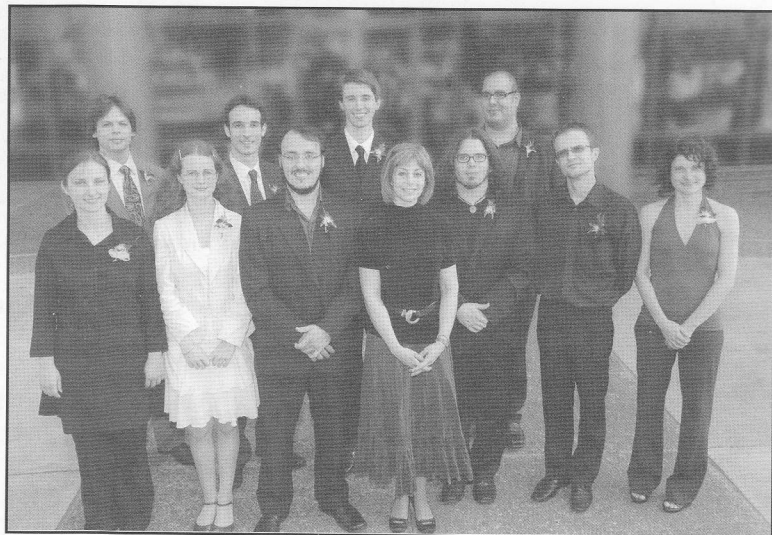


2008 JoAnn Falletta INTERNATIONAL GUITAR CONCERTO COMPETITION

By JULIA CROWE

THE THIRD JoAnn Falletta International Guitar Concerto Competition was held this year during the week of June 9th to 13th, 2008 in Buffalo, New York, with ten semifinalists from six different countries vying for the Grand Prize of \$7,500 (USD). The prize includes a paid return engagement with the Buffalo Philharmonic and the Virginia Symphony Orchestras, under the direction of conductor JoAnn Falletta, along with a recording contract with Fleur de Son Classics and a concert guitar worth \$10,000 made by luthier Dake Traphagen with an accompanying Karura flight case. Second Prize was \$3,000.00 and the Third Prize, \$1,500.00.



PHOTOS: EILEEN ELIBOL OF WNED/TV

The ten finalists and JoAnn Falletta.

Named after the conductor of the Buffalo Symphony Orchestra, JoAnn Falletta, the competition is open to contestants of all ages around the world. Falletta, originally a guitar major at Manhattan's Mannes College of Music who served on-call as a guitar, mandolin and lute performer with both the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic, hopes the competition will expand the awareness of guitar as an orchestral instrument among audiences as well as composers who might write orchestral works for the instrument.

'First of all, I want to say how thrilled I am with the high level of players we have been attracting,' Falletta says. 'In all three years, our finalists presented excellent and compelling performances of their concertos. I am also extremely happy to see that artists have come from all over the world to compete, and it makes it very special for the city of Buffalo to welcome these international guests. The city and everyone involved with the competition treat our visitors like guest artists, rather than competitors, and that is exactly how we think of them. They bring great talent and artistry to the region, and we celebrate each one of them.'

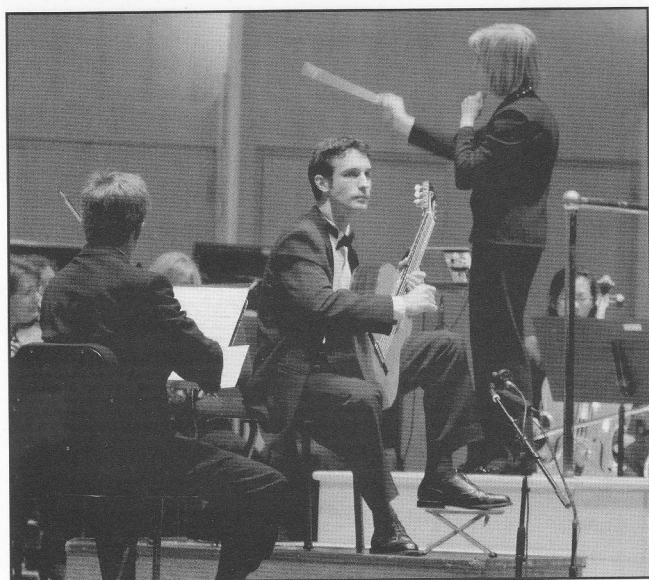
'I am not a judge of the competition, at my request. I think it is very important for me to support each finalist with supple and sensitive accompaniment, and to concentrate on our artistic partnership rather than on judging them. That has worked very well. As a guitarist I know this repertoire and the particular nuances and subtleties of the instrument, and it is a privilege and a pleasure to collaborate with the finalists. I think it is important that we offer awards from the audience and from the orchestra as well- these different perspectives are very interesting. I am glad that we have added this year an award for

the best interpretation of the new solo piece, chosen by the composer himself.

'We have also added performance opportunities for the semifinalists who are not chosen as finalists, and these performances were extremely well received. I would very much like to see the competition be able to commission an opening work for orchestra that would in some way celebrate the guitar and the competition. We were able to do this one year, and presented a stunning new piece by Miguel Aguila entitled *The Giant Guitar*. Our association with WNED gives tremendous radio exposure to our finalists - they are literally



Marco Sartor and JoAnn Falletta.



Marco Sartor in concert, JoAnn Falletta conducts.

heard around the world. Perhaps we might find an opportunity to add television coverage to that as well.

