredible piece from the beginning to the end” there are many, many compositions
like that in the past. You cannot stop just going through. For instance Mendelssohn’s violin
concerto – from the first note to the end there is no way to escape. But all compositions of
Lutoslawski or Ligeti and many others... all the composers have great ideas but don’t have
this “burn” (like Mendelssohn)

**M.P:** Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting”
pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. Composers like Steve Reich,
Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-
repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on of
self-repetition? When does your own style stop and self-repetition start?

**C.D:** First of all I wouldn’t talk about composition and guitar composers like me included.
Composer is somebody, at least for me, who has an idea where the music has to go, mostly
against their time etc. All guitar people like me are just writing more/less good guitar pieces.

**M.P:** But is there within this process self-repetition?
**C.D:** Of course. Like weak points... yes. Same like with improvisation. You have a certain character. You’re always trying to find something strong and to do that you go back to those ‘secure’ points. It’s exactly with composition. If you have no time to compose or don’t have any new ideas you can repeat yourself. You have to repeat yourself because there is (at that moment) ‘nothing on the list’. But the composer is someone who has ALWAYS something new. As well he has an order in those inspirations. Like Ligetti’s music.

**M.P:** You said last night you are a fast composer. You have an idea and you’re writing it down quickly. Are you throwing out the materials you don’t use?

**C.D:** I hate throwing out material but I had to learn to do it.

**M.P:** Are you re-using it, keeping for later?

**C.D:** No, deleting it. But if it’s running (composing) well I don’t have to do it. Because there is an instance telling me “write this and this and this”. For example my SINDBAD is 1.5 h long piece. I wrote it in 21 days. It’s quite fast. There was no break. The piece wanted to come (out). But it’s not like it's always like this every time. There is no rule in that.

**M.P:** I love your piece ILLUMINATA. It’s probably one of my favorite pieces ever written for guitar. How it came into your mind?

**C.D:** I was just fascinated with this (Carlo is taking guitar and starting to play first two bars of the piece) ‘light’ appearing. It’s (just) luck. I cannot tell you I am somebody to be able to write a piece like that. No. I’m not. In my case self-repetition doesn’t really work. Every time I’m taking guitar to my hands I have different sounds in my head. For me the style is not important. Absolutely not. It’s just luck.

**M.P:** So you agree with King, Metheny, Lutoslawski something is coming from above to us composers?

**C.D:** Of course. The reason that something is coming is also one step behind. If you are always in touch with the main conductors, orchestras, different things will come to you. But if you have guitar in hands other things will come.
For instance Koyunbaba is first of all about the tuning. Different tuning – different tonal world. The piece is being played from China to France, South America, people love it. There must be a reason. I don’t understand why. How the people play the piece is just awful. It’s wrong, it’s boring it’s no form. But they like it. What can I say...

**M.P:** Do you like then Koyunbaba after all these years? What are your feelings about that piece?

**C.D:** I like it. Because I like to play it. You have a nice feeling because guitar sounds, vibrates in your hand. I know it’s not a great composition. It’s just an example of what you can do with the guitar. In fact this piece was completely improvised in the studio. I had booked a studio I had to record Koyunbaba but didn’t know how it should be. So I called my friend - Turkish guitar player. I told him “I’ve got a problem, just listen to what I’m doing and then tell me what you think”. He was sitting there I started to play the piece ‘til the end. He said it’s done. It’s finished. It was the first time I played this piece in this form without any cuts, 100% improvisation. Not even a cut between movements. It was for me like a song. I finished recording but didn’t have the score. One friend asked me “please send me the score of that music” so I wrote down what I remembered how I did it. After that the edition (the publisher) wanted to publish the piece immediately. That’s why the first edition was without any information about the piece etc. So I cannot blame people to play it badly. What I cannot understand is why some musicians (professional musicians) are playing the piece so boring and meaningless. I cannot understand that.

So the piece for me is still alive. But I wouldn’t write like that anymore. But to play it is something different like that - the sound makes you still feel well.

**M.P:** Do you treat the voices of critics and audience applause with insignificance thinking of creating music for future generations, or rather do you think about contemporary audiences?

**C.D:** I just look what they say but usually I don’t really care. It’s like you have a concert you really feel like you have the audience. You really do. People are happy. After the concert they
are coming to you individually and telling you why they liked it. It’s always rubbish. Always. So I don’t care for personal comments.

**M.P:** Being a guitarist, is it an advantage when writing for guitar or rather a curse?

**C.D:** It’s the only way (to be guitarist). Of course. But you have to pass a certain point. For example I’m now working two years to forget how to play the guitar. I want to forget the classical way of understanding the guitar. All barre chords, positions etc it’s rubbish. It will never sound. We have to understand the point: in most of the guitar methods you have non-guitaristic points inside. *(Carlo is taking guitar and starting to play an example of changing position and not be able physically to keep the melodic note).* You are going to lose the music even if it’s technically perfect. For example I choose some exercises from Sagreras. He is full of such incredible unguitaristic moments. People should learn that. I think we have to understand the real challenges of this instrument. Then start to compose for it. On the piano for instance is the same. Bach’s piano music is not for the piano it’s just music. But Chopin, Schumann – it starts to be different. They really start to listen, to understand the instrument (itself). Debussy, Mussorgsky all those guys did an incredible job which was not done for the guitar. So why all those piano players made the sound for the piano music but for the guitar it’s forbidden? Continuation of this question means that somebody who wants to compose should NOT understand the music. This is the parallel situation for a composer. So only if you have NO idea what’s music you are able to compose it. It’s absolutely stupid! “I don’t know anything about writing for guitar NOW I’m ready to write for it” – it’s absolutely rubbish.

**M.P:** Many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. Could you tell me more about your beliefs and process of ‘creating’ new works? How do you balance improvisation and structure? Do you think about the form?

**C.D:** I think that there are very, very few forms. If you start something (new piece) the only possibility is to repeat the same, to make variation of the same (material) it gives birth to the forms of: variation, sonata, rondo etc. For example there was a time in very early music – it
was not allowed to have repetition in the music. But Tchaikovsky he is a master of repetition (in his little piano pieces). Bach starts with the idea and repeats it, to have an incredible experience at the end.

I don’t really see the problem with the form. The form will happen (at the end) anyway. I think so.

M.P: In the last few years, teenagers and kids are starting their education from very badly written pieces by amateur guitar composers. What’s your opinion about that?

C.D: In order to catch new students, to keep them in the guitar – we always go down and down and down. Today guitar method without blues, The Beatles songs etc. even incredibly badly arranged won’t sell. It seems like children and teenagers are only interested in music if you will give them just that. It’s absolutely not true. If you confront someone who really loves the music he won’t need that.

Today in the schools it's about the quantity not quality. So you need this rubbish music like that for all those young guitarists (maybe less talented) to play. For instance somebody who starts now to play the piano after few exercises immediately jumps to play (easy pieces) by Bach. On guitar we didn’t prepare this kind of way. We don’t have it.

The only chance is to compose good little pieces so then young people can meet up with good music. For instance I wrote last year 48 easy little duets divided for five different levels. But you need to promote that: to be in the right place, to push yourself. I don’t have energy to do that. I have energy to compose not to promote it.

M.P: So in today’s world the composer has to be a business man also.

C.D: Yes. But I’m not.

M.P: There is a famous line by Arnold Schoenberg: “If it is art, it is not for all and if it is for all, it is not art.” Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde or should we push ourselves, audience and players to the limits?
C.D: I remember one comedian in Munich. Brilliant guy. He said: “What is art? If somebody is able to do it it’s not art but if somebody is NOT able to do it it’s even less art”

M.P: So there is no art?

C.D: (Carlo is laughing) If I will take the trombone and will start to play in front of the audience for the whole evening – nobody will understand it. Will be art? No. Of course not. It’s not so simple. But it can be that real art won’t be recognized by anyone. It might be too early for it. If you will spend your whole life in one spot you will be much further (than others) in that situation. Somebody is just touching that spot. You will be more specialized.

There were many composers fighting for what they’ve been doing like Debussy or Beethoven for example. At the beginning people were saying “oh this guy is crazy”. Let’s take for instance Telemann and Bach. The first one was the Lloyd Weber of the Baroque and the second was just some “ok organ player”.

M.P: You’ve been using from the very beginning lots of extended techniques on guitar, pushing to the limits the instrument. Have you done it always consciously? Was it just natural for you to do it?

C.D: It was my wish. I’m player / performer at the same time. So I needed something new. It was natural. Without a plan. Only for me. I though Koyunbaba will be a piece only for me. No one will play it. No one will care. Because it’s difficult with some different techniques.

M.P: Do you have some composition which you personally would like to be performed more instead of for example Koyunbaba?

C.D: Yes. For example Sindbad. I’m pleased with that piece. This composition needs more attention. It’s written exactly how it should sound that’s why it’s incredibly difficult to read.

M.P: In 1968 you wrote the piece Hommage a J.Rodrigo which is op.1. You were then 21 years old. Is it really the very first piece you wrote for the guitar?

C.D: No. It’s the first piece I said to myself it could be the first piece I can start to count. The list of my works was done many years later. My publisher forced me. I didn’t really pay
attention to the order. I lost many pieces through all those years. Lots of very contemporary pieces...they are lost but so what.... Half of my pieces are rubbish anyway.

M.P: Not many composers are brave enough to say something like that!

C.D: Yes some composers won't say. Because they want to sell everything they wrote. I would have to go back and change many of my works.

M.P: You started education with Carmen Lenzi Mozzani at the age of 13 and ‘til today you’re playing on guitar by Luigi Mozzoni (from 1938). Is that a coincidence?

C.D: Yes that’s correct. No it’s not a coincidence. It was her (Lenzi Mozzani’s) guitar. It was an instrument constructed especially for her. Later I bought this instrument. But I had another Mozzoni guitar. Mozzoni was nobody just a great man. He was building violins and other instruments. (Carlo is showing me now pictures of both with A. Segovia etc). He was also a bad composer (smiling) he was working at the bakery at the beginning, started to play trumpet then started to play oboe. Absolutely self-taught.

M.P: You left Italy for West Berlin (Germany) in ’66. Then you studied composition at the University of Music (later The Berlin University of the Arts). Could you tell me with whom you were studying?

C.D: Heinz Friedrich Hartig. He was composing some pieces for guitar. Including pieces for German guitarist (star at that time) Siegfried Behrend. He was composing very bad compositions but back in that time for him it was great. He did everything through Behrend. It was just after the war. I had common friends with Behrend (he was a big fan of Italy) that’s how I met him.

M.P: Then you visited Turkey and it changed your life...

C.D: Yes. Meeting with the East. To be an Italian is similar to be like Polish. You have Eastern and Western culture. Not totally European. So I was always open to any cultures. Listening to this incredible new sound of Persian, Arabic music took me years to be able to really understand the value of it. (Carlo is taking guitar and starting to play “quarter tones”)
M.P: That’s good example of scales (with quarter tones) you are using in your compositions. But you are writing it down in normal tempered tuning. Should we play/perform your pieces differently? According to what you’re telling (showing) me now?

C.D: It depends on what pieces. Some of them yes some of them no. People don’t know how to intonate those tones. If they will intonate it as a Western musician does “something in between (two semitones)” – for me it sounds wrong. There is no “something in between”. There is intonation or not. It’s a difficult point. Without the education you cannot enjoy it (play it).

M.P: So you mean having your pieces very much influenced by Persian/Arabic culture we should stick to the score not to experiment unless we have deep knowledge about the scales and how to correctly intonate it...

C.D: Exactly. For instance in Anatolian Variations (Carlo is taking guitar and start to play the end of the first phrase with slightly bend semitones). The balance between those two notes is very important. If you really give the same importance to both notes the result is right. But (the sound) becomes not normal for us (Western musicians), it changes the spirit of the piece. It must be normal (natural). For example you can make a transcription of a piano sonata by Mozart for guitar. Very light piece on the piano becomes very difficult and heavy for guitar. It cannot breathe on guitar. It’s the same for the intervals (quarter tones) it’s about the simplicity. It will not work without it.

M.P: Most people think that we – composers can remember all notes we’ve ever written. However, the compositional process is so demanding that it is simply not possible to be able to remember it all. How is it with you? Are you able to recognize for instance mistakes someone is making when performing your pieces?

C.D: I am able to recognize the mistakes but on the other side I won’t remember the whole piece which I wrote in the past. Every now and then there is a piece like a “turning point”, some important pieces. Once I had a moment: I’ve been listening some guitar composition and I start to think “it is very good piece but I don’t remember when I composed it...!?“ later someone told me: “it’s not your piece it’s Bogdanovic’s piece“ (laughing) We just discovered
similar things (with Bogdanovic) so I got confused. But it’s really good. Sometimes it’s strange.

**M.P:** Who is interesting for you these days in composition? You mentioned Bogdanovic...

**C.D:** Yes. Him of course. He is one of few people who really works and makes things clear.

**M.P:** What would you suggest to young composers?

**C.D:** To write lots of pieces for the beginners, but really good quality music. Easy to play miniatures, same time good exercises but valuable (as well for the publisher). So then young people are able to meet at an early stage with good music. It happened with my set of Preludes. Someone else suggested me to write pieces like that.

For example György Kurtág - one of the ‘real composers’. He was composing music for solo piano four hands for the beginners. Just fantastic pieces...

**M.P:** You mentioned to me yesterday that you’ve been receiving versions of Koyunbaba for marimba and computer etc. I would never imagine your guitar music on any other instrument. For instance, Chopin’s music only truly works on the piano.

**C.D:** Of course. No I cannot imagine my music on any other instruments. It’s written for guitar. It’s typical for guitar. Even my Prelude and Fugue. It works and it’s been written for guitar physically.

**M.P:** In 20th century we have reached the height of complexity in tonal harmony, through the atonal language of high modernism. There are no limits in music. Some compositions can be “awful”, “unbearable to listen to” for one audience and “fresh”, “thrilling”, “inventive” for another. This freedom sounds liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left?

**C.D:** I did all. I shocked. *(Carlo took guitar re-tuned first string just quarter tone up and played E maj chord)* People have been in shock. They didn’t know what happened. The real
dissonance is meaningful for the audience when the audience is not comfortable with it.
Some of the people wanted to come to the stage and tune my guitar. But no, that’s what I wanted.

I often re-tune the guitar completely and start to improvise not knowing where I am what I’m doing, just reacting immediately to the new sounds.

For me composition is good when it’s free like improvisation. Improvisation is good when it’s constructed like a composition. The music is somewhere between. Sometimes I can fix something intellectually but on the other side I’m afraid to lose the spontaneity. I can react immediately to what’s happening in the room but I can lose the form. Both sides are interesting – both sides are making music and there is room for each.

**M.P:** Do you need to stimulate your creativity with different art forms?

**C.D:** No. Just the sound. I take the guitar and it works immediately musically (as well all percussive sounds).

**M.P:** Is there any ensemble or set of instruments you would like to compose for instead of guitar? Or do you think about sounds of other instruments while writing for guitar?

**C.D:** There was a time I thought I can jump to composing and I started to compose music for organ, flute etc but I finally realized that I was always interested in the instrument I really knew. One of my friends was a cello player. So I fall in love with the instrument and started to write for it. That’s how I work. I’m not like Wagner who even – because of his needs – create a new instrument. I’m just a poor guitar player nothing more. And I’m happy with it.

**M.P:** I didn’t realize you wrote so many guitar concertos but there are not really performed. It’s difficult in general to hear new guitar concertos. Everybody demands only Aranjuez. Why do you think that is happening?

**C.D:** Yeah... they are sure that the piece will be successful. But imagine the reality: Rodrigo wrote The Aranjuez with the idea to repeat, to make a copy of Vivaldi’s concertos. It’s incredible because it really didn’t work. But the 2nd movement is good. It’s really well done.
The cadenza is good too. The other two movements are really bad. But people love it. Conductors know it. But forget my concertos. Ponce’s Del Sur is great concerto even better than Villa-Lobos concerto and you only can hear it every five years. Why? Because it doesn’t have the warmth (like Aranjuez) like some pieces by Stravinsky. You can then really enter into the piece. Villa-Lobos was good composer not as great as Ravel but he wrote pieces which suited the guitar very well.

**M.P:** It’s really hard to talk about composing, but even more difficult to teach/learn composition. What do you think about the approach to teaching composition? Some people say you need to be born with the talent to compose, you can’t really learn it...

**C.D:** Yes, of course. You can learn ’til a certain point. Schoenberg came out with the 12 tone system. He didn’t recognize that he could compose EVEN with the 12 tone system not BECAUSE of. Everybody who was trying to use this system had to fight with Schoenberg because he was very skeptical about the results. It was not only about the system itself but what can you do with it. It’s a very bad moment in music because every idiot could start to compose the piece and you could not say anything to criticize it.

**M.P:** How do you judge other composers in terms of good and bad pieces?

**C.D:** I’m trying not to. Once I had a student. She was writing music with the rhythms out of context. No symmetry, nothing, randomly mixing pitches lowest and highest. She didn’t want to learn anything about composition just wanted to compose. But at the end her music was...good. She wrote simple pieces for accordion, flute and piano... good. Really good. I was listening and really liked it. She didn’t have any education but still...

Conservatively I would say “listen girl before composing you need to know how to use the pen” but she didn’t do it. Same time her results were really good. I never understood why. Very interesting...

I had another student – in his case I would say about the special “repeating” system he created. He had an idea for instance clusters and he was using it in every piece. Piece after piece. I don’t understand it. It’s an idea. Just one idea. You’re using it (in 1–2 pieces) and moving forward. Of course you will be immediately recognizable because of one same
technique you are constantly using everywhere. It will become “your style”. But is it good? I don’t think so.

Stravinsky said about Wagner’s music once: “I like the sound of it but it doesn’t have a reason to start and doesn’t have a reason to end”. It’s for me exactly like I would describe Messiaen’s music. Is it ok? Do we want it? I don’t know. I don’t want to criticize it. It’s just a system all the time they’re using. The system. It’s about the tension. Always the same tension.

I have similar problems with jazz music. Harmonically it’s always the same tension. I’m not interested in jazz harmony at all. It’s like 12 tone music takes attraction by note and jazz harmony you take some pure chord and putting some extra notes. Tonic – dominant. All the time. Rhythmically as well is only always swing. Nothing more. Of course you have amazing musicians and players but for me generally jazz for me is absolutely boring.

**M.P:** It’s so interesting to hear your so radical opinion about jazz, because your compositions are almost completely based on improvisation...

**C.D:** No. it’s not improvisation. I’m using situation harmonically on the theme. The melody creates the melody not harmony.

**M.P:** What about your Pork Pie Variations?

**C.D:** This is blues. Not jazz. Very simple harmonies. I think it’s a good piece but it doesn’t have anything to do with jazz.

**M.P:** Your Toccata in Blue – Gershwin... jazz...

**C.D:** Yes little bit. There is jazz in that piece. But I wrote Prelude and Fugue No. 6 – Its absolutely jazz theme in swing. I’m doing it once, twice but not all the time.

*(Carlo went to the other room and brought with him some of his scores. We started to play it through together over the next few hours)*

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**Roland DYENS (email interview)**

Top 5 Influences:

1. Tunis (my city of birth - Capital of Tunisia)
2. The MPB (initials for Popular Brazilian Music for Brazilians)
3. Chopin, Bach, Hector Villa-Lobos
4. My Spanish Maestro Alberto Ponce
5. French songs (the great ones from the last decades)

1. Stephen King compares the art of writing to "diggings": the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be "obtained", to be cleaned from "superfluous settlings". Pat Metheny talks about a "great broadcasting station in the sky" to which every composer has a built-in "receiver set". He is not "composing" but is simply writing down already-existing music which he "receives". Witold Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He "wipes out" empty spaces on the music staves "uncovering" an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

Well, I just feel bad and anxious when beginning a new composition (on the contrary of an arrangement actually). You should become an architect when composing and rather a designer when arranging because the basements of the house are already done. To use the metaphoras from the musicians you mention above, I feel closer to Lutoslawski’s actually. As a matter of fact I always say I’m generally using about 3 full erasers during the whole composition process. And a tenth of a pencil maximum. It’s (almost) true in fact.

My Maestro of Harmony/Counterpoint Mr Dondeyne (93 years old) said also this to me. He was so right.

2. I’m very intrigued by your approach to composing. It is clear that your roots are deep in improvisation (harmony, loose form, sparkling and fresh ideas in every new original piece or arrangement). The element of improvisation drives the process of composition. Yet you managed to capture all the ideas and details into a structured form. How does it work? Do you first think about the form of the piece, then “filling” it later with compositional/improvised materials? Or do you gather ideas first, getting a glimpse of the new piece, before choosing the form?
The form is always far from my mind actually. It comes after, by itself, once the piece is done. Any idea – either an arpeggio, 3 nice notes or a chord - is to be considered as a potential good start to my opinion. It is actually a pretext to continue in fact.

At the beginning of a meal you have a quarter lemon for the whole meal. And it is fully enough. It reminds me of my first Concerto (C° Metis). One day I showed it to Maestro Dondeyne who immediately said "you could have written 3 concerti with the many elements you used here for one only".

Once the primary tiny (and sufficient) element is "elected", I’m just waiting for the "engine" to warm up, this is to say that this 1st element generates, provokes other ones to arrive. Then it’s a bit about the same process than this of a puzzle. But it’s quite complex to talk about that. This is so personal actually, intimate almost. Plus there’s no magic “recipe” I could use each time. The rest is all about imagination or your personal path - call this inspiration if you prefer (I do not hate this word anyway).

3. **You are inspired by jazz and improvisation but on the other hand you have formally studied composition with conductor and composer Désiré Dondeyne. This gives you a unique and neutral position. Many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What are your beliefs about the process of creating new works?**

Where else than from an improv could come the primary elements of any work, even a “sort of” improv? Well, unless these elements are dictated by God voices, you never know (not my case at least). I think I answered this in the previous question. All composers are improvisers somehow, even if the real improvisers are, as we both know, those who are able either to improvise on something played around simultaneously (Jazz) or to improvise in solo (the luthenists of the past or the organ player’s manner let say).

4. **All your compositions are very well (idiомatically) written for guitar. It’s almost impossible to imagine them on other instruments. Do you always compose guitar pieces using the guitar only? You studied harmony and counterpoint. Do you
sometimes use the piano (if yes, why)? How do you compose for other instruments? Is it different from composing for the guitar? If yes, in what ways is it different?

Well. The composition process to me is mostly a permanent “back & forth” with and without the guitar.

“With” the guitar because you cannot write really well for the guitar without having the instrument in hands at some point. And “without” the guitar because it’s crucial not to be the slave of guitar’s usual stuffs, tricks & patterns in order to write something different. The great thing for me is – by the way this is the perfect example! – when you write something which is not playable, or almost not playable, THEN you make it playable with the guitar in hands eventually. At this point, since you are constricted to find solutions, not only you find them but these solutions are things you would never have written or imagined with the guitar in hands.

Let’s take the case of one of my arrangements, *Ne me quitte pas*, the famous chanson by the great Belgium singer Jacques Brel. Looking at the manuscript I felt that my “dream” at some point of the arrangement would paradoxically be to have the melody played “normal” and the accompaniment played tremolo instead of the contrary. Then I tried. Impossible. I tried again. Well, better. Then, poco a poco, step by step, it turned to something not only playable but easy even. This is the evidence of what I meant above. Without the guitar so to get fresh, free & spontaneous ideas & elements. With the guitar in order to make it not only playable but guitaristic as well.

On the other hand, don’t believe those guitarists who say they never use the guitar when composing. Not only it’s untrue but it’s not even a good idea.

The other instruments? I rarely write for other instruments or very occasionally. Who and how many players would play these pieces of mine? Since my name is “famous” in the guitar world I do prefer to “aim” at that community of potential players for my stuffs than another community of musicians who never heard of me before.

This being said, I regularly asked for the advices and the supervision from specialists when I composed for another instrument (mandolin, flute, percussions etc.). Wiser to do no? We do complain when non-guitarists sometimes write so badly for our instrument.
The piano? Yes, sometimes. Especially in the case of a Concerto for instance. But I’m not willing neither to write nor to play concertos anymore. Why that? Because it takes a long time to write something that will be played 8 times in 20 years anyway (let’s be realistic). And why I’m not interested in playing concerti either? Because I’m stuffed with the usual 2 short rehearsals, ever, with a conductor who doesn’t care after you worked like a dog for one concert only. That’s it.

Just for you know because it might interest you to know and for various reasons.

The last time I played a concerto was in Poland (Tychy maybe) in 2006. It was my double concerto *Concertomaggio*, for 2 guitars with my former student Jérémie Jouve. And you know why I decided neither to play nor to compose any concerto from this concert? Because it was the best experience in my life in terms of concerto playing.

The Polish conductor (I don’t remember his name) came to me after the 3rd (!) rehearsal and asked me if I felt the musical result was satisfying to me. "Of course" I said (and it was great indeed, believe me). Then he answered “I don’t share your feeling Roland. Can’t we have an extra rehearsal”? “Oh my God! Of course”! I finally said!!

Then the concert was just superb, with enjoying musicians in the orchestra and a quite involved conductor at their head.

And from this very night I decided to stay “above” (*giù* in Italian), keeping this moment as the highlight of my life in terms of concerto. Then I would never run the risk to spoil the souvenir of this unique experience with something bad (or less excellent) later on.

5. **You studied guitar with legendary guitarist and composer - maestro Alberto Ponce. Did you start composing during those years? Have you ever worked with him on your compositions (e.g. in terms of compositional materials or technical issues etc.)?**

No, I never did that neither with him nor with anybody else. Did he encourage me to compose? He didn’t but he played my music. Wasn’t this the best encouragement to have me continuing to compose?
6. Being a skilled and gifted guitarist like you might have some positive and/or negative consequences when it comes to writing for your own instrument. Is it an advantage to be a guitarist – having the knowledge of tricks and patterns – when writing for guitar or is it rather a curse? Where is the balance and how do you achieve it?

I can’t see the smallest outcome in being quite familiar with the “geography” of the guitar and knowing some of its main secrets. As a matter of fact, what else than a big advantage could it be for a composer-guitarist? The only (possible) weak point there could objectively be when you’re are both a (good) player and composer could be to write too difficult stuffs sometimes. This might be a trap somehow, yes.

7. Following last question: I spent few days this summer with Carlo Domeniconi. He said that “the biggest problem sometimes for the composers (who are writing for their own instruments) is that they are also good performers and performing their own pieces. After that other guitarists are scared to try to play those new pieces (not able to match the level of the original author’s version)”. It seems you don’t have this problem. Your pieces are performed worldwide. But have you ever felt something similar to Carlo Domeniconi’s theory?

First of all, not all composers are good players, absolutely not (not even of their own music to my opinion). On the other hand, if the theory that other guitarists could be scared to play my music because they would be afraid not to reach the level of the author’s version were true, I would then have good reasons to worry about my skills since my music is performed worldwide.

No, I do think the players of the new generation don’t have such scruples any longer. Plus the concept of “Official version” for a piece doesn’t make sense to me. What I prefer – what I love when it happens (rarely) – is to get surprised by an unexpected version, especially far from mine. It’s what I’m inertly expecting from the “ambassadors” of my music though.
8. Your compositions and arrangements (though inspired by jazz and improvisation) are written down in an extremely detailed way. You seem not to give much space to the performer - your scores provoke the player to follow exactly your vision of the musical material. Yet you are ranked highest in the "Top 100" list of most recorded original works for the guitar by living composers worldwide. How do you feel about all those different interpretations? Are there things that particularly bother you, or not?

Surprisingly, the thing that bothers me the most is to listen to my music actually. And well played or not. Because I'm only interested in “today” but mostly in “tomorrow”. A composition is a “yesterday” thing from the day it’s published. Even before. I don’t give space enough to the performer you said. The meticulousness of my scores would “provoke” the player to follow exactly my vision” etc...No Marek. I understand it might be tempting to think this but in fact this big amount of details means: “Here is my vision of this piece Hic e Nunc. As its composer I felt I owed its potential future performers to deliver my personal vision of it. Because I do respect them”. After this they are free to play it the way they want. As I said above, I love being “provoked” by a different version than the “Official” one. Has to be done with taste, that’s all.

But what is taste?

Well, this is quite a different debate, a different matter.

Philosophy is there.

9. Have you ever considered or had the desire to change / re-compose old composition(s) of yours? Or are finished pieces “untouchable” and you never go back to them?

I'm not interested in spending time with any of my old music. Unless the publication is full of misprints and errors (what I did with Saudade n° 3 which deserved the brand new version I did some years ago – I hated those recurrent mistakes played & recorded by so many players. Apart from that – and since I am what I call a “flexible” musician, I sometimes “touch” my own pieces but “privately” let say, in concert and never twice the same. As popular and jazz musicians do actually. This is my big paradox in fact: both extremely meticulous AND
extremely flexible. Not incompatible to my opinion. I’m the living evidence of that “contradiction” or paradox.

10. **Do you think it is wise to study composition formally at a university/college or let the talent naturally evolve? What, in your opinion, are the positive and/or negative effects of studying composition?**

I do think – and always thought – that both are essential, I mean to study composition AND what I call musical intuition (you say “let the talent naturally evolve”).

Let’s take my personal case to make my position easier to understand.

At the time I studied all that stuffs, it is true that I felt everything was “forbidden” to be done in terms of rules. Therefore composing became almost a nightmare because I tried to observe (apply) all these rules while I was composing. But with the years, I understood what for these rules were “invented” actually. Just to “alert” the freshman composer about some particular effects the non-respect of the rules would bring. To make it short, the rules are made to make you AWARE, not to prevent you from letting your intuition flow like a river. Once you integrate this concept, you could deserve the mantel of “composer”.

More generally, if I really had to choose between a multi-graduated composer unable to accompany a famous pop song (if the singer forgot the score at home) and a “natural” musician able to do that but who never studied anything of harmony, I always prefer the second one.

But ideally I love the cultivated musician doted of a huge intuition. Rare to meet, but not impossible...

11. **There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists “is the worst possible combination” when it comes to writing significant works for guitar. My response to them is always that according to this “theory” Chopin or Liszt will be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What are your**
thoughts about their way of thinking? What is your opinion on composers writing for their own instruments?

I think I partly answered this question in point 6. I think also that those “top young-generation” GFA winners you mention are mostly snobbish. My answer is that you have Masterpieces written by non-guitarists (José, Britten etc.) and bad pieces also written by non-guitarists. BUT, at the same time you have Masterpieces as well as bad pieces written by guitarists. HVL wrote Masterpieces for the guitar, right? And wasn’t he a guitarist also?

12. You are the “father” of various extended techniques (re-tuning, all sorts of percussive effects, borrowing techniques from acoustic and electric guitar etc.). Your creativity in that field has almost no end. You have inspired a huge amount of young composers writing for guitar. What’s left, or what’s next? What other sounds can be found on guitar?

Thank you so much for your words Marek. I’m even surprised to read I’m the “father” of something in the guitar field (I’m serious, I mean not “fishing for compliments” as they say). This being said – and like Schöenberg’s famous quote says (“There’s still a lot that remains to be done in C Major”) I’m convinced the classical guitar has still a lot of unrevealed secrets.

13. Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. Some of your works are completely different from each other yet always I can still “hear” Roland Dyens in each of them. At the same time composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on self-repetition? How do you manage writing and being inspired by all sorts of different styles, yet still be yourself?

The others are more able than I am to say whether I have a personal style or not. I’m told I have my own one (plus seemingly easily recognizable). I miss the necessary self-distance
actually.

On the other hand, being totally himself is a kind of a challenge to be honest, especially in a musical world where sounding “modern” (atonal even better) is THE point, the aim to reach by all means. Therefore music is somehow suspect when it sounds “too nice” or when the piece’s too “sexy” (to be good) and, even worse, when the “normal” public loves it! When I’m composing, this sort of “intellectual terrorism” bothers me still too often I must say…

Self-repetitive music? I like that and understand it receives success around and for many years. This style didn’t knock at the door of my inspiration yet but I think I would welcome it with courtesy when the day comes…

14. Witold Lutoslawski heard John Cage’s Second Piano Concerto on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period. Have you ever had this kind of experience?

No (t yet). Well. Could it be a country instead of a piece of music?
If so, then my first visit to Brazil changed my life (I was 20). Even more than my musical thinking.

15. There doesn’t seem to be much interest amongst the greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative. What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important guitarists choose other new music to perform? What is your advice to young composers?

This is not absolutely true Marek. And what about Koyumbaba? What about Brouwer Sonata? What about Koshkin, Bogdanovic and your humble servant’s pieces? They are played and over played by many guitarists since decades (look at the guitarist’s free choices in competition).

On the other hand, the audiences won’t ever adore “contemporary” music (in the meaning of atonal music), this is something to be hammered in our brains once for all. Basta with that
illusion.

Did the public for this music increase through the years? No.

Is there a growing amount of aficionados of this music? No.

That’s why “contemporary” music, in order to be enjoyed by the audiences, shouldn’t be totally cut off from neither popular roots nor tone. The problem with atonal music is that tonality is “prohibited” somehow. Tonality is our identity, our collective memory. There’s a great TV program on French TV which title is “Roots and wings”. Roots because roots (read above), and “wings” to make us fly further and higher. This is not incompatible, far from that.

My main advice to young composers is clear and simple: BE YOURSELF!

16. There is a famous line by Arnold Schoenberg: "If it is art, it is not for all and if it is for all, it is not art." Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde and yet still be fresh and new; OR should it be more commercial/easy-listening/crowd-pleasing; OR should we push ourselves, audiences and players to their limits?

I think I already answered this question (see right above).

I’m 100% convinced the Art Emotion (and even more the musical one) is universal actually. Therefore everybody in my opinion is able to appreciate great music, even when a bit sophisticated (which doesn’t mean “complicated”). And I know what I’m saying since I’m neither a laboratory operator nor a theorist but a “live musician”. It’s humbly what I always tried to do on my own at least.

Plus the fact of sharing “verb” with the public helps a lot to make the music we play “easier” to be understood. In other words, talking to the audience prior to performing a particular piece makes the public more complice, then not “excluded”. And once the public is complice it feels in better condition to listen to something requiring more attention.

17. Do you consider contemporary audiences when writing your compositions or do you create music for future generations?
Already answered.

“Roots and wings”. Remember that.

Plus Carpe diem, Hic e nunc, and Here and Now. This is my philosophy, my approach of music.

The none & abstract doesn’t interest me.

I always think of the “contemporary” public when composing. I imagine their reactions on every note, every silence, dynamic etc...

18. Music of the twenty-first century is beginning to have its own distinct style. Historicism (looking back) and following the styles of the past seem to be the trend. I have noticed characteristic synthesis of different genres and styles (like collage / patchwork) in today’s compositions. You are a great and unique example of that. Also, composers are tending (and expected) to be more capable of composing well in very different genres, styles. How do you see the evolvement of music composition in the twenty-first century?

I do prefer the word synthesis than patchwork actually.

We now have so many musical informations and so fast that, to my opinion, this century is expected to be THE synthesis one. It’s now or never somehow. But what’s more difficult to make a good synthesis? A real synthesis should be something clever, witty and, most importantly, that never gives any synthesis feeling.

19. In the 20th century we have reached the height of complexity in harmony through the atonal language of high modernism. There are no limits in music. Some compositions can be “awful”, “unbearable to listen to” for one audience and “fresh”, “thrilling”, and “inventive” for another. This freedom sounds liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left?

Is shocking the main aim in music? If so, then there’s still a promising future for that (playing topless or even naked, standing on one foot, compose the ugliest piece possible etc...).
More seriously – but I think I almost extensively answered this question before – I do think that since our ONLY goal (and duty somehow) is to move people, atonal stuffs, after their composers and defenders have had fun & pretended for over one century will touch more and more people, will die soon or later. Stop kidding with that. Game over. It’s now time to be honest. Personally, and more than ever, my only criteria remains “goose pimple” or not. Basic so.

20. **Following the last question: what are your thoughts on modern 20th century compositional techniques like atonal / twelve tone music?**

To my opinion it’s mostly a game for the composer actually, a cerebral game. Cerebral games could be very exciting, needless to mention. But who cares of the fact the composer observed or not the rules of the dodecaphonic game?

It reminds me somehow of my counterpoint exercises at the time I was studying composition. They all were quite exciting to do – a bit like chess actually –, they drove me crazy in the middle of the night but they were quite far from any musical emotion. And the more time runs, flies, the more the public will need to feel “emotional emotions” when attending a concert. Not being scared by not understanding what the point of the “contemporary” composer is. And moreover not to dare acknowledging he didn’t feel anything at listening to it. Ayatollahs of “modern language” make the public (and US) an impossible life actually. I’m myself “influenced” by them (and especially by the fake fans of this kind of music) when I’m hesitating to write some “fun” things. Never forget that music has to be a bit boring to deserve the mantel of “good”.

The worst “compliment” about a piece (or a concert)? Being told yours is” interesting”.

21. **Final question: what in your opinion is the future of classical guitar compositions in general? Should guitar remain mainly as a solo instrument? Or maybe guitar can become more of a chamber instrument? As a composer – what would you encourage young composers to explore if they would like to write for the guitar?**
To answer this question I’ll use a famous French expression: “Both my General” (don’t ask me the origin for that expression). Why would I put limits in terms of organology since the essential is that the guitar doesn’t get “suffocated” on stage due to a bad balance in regard to other instruments (if not solo). And this bad balance won’t exclusively be due to a wrong (or no) amplification in the case of musica da camera but as well to a wrong writing in terms of equilibre.

The future of modern classical guitar to me should never be far from the roots - I mean faithful to our common & human roots – and simultaneously rise towards the sky with fresh & inventive elements. This is 100% compatible to my opinion. Especially since the possibilities of the guitar are just endless and will always be.

“The more we’ll know about this labyrinthic instrument the more secretful it’ll seem to us, guitar lovers”.

David FENNESSY (email interview – incomplete)

1. Stephen King compares the art of writing to “diggings”: the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be “obtained”, to be cleaned from “superfluous settlings”. Pat Metheny talks about a “great broadcasting station in the sky” to which every composer has a built-in “receiver set”. He is not “composing” but is simply writing down already-existing music which he “receives”. Witold Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He “wipes out” empty spaces on the music staves “uncovering” an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

Of course, to begin is the most difficult thing. I seem to spend a lot of time waiting. There’s usually a feeling which is buried very far down and obscured by all sorts of other things which I’m trying to access and it’s only when I feel like I’m getting close to that feeling that I can really begin to write. Then I’ll find a sound or a chord or a gesture or instrument even – something which may have a metaphorical resonance with this feeling and I’ll focus on it more and more until it starts to reveal things.
I can’t say that I identify particularly with any of the quotes you presented so perhaps I can add two which have struck me as containing an element of truth in relation to my own practice. The first is from Joyce:

“Chance furnishes me with what I need. I’m like a man who stumbles along; my foot strikes something. I bend over and it is exactly what I need”.

The other is from the English Composer Frank Denyer:

“Every instrument I could think of, before I could even think of a note, was sort of done for, because I’d heard so many pieces for it. There didn’t seem to be any music left to write. So, I just had to find a little corner somewhere... always I want to find one instrument I can connect with, that I can make a gesture with, that I can possibly live with. It’s a kind of desperation.”

2. **Witold Lutoslawski heard John Cage’s Second Piano Concerto on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period. Have you ever had this kind of experience?**

I don’t know if I have had such extreme musical ephipanies but a few occasions spring to mind. The first was hearing Michael Gordon’s ‘Sunshine of your love’ with Ensemble Modern Orchestra at Edinburgh Festival in 1999. It wasn’t so much the piece itself (although I liked it, and still do, very much), it was more the idea that this kind of musical approach was feasible. It was very loud and extremely direct and, whilst having a basis in tonal material, utilized an orchestra which was detuned in 1/8 tones. Therefore the sound was familiar in one way whilst also being ‘dirty’.

3. **You are an ex-classical guitarist. You stopped performing many years ago. What caused this decision?**

When I went to music college, as a principal study guitarist, I thought that all musicians composed. I couldn’t believe it when I found out, upon my arrival, that the classical music world was split into creators and interpreters. This split still puzzles me.
In my own case however, I began to suffer from tendonitis about half way through my undergraduate studies. Eventually, it became clear that I wouldn’t be able to practice the required hours every day and I had to make a decision to change my primary study from guitar to composition. In the end it wasn’t a difficult decision to make as I knew by that time that I was never going to be a professional classical guitarist and the opportunity to concentrate on composition that presented itself was irresistible.

4. Following from the last question, it no doubt freed you from the guitar when it comes to composing for it. I know from my own experience that it is the essence of good composition to be as less attached to your own instrument as possible when creating a new piece. But are there any positive effects of being an active instrumentalist (guitarist in our case) as well as a composer at the same time in your opinion?

This is a difficult question for me to answer because it has been a while since I was an active performer on guitar. However I will say that the experience of having played music, especially in a group situation, has a profound impact on the way a composer thinks about how he writes for instruments. There are composers who I teach now who have never made a sound on an instrument or sung in a choir or played music of any kind. Their interface with music making has been exclusively through the computer. Now, whilst this is a perfectly legitimate situation and no doubt will become more and more common, producing all sorts of wonderful music, I cannot imagine a situation for myself where I could compose music without ever having made music in a practical way with others. Every decision I make in a composition is influenced by my imagination of how it might feel to play the music on whatever instrument it is I am composing for.

5. You said: “I sometimes think that every piece has its own individual technique, that you can’t apply a pre-existing formula to a new and unique situation” - do you think that composers should re-invent themselves every time before starting a new piece?
No, other composers can do whatever they like! But for me, the idea comes first then how to realize it.

6. **From your essay for RTE: “I think most composers would admit privately that composition is largely self-taught”** – I agree with you, but I also think that we have to go through the whole academic process of compositional education to realize our full potential. However, there are some self-taught guitarist-composers who never went through or believe in proper compositional training yet succeeded in the guitar world. What are your thoughts on balancing self-education with formal composition education?

I find your question to be somewhat pejorative here, Marek! The idea of what constitutes ‘proper’ compositional training varies wildly between different countries and cultures. Even within the same country you can find educational establishments with completely contrasting approaches to the teaching of composition. Therefore, I would argue that there is no ‘proper’ composition education at all. Instead, there are what these days they call ‘learning environments’. The student (and I apply that term to a composer at any point in their career) must be able to move from one environment to the next but somehow be able to pick out their own voice from that crowd. Maybe Steve Reich was right when he spoke about his traveling to Africa to study drumming and how it (and I’m paraphrasing) ‘merely confirmed’ what he already knew to be true!

7. **Many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. Composers like Andrew York, Roland Dyens or Carlo Domeniconi use improvisation almost entirely during the process of creation, and have succeeded commercially (at least in the guitar world). Could you tell me more about your beliefs on the process of ‘creating’ new works? Is there any space for improvisation? How important is form/structure to you? Which element is the more important and how do you balance the two?**
As I mentioned above, for me the technique of the piece derives completely from the original idea. By that, I mean that I have no preconceived ideas about the right or wrong way to realize a composition until I am in the act of doing so. For instance, in 2012 I composed a piece ‘Little Bird Barking’ for a solo violinist which is to be performed at dusk outside in a forest. The piece was developed over a long time in close collaboration with a performer friend of mine with whom I’ve worked many, many times. In the weeks leading up to the first performance, I went away to try to complete a score of the piece but I found that every time I tried to capture what we had done through improvisation and gradual evolution, I would somehow ‘kill’ the piece! It became a dead thing by being set in stone, as it were. Instead, the piece is a set of parameters or an environment perhaps, in which a certain performance can occur.

The very next piece I composed was for solo cello – 5 short pieces, two minutes each, completely notated in a traditional way and performed by a cellist who lived in a different country from me.

I see neither of these approaches as being superior but rather suspect that if I had reversed the techniques, it would have ended in disaster!

8. Following the last question: When in your composition process does the form of the piece come in? Do you think about it before writing the first note?

Yes, the formal aspect of the piece is crucial and I give it a great deal of thought before a single note is composed. Perhaps this is necessary if your music is involved with gradual process as mine often is.

However, I’ve begun to wonder lately if we composers are not a little bit obsessed with this idea of ‘form’. I can’t remember a time when I sat next to somebody in a concert and they turned to me and said “isn’t the form of this piece amazing?”! Perhaps this is why notions of ‘links’ or ‘bridges’ or even ‘developments’ can leave me cold. Look at the Rite of Spring – what on earth is going on there formally? But the music at any given time is so wonderful that we simply don’t care! What amazes me about that piece is how each musical moment relates to those which are either side of it. As a result, the music seems to be concerned only
with where it is at any given moment which lends an incredible aura of spontaneity – even after one hundred listenings!

9. I notice that some composers – like Villa-Lobos or Annette Kruisbrink (within the guitar world) – are extremely prolific with their writing (can produce a large amount of works in a short time). However, you like to extend the time of your compositional process. What role does time have in the process of composition for you?

Actually, I can be quite ‘fast’ when I need to be! But the time between pieces is crucial for me. I have to somehow forget what I just finished and allow it and all its residues to leave my system before moving on. And this can sometimes take a long time.

10. Being a composer – what is the most challenging for you when it comes to writing for the guitar?

The most challenging aspect of writing for guitar is to make it fresh again in my own mind despite my intimate knowledge of the instrument. I’ve tried different approaches to this over the years – scordatura, capos etc. All it needs is one tiny thing to make it a little bit unfamiliar and it can spark new ideas. The electric guitar is still a chronically underused resource in contemporary compositions in my opinion, as it has a potentially endless range of colours and sounds available. Perhaps the greatest challenge when writing for it in a group situation is to blend with other, purely acoustic instruments.

11. Have you ever consider or had desire to change / re-compose old composition(s) of yours? Or do you consider finished pieces “untouchable” and never go back to them?

In general, I would say that I do not go back and work on completed compositions. They are a personal document for me of where I was both physically and metaphorically when I composed them. It would be like going back and touching up old photos of myself!
However, extensive revision can and often does take place immediately after the first performance of the piece. This is a more practical issue though, to do with corrections and performance issues which have arisen.

12. There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists “is the worst possible combination” when it comes to writing significant works for guitar. According to this “theory” you might say that Chopin or Liszt can be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What do you think of composers writing for their own instruments?

13. Following last question: Is it an advantage to be a guitarist – having the knowledge of tricks and patterns – when writing for guitar or is it rather a curse? Where is the balance and how do you achieve it?

See 10

14. I learned recently about the process of writing of one of the top American guitarists and self-taught composers (Grammy award winner and one of the most popular guitarists-composers). He doesn’t “use manuscript paper but instead records his ideas and sketches via a standard tape cassette” and then later develops them into new pieces. What is your response to this kind of compositional process?

Whatever it takes.

15. Contemporary guitar-composers very often use extended techniques (retuning, all sorts of percussive effects, borrowing techniques from acoustic and electric guitar like hammering, tapping, playing “on the other side of string” etc.) What is your view and approach to writing extended techniques on the guitar?
My view is that, at the start of the compositional process, nothing is ‘out of bounds’. As the writing progresses however, the piece develops its own set of rules so some things, extended techniques for instance, seem perfectly logical to the world of the piece while others are totally out of place.

16. Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. Composers like Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer, Roland Dyens manage to find their success in self-repetition. You said: “certain things tend to keep cropping up in my pieces. When I think I have done something radically new I am always somewhat alarmed when a colleague points out "no, it still pretty much sounds like you". Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on self-repetition? Where do the lines cross between self-repetition and personal style? Is it bad, in your opinion, to be recognizable?

I think what I was trying to say in that instance was that it may be that the composer is in fact the worst person to make comments about their own style because they are too close to it. I don’t feel I have a ‘style’ as such – a vocabulary which I draw upon every time I begin to compose – however there is no escape that I, with all my musical and other experiences, am the vessel through which the idea passes. Therefore, all my abilities, failings and prejudices are apparent in the finished composition.

17. Back to the guitar world: there doesn’t seem to be much interest amongst the greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative. What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important guitarists choose other new music to perform?

This seems to be a question about commerce rather than art so I’m not best qualified to comment on it. However, I would point out that the two biggest names in classical guitar of
the last 50 years – Julian Bream and John Williams – were both major commissioners of new work for the instrument.

18. There is a famous line by Arnold Schoenberg: "If it is art, it is not for all and if it is for all, it is not art." Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde or should we push ourselves, audience and players to the limits?

What are ‘the limits’? What is ‘modern’ or ‘avant-garde’? I’m afraid these are just vague terms and you will have to be more specific in the question.

19. Do you consider contemporary audiences when writing your compositions or do you create music for future generations?

The only person I can consider when composing is myself. I try to imagine what I might feel or think when encountering my own music for the first time. To consider future generations would be presumptuous in the extreme on my part.

20. Music of the twenty-first century is beginning to have its own distinct style. Historicism (looking back) and following the styles of the past seem to be the trend. I have noticed characteristic synthesis of different genres and styles (like collage / patchwork) in today’s compositions. Also composers are tending (and expected) to be more capable of composing well in very different genres, styles. How do you see the evolvement of music composition in the twenty-first century?

21. Following the last question: in 20th century we have reached the height of complexity in tonal harmony, through the atonal language of high modernism. There are no limits in music. Some compositions can be “awful”, “unbearable to listen to” for one audience and “fresh”, “thrilling”, “inventive” for another. This freedom sounds
liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left?

22. Final question: what in your opinion is the future of classical guitar compositions in general? Should guitar remain mainly as a solo instrument? Or maybe guitar can become more of a chamber instrument? As a composer – what would you encourage young composers to explore if they would like to write for guitar?

Stephen GOSS (email interview)

Top 5 Influences:

Beethoven
Mahler
James Joyce
Terry Gilliam
London

1. Stephen King compares the art of writing to "diggings": the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be "obtained", to be cleaned from “superfluous settlings". Pat Metheny talks about a "great broadcasting station in the sky" to which every composer has a built-in "receiver set". He is not “composing” but is simply writing down already-existing music which he “receives”. Witold Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He "wipes out" empty spaces on the music staves "uncovering" an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

For me, the piece gradually comes into focus over time. At the beginning of the process, there is a conception, a soundworld, a character or a mood that results from an impetus, idea or set of ideas. It is vague and nebulous before it gradually evolves and changes. There is not
one final version of a piece that is waiting for me, but a myriad of possible versions (all equally viable). At various stages in the process I might take an unexpected turn or question some of the assumptions or decisions I have made up to that point. There is often a collaborator and they can have a significant input along the way. I build on silence and have the image of the first performance in my mind as I write. I think about the occasion, about the space, about the performer and about the context of my piece in the programme of the concert.

2. Witold Lutoslawski heard John Cage’s Second Piano Concerto on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period. Have you ever had this kind of experience?

This has happened several times for me. I might hear a piece that suddenly grants me permission to try something new. I’ll think, ‘well if that creative artist can do that, then maybe I can do either the same, something similar or the opposite’. The first time I heard Uri Caine’s reworkings of Mahler (it was the Funeral March from the 5th Symphony) it opened a door for me. I quickly got to know all his albums of reworkings (Wagner, Schumann, Beethoven and others) and set about trying similar things in my own work. Mark Anthony Turnage’s ‘Greek’ had a similar effect when I first heard it in the late 80s. It was vital, of the moment, and urban – a style that embraced popular culture (e.g. Prince and Miles Davis), the rhythms of Stravinsky and a harmonic language that drew on jazz and sophisticated 20th century harmony. Sometimes it’s first encounters with art, literature, or architecture that causes a paradigmatic shift in the way I think about music. Exhibitions of work by Gerhard Richter and Thomas Heatherwick have both shifted my musical centre of gravity.

3. You are a composer but also a professionally trained classical guitarist. It’s a very unique combination. What’s more is that you never stopped performing, being the founder and director of the Tetra Quartet. I know from my own experience that it is the essence of good composition to be as unattached to your own instrument as possible when creating a new piece. What is your reason behind this decision? What are the benefits and downsides of being a composer and active performing artist?
Performing is central to my understanding of composition. I write concert music pretty much exclusively. So an individual or a group of people will walk onto a stage and play or sing my music. Having that detailed inside knowledge of what it’s like to perform professionally is something I am trying to hang on to. It’s something I think about while I’m writing. I imagine myself performing the piece in public. When I’m writing for flute, or cello, or trumpet, I imagine the physical sensation of performing the piece – fingerings, bowings, tonguings, breathing, stamina issues, etc. Idiom is very important – I like my violin parts to look like violin parts. Britten is my model here – a performer and composer with a profound working knowledge of all the instruments and voices that he wrote for. I like to write music that is bespoke for the performers I am writing for. My guitar music changes whether I am writing for John Williams, David Russell, Xuefei Yang or Jonathan Leathwood. When I write for myself, I write a part that I find comfortable. The downsides? Well there isn’t enough time. Keeping your playing at a professional level takes a great deal of work and there’s a lot of music to write and a million other things to do in life.

4. You said: I’m always trying to escape default responses to musical stimuli (...) I think composers have to keep finding new and interesting ways of writing for the guitar in the light of an already extensive repertoire. - do you think that composers should re-invent themselves every time before starting a new piece? Could you tell more about how you have achieved and also carrying on trying to escape from those clichés?

Martin Amis published a collection of his criticism and called it ‘The War Against Cliché’. That struck a chord with me. This phrase is at the back of my mind whenever I’m composing. The artists I admire the most are the ones who’ve developed and changed direction over the course of their working lives, they never stay still – Beethoven, Stravinsky, Picasso, Miles Davis. These are people who’ve shed their skins regularly to uncover new ideas and unfamiliar ways of working. The point about writing for the guitar is slightly different. Clichés of idiom are different from clichés of compositional technique. Clichés of idiom come from blocks of patterns in people’s improvising or noodling. Avoiding personal idiomatic thumbprints is very difficult. My own work is full of them. I always try to imagine the sound I
want and then spend time trying to work out ways of how to achieve that sound. This is different from stumbling across musical material while improvising. In my experience the imagination is a more powerful compositional tool than fingers on an instrument. When I am composing I am sitting with the guitar or at the piano – it’s just that I’m looking for ways to unlock and realize vivid musical ideas rather than looking for those musical ideas through the instrument.

5. One of the composers and my teacher David Fennessy said once: “I think most composers would admit privately that composition is largely self-taught” – I agree with him, but I also think that we have to go through the whole academic process of compositional education to realize our full potential. However, there are some self-taught guitarist-composers who never went through or believe in formal compositional training yet succeeded, albeit only, in the guitar world. What are your thoughts on balancing self-education with formal composition education?

This is a complex question. It needs very careful unpicking. I would like to separate three related concepts that contribute to the creation of musical compositions – ideas, compositional technique, and context. Many people imagine that it’s thinking up the idea of a piece that is the difficult part. The idea is by far the most straightforward part. Humans are all capable of coming up with good ideas every day. The difficult part is realising these ideas and presenting them to other people in a satisfying way. This is where compositional technique and context come in. Here’s an example of an idea for a drama – two people fall in love, but their families don’t get on, this causes some problems and in the end the lovers die because they can’t be together. Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet is a great work of art, not because it’s a good story, but because of the way in which the story is told. The success of this play is dependent on Shakespeare’s skill and technique as a dramatist and the fact that he’s working in a context that he understood well and in great detail. Context for contemporary composers is the time (now) and place in which they live and the stuff they’ve learned and studied. Composers need to know the musical and cultural context for their work. The more music they have studied in depth, the more tools they acquire in order to write their own music. Most composers start by copying the music they most admire – so early pieces might sound like pale imitations of Lutoslawski or Gorecki or Steve Reich or
Radiohead, but as these influences multiply and diversify, so the composer’s musical personality develops and deepens. This sets the context. Compositional technique is what composition teachers spend most of their time developing. This ranges from the pragmatics of instrumental idiom and orchestration, through to the various different approaches there are for the generation and propagation of musical material. The study of musical parameters – form, structure, density, pitch, rhythm, harmony, style, time-feel, character, articulation, phrasing, rubato, register, texture etc etc. This eventually leads to the development of an embodied knowledge that informs compositional decisions on every level. A subtle nuance is the relationship between music material and time. Wagner’s Ring Cycle is four long evenings in the theatre. It starts with an E flat pedal that lasts for a very long time. It sets up the timescale – you know you’re in for the long haul. Composition cannot be learned quickly or easily. You can direct your own learning or you can enroll in a course at a university or college, but it’s surprisingly similar to learning an instrument. There is technique and there is creativity – technique can be taught and creativity can be encouraged (or at least not stifled).

6. Many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. Composers like Andrew York, Roland Dyens or Carlo Domeniconi use improvisation almost entirely during the process of creation, and have succeeded commercially (at least in the guitar world). Could you tell me more about your beliefs on the process of ‘creating’ new works? Is there any space for improvisation? How important is form/structure to you? Which element is the more important and how do you balance the two?

My compositional process goes through roughly the same stages each time: impetus – ideas – design – finding good notes – refinement. To begin any composition project, I start with an impetus. Examples of impetuses might be a text to be sung, a narrative, something visual, or simply a musical idea. Recently, I have been writing a lot of landscape music that evokes time and place. The impetus drives the compositional process on every architectonic level. In my work, a ‘good’ impetus should act as a consistent link between form, method and materials. The impetus then usually leads to research where the main ideas of the piece are developed and refined. This is probably the most enjoyable part of the process.
For example, my recent *Piano Concerto* had the architecture, sculpture and designs of Thomas Heatherwick as its impetus. As I mentioned earlier, I was bowled over by an exhibition of his studio’s work that I saw in London. The sheer range of styles and leaps of imagination between projects was staggering. So, once the impetus was chosen, I then had to work on the ideas for the piece. After some research I settled on four specific Heatherwick projects which would act as models for each of the four movements. I then thought about the kinds of soundworlds and overall structure I wanted for each movement. For example, the second movement is based on ‘Bleigiessen’, an indoor sculpture eight-storeys high made of thousands of small glass beads suspended on wires. The wires catch the light and blur the viewer’s image of the sculpture.

Once the ideas are clear in my mind, I start working on the design. This might include deciding on a form or structure, on where to use particular orchestral colours, registers, textures, densities, harmonies, and so on: roughly planning out the piece. In the case of the Bleigiessen movement, I designed the harmonic structure and registral limits ahead of working on the notes themselves. The delicate continuous solo piano part is a portrayal of the sculpture while the glittering reflections are rendered in varied orchestral hues.

The next stage is where the really creative work goes on. Mark Anthony Turnage once said that most important thing in composition is finding good notes. This is the part composers rarely talk about – the part where we actually choose which notes go in the score. This part of the process, for me, takes the longest and goes through many drafts and stages of refinement. The refining includes fixing many musical parameters into place: pitch, rhythm, orchestration, dynamics, articulation etc.

When composers talk about their work, they generally talk about what I call the impetus, ideas and design phases of composition. They will often miss out the choosing of notes bit and then talk about rehearsals, performances and revisions – the sheen. Of course, the reason we talk about choosing notes so little is because it’s done largely intuitively – it’s improvised. One note is selected over another simply because we think it sounds better. How do we know when we’ve made a good decision? We don’t know, we can only feel it. How can we talk about intuitive decision-making? Recent research into adaptive unconscious suggests there is a locked door between what we can do with our unconscious minds and how we try to explain it – the story-telling problem, as Timothy Wilson calls it.
For me, improvisation can be split into two basic types – real time improvisation and intuitive note choosing. In real time improvising (which can happen live on stage or might be recorded), improvisers tend to draw on a huge bank of musical blocks and ideas and instantly reassemble them to fit the context of the piece they are playing. Intuitive note choosing might lead the composer to more unusual shapes and patterns that come through trial and error.

7. I notice that some composers – like Villa-Lobos or Annette Kruisbrink (within the guitar world) – are extremely prolific with their writing (can produce a large amount of works in a short time). However, you like to extend the time of your compositional process. What role does time have in the process of composition for you?

Firstly, I don’t ‘like’ to take a long time over composing a piece. In my experience composition takes a long time. Maybe I’m just a bit slow, but I can’t just churn stuff out. Rather than getting faster as I older, I seem to be getting slower. Sometimes ideas gestate over a very long period of time. I have a folder on my computer marked ‘ideas for pieces’ which is full of things that I make a note of when an idea comes into my head. These include musical ideas and extra-musical ideas. When focusing on a new piece, I will spend and enormous amount of time deciding what will be distinctive or different about it. Much of my music is programmatic and I always research the subject matter in detail, often reading many books, visiting places, talking to people, thinking and reflecting. I try to make each piece as different as possible from the last one.

8. Being a composer – what is the most challenging for you when it comes to writing for the guitar?

Variety.

When writing for guitar (or any instrument) idiomatic habits develop in one’s writing (whether you play the instrument or not). These habits, if left to calcify, become limitations, which can eventually be debilitating. This is where time comes in. Default options or quick
compositional decisions often lead the composer to the familiar; relying on things that you know will work fine. However, we all need to leave our comfort zone and take some risks from time to time to avoid this kind of creative stagnation and predictability. I am fortunate in that I write for many different guitarists who have individual approaches to the guitar. Somehow tailor-making my guitar writing to the idiosyncracies of each individual guitarist helps keep variety. However, I never feel I achieve enough variety on my guitar writing; I’m always searching for new sounds on the instrument.

Beethoven wrote 32 piano sonatas; each one inhabits its own world. You can’t group a few of them together and say ‘these sonatas do the same thing’. Each one explores the piano from a different perspective. For example, in the last sonata (Op 111), the finale is a set of variations like no other Beethoven wrote, after more than 10 minutes of C major where the rhythmic momentum increases incrementally, Beethoven suddenly releases us and takes to the remote key of E flat major landing on, simultaneously, just about the highest and lowest notes on his piano. It’s an extraordinary moment of piano writing – idiomatic but highly original. Beethoven sets the bar very high; he gives us something out of our reach that shows us what could be possible.

9. **Have you ever consider or had desire to change / re-compose old composition(s) of yours? Or do you consider finished pieces “untouchable” and never go back to them?**

Once a piece has been published and recorded, I let go. However, I frequently re-use material from one piece in another. This is surprisingly common amongst composers from many historical eras. For example, Bach’s prelude from the E major lute suite was also used in a cantata as well as the in the violin partita, and Thomas Ades and Pierre Boulez reuse material from one work in another. This practice was frowned upon in the 19th Century, but otherwise it has been omnipresent. When time and or budget is limited, recycling old material is what people have always done.
10. There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists “is the worst possible combination” when it comes to writing significant works for guitar. According to this “theory” you might say that Chopin or Liszt can be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What do you think of composers writing for their own instruments?

Julian Bream commissioned two works through his trust last year – One by a guitarist (Leo Brouwer) and one by a non-guitarist (Harrison Birtwistle). They are both significant works. The fact a composer plays the guitar does not by definition mean that can’t write significant works for the guitar. That is absurd.

11. Following last question: Is it an advantage to be a guitarist – having the knowledge of tricks and patterns – when writing for guitar or is it rather a curse? Where is the balance and how do you achieve it?

It’s a double-edged sword. If you’re an outsider wanting to write for guitar it’s a steep learning curve. It’s not like learning how to write for saxophone, for argument’s sake. With a wind instrument, you learn the range and fingering charts, the qualities of the different registers, what’s comfortable and what’s not comfortable, how certain articulations and effects are executed, what the balance issues are, and off you go. With guitar, there is a lot more tacit knowledge to unpick. Very few non-guitarist composers have really understood the idiom well. There are exceptions, like Britten and Takemitsu for example, but significant collaborative input from a guitarist is absolutely crucial for most non-guitarist composers. Performers like David Starobin, David Tanenbaum and ChromaDuo work very closely with composers in this way. Many composers fall into the trap of thinking of the guitar as first and foremost a harmonic instrument. I think of the guitar as a melody instrument, more a violin or a cello with extra possibilities of resonance, than as a piano with debilitating limitations.

If you’re a composer and a guitarist then you tend to know the dark secrets of the instrument, but there is a danger that you depend too much on familiar formulas and pre-conceived ideas of the instrument’s boundaries.
12. Contemporary guitar-composers very often use extended techniques (re-tuning, all sorts of percussive effects, borrowing techniques from acoustic and electric guitar like hammering, tapping, playing “on the other side of string” etc.) What is your view and approach to writing extended techniques on the guitar?

If a composer has a musical idea that cannot be expressed unless extended techniques are used, then the composer should use them for the desired effect. But extended techniques can all too quickly become an affectation unless great care is taken.

13. Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. Composers like Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on self-repetition? Where do the lines cross between self-repetition and personal style? Is it bad, in your opinion, to be recognizable?

WH Auden once said – ‘an artist spends the first half of their life copying other people and the second half copying themselves’. I think there's a great deal of truth in this. The world has changed since the mid- to late-20th Century, composers cannot be one-trick-ponies anymore. There are composers (now in their 70s and 80s) whose individual styles are instantly recognizable. This is largely due to the fact that they rely on a relatively narrow range of compositional techniques and approaches. This suited the high-modernist aesthetic of the Cold War years, but the cultural climate has made a 180-degree turn since then. Stylistic pluralism has deprioritized the need to find a unique individual voice. Many composers shift styles in their careers, sometimes between pieces, sometimes within a single piece – Richard Rodney Bennett, Takemitsu, Zimmermann, Berio, Frank Zappa, William Bolcom, George Rochberg and many others. The models, as I said before, are Picasso, Stravinsky and Miles Davis – their work is richly varied across many different styles, but still recognizably theirs. They manage to integrate craft and art in order to express ideas clearly and distinctly. Artistic growth through variety and change is at the centre of my aesthetic outlook. I avoid dogmatic and systematic approaches to music at all costs. As Bach once said, ‘rules don’t make music, music makes rules’. 
14. Back to the guitar world: there doesn’t seem to be much interest amongst the greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative. What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important guitarists choose other new music to perform?

Actually, research has shown that guitarists play more contemporary music in their programmes than orchestras, choirs, chamber groups, violinists, cellists, pianists, singers, and just about every other instrument. Repertoire surveyed from 34 concerts given in 6 European guitar festivals in 2004 and 2005 shows a dominance of new repertoire: 58% post 1950, 23% 1900–1950, 19% pre 1900. The fact that a work written as recently as 1990 – Brouwer’s first sonata – is considered a piece of standard repertoire is unthinkable in the repertoire of many other instruments. That said, I suspect your question really refers ‘difficult’ contemporary music, rather than ‘light’ contemporary music. With the Bream commissions, which began in the 1950s, we reached a situation where many of the world’s leading composers were asked to write for the guitar. Many said no of course, but plenty said yes. The guitar is very fortunate to have these great works. Never in the history of our instrument did so many of the world’s most prominent composers write for it. Unfortunately, this also coincided with a time when the audience for new music was at its smallest. As Leon Botstein has remarked ‘New music for the concert stage commanded less attention during the second half of the [twentieth] century than at any time in the previous two hundred years.’ However, since minimalism and the cultural shift to pluralism, new music is much more popular with audiences. So, in fact, your question should be rephrased to ask what can be done to commission today’s top composers to write for guitar. Some of these composers have been commissioned – David del Tredici, John Corigliano, Steve Reich – but many obvious names have not – John Adams, Thomas Ades, Michael Torke, Arvo Part. And once these pieces are out there, what can we do to increase the number of performances? The guitar’s idiom doesn’t help and sometimes pieces by non-guitarist composers are difficult and awkward, making them very hard to pull off in concert. Closer collaboration between guitarists and non-guitarist composers will help.
15. There is a famous line by Arnold Schoenberg: "If it is art, it is not for all and if it is for all, it is not art." Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde or should we push ourselves, audience and players to the limits?

My view is that art is for everyone. Earlier I was talking about Shakespeare; an artist surely? But his plays were written for a very general audience. 80% of Elizabethans were illiterate, but that didn’t make them unintelligent. They would have known the stories that Shakespeare was retelling, they had enough context and knowledge to find a way in. They were enchanted, uplifted, moved, challenged and entertained by the fantastical settings and the exotic, poetic versions of these familiar stories. Art is a reflection of society and is therefore inseparable from the time and place in which it was created. And while Shakespeare’s work was aimed at the Elizabethan audience in England, so any composer working today can only write work for a contemporary audience.

It is important to remember that there is not a direct correlation between complexity and quality. Style is not art: style is a medium for the communication of artistic ideas. We must shake off the notion that simple means simplistic and that artistic expression is at its most sophisticated when meaning is obscured by surface complexity. It is much harder to write convincing simple music than it is to write needlessly complicated music. We should try to stretch our audience, to engage them through a familiar point of contact and then lead them into less comfortable waters. Art should make people think, it should move them, and it should make them see the world in a slightly different way. The style of musical language we employ as composers to do this is largely irrelevant these days. The most important thing is that any artist who has something they want to say is not restricted by a lack of compositional technique and limited contextual knowledge.

16. Do you consider contemporary audiences when writing you compositions or do you create music for future generations?

When I’m working on a piece I never think about possible future performances let alone future generations. It’s impossible to predict what might happen after the initial run of concerts, publication and recording, so I focus on the circumstances surrounding the
commission. Who is the piece for? Who is playing it? Where are they playing it? What else is
in the program? These questions really help to crystalize the piece in my mind and give it a
context. And the answers to them help make my pieces different from one another. They
make each piece bespoke. I don’t think about producing a body of work, I only think about
the particular job in hand. I think the idea of writing for posterity is a hangover from the 19th
Century. I’ll gladly admit I’m a pragmatist.

17. Music of the twenty-first century is beginning to have its own distinct style.
Historicism (looking back) and following the styles of the past seem to be the trend. I
have noticed characteristic synthesis of different genres and styles (like collage /
patchwork) in today’s compositions. Also composers are tending (and expected) to be
more capable of composing well in very different genres, styles. How do you see the
evolvement of music composition in the twenty-first century?

I would argue that the music of the 21st Century does not have its own distinct style. It’s in
our historicist natures to try and classify and pigeonhole everything. However, what’s
happening now is a fragmentation of an artistic mainstream. As the millennium hit, Post-
modernism was the buzz world for a new inclusive pluralist approach to artistic work.
However, this was too tied into French philosophy from the 1960s and, over a short time, the
instances of the use of the word Post-modernism declined sharply. Even Charles Jencks
renamed his iconic book ‘What is Post-modernism?’ to ‘Critical Modernism’ in a recent
edition. There are more influences than before and people are looking to the past for
inspiration – music of elsewhere and elsewhen as Paul Griffiths put it. However, there is more
artistic diversity now than at any time in the past and artists can write in whatever style they
want to.

When I was at University in the 1980s, nobody could have imagined the impact that the
internet would have on all aspects of our lives. Musical production and consumption has
been transformed beyond all recognition by various technological developments – sound
recording, international travel, the microchip. It has also been affected by political change,
natural disasters, and war. So the music of the future will be influenced by how people
respond to social and technological developments. So, from my viewpoint in the UK in 2014, I have no idea how things will develop.

18. Following the last question: in 20th century we have reached the height of complexity in tonal harmony, through the atonal language of high modernism. There are no limits in music. Some compositions can be “awful”, “unbearable to listen to” for one audience and “fresh”, “thrilling”, “inventive” for another. This freedom sounds liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left?

Hardly any music is atonal. People often try to divide music into tonal music and atonal music. For a brief period in the 1950s and early 1960s when Boulez and Stockhausen were studying in Messiaen’s class at the Darmstadt summer school, all aspects of music were subjected to serial treatment. This music might be considered atonal, but very little other music avoids a hierarchy of pitches (a tonality). Berg’s violin concerto, Schoenberg’s piano concerto, Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring – these are all tonal to a degree. The continuum between purely modal or diatonic music through to atonal music is vast and composers can now explore any point or points on this continuum.

I think pastiche is the last musical taboo. I remember being both outraged and excited when I heard David del Tradici’s Final Alice and George Rochberg’s 3rd String Quartet in the 1980’s. Rochberg wrote sections of his piece in the style of Mahler and a whole movement in the style of late Beethoven. Were composers allowed to do this? Pastiche has always been frowned upon, the idea that composer sacrifices their own voice and borrows that of another does still not sit easily with some people. Of course, the narrative attached to a piece of music can shock – for example, John Adams’ The Death of Klinghoffer – but this isn’t the music itself doing the shocking. The main problem we have as composers is not that we might shock people, but that we leave them indifferent and unmoved.

19. Final question: what in your opinion is the future of classical guitar compositions in general? Should guitar remain mainly as a solo instrument? Or maybe
guitar can become more of a chamber instrument? As a composer – what would you encourage young composers to explore if they would like to write for guitar?

I can tell you how I’d like things to develop. I would like the guitar to broaden both as a solo instrument and as a chamber instrument. I would like the repertoire of the solo guitarist to move away from having such a reliance on the Segovia repertoire. That repertoire is important but its central role needs to be challenged. I would like competition repertoire to be much more diverse. The over-prominence of fashionable pieces at festivals is a problem. There’s not enough risk taking in programming in my view. It’s often these festival programmes that inform the guitar’s canon. The guitarist-composer is an important part of the guitar’s future, and, consequently, I would encourage guitarists to make a serious study of composition and improvisation. I would like to see guitarists collaborating with composers as early as possible.

If a composer would like to write for guitar, I would encourage them to spend as much time as possible working closely with a guitarist. Listening to and studying repertoire is important, but composers learn the most from close contact with the instrument.

Simone INNARELLI (email interview – incomplete)

Top 5 Influences:

About my influences, hard to think about 5 names...I will share for "group"

Classic: Beethoven
Jazz: Keith Jarrett
Guitar: Castelnuovo Tedesco
XX century I. Stravinsky
Rock: Jethro Tull

1. Stephen King compares the art of writing to "diggings": the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be "obtained", to be cleaned from “superfluous settlings”.
Pat Metheny talks about a "great broadcasting station in the sky" to which every composer has a built-in "receiver set". He is not "composing" but is simply writing down pre-existing music which he "receives". Witold Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He "wipes out" empty spaces on the music staves "uncovering" an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

Compositional process is for sure mysterious in a lot of ways, even if we master all the composition skills, there are infinitive doors to go in; sometime you’ve maybe asked yourself: how do I composed this? Of we know the harmony and the structure of the piece, but we cannot recreate this process in an identical way.

I for sure think about, or have the sensation you pick up a piece hidden in some place of the universe, or someone choose you to receive the information. For this reason I don’t trust "I’ve all the piece in my mind and I just write it down"; some people are fascinated about that: I wrote a symphony in one day and so on; but reality is other, we’re hand craft in a way; of course there are differences...Brahms take 20 years to composed his major work, Mozart was faster..

In my case I prefer to compose a little each day and leave the idea to develop in my mind, I don’t like to force; this is the advantage from improvisation...so better don’t waste it.

2. Contemporary composers like you, Roland Dyens, Carlo Domeniconi (and many others) using extended techniques (re-tuning, all sorts of percussion effects, borrowing techniques from acoustic and electric guitar like hammering, tapping, playing “on the other side of string” etc.) What’s left? What other sounds can be found on guitar?

In my case, my way of composition is not very close to “effects” (apart from retuning that I widely use), I use it, but I’m more fascinated by harmony and counterpoint, although I respect very much the exploration of guitar timber.

I think possibilities are quite no-ending; anyway using it to compose with “fingers only” is empty to me; this incredible richness of the guitar has to serve a development of an idea.
3. I have strong feeling every time I’m studying or playing from your scores there is very strong percentage of improvisation. Your “Tribute to Keith Jarrett” or Three ‘Miles’ Sketches is a great example of that. You definitely use guitar during the process of creation. Am I right? What is the source of your inspiration? How important for you is the element of improvisation during composition process?

Well, in the first part of my composing career I used to write in a more “pianistic” way” (like for example my “Trois Preludes”; doesn’t matter if the result was very tough, a little in a Castelnuovo Tedesco way; also I was very strict in using development of few elements of a theme in some other pieces; so I’m wondering also if we have to explore the idiomaticity of the guitar or violent her nature in the name of the music; maybe there is a correct way, or maybe not exceed in one or another.

I think every composer has a love history with some instrument, a physical and spiritual contact with it is fundamental to my view of composing; it has been mostly piano along the history, now it is normal that composers growing up with a guitar are increasing.

In general I consider me a slow composer (apart some short pieces), I’m not an improviser at all, or better say, I try and try the better theme and structure and take my theme before I’m 100% convinced (for this I hate deadline!), I think that every note has to match (to my taste of course) and all are relevant in the economy of the composition.

For example you’ve mentioned Tribute to Keith Jarrett and Three miles Sketches, well in the second piece, there is a very short two-part theme that is developed all along the pieces; and in the tribute there is central cellule that is developed around (first and after); but each compositional process is cryptic and hard to find out; now I think that sometime a deep analysis find out things that composer knew maybe unconsciously, for this a thing a good composer has inside him the sense of structure, of proportion and theme development, and don’t need to theorize so much (I write this because I feel it strongly), of course I guess a composer is passionate for analysis but still...is a creator, not an analyzer; he has to open new ways; and finally it is easy in a way...only be yourself.

Also a reflection about great composers: I think they leave space in his works for unpredictable events, they don’t want to be predictable, and his own language is created and works because they follow their instinct basically.
4. Following last question - many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What I noticed you are very much into that technique yet you very well managed the balance between improvisations and “cold/calculated” composition. Could you tell me more about the creation process in your work?

Sometimes I ask myself about the deep meaning of improvisation...hard to say...probably Bach could improvise a fugue because he mastered the form and counterpoint; on the opposite: let’s give a guitar (or another instrument) to a man of the street and let him improvise...so improvisation like composition depends of the knowledge and practice...or maybe some people think Keith Jarrett wake up in the morning and perform the kln concert? He is improvising every minute of his life, only we were allowed to listen only these 2 hours in the concert hall; so I can call improvisation “composing in real time” that is of course fascinating, so I don’t understand this sentence: “I don’t believe improvisation” don’t confuse the art of improvisation to write the first thing you’ve in your mind...and about “cold/calculated composition is very mediocre way to think...my god the genius of composing is everything but cold/calculated.

How I’ve told before I’m in the opposite side, in the sense I like handcrafted, take my time; but if we think about the first composing process, the spark...how much improvisation is inside, when three note theme of Beethoven’s 5th symphony were born he was maybe hot/uncalculated..

After this I ask myself if there is any sense to talk about difference between improvisation and composition...just different way everyone can express his musical world.

5. All your compositions are very well (idiomatically) constructed for guitar. It’s almost impossible to imagine your written guitar pieces performed on any other instrument (like in case of your concerto Cuento Desde La Frontera). Do you compose guitar pieces always using guitar? Are you using sometimes piano? How do you compose for other orchestral instruments?
It depends on the piece and my moment of composing; of course even I use double or triple counterpoint, harmonization of the melody, my knowledge of the guitar makes me know what works or not (of course I check on the guitar if it is possible, sometimes I’m too much “optimistic” in the sense I suppose a too large amount of work of the performer. Sometimes I utilize piano if I write with orchestra; but still I’m convinced that the use of an instrument is not a limitation, with parsimony, in the sense (think like composer, not just move your hands).

6. **Do you think that being a guitarist – knowing all the tricks and patterns on the guitar – is an advantage or rather a curse when writing for the guitar?**

I think that we’re lucky to have the knowledge of a very complex instrument to compose, so we have to take advantage of this skill, to me the difference is only one: if you’ve a composer mind or not; after you can play maracas, you will compose.. ; I mean you can be a conductor and write music not substantial, thinking only about the decoration (only mastering the richness of orchestration.)

7. **You’ve been studying composition with another guitarist improviser and composer/arranger - Roland Dyens. Have you ever encountered problems sharing your guitar pieces with another guitar composer? Was it good to have someone who knows so well the instrument – guitar – or rather disturbing (not much productive/creative)?**

Roland’s knowledge of the possibility of the instrument is amazing, so it was a very rich influence, although he always respects my style of composition, I start studying with him when I was already seeking for my style, so of course I try to get what I need, he told me about some structure of the piece, and some notes or different harmonies he feels, and I feel very lucky I could hear his opinion.

8. **Witold Lutoslawski’s heard John Cage’s Second Piano Concerto on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period,**
the first result of which was his Jeux vénitiens. Have you ever had this kind of experience?

9. Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. At the same time composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on self-repetition? How do you manage writing and being inspired by all sorts of different styles, yet still be yourself?

10. Swedish musicologist Trygve Nordwall noticed that Krzysztof Penderecki composed his “Polymorphii” using electroencephalogram. He plugged one person to an electroencephalogram (EEG) and played his „Threnody of the Victims of Hiroshima” simultaneously recording results from EEG. That became the starting point of a new way in which he notated his compositions graphically. Is the traditional notation finished in your opinion? Or do you feel you are able to express your new musical ideas down in writing using traditional notation? Have you ever encountered problems with notating your music?

11. I have been noticing for a few years now a very disturbing tendency: there doesn’t seem to be much interest amongst the greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative. What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important guitarists choose other new music to perform? What is your advice to young composers?

I think that a performer has to believe in the music he plays, some big names don’t feel connected with some kind of music; I respect that; sometimes it happens that they play only “famous composers, like if they feel responsibility to introduce new guitarist composer’s music and it could happen that they play the “only piece for guitar” by a very famous
composer (and often nobody will remember that); but still I don’t want to generalize, during my life I think I was lucky to meet some incredible musicians that loves my music and do an incredible effort to play new music..

Go back to the theme: unlucky for us (composers) the diffusion of our works it is so much slower than performers, we always write in a way for future audience and musician (more or less);

Still I think we’ve to be much closer with young performer, because there could be more affinity, they are looking for music of his time; about promotion, for example what you’re doing Marek is admirable, produce Video/Audio with high quality and try be heard by the most audience possible. Other suggestion: a well renowned performer wants to waste less time possible; so it is important to send pdf and recording to a lot of them, like concert players are looking for new concerts, composer have to work on their promotion (I admit that nowadays I’m more lazy than years before).

12. **There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists “is the worst possible combination” when it comes to writing significant works for guitar. According to this “theory” Chopin or Liszt will be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What do you think of composers writing for their own instruments?**

Well, I feel that sometimes it sounds like a sort of “Revenge”, Guitarists are discriminated by other musicians, there is a sort of racism.

Say that it is always not fair to generalize; I was talking about the physical contact with your own instrument, very important for a composer to me; and everyone needs an instrument to be introduced to music, tell me a composer and you will be associated to an instrument. So it’s not depending on guitar, but the matter is the composer’s mind, guitar is a tool, from when is a deep knowledge of the instrument you compose for a limitation?? We need to avoid “composers with hands” but this could happen on Guitar, piano, violin and computer.
So it always a compromise between idiomaticity of the instrument and compositional skills (and this is more obvious if we compose in such form like “Studies” for the instrument).

We’re telling the world there are top class performers on the guitar that you can compare with other instrumentalists; so composer who have a guitar formation could be worst? Sometimes I’ve seen some “big names” of the guitar playing new piece for guitar by a “formal and famous composer” and I’ve found totally lack of interest. So I suggest the young performer to discover new interesting music for guitar without prejudice (and a lot of them luckily are doing this)

13. There is a famous line by Arnold Schoenberg: “If it is art, it is not for all and if it is for all, it is not art.” Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde and yet still be fresh and new; OR should it be more commercial/easy-listening/crowd-pleasing; OR should we push ourselves, audiences and players to their limits?

I think to write following a style or a “school” is a sort of defeat for a composer; you have to believe very strongly in what are you doing. I say: be honest with yourself and the music will benefit, no matter the style, deepness, different challenge you can take (I believe to write a one-page piece or a big form could be equally hard).

I think that some of my pieces are very tricky to read and practice, and probably they won’t have the same diffusion of more idiomatic works of mine, so about the question: if “balance is honest, it will work, I think it is not useful to be someone you’re not; to me the final judge of the quality of a composition is the taste/ear/heart of the composer.

14. Do you consider contemporary audiences when writing your compositions or do you create music for future generations?

15. Music of the twenty-first century is beginning to have its own distinct style. Historicism (looking back) and following the styles of the past seem to be the trend. I
have noticed characteristic synthesis of different genres and styles (like collage / patchwork) in today’s compositions. Also composers are tending (and expected) to be more capable of composing well in very different genres, styles. How do you see the evolvement of music composition in the twenty-first century?

16. In the 20th century we have reached the height of complexity in harmony through the atonal language of high modernism. There are no limits in music. Some compositions can be “awful”, “unbearable to listen to” for one audience and “fresh”, “thrilling”, and “inventive” for another. This freedom sounds liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left?

17. You are a composer who wrote the majority of your pieces only for guitar (or guitar with other instruments). Have you ever considered stopping composing for guitar and write (only) for other instruments?

Yes, I’ve consider this, mostly after my years in Paris, through a lot of contacts with other performers and starting to study Orchestration, anyway I remember that a great guitarist, good friend of mine, when I complained about this he told me: Simone this is your hell!

So maybe this is our destiny? We belong to this world; people we admire appreciate what we do. Sure I don’t say we cannot experiment new ways.; in this period I’m writing my second piece for guitar and orchestra (a 3 movement concerto), of course it is very demanding for me to compose than a solo guitar-piece, because I’m not used to doing it often.

Finally...I love guitar, why not offer to her our better ideas; maybe in the future other instruments will arrange our works.

18. Final question: what in your opinion is the future of classical guitar compositions in general? Should guitar remain mainly as a solo instrument? Or maybe guitar can become more of a chamber instrument? As a composer – what would you encourage young composers to explore if they would like to write for the guitar?
Top 5 Influences:

Sources of primary influence on my compositional process will be hard to limit to five. Also, they tend to rise and fall according to my preferences. My top five today would be different in a week. However, I would say a fixed star in my list would be Johann Sebastian Bach. A second, continued source of influence would be Jimi Hendrix. Bach would always be number one for me. Today Hendrix is number two. In the three remaining spots I would choose from Domenico Scarlatti, Thomas Luis de Victoria, Igor Stravinsky, Bela Bartok, Jean Sibelius, William Shakespeare, Billy Collins, Li Po, Vincent Van Gogh, Phillip Rothko and Julian Bream.

PREFACE

I think the best way to begin answering your questions is to start with a general description of my compositional process.

Compositions that are the result of a commission have many of the opening variables built in: instrumentation, duration, performers, location, deadline and details about the occasion like; the opening of a season, opening a hall, opening a series, repertoire for a recording, a piece of repertoire for an artist's season, etc. With any commission I need to know how soon they will need it, how long should the finished piece be, how many musicians will be involved in the performance and who are they and where will it be performed. If I am being commissioned to write a work that uses voice or voices I will also need to know what my text choices are. If using a text some aspects of the formal outline will be imposed by the words. On the positive side of this process I am guaranteed a premiere and I will be paid for my work.

But a commission includes the imposition of limitations that will affect my level of inspiration. If I am commissioned by semi-professional musicians I know that the work will be rehearsed thoroughly but that the professionalism of the performers will need to be
accommodated. If professional musicians commission me I know the work will receive less
rehearsals but superior technical command by the musicians involved.

Generally, when someone pays for a composition they will want to have a say over
the process. They will often innocently suggest what they are looking for in terms of
harmony, melody, complexity, etc. If the limitations are too great or uninspiring you can
refuse the commission or set a price that makes the variables acceptable.

Compositions that are the result of personal inspiration often have their own sand
traps and pit falls. You have no limitation on your duration, instrumentation, content and
process. Because no one is asking for it you only have to please yourself. But, because no
one is asking for it it has a better that average chance of never being performed. Many
composers have dozens of finished works that have never been performed or remain
incomplete because of the realities of time and pressure. You can start a symphony or
concerto, get pages and pages of finished music then get a commission that pays and will be
played. The piece often is abandoned, left incomplete because of the pressures of the
profession. Professional composers rarely turn down a commission since they are in the
business to write music for a living. I will on occasion, write a piece for myself to play or
write a piece for a friend or professional colleague as a gift.

I rarely, if ever, use an instrument when I am composing. Each piece begins by tuning
in to what I am hearing in my mind. I will start with sketching a few motives, melodic lines,
harmony or snatches of rhythm. This is a way of doodling while I focus on the piece to
come. Lately I try and get the first page of music fixed in my inner ear, memorizing all the
details. I will then leave it alone for a day or two; sometimes as much as a week. Then I write
down the first page. Once that task is complete I just try to keep up. At this point I am
mostly just taking dictation – writing down what I am hearing. Under normal circumstances I
compose in the morning. This often feels less like composing and more like catching up with
where the piece has gone while I slept. The progress of the piece is truly dependent on how
well I capture the opening music.

Once the piece is mostly out and written down, I start looking for ways to improve
what I have. I may extend some passages while others may be shortened or eliminated
altogether. I have found that as I get more experienced I do less and less of this kind of
work. I have learned to respect the process of being patient. If the music has gone into my
subconscious, I only damage the piece by trying to force it along. I just have to wait. When
the next music is ready I will know it. Some days I produce nothing while others I will have to scramble to keep up with the flow. Pieces tend to pick up their on momentum. As I get more of the music captured the piece develops its own gravitational field, its own atmosphere, its own unique shape, and its own tempo of revealing itself to me.

Trying to get at the source of where the music comes from is beyond me. In fact, I really don’t want to know. I know how to get a piece started and am thankful that I can reach the double bar. The more I try and “compose” the piece, the more I am likely to mess it up. The process for each piece is subtly different and I try to learn what the piece is teaching me.

It is always my hope that each piece is a new and unique experience. I want each piece to be different and I actually enjoy not knowing how it will turn out or what is coming next. It makes the process more enjoyable to find surprises in the music you compose. The entire pay-off in being a composer is that the process of writing a new piece is fun, moving, exciting, complex, simple, unpredictable and most importantly, new.

Some pieces take a long time to gestate while others come out very quickly. I have examples of works that take months or even years to compose and works that take days. Sometimes I think I am going to write a three-minute piece and it turns out to be twenty minutes. I have found that I must accept what comes and not be willful or stubborn in my approach.

My technique of capturing music involves writing the score by hand. I do very little sketching, for the most part. As the music comes, it comes fully formed and I write it down. As I write each note I have the opportunity to hear it and double check that it is the right choice. I learned dictation by hand and my ear and hand are linked. I have never used a computer, just like I don’t use the piano or guitar. The machines actually get in the way. I hear, I write: pretty basic stuff.

Once I complete a piece I send it off to the commissioner and wait to see if it is acceptable. If no further work is needed I move on to the next piece in the stream. I think you will find most composers tend to live in the world of the piece they are currently writing. I certainly enjoy whatever success each of my pieces earns, but I tend to believe that they earn their success on their own merits.

I can usually hold several pieces in my head but I can only write one piece at a time. I become unfocused if I try and write two or three works at the same time. I can do it, but I
I am not happy and tend to feel very stressed out. Like juggling too many kittens at once. There are so many details to get right in my capturing process that I don’t feel I do justice to the process if I try and do more than one at a time.

Now, let me try and answer each of your questions. I may refer to what I have written above to avoid being repetitive.

1. **Stephen King compares the art of writing to “diggings”: the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be “obtained”, to be cleaned from “superfluous settlings”. Pat Metheny talks about a “great broadcasting station in the sky” to which every composer has a built-in "receiver set". He is not “composing” but is simply writing down pre-existing music which he “receives”. Witold Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He "wipes out" empty spaces on the music staves “uncovering” an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?**

I feel like I am trying capture the piece that is coming through me. Each piece is different so the process is different. It takes technique, energy and flexibility to learn to write down each new piece with its own variables of language, rhythm, harmony, counterpoint, timbre, melody and nuance. I have learned through years of experience to respect each piece and not try and make it something it is not. I can waste hours or days trying to take the piece in a direction I think it should go rather than let the piece teach me to follow where it wants to go. I simply try and get out of the way and write it down.

2. **Your piece for two guitars entitled “13 Ways of Looking at 12 Strings” (13-movement piece almost fifty-minutes long) is a great example of planning the structural and compositional form. Do you first think about the form of the piece, and then fill it later with compositional/improvised materials? Or do you gather ideas first, getting a glimpse of the new piece, before choosing the form?**
The form the finished piece takes is often something I can get wrong if I force it. With 13 Ways of Looking at 12 Strings, the form evolved. I knew from the very beginning that I wanted to write a work that would explore the various aspects of combining two of the same instrument. The final form turned out to be very interesting and expansive. When I started the original title was duo. As it became more complex and multi-faceted, I realized that everything I thought about the piece at the outset was wrong. The finished work dictated the title, the shape, etc. However, I knew within a few days after starting the piece that it would probably end up having between ten to thirteen parts. In my work for guitar quartet titled Fore! I knew it would have four main movements with an introductory movement and an extended closing movement. That work was intended to be a study for a future symphony. The concept was that the four main movements could come in any order and that the performers would determine the order. Additionally, I wanted the four movements to be played without a break – that the entire work was one continuous whole. To control the overall shape I felt I needed the outer parts to be fixed. The challenge was to figure out a way to segue from each of the internal movement to each other and the outer parts. To get a sense of how this works, the introductory movement could go to the first, second, third or fourth movement – if this is to be done smoothly I had to develop material that could lead to each of these movements. In order to not prejudice the performers I designated each movement with a color, not a number. The colors were intended to be neutral, none-judgmental designations. Once the players reached the end of whatever movement they chose I had to develop segue material that could lead not only to the other movements but material that could take that movement to the finale. Once I had developed my technique, then the piece was composed very smoothly. Admittedly, this was a concept imposed onto my normal compositional process. However, as I said at the beginning, it was a study intended to help me develop skills that I would later use in writing an orchestral piece. The final piece turned out to be quite natural sounding without a sense of artificial formal imposition. From the outset I was prepared to abandon the work once I had acquired the technique I was searching for. The actual process of composing that work turned out to be the same as my other works in that I had to capture a multi-dimensional work that could be looked at from different, non-linear perspectives.
3. Many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Your roots are in jazz, rock, and popular music as well. What are your views about the process of creating new works? Is there any space for improvisation?

I love the process of improvisation. I improvise on the guitar every day for pleasure. I seldom use improvisation as a tool for generating a piece of music because I believe my ability to hear is better than my ability to play. In fact, the danger of improvisation is that you will let your fingers lead the ear. When writing complex music with multiple parts, numerous cross-relations and evolving harmony the hands just don’t have the same ability that the mind does. Naturally, the mind can control the hands, but my experience is that the mind controlling the fingers and the form usually results in simplified choices of harmony and melody. Or, it fosters a sense of safe process moves that allow you to not actually improvise but use tools you have already developed. These are a lot like modal flamenco passages that get strung together in newly created chains. I have tremendous respect for my colleagues who can actually improvise. I have learned for myself that I compose in my own way and it does not involve improvisation as a tool.

4. Kimberley Perlak in her PhD titled “Finding a Voice (…)” described you as “non-guitaristic” in the traditional sense (your unconventional approach to harmony, unexpected accidentals, shifting meters, percussive and sonic effects etc.). Yet all your compositions are very well constructed for guitar. Do you always use the guitar when composing for the guitar? Or do you sometimes use the piano?

I compose guitar pieces away from the guitar. However, the reality of the fingerboard and how the hands work are in my DNA. I am a guitarist. I love the guitar, I think about the guitar, I hang out with guitarist, I read about the guitar, I write about the guitar and I play the guitar everyday. It is just a matter of perspective whether I use or don’t use the instrument as a compositional tool. When writing I use the guitar that is in my mind. When I am writing a guitar piece I try keep the process of what I am writing distinct and separate from what I am playing. Nevertheless, when a piece is complete I can’t wait to play it. It is
like unwrapping a Christmas present I have given myself. I know what is there but it is still thrilling to feel it in my fingers.

5. **Do you think that being a guitarist – knowing all the tricks and patterns on the guitar – is an advantage or rather a curse when writing for the guitar? Where is the balance and how do you achieve it?**

It certainly is not a curse. I am also not sure it is an advantage. Given the way I have evolved as a composer it really is neither. The balance for me is not using the guitar when I compose. My knowledge of the guitar is not that much greater than my knowledge of the cello, piano, harp, choir, strings, orchestra, organ, trumpet, etc. Naturally, because I have studied the guitar intimately I have certain affinities for its sound and timbre. I see that as an advantage.

6. **You wrote a great number of works for symphonic orchestras, chamber ensembles and solo instruments. What is your process of composing pieces for other instruments? Do you use the piano? Is it the same or different from how you compose for the guitar?**

One of the important aspects of learning the craft of composing is to study the instruments of the orchestra and beyond and internalize their sound and techniques. Studying the repertoire the performers of the particular instrument prefer; looking at how it is used in solo, chamber, orchestral and concerto repertoire is a good place to start. It is also important to discuss the various instruments with the players who have mastered them. Try to learn how they think and feel about the instrument – what they love about it and what keeps them playing it as a career. Also listening carefully to what they omit and what their musical preferences are. The next step is to write for the various instruments and instrumental combinations and hear what your music sounds like on them. Then you can internalize what you have learned and begin hearing those instruments from the inside. I can never play the flute as well as I can hear it in my mind. I can never play the oboe or clarinet or cello or marimba as well as I can hear them in my mind. Put guitar in the mix and you begin to get the general idea of how this process works for me.
7. You are a professional composer (studied composition with Charles Jones William Bolcom) but also a professionally trained classical guitarist (studied with Christopher Parkening, Alirio Diaz, and Michael Lorimer). It is a very unique combination. What’s more is that you never stopped performing (solo, chamber music and of course with The Oregon Guitar Quartet). I feel from my own experience that it is for the benefit of good composition to be as less attached to your own instrument as possible when creating a new piece. What are your thoughts on the benefits and downsides of being a composer and an active performing artist?

Many composers have maintained an active performing career. It is simply a matter of keeping your technique in some kind of shape. I perform regularly enough that I am never rusty. One aspect of being a performer is that I know precisely how difficult the job of playing music on stage really is. This informs my compositional technique with a profound sense of reality. Performing musicians live with the realities of practicing, rehearsing, performing and doing it over and over again. Composers tend to be a little isolated and can too easily become disconnected from the professional for whom they intend their music. The ones that stay connected to the stage and recording studio tend to maintain a better sense of perspective. Nevertheless, many composers manage to stay away from the concert stage and write outstanding, innovative music. I just love to play music. I always have. I love to walk on the stage and make music – create the living connection with an audience. It is a unique and human part of the craft. I will continue to perform as long as I can. Every time I step onto a concert stage I am filled with gratitude and humility. It is a privilege that is distinct and uniquely different from the process of composing.

8. Have you ever considered or had the desire to change / re-compose old composition(s) of yours? Or do you consider finished pieces “untouchable” and never go back to them?

My belief is that being a composer requires that I move forward in my craft. If I don’t like a work that I have written, too bad. I probably can’t fix it anyway, so why bother. I focus my energy on what is coming through me. One side note is that I tend to tinker on music that I perform. I find little adjustments that become part of my own performance of the piece.
However, I never consider those tinkered parts as adjustments or changes that need to be made to the original. When I finish a performance cycle with a particular piece, I simply put it away and forget the little changes I have made. It is just part of my process. An example is my own playing of Open Up Your Ears. David Starobin made an incredible recording of that piece that really defines it. However, when I started playing it I found myself inserting extra stuff. Sometimes it would be improvised, sometimes planned. I am perfectly happy with the score as published and I am happy to hear it played as published. But, when I perform it I tend to reconstruct it for my own use. I do that because I can, but the written work is what I stand behind and encourage players to use. My inserts are for me. I am not intending to create a new or parallel version. Just a little personalized version for me to play. (I think these personalized versions fold back to my improvisation past. I like to keep a little risk happening in my own performances. Even in my quartet playing I tend to make little changes in my part. Again, it’s little things that I like to do on the spot. However, in my quartet playing I would never endanger the ensemble. The changes tend to be small and unobtrusive. Again, just for me.)

9. You are collaborating not only with improvising musicians but as well with classically trained ones. How important for you is collaborating with other musician(s) during the process of creation? At what stage of writing do you collaborate?

I would say that working in any kind of musical situation where multiple musicians are involved, you become collaborative. I think the type you are talking about is when you expect the participating musicians to contribute original material. When I work in that kind of musical environment I tend to accept whatever ground rules dominate the genre. If I am composing something that requires the musicians to improvise, I try and provide them with enough information about what is expected to allow them to contribute to the style of the piece, blending their efforts toward the overall musical goal of the piece.

10. One of the composers I met during my academic education - David Fennessy once said: “I think most composers would admit privately that composition is largely self-taught” – I agree with him, but I also think that we have to go through the whole academic process of compositional education to realize our full potential. However,
there are some self-taught guitarist-composers who never went through or believe in formal compositional training, yet they succeeded, albeit perhaps only within the guitar world. What are your thoughts on balancing self-education with formal composition education?

I think the role of education is important when it comes to composing. Nevertheless, I also believe that education cannot substitute for producing music, learning from your triumphs and errors, reaching the double bar and moving on. There is a cumulative affect learned only through experience that cannot be taught. However, I believe that composers must study craft and technique. There is so much to learn about counterpoint, orchestration, dictation and ear training, harmony, melody, rhythm, time, phrasing, etc. You can never stop learning from the great masters. I continue to return to the music of Bach, Scarlatti, Haydn, Mozart, Sibelius, Stravinsky, Shostakovich, Britten, Victoria, Morales and Dowland to increase my technical command and appreciation of style and musicianship. Learning is the lifeblood of composers. Only through study can you acquire the skills to learn from your own music. To recognize your voice and advance your art. Craft is the key to enjoying a lifetime of development. I like to think that everyone can improve and continue to learn. Education is the springboard. Whether it happens in an institutional setting, a private setting or through hit or miss; learning and improving has always been one of my principle goals.

11. There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists “is the worst possible combination” when it comes to writing significant works for guitar. According to this “theory” Chopin or Liszt will be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What do you think of composers writing for their own instruments?

It’s a curious thing in that young players tend to play music by Brouwer, Mertz, Sor, Barrios, Tarrega, Regondi, etc. I think any guitarist who dismisses a composer who is a guitarist is just being ignorant or immature or both. It is not limited to young players, though; everyone has a right to their opinion. However, the bottom line is how good is the music that is being composed. If a player dismisses a piece of music categorically, then it is their loss. There will
always be reactionaries who believe more in their own opinion than in what might be a wonderful new piece of music. It is important to understand the distinction between a composer who plays the guitar and a guitarist who composes. The best of all possible worlds is to create a vital, living body of music for our instrument; who composes it is completely irrelevant.

12. Contemporary guitar composers Roland Dyens, Carlo Domeniconi (among others) have been using various extended techniques (re-tuning, all sorts of percussive effects, borrowing techniques from acoustic and electric guitar like hammering, tapping, playing “on the other side of string” etc.) What’s left, or what’s next? What other sounds can be found on guitar?

I have never consciously tried to incorporate extended techniques into my composing as a thing unto itself. When composing I try to capture what I am hearing. Perhaps because of my long and intimate relationship with the guitar and its vast range of timbre choices, I know how to hear into its hidden corners. There are some works where I have had to stretch the range of what the guitar normally does to reach what I was hearing it could do. I think as long as composers explore the breadth of the instruments range, they are going to keep finding new timbre territories.

13. Witold Lutoslawski heard John Cage’s Second Piano Concerto on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period. Have you ever had this kind of experience? What is the source of your inspiration?

The Pacific Northwest had one of the greatest short story writers in the twentieth century – Raymond Carver. In a book of essays titled “Fires” he describes his own writing process. He says that not everything is planned in his own work: that events, plot twists and characters can behave in ways that he never planned or imagined possible. For me this seemed to describe what I had been trying for in my own composing. I started out as a meticulous planner, sketching out details and overall compositional strategies before I began. What inspired me in the Carver essay was the importance of actually not knowing where the material was going to take you and the thrill of not knowing what was going to happen. As
a result, I have tried to develop a compositional technique that allows me to go with the flow. For me, once I learned to follow the music rather than try and lead it, composing has become a much more organic, human process, not to mention more exciting, unpredictable and sometimes just plain fun. I never know what is going to happen and it is incredible. But, you have to listen carefully to what the material is telling you to do and learn which pathways lead to the truth and which are simply terminal tentacles. As Guy Davenport puts it, every force evolves a form.

14. Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. At the same time composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on self-repetition? How do you manage writing and being inspired by all sorts of different styles, yet still be yourself?

I am not sure composers necessarily have to come up with anything new. Perhaps original would be a better description. I often think about the limitations imposed on American blues musicians. They have so very little freedom in the formal conventions of their genre. The coin of the realm for them is personal expression. They accept the conventions of form and content as a given and put their stamp on how they actually shape their own personal versions. Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon were working from the same playbook and yet they are wonderfully individual and express themselves uniquely. For me that has always been the task at hand. I accept the conventions of the classical composer and try to carve out a music that uniquely expresses my own musical thinking. If your musicianship is founded on solid technique and your imagination is given room to develop, your music should end up sounding like something you would like to hear played in concert.

15. There doesn’t seem to be much interest amongst the greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative. What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important
The real answer for me is complex and involves many variables. Without seeming too pedantic I would like to digress with a historica/cultural sidebar. In the 15th century the world was forever changed by the invention of the printing press. This was a huge step forward in literacy. It obviously meant that books could be produced on a scale unimaginable prior to its invention. At the same time music notation developed the ability to indicate time and rhythm as distinct from pitch. This opened the floodgates for composers to write music of multiple parts. It also opened the door for the notation of instrumental music. With all of this in place, musicians who could compose music by writing it down moved to the forefront in the development of more and more complex music. To be more direct, by exploiting the latest developments in technology, composers became the engines that drove musical history. This remained true until the twentieth century. The age of the titan composer was at an end. With the advent of new electronic developments, musicians could record their playing. This new technology developed fairly rapidly, moving the performer into the forefront of musical development. For the first time in the history of music, listeners could hear music from the past anytime they wanted. Home stereo systems brought the music of Brahms, Sibelius, Beethoven, Mozart and many others into the home. We had moved into the age of the performer becoming the new musical titan. Composers had become a less important factor in the production of music. Additionally, the forms of music that were traditionally not notated, like folk music, world music, improvised music like jazz and blues, the spoken word and many others ephemeral art forms could now be captured. Composers provided the literate world with music that could be read and reproduced on instruments if you had the skill. This new age has given us electronic technology that can provide music on demand for those who cannot play a musical instrument or even care to try. Now days you can download files onto your phone and listen to new music almost instantly. The new personal computers come with operating systems that allow untrained users to record, edit and post their own musical experiments. There is a talk that I often give to music educators that involves a small proof of this important paradigm shift. I ask them to write down the names of the five greatest pianists from the nineteenth century. The answers are typically Brahms, Chopin, Beethoven, Schubert,
Schumann and Liszt. Next I ask them to write down the five greatest twentieth century pianists. The names that most commonly come back are Horowitz, Gould, Rubenstein, Richter, Ashkenazy, Van Cliburn, de Larrocha and Hewitt (someone will invariably throw in Libræce). What is telling about these two lists is that the first contains nothing but composers while the second contains only performers. The same set of questions involving the guitar would produce Sor, Giuliani, Carcassi, Regondi, Mertz and Tarrega while the second set would undoubtedly include Segovia, Bream, Williams, Lagoya, Yepes, Starobin, Tanenbaum, Fisk, Barrueco and Kanengiser with the occasional Hendrix, Van Halen, Wes Montgomery and Jim Hall thrown in. Composers are still necessary, but they are not critical. A young guitarist can build a career playing only Baroque and Classical aged music. We have players who have built and maintained astonishingly musical careers playing the lute – an instrument claimed to be extinct at the beginning of the twentieth century. With these new early music enthusiasts came the rebirth of Dowland, da Milano and Weiss. It is all good news in that there is more great music available than ever before. The sheer mass of recorded music has rendered the live concert an endangered species along with composers, who often struggle to find an audience for their important and innovative music. The living tissue for anybody of repertoire is evolution. The lute, while discovering great treasures from the past, is not inventing new ones. There are no more works coming from Bach, Beethoven, Scarlatti, Chopin and Mozart. At some point in the future the pendulum that has swung the new paradigm toward the performer will invariably begin to move back in the direction of the creation of new works. However, that crazy pendulum may shift in a completely different direction and render classical music newly obsolete. My advice to composers, young ones included, is to write good music that can stand on its own merits without an apology or a lengthy explanation as to why it is good. The critical component in my answer is that contemporary music is not the banner to wave. Compose good (and great if you can actually control that part of it) music that is meaningful and it will find an audience. Guitar is a wonderful instrument in that it has a tremendous body of works written for it in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Our audiences can take new. What they can’t stand is ordinary, dull or unexpressive music. Composers have to compel audiences to listen through the power of their music, not their sense of entitlement to an age long gone.
16. There is a famous line by Arnold Schoenberg: "If it is art, it is not for all and if it is for all, it is not art." Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde and yet still be fresh and new; OR should it be more commercial/easy-listening/crowd-pleasing; OR should we push ourselves, audiences and players to their limits?

Schoenberg is wrong. Just because he said it does not make it true. Great art can have popular appeal. Verdi is great art with popular appeal. Tchaikovsky is great art with incredible popular appeal. The list is long. Popularity does not guarantee artistic content, but you can find artistic works that have popular appeal. Beethoven's 5th and 9th Symphonies are nearly universally known from just a few notes. And, they are outstanding musical and artistic achievements. Composers have to develop a musical language that can express their message as directly as possible. If it is a thorny, complex musical language, then the number of people that care to approach it without harm are necessarily fewer. Perhaps a different way to restate the Schoenberg quote: “If it is not good, then it is not art and if it is art, then it is good”.

17. Do you consider contemporary audiences when writing your compositions or do you create music for future generations?

Since I have no idea what a future generation might be, I don’t think there is any way to write for them. When composing I try to please myself. If my instincts are good and my ability to write down what I hear is keen, then I will probably write a piece I would enjoy listening to. If I like it then my job is done. It is up to the piece to win an audience for itself. There is nothing I can do once it is out in the world. (There is a bit of a myth about an audience – there are just people listening collectively. They don’t act together until the piece is finished, then they clap or don’t clap. When a person is listening to a composition in a concert, it is an intimate and immediate experience that can be transcendental. It is the composition speaking directly to them through the medium of the performers.)

18. Swedish musicologist Trygve Nordwall noticed that Krzysztof Penderecki composed his “Polymorphii” using electroencephalogram. (He plugged one person to
electroencephalogram (EEG) and played his „Threnody of the Victims of Hiroshima” simultaneously recording results from (EEG). That became the starting point for a new composition.) You are also innovator of diagram notation. Do you think traditional notation is finished, that it is not enough to write down and convey new music ideas anymore? Have you ever encountered problems with notating your music?

Music notation is always evolving and changing. It is our job to use the symbols presented by our notational system to write our music down. If those symbols and conventions are not enough, invent new ones and extend the system. It is up to us to use it correctly and extend it when we need to. Inventing notational solutions to clearly write our musical intentions is just one of the many jobs composers must master.

19. **Music of the twenty-first century is beginning to have its own distinct style.** Historicism (looking back) and following the styles of the past seem to be the trend. I have noticed characteristic synthesis of different genres and styles (like collage / patchwork) in today’s compositions. Also composers are tending (and expected) to be more capable of composing well in very different genres, styles. How do you see the evolvement of music composition in the twenty-first century?

My opinion is that classical composers are necessarily becoming more eclectic. There are so many musical styles across the range of music one is exposed to, including those from the past. Composers have always been assemblers as well as inventors. The central concern for me is making sure that if I use a musical style that is borrowed, that I do it in a fashion that integrates it into my own musical language. Additionally, I compose what I hear. My hearing is made up of a complex blend of what I have composed, what I have played and studied as a performer and what I have heard intentionally, informally and unintentionally. Since it is nearly impossible to create a musical language without influences, I am shaped by what I take in. I have found that with increased skills and experience, the integration process has become a natural part of my own musical language.

20. **In the 20th century we have reached the height of complexity in harmony through the atonal language of high modernism.** There are no limits in music. Some compositions can be “awful”, “unbearable to listen to” for one audience and “fresh”,
“thrilling”, and “inventive” for another. This freedom sounds liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left?

There are so many ways to still shock an audience. Shocking an audience, if that is what you wish to achieve, is a matter of creating a certain level of expectation and then altering the outcome. Like telling a good joke, the punch line must have an element of surprise and the buildup must be timed with precision. Composers can also surprise an audience, move them, amuse them, elevate their spirits, cast them into despair and entertain them. Any human emotion can be conjured by composers. The trick is to make the listener feel something. You can make an audience feel angry, happy, sorrowful and elated sometimes in the same piece. There is great artistic freedom in composing, but also great artistic responsibility. I think composers are not often aware how emotionally vulnerable listeners are. They are trusting and willing to take a risk, emotionally, in listening to a new piece of music. Composers must learn to honor that relationship if they wish to build interest in their music.

21. **As a composer – what would you encourage young composers to explore if they would like to write for guitar?**

I would encourage them to study the solo repertoire, spend time with a guitarist and listen to recordings from the best of our ilk. I would also encourage them to play a guitar, if they haven’t already – it is a cultural rite of passage.

22. **Final question: what in your opinion is the future of classical guitar compositions in general? Should guitar remain mainly as a solo instrument? Or maybe guitar can become more of a chamber instrument?**

The future of the guitar is incredibly bright. We are living in an age where the guitar is building a vast and varied repertoire of solo and chamber music. It is being used in opera, theater, orchestra and film music. There is so much good and great new repertoire for the guitar that a single player cannot master it. What the piano experienced in the nineteenth
century (Brahms, Chopin, Schumann, Liszt Schubert and Beethoven) the guitar is experiencing right now. As part of my current musical life I am playing in a guitar quartet. I have learned through creating arrangements, transcriptions and writing original music for that combination that the range of expression is vast and the possibilities of what four guitars can do together is seemingly unlimited. Additionally, it has been one of the greatest musical pleasures of my life to spend time with three other guitarists. Performing, recording and rehearsing with them has been a source of remarkable inspiration.

Annette KRUISBRINK (email interview)

Top 5 Influences:

1. So therefore I would say that my first influence was my mother. When I was in her womb she studied the piano for about 4 to 6 hours a day. And since the moment that I was born I heard almost all the piano repertoire every day; Bach, Telemann, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, Rachmaninov, Mussorgsky, Debussy, Ravel, Albéniz, Falla, Ligeti, De Leeuw and many many more. (My mother told me that when she played the piano, I used to sit next to the piano holding my ear against the sideboard, or I sat under the dining table listening to her playing the piano and telling her, when I was only about 5 years old that the acoustic was better there!)

2. As an adolescent I was raised in a Polder (a tract of low land, especially in the Netherlands, reclaimed from the sea or other body of water and protected by dikes). During whole my childhood houses were built in this area and year after year I heard the sound of ramming piles into the clay soil to make the fundament for the buildings. This rhythmical ramming has had a major influence on my composing.

3. From the moment that I played the guitar I loved Spanish music in general and flamenco in particular. The Spanish musical modes are recognizable in my work.
4. My guitar teacher at the Conservatory of Zwolle, Pieter van der Staak (1930-2007) was also a composer. Not his way of writing influenced me but his thorough knowledge and skills of writing for the guitar in combination with other instruments.

5. Later I became interested in ethnic music and especially in the music of (Northern) India. Several works of mine are based on ethnic tone- and rhythmical systems. The Indian philosophy, their instruments, their Raags and Taals can be heard in many of my works (f.e. Raga Suite, Carnatic Interlude, Ahimsa, Matanga, Epitaphe sur ma Pierre Tombale).

Some composers have my special interest but I don't know for sure if, and to what extend they’ve influenced me, so I won't mention any names.

1. **Stephen King** compares the art of writing to "diggings": the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be "obtained", to be cleaned from “superfluous settlings”. **Pat Metheny** talks about a "great broadcasting station in the sky" to which every composer has a built-in "receiver set". He is not “composing” but is simply writing down already-existing music which he “receives”. **Witold Lutosławski** compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He "wipes out" empty spaces on the music staves "uncovering" an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

Yes, like most artists (I presume) I have some similar visualizations. Every single person is a medium to manifest what IS. And all is, have been and will be. In fact it comes to the same thing. So when I ‘deliver’ (note the quotation marks) another composition it is no more than a disclosure of what was already there. The effort of the working process is to unfold rather than to create, like felling yourself a way through the jungle. In this context I would like to compare it with the question to Michelangelo Buonarroti: “How do you know what to cut away?” Michelangelo: “It’s simple. I just remove everything that doesn’t look like David.”

I experience a continuous line in time and space. I jump in somewhere on that line and I stop at a certain point: the beginning and end of a composition (length in time/duration). The art and challenge is not to lose the line out of sight (character and form). After almost each completed composition I have the curious sensation of: how this piece is suddenly there?
Regardless of the complexity and labor intensity. This moment can occur both immediately and a few years later.

2. Contemporary guitar composers like you, Roland Dyens, Carlo Domeniconi (among others) have been using various extended techniques (re-tuning, all sorts of percussive effects, borrowing techniques from acoustic and electric guitar like hammering, tapping, playing “on the other side of string” etc.) What’s left, or what’s next? What other sounds can be found on guitar?

Seek and ye shall find! There are lots more extended techniques that still have to be discovered, I am sure of that. Just take your guitar like as if it is the first time that you hold this instrument in your hands. Explore the sounds, the possibilities, the extended techniques, use different attributes, put it all upside down and for sure after a while you’ll shout ‘Eureka’ (don’t forget to invent a new notation sign for your new ‘discovery’!) There is also still a lot of research to be done on the sounds of a guitar in combination with other instruments. New sounds can be produced and can be experienced when playing for example a Bartok pizzicato on a guitar together with the consonant S spoken through a descant recorder. Or playing a high harmonic on a guitar together with a slap-tongue on a bass clarinet. Though the techniques to produce the effect do exist already for both instruments, the sound sensation can be new. Also luthiers will apply new inventions on the guitar, new shapes, other materials, practical attributes… For example the invention of the 21st century microtonal guitar with its removable frets is quite revolutionary! Another item is the development of the recording technique and the increase of use of all sorts of devices to listen to music. It maybe goes beyond your question but it is important to realize that in the future people will listen more and more to music without ever having heard an acoustic instrument in a live situation! Like some urban kids who don’t know where the milk comes from! Sound engineers can easily manipulate the acoustic sound. Actually nowadays they almost always do. They can change the sound of a guitar and the effects that the player produces on it according to their own taste or to the public taste.

3. You are one of the most prolific composers (in general) I know. You already composed over 300 different compositions. I have a strong feeling every time I’m
studying or playing from your scores that there is very strong percentage of
improvisation. You definitely use guitar during the process of creation. Am I right?
What is the source of your inspiration? Your imagination? Art? Or just...life?

There is not just one source of inspiration for me. It depends strongly on whether I write in
commission (often with certain demands) or for amateurs or for a singer (text), and so on.
My imagination is big, so there is no lack of ideas. Very often the commissioner asks to write
according to a specific theme of an event. Thus this theme is the source of my inspiration.
The art form of poetry is very often a source of inspiration to me as well as events in my life.
And to mention last but not least, funny enough a certain word that I hear or read can be the
beginning of a new composition!

4. Many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of
composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure.
Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What are your beliefs about the process
of creating new works?

I write intuitively as well as according to a specified schedule. The intuitive side, for me it is
not the same as improvisation. When you happen to meet with a strong percentage of
improvisation in my compositions, as you’ve mentioned in your previous question, I would
rather call it intuition. I start a new composition with an idea (intuition), and almost
immediately I analyze this idea and that’s where the ‘calculation’ starts. During the creation
process new ideas appear and so intuition gets mixed with calculation.

5. All your compositions are very well constructed for guitar. Do you compose
guitar pieces always using the guitar? Are you using sometimes the piano? What is
your process of composing pieces for other instruments? Is it the same or different
from how you compose for the guitar?

When I compose for guitar I very often use the guitar during the process of creation. But not
always! I also compose in my head and/or I use the piano and the computer. And when I
compose for other instruments I never use the guitar. For example in my ‘Concerto for Guitar
and Orchestra’ (Opus 44) I composed the orchestral parts from the head and for the guitar part I used the guitar. In fact, composing for orchestral instruments is not that difficult to my opinion, so it is easier to write by heart then. The difficulty lies more in the combination of the orchestral instruments, the orchestration. But this is maybe another issue. I found a very convenient way for me to work: first there is ‘something’ in my head, an idea and a coarse form, which I work out in my head, then I project this on paper, I type the handwriting into Finale (computer notation application), when I am satisfied with these first results I continue by handwriting and after new results I type them into Finale, and so on.

6. Do you think that being a guitarist – knowing all the tricks and patterns on the guitar – is an advantage or rather a curse when writing for the guitar?

I prefer to combine this question with question nr. 13. So you’ll find my answer there.

7. Witold Lutoslawski heard John Cage’s Second Piano Concerto on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period. Have you ever had this kind of experience?

In 1996 when I visited the Spanish Festival de Música Contemporanea in Alicante, for the first time in my life I heard the music of George Crumb. I was deeply impressed by how he works with acoustical instruments and by his transparent way of writing for heterogeneous ensembles. Hearing his music influenced me in a way that I started to concentrate more on sound production, delay of sound and space in music. A kind of similar, but more overwhelming experience I had when hearing Galina Oestvolskaja, her Composition Nr. 2, “Dies Irae” for 8 double basses, piano and percussion (hammer and wood block). Dark, primal force and simple but really powerful rhythmical beats! It made me conscious of the fact that using percussion in music should be always functional.

8. Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. I can easily find some of your works completely different from each other. Your 60+ compared to Matanga followed by Variations or Formula 1 (just to mention solo pieces) are completely different yet I can “hear” in each of them Annette Kruisbrink. At the same time composers like Steve
Reich, Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on self-repetition?

Every new composition of a composer contains elements of self-repetition, self-copying. Because we all carry our own luggage in life. The content depends on when and where one is born, the circumstances in which you have lived and live right now, your genetic characteristics, etcetera. You cannot escape from this. Some composers' characteristics are more obvious than those of other composers. Some composers prefer to use elements in their compositions which are more noticeable than other elements. For example, you mention that despite of my various ways of writing you can recognize my signature. Maybe it is because I use 'not such obviously' recognizable repeating elements in each of my compositions.

When writing in an existing style or genre without adding any personal elements then one can speak of copying. But when a composer DOES add non-stylistic elements to an existing style he/she can be recognizable by putting his/her own signature. Furthermore it depends on who is judging. The listener can have the impression that the works of a certain composer are more of the same whilst the composer notices great differences between his/her own works. So it is not that clear and it is not so obvious to separate the two, personal style and self-repetition.

9. **Swedish musicologist Trygve Nordwall noticed that Krzysztof Penderecki composed his “Polymorphii“ using electroencephalogram. He plugged one person to an electroencephalogram (EEG) and played his „Threnody of the Victims of Hiroshima“ simultaneously recording results from EEG. That became the starting point of a new way in which he notated his compositions graphically. I know you are experimenting for many years now with a graphic way of writing down your musical ideas / visions and trying to give freedom to the performers. Is the traditional notation finished in your opinion? Do you feel you are not capable of writing your new music ideas down using traditional notation? Have you ever encountered problems with notating your music?
Despite of all kinds of inventions to notate music (tablatures, klavarskribo, graphical notation and all other sorts of alphanumeric notations) the modern musical staff system (with Guido of Arezzo regarded as the inventor) is to my opinion a very good and sufficient system in which one can work really refined. Especially when a composer demands an extreme precision of execution. For new, unfamiliar techniques / effects, new characters can be invented and added into the staff. All other notations that need further explanation can be explained in a preface or in a footnote added to the score. In the course of years, many new characters now became standard. Angela Lehner-Wieterink wrote an interesting book about modern guitar notation: Neue Notationsformen, Klangmöglichkeiten und Spieltechnieken der klassischen Gitarre.

When the composer prefers to leave a lot of freedom to the performer and would like to see own initiative of the performer then it is obvious that graphic notation for example is a good and far more effective option.

So there are plenty of choices. I use all kinds of forms, but mostly the conventional staff notation. Sometimes I also use several notation systems in one and the same work.

10. What are your thoughts on getting young guitarists to be interested in and play new and good classical guitar repertoire?

I would prefer to use the term ‘youngsters who play the guitar’ instead of ‘young guitarists’. It will probably reduce the annoyance about this topic immensely!

But a fact is that more and more people have access to all kinds of ‘funny’ computer composing applications making it very easy to ‘fabricate’ a tune or ‘fiddling together’ a prefab ditty. I would say: these are the decades of amateurish fooling and tooling around with the copy and paste buttons!

One of the main causes of playing ‘bad repertoire’ is the general overvaluation of mediocrity which in recent decades only increases. Furthermore there is a lack of good examples provided by public media and we face a general lax attitude and/or incapability of many teachers in this. Also in many societies music is not recognized as education, but as a hobby.

The guitar, not being an orchestral instrument, in all history have been both a folk instrument
and an art instrument as well. Nowadays the guitar, acoustic and electric, appears in almost any non-classical instrumental ensemble!

So there is a lack of good examples of good music for the classical guitar on public media and stages for younger and/or beginners who play the classical guitar!

A teacher’s task is to present classical guitar repertoire to his/her pupils. Concerning knowledge of the classical guitar and its repertoire, most beginners who start to have guitar lessons know nothing at all about this. They probably only know some pop songs and some electric guitar players and that’s why they came for lessons in the first place: that is what they want to learn.

So the teacher should open their eyes and ears!! Who else can do this? And then it turns out that most beginners really appreciate this newly revealed fantastic rich musical world of the classical guitar. They just didn’t know!

Of course one cannot enthuse everyone for the classical guitar repertoire (both classical and contemporary), especially teenagers are often not motivated enough because nobody in their school plays classical music or their interests go to boyfriends/girlfriends or what so ever. It is important that these teenagers keep playing. For this purpose I published two books with attractive music for adolescents: ‘Knock before you enter’ and ‘Access permitted’.

Pieces like this proved to be suitable to keep these youngsters playing the guitar. And fortunately there are many good pieces written in different styles by professional composers.

11. I have been noticing for a few years now a very disturbing tendency: there doesn’t seem to be much interest amongst the greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative. What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important guitarists choose other new music to perform? What is your advice to young composers?

Well, the core of all this lies partly with the system on which societies deal with the arts. As long as the programmers of theaters and concert halls think commercial they will not program contemporary music because they experience that this will influence the amount of people visiting the concert in a negative way. So the programmers will choose the guitarists who play the conventional repertoire. And in order to get concerts the guitarists will choose...
to play the classical highlights of guitar repertoire. And the audience misses the great experience of hearing something really new. To my opinion it isn’t the case that audiences don’t want to hear contemporary music. It is that they need to learn how to listen to new music. So governments, concert programmers, composers, performers and teachers have an educational task to fulfill. For several years, the Dutch government subsidized orchestras and ensembles under condition that a certain percentage of the program should be reserved for contemporary music. That worked well. The audience comes for their favorite music and they get the opportunity to hear new music. My experience when playing recitals for an untrained audience is the same. I always include new pieces in my performances and I am happy to say that the reactions are surprisingly positive. Very often people appreciate the new pieces even more than the conventional repertoire. So performers and programmers should not underestimate the audience and should include new pieces into their repertoire. Programmers and composers can work together by organizing concert-lecture series dedicated to contemporary music in which the composers give an explanation to their new work.

It always takes time to change mentality. Remember that what we nowadays call classical music was experienced as modern in the time that it was made. Also the ‘new music’ back in Segovia’s time till the 80-ties was relatively newer than it is nowadays. Partly because it was frugal launched on the market.

As a professional musician you should never stop developing and learning and you should keep yourself informed about new repertoire. My advice to young composers is: Stick to your own nature and do not try to write for others or for your fellow composers. Don’t wait to be discovered but go and find your explorers. Have patience, work hard, do not get distracted and never stop learning. Do not expect all from a teacher but be a good and observant student too. If you wish to be a musician, devote yourself to music then!

12. There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists “is the worst possible combination” when it comes to writing significant works for guitar. According to this “theory” Chopin or Liszt will be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What do you think of composers writing for their own instruments?
The advantage for a guitarist who composes for guitar is that he/she knows the possibilities of the instrument and thus can exploit this thorough knowledge of- and experience with the instrument. But precisely this knowledge and experience can also lead to freaky compositions overloaded with standard guitar tricks used according the technical preferences and technical skills of the maker.

Compositions composed by non-guitarists, as far as I’ve encountered them, can be put into two categories: Firstly, the works that, one way or another, do not come off. I mean, they are lingering within a same certain mood within one and the same work. One reason could be that the composer only uses a certain number of playing possibilities on the guitar; those he/she is familiar with. One should dare to take more “risk” and one should make a more thorough study of the instrument. At the other hand I also detect large contrasts of playability within one and the same composition and in compositions in general made by non-guitarists (7-notes plaqué chords written for a six-string guitar and other technically unplayable chords versus very simple melodies, diphthongs/triads, etcetera). The work should be presented to and discussed with an experienced guitarist who is familiar with contemporary repertoire.

Secondly, the works that, one way or another, are really special! Composers who write surprisingly different pieces, not chained by the ‘burden’ of knowing common playing techniques. Composers who invent new techniques and effects, sometimes without knowing themselves. Composers who make a thorough study of the guitar and write really well for it.

13. **There is a famous line by Arnold Schoenberg:** “If it is art, it is not for all and if it is for all, it is not art.” Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde and yet still be fresh and new; OR should it be more commercial/easy-listening/crowd-pleasing; OR should we push ourselves, audiences and players to their limits?

Art is transforming nature. The bigger the transformation the further it goes beyond comprehension. Those with enough artistic intelligence, those with a developed discernment and those who have the capacity to be broad-minded will appreciate the, in modern times, general abstract visuals arts and music. The smaller the transformation the more supporters.
To my opinion this is not art but I would name it artistic in case it is good and rubbish in case it is bad. There are skillful artistic composers, art composers and composers who are gifted with both capabilities. All have their function in society! It makes no sense to deny our own nature. Fortunately most composers are aware of their own capabilities and their own limits. In fact it is usually a natural process in time what kind of composer you eventually will be. If a composer creates something against his/her nature then it is forced. The real art is to find and apply into your creations a balance between your artistic skills, your own nature of art and the right degree of attraction for those who are going to study and analyze your creations.

14. Do you consider contemporary audiences when writing your compositions or do you create music for future generations? For example like Schoenberg, he was thinking of his heritage and what he is leaving for the future generations and he doesn’t care about here and now.

I don’t think about audiences at all. I think about the performers. Music should be playable. In this sense I am not talking about difficulty or style but about a composition having a strong attraction to practice it. Then with the performer as a medium it also will appeal an audience. Only then the listener can join with the performer and through him/her with the composition itself and with the composer.

15. How do you see music of the twenty-first century evolving into?

Indeed, nowadays hundreds of new pieces in all styles are launched every day by music publishers, record companies, YouTube, social media to name a few. It is easier and faster to publish, to record, to get access to arts and above all there all kinds of apps making it easier to create and making creation more accessible to more people. It is a completely different time now than it was in the pre-computer period. It’s a jungle with millions of consumers and a huge amount of artists who are all fishing in the same net. The crowd is sipping and zapping around on this planet longing to try and taste all seductive recipes, resulting in a general hastiness, brevity, superficiality and emptiness. Indeed it feels like living in a collage and being part of the creating of a piece of patchwork. When I speak for myself: my interests
are fairly wide and I'm not tied to a concept. Nor do I follow a specific ‘composing school’. I compose in multiple styles; tonal and atonal, for amateurs and pros, from a technically easy level to very difficult levels, from cabaret to extremely seriously, from solo instrument to full orchestra, etcetera. So it may seem like my composing is not based on a particular vision. But the fixed elements in all the diversity of my writing, of which I am constantly aware during the composition process, are: finding the right form, a right dosing of challenges and playability for the performer. The compositions’ elements have to fit basically and logically together, with a natural flow and sound, regardless of the length of the composition or the style in which it is written.

The time and environment we live in influences the kind of creations we produce. There are no bad and good times, no bad and good environments. In previous centuries composers lived far more isolated and were less familiar with the works of colleagues, they were less distracted by extern influences and didn’t have as much history as we have at the moment. But remember that new trends then where probably experienced as being more revolutionary then they do now. Besides that we cannot see the details that took place in the past. When people look back in history they make time boarders by categorizing only the most remarkable, only the recognizable changes into long periods. So when in about 300 years people will look back at the globalized 21st century they might even think it was a rather dull period then.

In all the diversity we think we live in nowadays really good inventive new compositions are made.

16. In the 20th century we have reached the height of complexity in harmony through the atonal language of high modernism. There are no limits in music. Some compositions can be “awful”, “unbearable to listen to” for one audience and “fresh”, “thrilling”, and “inventive” for another. This freedom sounds liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left?

Here I would like to quote Friedrich Nietzsche: “and those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music.”

All music itself is abstract. Not the music itself has the capacity to shock, but the idea behind the music in combination with the mental resilience of the listener/consumer. I am convinced
that the idea, the story behind the music has a great influence on the appreciation of the music. For example Stravinsky’s famous work The Rite of Spring wouldn’t have had the same shock effect at its Parisian premiere in 1913 if the story behind it was not a pagan ritual about the sacrifice of a young virgin. If the story was about for example the Trans-Siberia Railway; the music representing the steaming locomotives and the dancers visualizing the travelers, it probably wouldn’t have had a shock effect at all. Nor wouldn’t it have shocked if there had been no story (non programmatic).

If for instance I would make the audience believe that the unconventional sounds that the performers produce on their instruments when playing my abstract, a-tonal, avant garde piece ‘Jungle Skunk’ (for guitar, stringed instrument and soundtrack), suppose I would tell them that the sounds represent the action of killing all children with Down’s syndrome. People will be shocked! Not by the music but by the sick thoughts of the composer. The expressed thoughts are a taboo, not the sounds. In fact ‘Jungle Skunk’ is music to an innocent story based on a Zimbabwean poem and that is an important factor why, despite of the unknown, unconventional sounds produced on the acoustic instruments in combination with the soundtrack, people do like this music. Music itself is not shocking. Something is perceived as shocking in the minds of the recipients. Due to increasing globalization, multicultural societies and easier access to knowledge, only in Western secular society few taboos are left. When it comes to some other cultures and when it comes to religion there is still a long way to go.

17. Final question: what in your opinion is the future of classical guitar compositions in general? Should guitar remain mainly as a solo instrument? Or maybe guitar can become more of a chamber instrument? As a composer – what would you encourage young composers to explore if they would like to write for the guitar?

The classical guitar does fine! There are a lot of good young players who play on a high level. Aficionados of the classical guitar organize meetings, lectures, concerts, festivals and competitions. I have been a jury member in both guitar and composition competitions and I notice that there are lots of talented musicians! Young people who play with a lot of feeling and write beautiful new repertoire for the guitar. Also, more and more is being composed for solo guitar and guitar in chamber music by composers who are not guitarists. Especially In
these hectic times, the intimate sounds of the guitar will always be appreciated. And finally my final answer to your final question: Be positive and go with the flow! In the near future guitar recitals will be given on the moon!

David LEISNER (email interview)

Top 5 Influences:

Igor Stravinsky
Bela Bartok
Philip Glass
Ad Reinhardt (painter)
Taoism

1. Stephen King compares the art of writing to "digging": the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be "obtained", to be cleaned from "superfluous setlings". Pat Metheny talks about a "great broadcasting station in the sky" to which every composer has a built-in "receiver set". He is not "composing" but is simply writing down already-existing music which he "receives". Witold Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He "wipes out" empty spaces on the music staves "uncovering" an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

This is the image I have always had: The seed of a composition usually comes to me in a moment, unbidden and by surprise. Within this seed is a good deal of content and detail of the piece to be written. The process of composition for me begins with the slow unraveling of the contents of the seed, as there is an enormous amount of material contained within this tiny moment, this little kernel.

2. You said that “the form is very important to me because I feel that if you hang the content of what you have to say on some kind of form, whether it is an established
form like a sonata, or a new form, or a form that you may not quite be able to articulate, but can sense tangibly, then your piece is more enduring.” When the form of the pieces comes in? Are you thinking about the form from before writing the very first note of new piece? Is there space for improvisation?

In most cases, the form emerges out of the content. Over time, the music that occurs to me suggests a form or a sense of the form, and I follow its wishes. There have only been a few times in my composing life that I remember when I’ve chosen the form before beginning the piece - a couple of passacaglias and my guitar Sonata.

The "seed" that I spoke of and the form are only the blueprints for the work. I am always open to new directions and diverging pathways when they present themselves. When this mental "improvisation" occurs, the piece usually opens up and starts to take on a life of its own, which I respect and then increasingly relinquish my control.

3. Following the last question - many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. Composers like Andrew York, Roland Dyens or Carlo Domeniconi using improvisation almost entirely during the process of creation. Could you tell me more about your beliefs and process of ‘creating’ new works? How do you balance improvisation and structure / form?

Personally, I don’t trust my sense of physical improvisation, because I would tend to fall into old, learned patterns of playing, rather than create something new. That is why much of my composing occurs either with only pencil and paper in front of me or at the piano, an instrument on which I have no technical foundation. It is also an instrument in which all the notes are clearly and logically laid out before you, and its sonority is neutral. But I am very much in favor of mental improvisation, constantly turning the possibilities around in my head, as I play with the ideas and see what comes of it.

Your word, "balance" is extremely important to me. The balance of improvisation and structure/form is what I strive for. Everyone’s image of what this balance consists of is
different, I would think, but for me, the ideal is balancing the freedom of mental improvisation and play with the rigor and stability of the architectural concerns. One need only be conscious of this balance, I believe, in order to maintain it.

4. I noticed that some of the composers – like Villa-Lobos or Annette Kruisbrink - are extremely prolific with their writing (can produce large amount of works in short time). I noticed you like to extend the time of the process. What role does time have in the process of composition for you?

Once I get going, composition usually comes very quickly for me. I spend a long time "incubating" the piece, gathering ideas and sounds in my head. Then, when I sit down to write, with a good deal of the "seed" unraveled in my mind, the piece usually comes out in a white heat. This is perhaps the result of my needing to juggle both careers of composer and performer, combined with my being the kind of composer who requires complete focus on composition when I write. So, rather than spreading out my composition over time, I will set aside certain times of year in which I do nothing but eat, drink and dream about the composition at hand. In this way, the time of composing the essence of the piece becomes very concentrated, intense and utterly timeless. Then there comes the more leisurely time, by necessity, of revision - the moment when I must assess the product of my drunken reveries in the clear light of the next day.

5. I've read (Soundboard Interview 2007) that you almost never use guitar when composing (for guitar), only piano. Since your pieces fit very well to the guitar (written in most idiomatic way) how does the process of composition look like? Are you adapting pre-written compositional materials to the guitar or; during the composition process on the piano, do you carefully and constantly imagine the guitar fretboard?

Since I've played guitar for most of my life, I have an instant image of how a musical passage looks and feels on the guitar. It is so quick as to be almost simultaneous with playing the note or chord on the piano.
6. Following the last question: being a composer – what is the most challenging for you in writing for the guitar?

Writing for solo guitar is the hardest thing for me. It is so much easier to write chamber music with the guitar, where the responsibility for variety of timbre, pitch, texture, sonority is distributed among the instruments.

7. Have you ever considered or had the desire to change / re-compose old composition(s)? Or do you never go back but rather consider the finished piece as untouchable?

Generally, I let go of a piece once it's done and consider it a product of its period. However, there have been a few times that I can think of when I've gone back to revise. A couple of my Four Pieces for solo guitar were early pieces that I decided to revise considerably many years after their composition. Dances in the Madhouse had some revisions after its first printing. And the piano parts for two of my early song cycles for voice and piano underwent considerable revision later, when I was more confident of my piano writing.

8. You also wrote pieces for piano, voice and other instruments. Regarding the compositional process: how do you compose for other instruments compared to writing for the guitar? Are you collaborating with other instrumentalists / singers during the process of creation? If yes - at what stage? If not – why not?

As for the voice, I rely on my own considerable experience early in my life as both a singer and a choral conductor. I have a natural sense of how the voice works, what makes a singer sound good, and how to set texts (although Virgil Thomson once gave me an amazing lesson in text-setting that masterfully taught me in the space of about an hour just about all I'd ever need to know on the subject).

As for instruments, one must largely rely on knowledge gleaned from orchestration texts and teachers. Kent Kennan's book on the subject has always been my main resource, and the great composer and orchestrator, David Del Tredici, was the perfect teacher for me in private
One cannot constantly be bothering instrumentalists with questions when, say, writing a work for orchestra - it would be impractical, as there would be too many questions. But the occasional question can certainly come up. Since I write so quickly, both by necessity and by nature, waiting for the answer to a question like this is often not possible. Once in a while, it is so urgent that I cannot go further with composing until I have an answer, but mostly the questions are asked at the revision stage. Overall, I feel it is important to have done my "homework" on the writing for the instruments at hand. Of course, once a piece is finished and delivered to the performers, I am very open to suggestions from them as to how to make it better.

9. Being a skilled guitarist like yourself might have some positive and negative sides when it comes to writing for your own instrument. Do you think that being a guitarist – knowing all the tricks and patterns on the guitar – is an advantage or rather a curse when writing for the guitar?

The danger for me is writing music that might be too difficult for many guitarists to play. I sometimes have to temper my own tendency to go for the virtuosic challenge.

Of course, just like my experience with singing, my experience with playing the guitar gives me an intimate knowledge of what sounds and feels good on the instrument.

10. You described yourself primarily as self-taught as both a guitarist and composer. Do you think it is wise to study composition formally at universities or rather let natural talent develop freely? What are the side effects (both bad and good) of studying composition formally at an educational institution in your opinion?

There are pros and cons to the academic study of composition. On the positive side, there is much to be said for a solid, rigorous training in the fundamentals of composition - theory, harmony, counterpoint, form, orchestration. With a strong academic background in these areas, a composer should be equipped to write anything he or she desires. The danger, of course, is that one might be so overwhelmed with rules and the history of great music that one might have trouble finding their own voice.
The auto-didact can learn many of the same things on their own, and may find her/his own voice more directly. One might come to compositional solutions less cerebrally and more by a natural "feel", and maybe even write music that is more emotionally powerful. But, on the other hand, the lack of a proper hierarchical training of theory and technique might leave holes in the foundation that are difficult to fill later in life, leaving the composer with a lack of security and self-confidence.

The path I chose is simply the one to which I gravitated. It wasn't a conscious choice. I would never recommend the self-taught approach to anyone other than the person who can't help but travel in this direction.

11. There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists (like you and me) “is the worst possible combination” when it comes to writing significant works for guitar. According to this “theory” Chopin or Liszt will be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What do you think of composers writing for their own instruments?

I believe that it is EXTREMELY important, if not essential, that composers write for instruments other than the one(s) they play. If they don't, their work may become very narrow and solipsistic. And composing for other instruments can only bring a greater breadth to writing for the guitar when one returns to it.

Guitarist/composers also run the risk of limiting the scope of their imagination by writing only for an instrument as limited, I'm sorry to say, as the guitar. We must face the fact that, unlike the virtually limitless possibilities of the piano, to which a composer like Chopin could easily devote most of his writing, the guitar is bounded by volume, idiosyncratic difficulties, pitch range, a wildly uneven quality of tone on different strings in different positions, etc., etc. Certainly, some of these limitations may be turned into strengths, and this is not to say that it's impossible to write an enormous variety of work for our beloved instrument. I'm
only saying that a composer should be very wary to write only for the guitar, understanding its inherent limitations.

When a non-guitarist composer writes for the guitar, they would tend to write with a certain freshness that is unfettered by guitaristic habits and clichés. (And this is one of the reasons why I rarely use the guitar when writing for it). For example, whereas a guitarist might be afraid to write contrapuntally for the guitar and write more "vertically", a non-guitarist might think counterpoint first and then figure out how to make it work on the instrument. In the same way, a guitarist might voice a chord in ways to which we are accustomed, but a non-guitarist might voice the chord more "musically". Or a guitarist might resort to figures of accompaniment that are common or readily fit the fingers, whereas the non-guitarist might come up with an original accompaniment figure that might feel strange to the fingers at first, but in the end breaks through a barrier.

As to the question of a guitarist writing a "significant" work for the instrument, there is no reason why this cannot happen, and it has happened in a number of cases already. But the chances of a truly significant work, in the sense of the larger world of music, coming from a non-guitarist are greater.

12. Contemporary guitar-composers very often use extended techniques (re-tuning, all sorts of percussion effects, borrowing techniques from acoustic and electric guitar like hammering, tapping, playing “on the other side of string” etc.) I haven’t notice many of those techniques in your works. What is your approach to extended techniques?

I don’t enjoy either creating or listening to sound effects for their own sake. They need to have a musical reason for being. While there might be fewer examples in my work than in some others, there have been a good number of times when I felt the musical urge or necessity to use some "extended techniques". They all felt like natural extensions of the musical idea. Examples in my guitar compositions are: the vocal "Shhh" in the last movement of Labyrinths, playing on the other side of the fingered notes in “Episode” in Four
Pieces, playing above the fingerboard in the slow movement of *Extremes* for flute, clarinet and guitar and the second of the *Three James Tate Songs* for medium voice and guitar, playing behind the nut in the third song of *Confiding* for high voice and guitar and the fifth song of *West Wind* for high voice and guitar, percussive tapping in the last movement of *Dances in the Madhouse* for violin or flute and guitar, and alternative flute trills in *El Coco* for flute and guitar.

13. **Witold Lutoslawski heard John Cage’s Second Piano Concerto on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period. Have you ever had this kind of experience?**

No, nothing so dramatic. The closest thing in my experience is frequent and intense encounters with minimalist and reductive art - the black paintings of Ad Reinhardt, the “zips” of Barnett Newman, the light works of James Turrell, the meditative works of Florence Pierce and Constance DeJong, the monochromes of Anne Truitt, etc. - have brought me closer and closer as a composer to the reductive esthetic.

14. **Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. Composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on self-repetition? Where is the line between personal style and self-repetition?**

The closest I have come to a conscious personal style is the recent works of the last 10 years or so in a reductive style. My focus on music that is concerned with repetitive structures, and slow to evolve (but not too slow!) has felt like it is more specifically Me than anything else I’ve written. At the same time, people who have heard concerts of my music, in which are examples of both my older and newer styles, have often said that it is all clearly music by the same composer, that it all shares a similar sense of style. I take this as evidence perhaps of something consistent in my creative core, but I’m the last person to be aware of it.

Self-repetition? It would seem to me to be inevitable. We are finite beings.
15. There doesn’t seem to be much interest amongst the greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative. What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important guitarists choose other new music to perform? What is your advice to young composers?

What draws an audience to read contemporary fiction or contemporary poetry? What do those writers offer that we composers don’t? This may be something for a young composer to contemplate. But then again, if a composer can write something that is truly expressive of him/herself in this particular moment in time, then there will be an audience for this music.

Performers can always find increasingly more effective ways of verbally introducing new music to audiences. For better or for worse, a listener's interest often enters through a door of words. Presentation is the key to inviting an audience in.

16. There is a famous line by Arnold Schoenberg: "If it is art, it is not for all and if it is for all, it is not art." Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde or maybe not too commercial but at the same time tonal, fresh, new, creative OR should we push ourselves, audience and players to the limits?

Every composer must find her/his own balance. Another angle on Schoenberg’s statement might be: if your art is about the audience, it is not art. However, I might imagine this as being a spectrum of possibilities, rather than the black and white distinction of art or not-art. A composer’s personal experience of life is unique. The more pure the composer’s expression of that experience is, the more an audience will recognize freshness and originality.

17. Do you consider contemporary audiences when writing your compositions or do you create music for future generations?
My goal is to write music that is true to myself, effective in its communication and built to endure.

18. **Music of the twenty-first century is beginning to have its own distinct style.** Historicism (looking back) and following the styles of the past seem to be the trend. I have noticed characteristic synthesis of different genres and styles (like collage / patchwork) in today’s compositions. Also composers are tending (and expected) to be more capable of composing well in very different genres, styles. How do you see the evolvement of music composition in the twenty-first century?

The trends you mention are, I believe, symptomatic and typical of the transitional nature of a turn-of-the century period. I would think that music of the 21st century will probably increasingly reflect the influence of the computer, either directly or indirectly, as it is the essential new ingredient of our era. Music, for example, that engages multiple senses or presents multiple sound images simultaneously (akin to multi-tasking) will, I imagine, become more prevalent. Or perhaps it may go in the opposite direction - music that requires more focus and attention as life around us becomes faster and more bewildering - this is the direction my own music has been going.

19. **Following the last question: in the 20th century we have reached the height of complexity in harmony with the atonal language of high modernism. There are no limits in music. Some compositions can be “awful”, “unbearable to listen to” for one audience and “fresh”, “thrilling”, “inventive” for another. This freedom sounds liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left?**

Most of the great composers have had a lively capacity for surprise. I imagine that this will not change. While there is perhaps "nothing new under the sun", there are endless new ways of expression. Shock and iconoclasm are often an integral part of art in all its forms. I trust artists will continue to instinctively gravitate toward these kinds of liberation, although
my personal hope is that it is not for its own sake, but rather part of the organic creative process.

20. Final question: what in your opinion is the future of classical guitar compositions in general? Should guitar remain mainly as a solo instrument? Or maybe guitar can become more of a chamber instrument? As a composer – what would you encourage young composers to explore if they would like to write for guitar?

Throughout my career, it has been my hope and expectation that guitarists would become much more active in chamber music, getting out of the "ghetto" that is the world of the solo guitar. Other instrumentalists play in orchestras or play a good deal of chamber music and are all the more intelligent and versatile for this breadth of experience. While there certainly has been an increase of chamber music activity in the guitar world, it has been far slower than I expected, and the audience for it, to my great surprise, also appears to be smaller than for solo concerts. As guitarist, listener, teacher, presenter of guitar chamber music concerts and composer who has written a lot of chamber music with the guitar, this puzzles and disappoints me. With the development of fine amplification equipment that compromises very little the sound of the instrument, there is no reason why the guitar can't be an equal partner to all other instruments. The guitar as a solo instrument has its limits, but as a chamber instrument, its possibilities are virtually infinite.

My advice to young composers who might write for the guitar is: please write more chamber music (i.e., guitar with other instruments, not just other guitars), and don't be afraid to explore counterpoint on the guitar, as it is likely to lead you to music of greater substance. Also, the guitar is quite an interesting source of timbral possibilities - don't forget to take advantage of this.

Ben VERDERY (email interview)

‘Top 5 Influences:
Literally everyone I know can influence me, everything I hear can influence me, it all is stored somewhere in my brain- being, some obviously more concretely-firmly than others. Here is a list in no particular order and incomplete. I reluctantly have answered this question!

1. Bach and many, many western composers spanning centuries
2. Rock Music- African American music particularly Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles and Aretha Franklin
3. World music of many varieties, Indian and Celtic
4. Religion: Buddhism and Christianity
5. Teachers: Fred Hand, Leo Brouwer, Anthony Newman, Seymour Berstein

1. **Stephen King** compares the art of writing to "diggings": the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be "obtained", to be cleaned from “superfluous settlings".  
   Pat Metheny talks about a "great broadcasting station in the sky" to which every composer has a built-in "receiver set". He is not “composing” but is simply writing down already-existing music which he “receives”. Witold Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He "wipes out" empty spaces on the music staves "uncovering" an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

I'm not sure I have a similar feeling as described above by those three giants but I would agree with what they say to a degree especially Mr. King.  
I usually begin a piece with feelings of excitement, wonder and uncertainty. I know I have to begin and that in and of itself can be difficult. Sometimes as they say, when you commence a work or any project you are 50% on your way to completion.  
I usually am thinking about the piece quite a lot prior to writing. I will be thinking about its form and or its emotional content. I think about the person for whom I am writing the work and their style of playing.  
That having been said, each new piece is usually its own journey. How I begin a composition today may not be how I would have begun yesterday. My composing methods have definitely changed over the years.
2. You said that “I’m always combining my rock and classical influences (...) I love canon. I love stretto. (...) I start with a complete idea, but after a few measures it becomes clear to me where I’m going”. When does the form of the piece come in? Do you think about the form before writing the very first note of a new piece or after?

Through the years it has varied. In the case of an early piece like Capitola, it was clear from the beginning that it would be in rondo form especially since it was modeled after François Couperin’s Les Barricades Mysterieuses. My composing methods have definitely changed over the years. Currently I think about form before, during and after. I am constantly questioning the form of all of my works.

3. You said in one of your interviews about your compositional process: “I’ll improvise to begin”; some of your chamber works include collaborations with improvising musicians. Your roots are deeply in rock music and you seem to use improvisation extensively during the process of creation. Many composers however don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. Could you tell me more about your beliefs and process of ‘creating’ new works? How do you balance improvisation and structure / form?

Wow, these are all such involved questions! All in life is constantly changing. We know that and yet we resist it like mad. No one piece I write really begins the exact same way as I alluded to in the first question. I don’t really have a system of beginning a work but I do have creative processes that I turn to and one is most definitely my personally style of improvisation. I would hardly call myself an improviser. I am perhaps a “want to be” improviser. I definitely have an improvisational spirit.

All students should improvise on some level, ANY level, No JUDGEMENT! It could be rock, jazz, figured bass, fugues if you are that skilled, free Improv, atonal improv, it does not matter. I hate to quote the folks at Nike whose sneakers I wear, but we all should “JUST DO IT!”
I think I read once John Adams (one of my favorite living composers) saying that all of his pieces essentially start from some sort of improvisation at the piano but I would hate to misquote him!

To a degree I think many pieces do start that way. A fragment of a melody or a progression comes to you either away from or with the instrument in your hands but it arises from sitting down and essentially improvising or it could even be “noodleing”. I think Roland Dyens told me some of his best ideas come to him back stage waiting to play a concert improvising with the guitar in hand.

I might find a group of notes and play them as an arpeggio or improvise- discover a harmonic progression. These can often be the starting point of the piece.

I wrote a piece three years ago entitled Standing In Your Own Light for Koto and guitar. It is a ground. In that instance I knew it would be a ground and so I began with that parameter. Knowing it would have a ground bass line I began choosing the pitches and there was less improvising as it were at the outset.

As for employing improvisation in a formal work, I have really enjoyed having that element in certain pieces but I knew the performers quite well and respected their improvisational abilities.

I was so excited to see that Magnus Linberg asks for a cadenza in his piece Mano A Mano. I have coached the work twice and believe the cadenza works beautifully. I am greatly inspired by that and the work in general.

One of my heroes Leo Brouwer has in his music of the 70’s some improvisational like elements. For example in Espiral Eterna there are passages where the performer is given the pitches but can improvise the duration of the pitches and the dynamics. He gives you an outline as to how he wants the passage to be shaped but the performer is encouraged to be creative. He or she must be sensitive to the form and not “overdo it” as it were.

In Ellis Island (a work for guitar ensemble) I have a free sound improvisation section in the middle of the piece directly inspired by work I did with Leo. In addition, there’s an electric guitar solo at the end of the work. In that case I didn’t really know the ensemble and had to be confident that the improv would work within the structure and trust the conductor to “conduct” the improv in a musical manner. The same with the guitar solo at the end. I give guidelines for the improv similar to what Leo does.
Ingram Marshall wrote a concerto for Classical and electric guitars for me and Andy Summers. In this piece he had quite an extended Cadenza in which he asked for an improvisation but gave us certain modes to use in the improv. So it was an improvisation with pre-determined pitches. I thought it worked wonderfully. I will soon learn a duo piece by Javier Farias written for myself and Eliot Fisk in which we both have to improvise in different places in the work. In this case he gives the scales he wants us to play in the given measures.

I can be in agreement with those who find that improvisation can mar the form of a work. It can be a dangerous path to go down and in the wrong hands an improvised section can have the audience looking for the exit sign!! I have attended concerts where the improvisation has me thinking ..." ah, waiter, check please!!" It all really depends on the piece and the performer and that is what makes it exciting. I’m certain there will be more and more improvising in future works for the guitar.

4. Staying with the compositional process – I noticed that some composers, like Villa-Lobos (in which you said he “has been a big inspiration” for you) are extremely prolific with their writing (can produce large amount of works in a short time). What role does time have in the process of composition for you?

Generally I work well with deadlines. Ezra Laderman once told me many composers would not get anything done without them. I respond to deadlines but most of my music have been composed with an opened ended schedule.

When I set out to write, I do so with a terminating date in mind. I generally set aside a time to compose free of any concerts or even practicing the guitar. I cannot keep up my guitar playing and compose at the same time. Composing is all consuming. In the set time I have allotted myself to write the piece, I try to complete the piece. I always allow some extra days for revisions.

That having been said, a piece is only finished when it is finished. I don’t “rush “through it just to get it done by a certain date. A certain amount of time is spent away from the piece and that is often when many good ideas arise within the process. Leaving the work and walking or doing the dishes thinking about it can often be when certain problems are solved. Consequently the dishes may not be so clean!!!
Time is always moving so its role is ever present.

5. **All your compositions are very well constructed for guitar. It’s almost impossible to imagine your written guitar piece performed on any other instrument.**

Do you compose guitar pieces always using guitar? Are you sometimes using the piano?

The guitar is always by my side when I am writing anything. It is a great friend. I do a fair amount of singing while composing. The Sibelius program also helps tremendously. Whatever it takes for me to write the best most truthful music, I will do. In the end, all that matters is the piece you compose not so much how you wrote it. Berlioz was said to have had his guitar by his side when he composed and did orchestrations.

6. **Do you think that being a guitarist – knowing all the tricks and patterns on the guitar – is an advantage or rather a curse when writing for the guitar?**

Often that is where a young guitar composer will embark upon the creative journey. Some wonderful guitar pieces are the result of tricks and licks.

If a guitar composer composes enough he or she will most likely start to look elsewhere for beginning material. There is nothing “wrong” with tricks and licks as jumping off points or even main material. It’s what you do with them, how you develop them that will make them into a piece worth listening to.

In addition, one can compose at the level of one’s playing and be thinking too heavily about the guitar aspect of the piece and not the inherent musical aspect of the piece. Studying great guitar compositions by non-guitar composers: Britten, Takemitsu, Ginestera, Espere, Berio, Linberg, Martin, Reich, Marshall, Walton, to name a few, can be illuminating and help as a guide to thinking-composing outside the guitar box as it were. I have learned extensively about the guitar through the non-guitarist composers who have written for me.

7. **You wrote a multi-movement work entitled “Capitola, CA” scored for solo guitar and mixed instrument ensemble. What is your process of composing pieces for other instruments? Is it the same or different from how you compose for the guitar?”**
For the record, Capitola was one of a set of fifteen pieces entitled Some Towns and Cities. The CD has the same title.

Generally it is the same. I have to study more when I compose for other instruments. I always try to "workshop" the piece after I have written it. I want to make sure that the writing works for the piece as well as the given instrument. I rely a lot on the player to guide me during this workshop period. I have been open to changing notes and rhythms if it helps the music and the player.

8. Have you ever considered or had the desire to change / re-compose old composition(s) of yours? Or do you consider finished pieces "untouchable" and never go back to them?

Just three days ago I rewrote a small passage in Now and Ever which was written for and recorded by David Russell. I have made several other changes in that work since the recording.

It totally depends on the work but I am a "tinkerer".

Recently I revised the ending of the third movement of Tears FOR Peace for guitarist Ray Zhou who will be recording it. I like the revisions and think the piece is much better than the original, which is recorded on the CD Start Now.

In general, I almost always do some sort of revisions.

9. You are collaborating not only with improvising musicians but as well with classically trained ones. How important for you is collaborating with other musician(s) during the process of creation? At what stage of writing do you collaborate?

I show the musicians the piece when it is finished. At that point I am very open to suggestions.

I’ve never shown a player the music mid composition. I’m way too vulnerable at that time.

10. Could you tell me more about your compositional training e.g. your mentors etc. Do you think it is wise to study composition formally at universities or rather to let
natural talent freely develop? What are the side effects (bad and good) of studying composition formally in your opinion?

I have never studied composition formally but have taken informal lessons as it were from friends. I still do this and I’m sure on some level will continue to. It is the same with my playing. A couple of times a year I will ask for coaching on certain pieces by an 88 year old pianist named Seymour Bernstein.

All of my friends have either studied formally or at least taken some lessons from this or that person. I don’t see any down side to studying composition. Knowledge can only help your writing. Of course a bad teacher could potentially stunt your growth for a period but hopefully one would move on and seek out other teachers.

11. There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists (like you and me) “is the worst possible combination” when it comes to writing significant works for the guitar. According to this “theory” Chopin or Liszt will be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What do you think of composers writing for their own instruments?

Composers who write for their own instruments will have unique artistic-sonic insights. Because of their intimate relationship with the instrument, they can bring out extraordinary colors, timbres and techniques that most Non guitarist composers would simply never think of. I say most. Composer Elizabeth Brown wrote the duo “Atlantis “for Guitar and Theremin for myself and her (it’s on You Tube) involving a technique I would not have thought of.

Worrying about writing a “significant” work or being considered as we say in the U.S. a “Legit” composer will only create obstacles to writing beautiful music from your heart. You mentioned Paganini, Chopin and Liszt. In our world Barrios comes to mind. Was Barrios a ‘legit’ composer or just a “poser”?!!!

At the end of the day or at the beginning of the day for that matter, who really cares? It is only important that he gave us authentic and beautiful music.
Stay true to your artistic vision and write the music you hear. No one wants to hear music that lacks authenticity. If you are a guitar composer, great!! That is who you are. If you want to write symphonic music and chamber music, great! Do it!

One’s music will be judged over time and we are not the critics. Our task, our joy is to just keep writing. Perhaps a work in time will be thought of as “significant” by the guitar playing public but it should not be our concern. Being a good composer and writing music from your heart and mind is all that matters whether it is for one instrument or many. Louis Armstrong said there are two types of music, good music and bad music!

12. Contemporary guitar composers like you, Roland Dyens, Carlo Domeniconi (among others) have been using various extended techniques (re-tuning, all sorts of percussive effects, borrowing techniques from acoustic and electric guitar like hammering, tapping, playing “on the other side of string” etc.) What’s left, or what’s next? What other sounds can be found on guitar?

All of these techniques-tunings are means to an end. Alternate tunings really inspire me. They have helped me write the piece I hear. Prepared guitar is wonderful when it is used convincingly. The piece has to work whether it is in standard tuning, scordatura or prepared guitar or played with a stone found from the Himalayas!

I can’t say what’s next but as Woody Allen said when asked if there was an afterlife:

“I don’t know but I’m bringing a change of underwear”

13. Witold Lutoslawski heard John Cage’s Second Piano Concerto on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period. Have you ever had this kind of experience?

Yes, one example was when Ingram Marshall wrote me Soepa for Digital delay and loops. I have recently brought the piece back into my repertoire and am reminded what a truly innovative and expressive work it is.

Soepa introduced me to the creative use of electronics. In the third movement Ingram has the performer playing at different tempi from the delay. Doing this creates interesting different rhythmic patterns. This was revelatory to me. Ingram and my friend Jack Vees who
also wrote a digital delay piece for me on the same CD Soepa have been big influences and substantially changed my compositional outlook.

I wrote two works inspired by Ingram and Jack’s works one called Be Kind All the Time and Phillipe’s Center. Both are up on You Tube. (Phillipe is spelled wrong in the title, ugh!)

14. Composer must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. Composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on self-repetition? When does your own style stop and self-repetition start?

I’m not concerned with having a style only with writing the best most truthful music I can at any given point. That having been said, we all have certain compositional “moves” that may result in a noticeable style. I can favor certain intervals like the minor second, which is quite prevalent in a number of pieces. I work in modes more than not. I also favor time signatures like, 7/8 ad 5/8.

As for repeating myself, myself, myself, I’m sure I do it all time. In general, since I don’t write as frequently as most composers, I may repeat myself a little less. When I sense I am repeating myself I try to go in a different direction. For example I had two commissions in the summer of 2012 back-to-back and the materials for the pieces were consciously entirely different. One was based on bird calls with a quote from Milan and the other was a ground. If you write a lot of music year in and year out, you are bound to repeat yourself to some degree. Sometimes in searching for a type of expression one has to repeat oneself to finally arrive at the desired artistic destination. We can see this alot with visual artists. I can’t speak for the composers you mentioned but must say I love a lot of their music! Even when they do repeat themselves there will be something a little different from the previous piece.

15. There doesn’t seem to be much interest amongst the greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative. What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important
guitarists choose other new music to perform? What is your advice to young composers?

I have been programming living composers’ music on my recitals since I can remember. My models were Julian Bream who every year killed himself to commission, learn and premier a new work and Leo Brouwer who played other’s works and his own. I am not alone or unique in doing this.

I am doing what really interests me. Many composers write for me and I am excited to share their works with whomever decides to listen.

We must be ourselves. It takes time to figure who we are as artists. It requires being quiet and listening to your inner voice and following what really excites you.

Audiences don’t want to hear what you think you “should” play. They want to hear what you love to play even if it is new to them. I have found with proper explanations before a work, audiences have been delighted and excited by most of the music I have presented, Certainly not all, but most. Presentation and skillful programming is critical. They can in addition be intrigued to hear you are experimenting with a work, sensing you are on some sort of artistic journey and they are along for the ride. This is partially what I found hearing Julian Bream year in and year out in New York. It was exhilarating to think “what new work will he premier this year?”

I had a student at Yale who really did not like any new music that was not very tonal and compositionally conservative. He loved the standard rep and recorded it. That is who he is. I admire him for that.

The only advice I have for young composers is what I have said earlier, write the music you hear and feel. Audiences want and need truthful musical expressions especially today. If you are feeling violent, write a violent piece. If you are madly in love write tone poem for your lover. If you have lost someone dear to you as I did a few years ago write a piece in his or her honor. In my case it was a piece entitled Tread Lightly. Now I open many recitals with it.

16. There is a famous line by Arnold Schoenberg: "If it is art, it is not for all and if it is for all, it is not art." Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde or maybe not too commercial but at the same time
tonal, fresh, new, creative OR should we push ourselves, audience and players to the limits?

Write what you feel at that moment. Don’t worry about pushing anything to the limit. You can write a long involved piece that is unplayable and lies dormant. Don’t be afraid to mine the music of past masters! Recently I heard a lecture – analysis by composer Martin Bresnick on Debussy’s Prelude à l’apres-midi d’une Faune. He demonstrated among other things, how much we as composers can learn and use from older works. In this sense we should push ourselves to learn from the past so we can create more interesting music in the future.

17. Do you consider contemporary audiences when writing your compositions or do you create music for future generations?

It depends on the situation. If it is concert music then I don’t consider anything but writing the best piece I can.

When I wrote and recorded music with Andy Summers, the musical styles were all over the map because we both have broad musical tastes. This allowed for a range of pieces from ambient improvisations to him improvising over a Bach Sarabande. We really didn’t try to target any particular audience. Perhaps commercially that was a bad decision but that’s what we wanted to do at the time.

The music I wrote for the documentary movie Corida Goyesque had definite Spanish influences. Again, the situation-commission will dictate to a degree what the music will be.

18. Swedish musicologist Trygve Nordwall noticed that Krzysztof Penderecki composed his “Polymorphii” using electroencephalogram. (He plugged one person to electroencephalogram (EEG) and played his „Threnody of the Victims of Hiroshima“ simultaneously recording results from (EEG). That became the starting point for a new composition.) Your works seems to be very much in roots of rock music – all musicians know that it’s just nearly impossible to “notate” swing; pulse ‘ghost notes’ etc. Do you think traditional notation is finished, that it is not enough to write down and convey
new music ideas anymore? Have you ever encountered problems with notating your music?

Traditional notation is here to stay. For the record, not all of my music by any means is rooted in Rock and Roll.

I have not had any real problems notating my music but I could certainly improve! Notating one's ideas clearly and succinctly is an art in and of itself.

Phrases and notes that do require a certain musical “feel” as you know can have brief descriptions above the given note.

The more information the composer gives to the performer the better. The performer can always choose not to adhere to the suggestions but at least they are there.

Manuel De Falla writes Mournful and Calm above the first line of his masterpiece Homenaje. He then continues with explicit dynamic and articulation markings starting with the upbeat into the piece. This kind of attention to detail helps everyone.

I've noticed the absence of phrase markings in a lot of guitar music. This is a shame as phrase markings can really help the performer.

You Tube has also served as a type of modern notation. People can go on line and hear how a performer as you mentioned “swings” a phrase. With the addition of You Tube and more advanced and flexible notation software, scores will be increasingly improved. That having been said, it is the composer's job to make it clear to the performer what he or she wants through whatever means.

19. Music of the twenty-first century is beginning to have its own distinct style. Historicism (looking back) and following the styles of the past seem to be the trend. I have noticed characteristic synthesis of different genres and styles (like collage / patchwork) in today's compositions. Also composers are tending (and expected) to be more capable of composing well in very different genres and styles. How do you see the evolvement of music composition in the twenty-first century?

I would agree with much of what you have said. Young composer’s music will reflect to a degree the values and aesthetics of their teachers and musical heroes. The more educated young composers are about not just western music but music of the far East and middle
east, the more varied the compositions will be. This is evident in the music of older composer’s like Steve Reich who was greatly influenced by African music and before him Lou Harrison who loved Gamelan music. Today’s young composers’ influences are more diverse that they have ever been largely because of the internet.

The rigors of conservatory training are not what they used to be in many places. Composers rely less on their inner ear and don’t feel the need for intense musical training because of programs like Sibelius.

They are composing with great ease on their laptops and some even don’t feel the need or the desire to have live musicians playing the music they write. It has become more difficult for pieces to enter and remain in the main stream of the symphonic, operatic and instrumental repertoire simply because there are so many people composing and so many premiers. Composer’s scores are printed and available through the Internet with great ease, hence players can download it and play it immediately. Music stores like record shops are a thing of the past.

What matters only is the end result not so much how it was created as I mentioned before.

I am very optimistic about all music and am hearing interesting music in all genres. I see this trend of many composing in variety of styles continuing for years to come. Because of the internet great music will survive more easily simply because of its availability to so many. This is positive.

20. Following the last question: in 20th century we have reached the height of complexity in harmony through the atonal language of high modernism. There are no limits in music. Some compositions can be “awful”, “unbearable to listen to” for one audience and “fresh”, “thrilling”, “inventive” for another. This freedom sounds liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left?

It depends solely on where the music is being performed. It would take a lot to shock certain new music audiences in say New York or Berlin. For other more conservative audiences say in certain parts of America or anywhere, many pieces might be shocking simply because the listeners are unfamiliar with a large majority of new and experimental music.
I can’t honestly say if there are any real musical taboos left. I’m not sure I would know.

21. **As a composer – what would you encourage young composers to explore if they would like to write for guitar?**

Explore the music-scores of the past starting with Milan up through Linberg. They hopefully will be inspired by the extreme diversity of compositional styles and techniques that make our repertoire. In addition, they should definitely look at 1. Seth Josel’s new book which he co-authored entitled “The Techniques of Guitar Playing”, published by Bärenreiter as well as his web site Sheer Pluck 2. Check out the work being done by young guitarists like Dan Lipel who’s the guitarist in the fabulous new music ensemble Ice. 3. Look at John Scheiders book on composing for guitar. 4. Listen to young composers of varied backgrounds and genres like Bryce Dessner and Nico Muhly. These are just some thoughts and names that come immediately to mind.

22. **Final question: what in your opinion is the future of classical guitar compositions in general? Should guitar remain mainly as a solo instrument? Or maybe guitar can become more of a chamber instrument?**

We are in a horizontal period now with technology. Things are spreading out not going vertical. People are creating music on their iPads and cell phones. As we know the technological highway is being built as we try to navigate it. Interest in learning how to play an instrument in the traditional sense appears to be waning. Electric Guitar and drum sales in the big companies are down companies compared to the 80’s or 90’s. But sales of electronic devices are way up. How is the guitar fitting into this landscape or soundscape? Is it at all? Should it? Have conservatories addressed the issues of career opportunities for a classical guitarist given You Tube and the internet in a valuable and in depth manner? Can we afford to give music away constantly? Should we? These are some questions I am asking myself and students. The future of the instrument whether solo or chamber will always be guided by those who play it and their respective popularity as artists. Guitarists need to follow their creative voices.
It may result in forming an electric guitar quartet such as a former student James Moore did with the Dither quartet or in pursuing a more soloistic career in the case of Simon Powis. That having been said my former students Simon Powis, Rene Izquierdo, Rubert Boyd, Kim Perlak, Tracy Smith and Marco Sartor to name a few all play chamber music or have duo’s or trios. Chamber music is of course vital to the survival of the instrument in a bigger musical arena. Chamber music employing both electric and classical guitar chamber has never been more abundant.

Nigel WESTLAKE (email interview)

Top 5 Influences:

1. My wife Janice. From the start has had unshakable faith in my abilities & has encouraged & guided me in every step. In fact without her I’m sure I’d still be playing clarinet in some hack orchestra somewhere.

2. My father (he taught me the clarinet & also much of what I know)

3. My Grandmother Miriam Christian (she introduced me to Indian music & was an inspiration in my youth)

4. Richard Gill (my first harmony teacher. A very inspirational character who planted the seed within me to believe I could compose)

5. Igor Stravinsky. His early works were & still are very influential. His music was for me an “invitation” to get started on the process of composition.

1. Stephen King compares the art of writing to "diggings": the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be "obtained", to be cleaned from “superfluous settlings”. Pat Metheny talks about a "great broadcasting station in the sky" to which every composer has a built-in "receiver set". He is not “composing” but is simply writing down already-existing music which he “receives”. Witold
Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He "wipes out" empty spaces on the music staves "uncovering" an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

These analogies all ring true to me. It's those moments, when time stops, when you find yourself "in the zone" and the music starts to flow, it is as if a higher force is taking your hand and leading the way. It's almost like there is someone, or something, standing behind you, telling you what note comes next. These are the moments I pray for.

2. I have always been intrigued by the differences (in approach to writing) between your works for guitar and works written for other instruments. Pieces like Hinchinbrook Riffs, Winter in the Forgotten Valley, Songs from the Forest, and even Antarctica are much more tonal, more ‘friendly’ to the audience than your pieces for other instruments (e.g. two phenomenal piano sonatas, string quartets and amazing piano trio). Are you deliberately composing differently for the guitar? Do you have different approach to the guitar audience or guitarists? If yes, why?

Most of my works are usually composed with a specific agenda in mind. This self-imposed agenda is an unwritten agreement (or understanding) between myself and the commissioner of the work. It involves numerous aspects surrounding the context of the commission, such as audience expectations, context within the program, technical facility and musical taste of the performers and so on.

For example, the piano sonatas, piano concerto and the piano duo "Oscillations" were all composed specifically for piano virtuoso Michael Kieran Harvey, and were designed to be included in hard edge and uncompromising programs of contemporary piano repertoire. During the composition process for all these pieces, Michael was very pro-active, visiting me frequently and pushing me to write music of a very technically challenging nature, with powerful rhythmic impetuous. His enthusiasm was infectious and I really had no choice but to oblige (willingly!). These pieces served to extend my compositional facility and the process of developing them with Michael was very exciting.
By way of contrast my early guitar works were commissioned to be performed by UK guitarist John Williams. In the early 1990’s I toured with John, playing clarinet and bass clarinet in his seven piece mixed ensemble "Attacca". Having the privilege of working closely with him for numerous weeks gave me an insight into his musical approach and philosophy. Thus the underlying agenda for works such as Antarctica and Songs From the Forest was informed by Johns passionate desire to communicate with his expansive and devoted audience, and to use the guitar as a voice for dramatic narrative (my words, not his). This was another form of compositional challenge and it was a hugely rewarding experience to work with such a gifted musician and humanist. Other guitarists I have collaborated with in the writing of new works, such as Timothy Kain & Slava Grigoryan share a similar outlook & relationship to their audience & this has inevitably shaped my thinking & approach.

3. **Following the last question: being a composer and clarinetist – what is the most challenging for you in writing for the guitar? Is it an advantage to be a guitarist – having the knowledge of tricks and patterns – when writing for guitar or is it rather a curse? Where is the balance and how do you achieve it?**

I can’t see that being a guitarist would be a curse when writing guitar music. I always listen with delightful envy to the works of guitarist/ composers, and wish I had at least a minuscule amount of playing chops to be able to assist me during the writing process. I’m very lucky to be able to count among my close friends a number of excellent guitarists, all of whom have been very generous with their knowledge and assistance. When developing ideas I frequently have a guitar close by so that I can check issues relating to finger span and hand positions.

4. **Are you working closely with guitarists while you compose? Are you using their advice? Do you like to involve guitarists/performers in your compositional process?**

Yes. I very much welcome the input from the performers for whom I’m writing and I greatly value their advice. It's important they feel ownership of the work, and are comfortable investing their passion and expertise in the performance.
5. As a clarinetist and performer - you seem to have strong roots in jazz (improvisation). Your pieces like ‘Six Fish’ or ‘Hinchinbrook Riffs’ are great examples of the jazz influence. I have always felt every time I’m studying or playing from your scores that there is a large percentage of (written down) improvisation. Yet you always manage to find the right form /structure / balance for your pieces. What is your source of inspiration? Where do you start when you write a new composition: with improvisation or with structure?

As much as I admire the art form of jazz I would never suggest I had any talent for it whatsoever, although my early years as a clarinettist were spent dabbling in various forms of improvisation and it was these naive explorations that eventually lead me to composition. Your comments about my work being “notated improvisation” may well hold a germ of truth (although I’ve not heard anyone say this before). Certainly I enjoy mucking around with riffs and sometimes find myself gravitating to certain ideas through noodling on the keyboard (when all else fails). In truth my approach to composition is haphazard, random and not to be recommended (one of the reasons I choose not to teach). Being primarily self-taught, I am at the mercy of my raw instincts, intuition and prior experiences. I’m just lucky to have had the great fortune to have hung out with some incredible musicians that provide constant inspiration and guidance through their artistry.

6. Following the last question - many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. Composers like (from ‘guitar world’) Andrew York, Roland Dyens or Carlo Domeniconi use improvisation almost entirely during the process of creation, and have succeeded commercially (at least in the guitar world). Could you tell me more about your beliefs on the process of ‘creating’ new works? Is there any space for improvisation? How important is form/structure to you? Which element is the more important and how do you balance the two?

I’m not a big fan of fusing improvisation within the context of compositional structure. I’ve only done this once, when writing “Shards of Jaiselmer” for the Grigoryan brothers, both of whom are wonderful masters of notated and improvisational forms. More and more I am
finding that structure is absolutely critical in communicating one’s ideas. I’ve been approached a number of times to write concertos for jazz musicians, but this idea doesn’t hold much interest for me. I guess basically I’m a control freak and am unwilling to surrender my structural architecture (if I may be so presumptuous) to the will of a third party.

7. **Are you composing for the guitar using the piano (then adapting the material for the guitar) or do you compose thinking very specifically for the guitar? Do you think differently when writing for other instruments?**

Yes I think very differently. I find the guitar to be by far the most challenging of all instruments to write for.

I usually write using a keyboard that is triggering guitar samples (including harmonics and effects). Once I have some ideas on paper I attempt to play through them using an actual instrument (painfully and slowly). I try to gravitate to Ideas that are somehow informed by the idiomatic challenges of the instrument incorporating open sonorities as much as possible.

8. **Contemporary guitar-composers very often use extended techniques (re-tuning, all sorts of percussive effects, borrowing techniques from acoustic and electric guitar like hammering, tapping, playing “on the other side of string” etc.) What is your view and approach to writing extended techniques on the guitar?**

Even though I only use them sparingly I’m a big fan of extended techniques.

9. **Do you think that by not being a classically trained guitarist helps you to write better for the guitar or does it cause problems instead? Does not knowing guitar-specific patterns, tricks, “comfortable” positions and chords, “good and easy” fingering etc. allow you to be more free or does it hinder your compositional process? What are your thoughts about this?**

No. I suspect I am substantially disadvantaged by my lack of knowledge.
10. Witold Lutoslawski heard John Cage's Second Piano Concerto on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period. Have you ever had this kind of experience?

No, not really.

11. Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. Some of your works are completely different from each other (e.g. solo, chamber or orchestral works, percussion ensembles etc.) but I can still "hear" Nigel Westlake in each of them. At the same time composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on self-repetition? Where do the lines cross between self-repetition and personal style? Is it bad, in your opinion, to be recognizable?

When I am working I never make a conscious decision to sound "original" yet this is the quality I most admire in the work of other composers. The work of every one of my musical heroes is marked by a distinctive and unique individual voice that is instantly recognizable. Think of the heritage of Shostakovitch, Prokofiev, Stravinsky, Messiaen, and Zappa. Their work can be identified in the space of half a bar. That is an incredible achievement. Needless to say I’m very encouraged by your comments that you can hear evidence of a particular sound world in my work.

12. I noticed that you tend to use concrete pulse in your slow movements (Piano trio, string quartet no.2, Antarctica 2nd movement). Can you comment on the nature of timing in your compositions?

It’s difficult for me to intellectualise on such matters, as composition is quite an intuitive process for me. I just do what feels good at the time.

13. Back to the guitar world: there doesn’t seem to be much interest amongst the
greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative. What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important guitarists choose other new music to perform?

In some ways composers only have themselves to blame. They have spent decades turning the alienation of audiences into an art form by concerning themselves solely with process and taking music into the realm of science. As composers, we all benefit by the incorporation of innovative techniques into our workflow, but I believe to pursue this agenda at the expense of all else is perhaps misguided. I try to keep a balance, offering the musicians with whom I am working & my audience a sense of communication, whilst at the same time working with material that to me sounds fresh & perhaps challenging on some levels. My most recent compositions, the song cycle "Compassion" and "Missa Solis - Requiem for Eli" are unashamed attempts at communicating specific emotions and ideas through music. These are the works I am most proud of.

14. There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists “is the worst possible combination” when it comes to writing significant works for guitar. According to this “theory” you might say that Chopin or Liszt can be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What do you think of composers writing for their own instruments?

I am not familiar with such comments, but this strikes me a ridiculous generalization that is not worthy of discussion.

Andrew YORK (personal interview)

MAREK PASIECZNY (M.P.): Stephen King compares the art of writing to "digging": the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be "obtained", to be cleaned from
“superfluous settlings”. Pat Metheny talks about a "great broadcasting station in the sky" to which every composer has a built-in "receiver set". He is not “composing” but is simply writing down already-existing music which he “receives”. Witold Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He "wipes out" empty spaces on the music staves "uncovering" an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

ANDREW YORK (A.Y.): I think that all artists that are involved in the creation processes find an analogy to explain the same process. The analogy is irrelevant. It can be anything. It can be a broadcasting station in the sky or an eraser on a piece of paper, capturing pre-existing music – it’s all the same process. It’s just the personality of the artist that finds a way to describe it but it is clearly still the same process. Sure, I have the same feeling and I’m comfortable with any of these analogies. If you’re religious you would call it a spiritual event. But I think it’s something higher, it’s something deeper in our being, could be involved in the collective unconscious. If we think of Jung and the collective unconscious, we are on a very deep level that is all connected as a form of consciousness with tendrils that go out and connect, connect us to the entire world and to other people. There is probably a series of deep order that we tap into and that deep order transmutes itself and then comes out through our consciousness as beauty. The person who perceives that beauty will then try to translate that order into the real world. So it feels like it’s being broadcast. But to me it’s almost a question of philosophy, and a bit obvious. It’s just every artist’s analogy, the feeling of wonder that this happens at all, but it’s the same process for everyone if they’re truly involved in creation.

M.P: Some composers like Penderecki, Stravinski thought about compositional skills as just a tiny bit of talent and mostly - almost entirely - hard work, study, education etc they did not wait for the inspiration, epiphany...

A.Y: Yes, talent is necessary but in a way somewhat irrelevant. A good composer can schedule his inspiration. It doesn’t mean you’re going to be inspired equally at all times. A good composer can tap into a sufficient amount of this order of beauty to create music when needed. Most of my writing is done when I have a commission and a deadline and I still look for the same feeling of inspiration.
**M.P:** ...and you are trying to get into a special mood then? Trying to find, feel the epiphany?

**A.Y:** That’s always nice. I mean that’s where it comes from but it’s not necessary. A composer also has skills that allow them to compose without inspiration and compose believably. We prefer inspiration. This is just talking around the subject; all this is just explanation of the process which is more philosophical. It doesn’t really approach the matter. It’s just appreciation of the wonder of the process. It’s mystical and that’s great, it’s wonderful but we’re all going to explain it differently. There is no right answer to this.

**M.P:** I’m very intrigued by your approach to composing. You don’t use manuscript paper but instead record your ideas and sketches via a standard tape cassette. It is clear that your compositional process is mainly based on written-down improvisations. From these recordings of ideas, how do you structure them into new pieces? Do you first think about the form of the piece, then “filling” it later with compositional/improvised materials? Or do you gather ideas first, getting a glimpse of the new piece, before choosing the form?

**A.Y:** My process is more inductive than deductive. I start with small elements that begin to suggest a formal possibility. The form becomes clear to me as I go along. It’s like the ideas inform the form. It’s a difficult process in a way. I know composers that are completely opposite to this approach, like Ian Krouse. He starts with a grand vision of a form and then he fills in the bits and that works very well for him. I don’t do that typically. I find little magic ideas like little crystals in a way and I start to put them together and develop them and grow them. After a while that suggests formal structure.

**M.P:** Following the last question - many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What are your beliefs about the process of creating new works?

**A.Y:** I disagree with almost any statements that are extreme. It’s ridiculous. There is room for many paths. There is room for intellectual creation and there is room for music that comes
from improvisation. To deny improvisation is to deny a millennia of Asian watercolor 
improvisation on rice paper where if you make one mistake, if you move too slowly, then you 
wet the paper too much and you rip the paper. This forces you to continuously create in the 
moment without deliberation - true improvisation. That’s one of the most beautiful 
improvisatory arts that I can imagine. To deny improvisation is to deny a huge part, not only 
a part of our artistic heritage, but our personal abilities because we are spontaneous creative 
beings and improvisation is a spontaneous creation of music. Anybody that could say they 
don’t believe in improvisation, I think they just don’t know anything about it. They probably 
can’t do it so they don’t believe it exists. I believe that there are many valid methods and to 
completely discount an artistic, a large genre makes no sense to me.

M.P: so is it definite: is improvisation a part of your compositional process?

A.Y: whether it is a part of it or not - I can’t deny it, whether I use it or not. I don’t improvise 
my pieces. Some of my pieces are based on improvisation but some are not. I don’t like 
rules. Rules tend to block the creative process rather than enhance it. People that make 
statements like that are essentially not really involved in the creative process, they are 
involved in thinking. And that suits an intellectual. The intellect is a very powerful tool but 
people whose intellect is not that powerful tend to believe that their intellect controls the 
creative process, which is far from the case. We are much deeper beings just as the first 
question states there is much more to us then the intellectual mind. The intellectual mind is 
not the receiver for the broadcast order and beauty. If you focus on your intellectual self, it’s 
a tool. It’s not the focus of our being. Many people mistake it as the focus of their 
consciousness, which I do not.

M.P: You major instrument in college was flute. You also wrote pieces for piano and 
other instruments. What is your process of composing pieces for other instruments? 
Do you use the piano? Is it the same or different from how you compose for the 
guitar?

A.Y: No I don’t use piano. Yes and no, it’s different and it’s the same. The part that is the 
same, for example: when I write a piece for the guitar I think that the piece is a success if I 
can turn it into the string quartet and it still has compositional integrity. If you look at some
of the steel string players who are really great but they don’t actually have developed compositional skills, the pieces sound really wonderful on guitar but when you try to translate them they don’t work. But the no part of the answer is that, we also must use the idiomatic nature of the instrument. Because every instrument has idiomatic capabilities. When studying the Bach cello suits, how he uses the cello – it's completely natural and idiomatic, yet woven into that is an extremely deep and precise counterpoint. So a good composer doesn’t fear the idiomatic qualities of the instrument but actually uses them to his benefit and if that composer is a genius, like Bach, then there is no division in the process. He can take the idiomatic quality of the instrument and also create music that has great integrity and purity. Very difficult. Not many composers can do that.

**M.P:** So for instance if I will ask you to write me a piece for guitar and oboe. What would be your first approach to the process? Study and listen to oboe music etc?

**A.Y:** yeah, I would listen to oboe and follow scores to get the sound of the instrument in each of its registers. I would look and see how other composers have written for it to see what actually happens in certain passages when realized by the oboe. I would absorb all that subconsciously over a period of time very quickly. And then I would begin to write.

**M.P:** So purely technically – would you take the guitar in your hands and start to compose imagining the oboe?

**A.Y:** probably I would imagine the music in my mind. I do a lot of my writing just in my mind. When I’m walking or driving it comes sometimes. I use the guitar as well. But often I enter the music directly into the computer, into the notation program. I do that as well.

**M.P:** so you would never use the piano?

**A.Y:** I don’t have a piano. I’d rather use my mind. I wrote some pieces not long ago for piano and they’re extremely virtuosic because I don’t play piano. They’ve been recorded, they came out very well, but I just wrote them in my mind. I can’t write a piano piece on the guitar. That would limit the scope of the piano. I don’t play piano well so I just wrote it mentally and typed it right into the computer.
M.P: Do you think it is wise to study composition properly at a university/college? What, in your opinion, are the positive and/or negative effects of studying composition? Have you ever studied composition?

A.Y: no. I’m proud to say I’m auto-didactic. That being said: I studied with some of the great jazz arrangers and composers. I did a course in jazz arrangement with a brilliant guy named George West when I was in doing my undergraduate. As for composition: I’ve been studying composition since I was 5 years old, on my own. I’ve studied recordings all my life from extremely disparate fields. As soon as I could read music I would get the scores and follow along. Much like Segovia taught himself, I taught myself. I didn’t have the liability of a composer, of a teacher with opinions. I had teachers in other aspects of my life but I’ve learned by insatiable appetite for seeing how music was structured, because my ear already told me how it was structured but I wanted to see how it was put together by the composer. I could already hear the harmonies when I was a child. I really wonder what a teacher would’ve done for me except get in the way. I’ve studied more than anybody I know, but what does study mean? If you work with a teacher you are having a relationship where they’re telling you what to do. Perhaps truly intelligent people do better if they don’t have a teacher in the traditional sense because there is no one to slow them down, and they can learn at an accelerated rate.

M.P: What would you advise someone finishing school that is very talented in composition? Should they study at home on their own or go to an academic institution to study composition formally?

A.Y: Well that’s impossible, it would depend on the person. There’s no one answer. What if it’s someone who is clearly brilliant? Then their path doesn’t really need the intersection with someone with probably less ability and intelligence than them. So I might tell them something very different than someone who’s very talented but I believe would benefit from the interaction with more experienced people. There’s no answer to that question, it depends on the person, and my assessment of the person which hopefully would be helpful to that person. I’d be very suspicious of any other kind of answer. I’m telling what works for me, I don’t advocate it for others, not at all.
M.P: There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists “is the worst possible combination” when it comes to writing significant works for guitar. According to this “theory” Chopin or Liszt will be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What do you think of composers writing for their own instruments?

A.Y: It’s completely ridiculous. It’s easy to answer this question. When we are in our twenties we think ridiculous things that we believe they are true. I certainly did. As we get older we realize how silly we were. Life is a process. There is nothing wrong with this. I was the same. I had very deep opinions in my twenties. When I look back now I’m incredulous of some of the things that I closed my mind to. That is the process of being a young man. You will be very fierce with your opinions and defend them with great energy and certainty. And if you are wise enough as the decades go by you begin to realize that your held beliefs weren’t necessarily true.

M.P: Contemporary guitar composers like you, Roland Dyens, Carlo Domeniconi (among others) have been using various extended techniques (re-tuning, all sorts of percussive effects, borrowing techniques from acoustic and electric guitar like hammering, tapping, playing “on the other side of string” etc.) What’s left, or what’s next? What other sounds can be found on guitar?

A.Y: well... the next genius will bring it. There was an Our player named Ziryab (OWN REFERENCE - real name: Abul-Hasan Ali Ibn Nafi). He was so brilliant that he changed the course of our playing forever. He was like the Michael Hedges of that time. His techniques, the way he wrote, the way he played, everybody changed. In our period Paco De Lucia was a figure like that. He changed flamenco forever. In the compositional steel string world – Michael Hedges. Classical world doesn’t know anything about him. All techniques like slapping, tapping, hammering etc – he did it first. He did it with compositional genius. What you hear now is just a sort of parody of what Michael Hedges did. He changed things forever. What’s next on the guitar? None of us can say. It will take the next Ziryab, de Lucia or Hedges to show us what the next thing is on guitar. We all use extended techniques. Right
now I do a lot of altered tunings. I write most of my pieces in altered tunings. I find this to be a very fertile ground of inspiration for me, getting sounds that you can’t get in standard tuning. I’ve written very few pieces recently in standard tuning, except ensemble works where all the guitars are in standard tuning.

**M.P:** Do you think that being a guitarist – knowing all the tricks and patterns on the guitar – is an advantage or rather a curse when writing for the guitar?

**A.Y:** That’s the risk. Everything you learn is potentially, as you said, a blessing or a curse. It’s all up to you and your mental and creative ability. You must subsume, assimilate and absorb all the knowledge that you have, and then it can become a source of strength. For many people it becomes a prison.

**M.P:** So you would want firstly to study, listen, absorb all possible knowledge about a particular instrument before writing for it like in the case of the oboe example

**A.Y:** sure, I want to study how it sounds in detail. If I try to write something for an instrument I’ve never heard or I know very little about, I’m going to be quite surprised when I hear what I wrote actually played on the instrument and probably not in a good way. Have you ever heard a good guitar piece written by a non-guitarist who didn’t work with the guitarist in his composition? I have not. Every successful piece for guitar I know has a guitarist involved somewhere. The reason is quite simple - because the guitar is the most complex instrument in terms of geometry. There is no other instrument that uses a two dimensional geometric field with the degree of complexity that the guitar does. I’m speaking of the fretboard, which requires shapes in two dimensions to create music. Cello and violin also have fretboards but do not use it the same way, as they are essentially linear instruments. But the complex left hand geometry of the guitar makes it very difficult for the composer. Piano is linear – extremely easy to conceptualize. Guitar is monstrously difficult because we have to think in a two dimensional geometric field and what’s possible with four fingers.

**M.P:** Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. Some of your works are
completely different from each other (e.g. your Transilience, Sunburst, or Seven In Essence) but I can still “hear” Andrew York in each of them. At the same time composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on self-repetition? How do you manage writing and being inspired by all sorts of different styles, yet still be yourself?

A.Y: No I don’t try to do that. I don’t care if someone recognizes that I wrote it or not. They will because it’s just inevitable, because of the way I work but that’s not my intention at all.

M.P: but do you create consciously or subconsciously some of your personal, unique harmonic / melodic patterns etc.?

A.Y: consciously I know some of them. There are probably many I don’t know.

M.P: and do you try to avoid them or use them?

A.Y: neither. Because I find that what I’m trying to do at this stage, I’ve written a lot of music now and the danger is to quote myself. We call it formulaic writing when you seem to have a formula that works and you tend to repeat it and do the formula - to me that’s when the composer starts to die. What I try to do is to not repeat myself or not write with any formula. I try to start each piece from the beginning like I’ve never written a piece before. Of course I can’t do that because I have experience but I try to make it a new and fresh experience and it’s not easy. But I hear many composers who become parodies of themselves. Or pop stars that become parodies of their own styles, because it’s hard not to fall into this trap. You have this body of work and it influences you. When you write you refer to that and you start sounding like a version of yourself that’s not really yourself anymore. I think it happens to a lot of artists, so I work very hard to start a piece completely fresh, which means, I don’t know what it means, you see I don’t want to have rules and that’s not even a rule. I try to avoid moving into a thing where it’s enclosing. I try to always break down and have a potential that can take me anywhere.

M.P: but you have this experience that someone is telling you “yeah that’s sound like York”

A.Y: all the time. They recognize my style.

M.P: so does it bother you or is it a compliment?
A.Y: it is a compliment. If you listen to Beethoven you don't need to know it's Beethoven, or same with Bach. You can usually tell. I think any good composer or author or filmmaker, there is something about the way they put their ideas together that's recognizable without being repetitive. I think it's something very deep in the order that's the spirit of the material, deep intelligence in it that shows the origin if it's really from the artist.

M.P: but consciously is there something that you would deliberately use (for instance we've got Chopin's chord: dominant seventh with replaced fifth by sixth) as an identity?

A.Y: I don't do anything like that. I mean that's fine but for me it would be pretentious to do that. I don't want to do that. I just want to make good music that expresses how I feel. That's it. I think because my music is very personal that there is something of me in there that people recognize. I think the problem with some young composers, some very analytical composers or intellectual composers – their music has no character, because they are afraid to really reach deep inside. They are trapped at the level of their intellect which inhibits creative authenticity. It's no wonder that most of their, these pieces can't be recognized, because there is nothing to recognize. [Pause] I noticed that there are certain harmonic movements that I find very moving. When I listen to a piece and there is something in it that really has an emotional impact, I notice somehow the movement that can cause it, but it's not always consistent. Another piece may use the same device but not work. I am aware of these things and I use them but I don't use them to make it 'sounds like me' - I use them because I find them moving. I don't make myself use them but I noticed that they do happen. I think any composer would be attracted to harmonic, melodic or rhythmic content that has some kind of meaning for them. That they find it fascinating, or cool, or interesting etc. Otherwise what's the point? You have to like what you're doing. It's not all just an intellectual construction; there has to be something fascinating to it. I trace some of it back to my very early childhood, like songs my mother used to sing to me where there was an implicit harmony that completely resonated with me when I was a tiny child and it just had this magic feeling and I still feel it now when I hear it in music. So I noticed those coming out in my music.

M.P: Following that issue. In most cases, earlier compositions reflect on later pieces, e.g. Roland Dyens has Tango en Skai, Carlo Domeniconi – Konyubaba, you have ‘Sunburst’. I noticed that there are some tendencies from people who know your music to expect your
new pieces to sound like or similar to ‘Sunburst’. Also young guitar composers are trying to imitate, even copy your style from that early composition...

**A.Y:** You know who influenced me when writing Sunburst was Michael Hedges. I wrote that piece as homage to him. Not copying his techniques, which would be derivative. But I wrote the whole ostinato section to get the spirit of some of his compositions.

**M.P:** Do you still have people expecting or asking you while commissioning new pieces to sound like Sunburst?

**A.Y:** Sure. People always say ‘oh I love your music, I love Sunburst’. And I’m like ‘yeah well... I wrote that in 1986’ have you heard the 50 other pieces I’ve written since then? But it’s still great. I’m grateful that the piece was popular and still is and people love it. It’s funny: I was commissioned in Japan by Sony records. They wanted me to write a sequel to Sunburst. I thought ‘Ok, that I can do’. So it doesn’t sound like Sunburst but it has a similar spirit. I use the same tuning and called it ‘Moontan’. So that was very direct. The ones you think are going to be successful, you never know. I’ve had several others which have been super popular, which is great, it makes me feel good.

**M.P:** Witold Lutoslawski heard *John Cage’s Second Piano Concerto* on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period. Have you ever had this kind of experience?

**A.Y:** Not to that degree but I find that remarkable, such a transcendental change, it is very powerful. I can’t imagine completely throwing out everything I’ve ever done. I feel like what I’ve done through my life has been building upon a foundation. I can’t throw it away because to me it’s extremely meaningful, and complex and it’s built on a structure that is actually profoundly complicated even though people don’t realize it, so for me to throw it out would make no sense. But I’ve altered it when I heard Michael Hedges first. The things he was doing on the guitar changed my conception of what was possible for solo guitar but it didn’t make me want to throw out everything, it made me want to expand into this new realm of technical possibilities, and that’s when I wrote ‘Sunburst’.
M.P: following your thought about Michael Hedges – it reminds me of an interview I read with Witold Lutoslawski where he told of this fascinating feeling (I also often have it): when he listens to someone else’s composition, a good composition, and at the very same time he starts to hear in his head a completely new piece of his own, so the existing music he heard was triggering spontaneously new musical ideas...

A.Y: That’s happens to me all the time. When I’m in a concert, I’m listening to the way a composer structures music, and I’m thinking of ways that I could use that. I can be listening to music and I can hear other music in my head. I am able to do that.

M.P: During the interview you gave for Classical Guitar magazine in 2007, you said that “If people do not write new music and take it into the future, the guitar will die”. I cannot agree more with you. But I have been noticing for a few years now a very disturbing tendency: there doesn’t seem to be much interest amongst the greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative. What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important guitarists choose other new music to perform? What is your advice to young composers? Do we need to change style?

A.Y: That’s a good question. Style is not something you choose, it’s something you are. That being said: I can write in an authentic jazz style because I was authentic jazz player for many years. So it’s not that I was able to switch to that style but because that style is in me. An artist cannot change because of external circumstances. That is the wrong approach. An artist gives what he is and he gives with fierceness and he gives with the idea of ‘what I do is completely great’. It doesn’t matter if anybody else likes it or not. What I’m doing is valuable and it is the right thing to do. I don’t change it for anybody. I don’t care what any other composers think about my work or anybody thinks of my work because it becomes the matter of cognitive ability. Can you really be sure that someone has the intelligence or the sensitivity or the ear to adequately judge the work of another composer? I’m not convinced of it. The guitar world is not a world of great intellect. There are some intelligent people but
not a lot of them. So I don’t really care what anybody thinks. So to change styles? It’s utterly wrong.

**M.P:** What about the audience? Some people say we should educate the audience by bringing pieces like Takemitsu, Henze and others...

**A.Y:** What does that mean to educate an audience? It means whatever you want it to mean. You can have your personal agenda of what it means. I’ve heard from people who have an agenda: “We must have new music. I love new music” like the music which is difficult to listen to and therefore it’s my responsibility to educate the audience. That’s not educating the audience. That’s forcing their personal agenda on the audience. So define what you mean by educating the audience. I see it somewhat simply: to create is to create and that’s where it ends. Everything external falls away as unimportant. Everyone’s opinion is unimportant. The opinion of a teacher is unimportant. Once you are your own artist, you are acting in the capacity of God, in a sense. You’re creating things and you don’t need anybody’s opinion or permission to do whatever you want to do because the power is completely in you. You can’t listen to anybody else. Sometimes someone you really respect may give you some advice that helps you along the path but you never change for external reasons.

**M.P:** let’s approach this issue from different more practical / technical perspective: someone is coming to you to commission a new piece and gives you absolutely free hand. Not even asking you about the length or form or language or even orchestration. Would you choose to write something new, fresh but maybe more advanced in terms of language e.g. less tonal, more experimental etc. something you’ve never written before, or to choose more secure path to please people...

**A.Y:** No, I never think about pleasing people. Of course I want to please them, I want them to be happy, I don’t try to upset them! It’s a very important distinction: as soon as you say “I’m going to write this to please you, to please the critic or to please the commissioner or please my colleagues – you are not creating anymore. You are putting yourself in a very weak and subservient position. When you create music you create music. That being said: someone says ‘I have an ensemble, they are amateurs they’re level is about this, we would like a piece 4 minutes long etc’ - I try to control my creation to fit in that but I don’t try to please them. I just try to write a good music. Often I write it a little too hard, a little too long, whatever. The
piece tells me what it needs to be ultimately. Early on when I got a reviewer who came to one of my concerts and gave me a negative review and it infuriated me but I thought about it a long time. At this point the composer has to decide how to personally have a mental relationship with the reviewers, reviews and criticism. It’s not easy. You must come to terms with it. I did gradually realize that it doesn’t matter what the critics think at all. It’s not that I don’t care in terms of self-preservation, it’s because I realized they are human beings with their own agendas. For example: there was a critic in Los Angeles who loved new music like Takemitsu. So he came to a concert by a guy who played only new music. There were only maybe 14 people in the audience and the guy didn’t even play that well. Well, the critic gave a rave review, he said it was a huge success. It was a lie, the whole thing because he wanted to support new music. I’ve read that review. I was there. This is not reality. I started to realize: critics are human beings, they have their own opinions and what they say about me, even though it reaches people and they may have power, is not the reality and I don’t care. So to write to please a critic is the worst thing you can do. That’s the extension of the same idea. You can only write for yourself. That’s the only person you can write for.

M.P: There is a famous line by Arnold Schoenberg: “If it is art, it is not for all and if it is for all, it is not art.” Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde and yet still be fresh and new; OR should it be more commercial/easy-listening/crowd-pleasing; OR should we push ourselves, audiences and players to their limits?

A.Y: Well, that just proves how imperfect Schoenberg can be. I don’t agree with that at all. Schoenberg had a great mind, brilliant man. Any musical experiment is valid. But one of the great misfortunes is 12-tone music. It goes against natural law. It doesn’t work. That’s what I say – some people might disagree, but very few. How often can you hear concerts with 12-tone music? You can almost use the word – never. There is some great music, some of it is fascinating but essentially it goes against natural law, against the mathematical structure, the harmonic series that informs and supports the structure in music. Again, it was a great experiment but it just doesn’t work. It doesn’t have any emotional validity. I stick by that. Going back to my previous statement: music like Bach’s can exist on multiple levels. Isn’t it Bartok that said “listen to the music of the people or the music of genius, nothing else”.

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Because the music of genius will try to incorporate all those elements, like Bach did. Schoenberg didn’t have it, he may have been brilliant, but he wasn’t a genius, it didn’t work.

**M.P:** Do you consider contemporary audiences when writing your compositions or do you create music for future generations? For example like Schoenberg, he was thinking of his heritage and what he is leaving for the future generations and he doesn’t care about here and now.

**A.Y:** That’s dangerous, because that’s his conception of what will be important in the future. Maybe he’s right, maybe he’s not. Of course I would like for people to play my music in the future but it’s just to me again one very simple idea that I try to make music that is accessible to people who know nothing about music, that there is something there that calls to them because it is a spiritual thing. And then as it gets more complex, with more levels as you look into it, a musician could look into my pieces and go ‘Oh wow he uses these extended harmonies etc’, a composer might look and say ‘Oh he’s actually using three-voice counterpoint and medieval cadences…mixed in with this rock ‘n roll element. It’s like layer after layer after layer of order. That’s what Bach does. To me that’s all. Someone who has a really good mind can offer music that has multiple levels of appreciation from the simplest person who responds to the rhythm, harmony, melody to very deep levels of order. That’s why I don’t care what critics or other composers say because they often will miss the majority of the layers that are in music. I know this for a fact. Listening to music is a cognitive test and one’s response and comments often reveal the limits of their perception.

**M.P:** In the 20th century we have reached the height of complexity in harmony through the atonal language of high modernism. There are no limits in music. Some compositions can be “awful”, “unbearable to listen to” for one audience and “fresh”, “thrilling”, and “inventive” for another. This freedom sounds liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left?

**A.Y:** That’s a great question actually but I disagree with the premise of it. We’ve reached the limit of complexity of tonality? Take a scale, 8 notes, don’t repeat a note. How many ways
can you combine these eight tones, order them? [We are calculating it] the result is: almost 40,000 combinations. And this is before we include rhythm, harmony and this is before we include repeating any notes and we only have 8 notes! Doesn’t that answer the question? We have not even come close to reaching the limit of harmonic complexity and this is only a major scale, what if it’s chromatic? What if we will do all 12 notes? Let’s see (starting to calculate it) almost half a billion! Again we have 12 notes, played once, one at the time, no repetition, no rhythm, no harmony... The point is most of the people don’t think of this. Tonality is dead? No. That’s why I’m pointing this out.

**M.P:** Yes I get your point. You have it down in black and white mathematic proof but what I mean by the question is to say that back in the 60’s we had cluster chords, atonality, the 12 tone system. Emotionally is there anything really left, anything new, anything more we can do to shock, thrill the listener...?

**A.Y:** People today can’t be shocked anymore...because of people staring at their phones, the deluge of information and sensory input is deadening. Was it in the 20’s, when the ‘Rite of Spring’ was premiered in Paris, there was a riot. Can you imagine people caring about any music where they actually get upset anymore? Wow, they wouldn’t even notice. So it’s a different world. You can’t think of how to shock people. People now are too involved in technology and they are so removed that they don’t have the concentration to be shocked by an intellectual construct. There were no phones, no TVs in the 20’s. People hungered for art, being informed artistically. They would have to go to the opera; they would have conversations about philosophy, things like that because there were no distractions so they could be shocked by ideas back then. Now it’s impossible to shock because you can go on the Internet and be shocked deeply in seconds. There is nothing shocking anymore. Music being shocking? That’s ridiculous. It’s a matter of context. The context has shifted so deeply, this kind of questions is irrelevant, meaningless. We are in a different world now. The word ‘shock’ should just drop away like a leaf from the tree, it’s meaningless.

**M.P:** Final question: what in your opinion is the future of classical guitar compositions in general? Should guitar remain mainly as a solo instrument? Or maybe guitar can
become more of a chamber instrument? As a composer – what would you encourage young composers to explore if they would like to write for the guitar?

A.Y: That’s happening anyway. In the last year I’ve written five guitar ensemble pieces. Probably 80% of my commissions are for guitar ensembles, all guitars. This is typical for me. About guitar with other instruments: It is often an unhappy marriage only because guitar is such a delicate, salon instrument…it’s my opinion. It can be done with the pairing of certain select instruments with guitar, but it is difficult to do well.

M.P: yes, but as well we are in the 21st century and we have quite developed amplifying systems...

A.Y: ...yes which is necessary so that makes it possible, however it’s required because if you put violin and guitar on the stage and the guitar is not amplified, you can hear violin very well, but what do you hear from the guitar? We hear the attack. To me the beauty of the guitar is what happens AFTER the attack - that beautiful sustain but it’s very delicate. So yes you have to have amplification.

M.P: so maybe the future is acoustic or electric guitar?

A.Y: sure, we all are amplified now when necessary but guitar is guitar it sounds great in a small room. If you will pair it with other instruments it’s a difficult situation. The guitar and orchestra is kind of ridiculous in a sense. There are some beautiful pieces written for guitar and orchestra but essentially if you’re not amplified - it is absurd. You can do it, strong players can make the best of the situation, but it is a difficult situation. Guitar is louder than a koto but other than that, all other instruments are louder, even a harp (with its very powerful attack). So to say that guitar has one future path and that’s combining it with other instruments – sure there’s nothing wrong with that but I don’t think that’s necessarily going to ensure the success of the instrument.

M.P: from your perspective and your experience, what would be your advice to a young composer that wants to know what kind of music to write for the guitar?

A.Y: If someone came to me and said what kind of music should I write, we would have to have a serious talk because there’s a real problem implicit in that question. You can’t tell someone what to write, you have to write what you love, and what you can hear in your
mind. You can experiment by purposely writing in the style of other composers to learn, but that’s just an interim period of your own education. You do that to learn, but that’s never the end goal. You must find your own style, your own mode of expression. That’s what you have to discover. It all ties up with what we’ve been talking about: the recognizable voice of the composer comes from their personal qualities. There is really no advantage to being a chameleon later in life. When you’re young you do that to learn, which allows you to get skills. The skills will help you later to express your voice. It’s not the other way round, you don’t learn those skills so that you can write in other styles, unless you’re writing for films - but that’s a different subject entirely. In film, basically you are supplying an emotional soundtrack for another mode of art, visual art. Those guys are absolutely brilliant, but it’s a very different process than writing abstract, pure music that stands on its own. Writing pure music requires a perfect storm of formal integrity, patternistic intelligence and charisma.
Appendix A: Interview Guide

Compositional Process and Style:

Defining the beginning of the process

1. Stephen King compares the art of writing to “diggings”: the fossil is already formed, and only needs to be "obtained", to be cleaned from "superfluous settlings". Pat Metheny talks about a "great broadcasting station in the sky" to which every composer has a built-in "receiver set". He is not “composing” but is simply writing down pre-existing music which he “receives”. Witold Lutosławski compares composing to a blank sheet of music paper and an eraser (not a pencil). He "wipes out" empty spaces on the music staves "uncovering" an already-written piece. Do you have similar feelings/experiences at the beginning of the creation/composition process?

The role of improvisation and formal structuring

2. Do you first think about the form of the piece, and then fill it later with compositional/improvised materials? Or do you gather ideas first, getting a glimpse of the new piece, before choosing the form?

3. Many composers don’t believe in improvisation. They criticize this method of composing, mainly because improvisation clashes with the idea of musical structure. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What are your views about the process of creating new works?

The approach to writing for the guitar vs. other instruments

4. There are some top young-generation guitarists (GFA winners) who think that composers who are also guitarists “is the worst possible combination” when it comes to writing significant works for guitar. According to this “theory” Chopin or Liszt will be considered the worst possible composers for piano, and Paganini the “biggest failure” for the violin repertoire. What do you think of composers writing for their own instruments?
5. Do you think that being a guitarist – knowing all the tricks and patterns on the guitar – is an advantage or rather a curse when writing for the guitar? Do you always use the guitar when composing for the guitar?

6. What is your process of composing pieces for other instruments? Do you use the piano? Is it the same or different from how you compose for the guitar?

**The use of guitar extended techniques**

7. Contemporary guitar composers Roland Dyens, Carlo Domeniconi (among others) have been using various extended techniques (re-tuning, all sorts of percussive effects, borrowing techniques from acoustic and electric guitar like hammering, tapping, playing “on the other side of string” etc.) What’s left, or what’s next? What other sounds can be found on guitar?

**Notation:**

8. Swedish musicologist Trygve Nordwall noticed that Krzysztof Penderecki composed his “Polymorphii” using electroencephalogram. He plugged one person to an electroencephalogram (EEG) and played his „Threnody of the Victims of Hiroshima” simultaneously recording results from EEG. That became the starting point of a new way in which he notated his compositions graphically. Is the traditional notation finished in your opinion? Or do you feel you are able to express your new musical ideas down in writing using traditional notation? Have you ever encountered problems with notating your music?

**Personal style vs. self-repetition**

9. Composers must constantly come up with new sounds, ideas, “fresh, exciting” pieces, and yet keep our own language recognizable. At the same time composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, or in the guitar world - Leo Brouwer manage to find their success in self-repetition. Do you think you have a personal style and what are your thoughts on self-repetition? How do you manage writing and being inspired by all sorts of different styles, yet still be yourself?

**Influences**

10. Witold Lutoslawski heard John Cage's Second Piano Concerto on the radio - an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative period. Have you ever had this kind of experience? What is the source of your inspiration?
11. What are five of the most important influences (for instance other composers, artists, places, cultures etc.) on your music, both past and present?

The pros and cons of compositional education

12. Do you think it is wise to study composition formally at a university/college? What, in your opinion, are the positive and/or negative effects of studying composition?

Music of the 21st century:

How to encourage more interest in new guitar music

13. There doesn’t seem to be much interest amongst the greatest guitar players of today for playing complex or difficult new music. The repertoire is generally conservative. What can we do to make professional guitarists and audiences listen to and appreciate contemporary music more? What can we do to make important guitarists choose other new music to perform? What is your advice to young composers? Do we need to change style?

14. What are your thoughts on getting young guitarists to be interested in and play new and good classical guitar repertoire?

Characteristics and purpose of new music

15. There is a famous line by Arnold Schoenberg: “If it is art, it is not for all and if it is for all, it is not art.” Do you think we should balance our compositional language to be not too modern/avant-garde and yet still be fresh and new; or should it be more commercial/easy-listening/crowd-pleasing; or should we push ourselves, audiences and players to their limits?

16. Do you consider contemporary audiences when writing your compositions or do you create music for future generations? For example like Schoenberg, he was thinking of his heritage and what he is leaving for the future generations and he doesn’t care about here and now.

17. In the 20th century we have reached the height of complexity in harmony through the atonal language of high modernism. There are no limits in music. Some compositions can be “awful”, “unbearable to listen to” for one audience and “fresh”, “thrilling”, and
“inventive” for another. This freedom sounds liberating, but does music still have the capacity to shock? Are there any musical taboos left? How do you see music of the 21st century evolving into?

The future of the guitar:

18. Final question: what in your opinion is the future of classical guitar compositions in general? Should guitar remain mainly as a solo instrument? Or maybe guitar can become more of a chamber instrument? As a composer – what would you encourage young composers to explore if they would like to write for the guitar?
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