'I could never thank Artistic Directors Joanne Castellani and Michael Andriaccio enough for their sensitive and intelligent stewardship of this competition. It is our hope that this competition might increase interest and excitement about the instrument we all love - especially on the concert stage with orchestra. The competition also attracts a very different audience - one that is much younger, more diverse, with lots of rock, folk and jazz people who love guitar.'

Artistic Directors Michael Andriaccio and Joanne Castellani received a total of 51 entries this year, from which they selected twenty-five contestants and then the final ten. The contestant submissions, sent directly to the WNED radio station, are masked and numbered to maintain complete objectivity during the judging process. Also assisting with invaluable competition coordination were Nancy Baun, WNED staffer Wendy Ceppaglia and WNED producer, Mindy Fox.

This year's judging panel included: Ms Castellani, who is on music faculty of SUNY at Buffalo and Mr Andriaccio, President and CEO of Fleur de Son Classics, Ltd. Also included were guitarist and University's School of Music in Montevideo instructor Eduardo Fernández, founder of Uruguay's CIM/UNESCO section and Artistic Director of Montevideo's biannual International Guitar Festivals and Columbia's Encuentros Nacionales de la Guitarra; guitarist and composer Brian Head, who serves as President of the Guitar Foundation of America; Classical 94.5/WNED programme host John Landis; guitarist and composer David Leisner, who is co-chair of the guitar department at the Manhattan School of Music; Tony Morris, both a guitarist and radio host of the popular World Satellite-broadcast programme, *Classical Guitar Alive*, and guitarist Enrique Muñoz Teruel, the

director of many well-known European guitar festivals and competitions, including the Concurso Internacional de Guitarra. Also present as a guest of honour was Matanya Ophee, publisher of Orphee Editions.

The ten semifinalists for the 2008 competition included: Meliset Abreu of the USA, a graduate of the Mannes College of Music in New York who studied with Michael Newman and also with Oscar Ghiglia at the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena, Italy; David Gálvez, who studied at the National Conservatory of Lima under Oscar Zamora and received both his bachelor and masters degrees in music from the Manhattan School of Music; Chad Ibison, who started his classical guitar studies three years ago and is currently studying with Andrew Zohn at Columbus State University's Schwob School of Music; Krzysztof Meisinger of Poland, who is studying guitar at the Academy of Music in Bydgoszcz with Krzysztof Pelech; Guido Sánchez of Costa Rica, who is currently pursuing his doctoral degree in guitar at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music; Anna Mnich of Poland, a student of Wande Palacz at the Academy of Music in Katowice, Poland who will be continuing her education at the Manhattan School of Music with David Starobin; Gonzalo Gallardo of Peru, a returning contestant who is a graduate of Cornell University's School of Arts and Sciences and is pursuing his doctoral studies this autumn; Benjamin Beirs, who studies at Peabody with Julian Gray, Marco Sartor of Uruguay, a returning contestant who is a graduate of the University of Uruguay's School of Music and also the College of Charleston's School of the Arts, where he studied with Marc Regnier; and Laura Klemke of Germany, a student at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Weimar.

After a community welcome at WNED-TV and radio, five of the contestants performed in the first round of semi-finals Tuesday evening, broadcast on live radio and by internet feed from



The three finalists, left to right: Marco Sartor, Laura Klemke and Benjamin Beirs.



The judges and the three finalists.

the Mary Seaton Room of Kleinhans Music Hall. For each evening of the semifinals, contestants performed their chosen concerto in entirety, accompanied by a pianist and then each contestant performed the required set piece, *Asiana V*, written by Serbian composer Nikola Starcevic.

Starcevic, a guitarist and graduate of the Belgrade Music Academy – FMU, was the winner of the 2007 JoAnn Falletta International Composers' Competition, which alternates years with the Guitar Concerto Competition. His winning piece, *Asiana V* (Orphee Editions), is dramatic with a fast-paced tempo, filled with Villa-Lobos-style chord progressions which traverse the full length of the fretboard. The contestants had one month to learn and memorize this piece for the competition.

'*Asiana V* is a part of cycles *Asiana*, which contains 5 pieces of a similar style and form,' Starcevic says of the piece. 'I didn't write inspired directly by Asian music, as the title might indicate. Usually, I let the music come out of me without thinking of a particular style or its purpose, which is what happened with the whole cycles *Asiana*. I named the piece after I finished the work. I always try to find a name which has something to do with a piece. Each piece from *Asiana* has some elements in some parts (harmony, pentatonics, specific rhythm) which could possibly remind one of Asian music. So it is only kind of an association of music of that part of the world. Also, I had written *Asiana V* before I found out about the competition, so the piece wasn't originally written for that purpose.

'About my composing process: usually I hear a theme inside my head and play the guitar to shape it. Sometimes, a theme comes to me while playing the guitar. And sometimes I intentionally will seek out a theme I already have in mind. A good theme is the most important to me. It must be good as itself, even when played without the rest of the piece. Also, the theme has to tell you about the style and character of the piece.

'Basically, I have no composing rules but what I usually do after the theme is shaped is to work on all possible variations of it or variations of some parts of it. There is usually a part or a few that change the character, serving as a contrast. I try to make a piece sound interesting from the beginning on through to it's end so I am shaping it until I am satisfied as a listener, not only a composer.

'If I am home, I usually use a computer software when composing, even it is slower then a handwriting, because I have to do it sooner or later. Also, sometimes it helps in shaping the piece, because I can put myself easier in a role of a producer and a listener than when playing by myself.

'As I have already mentioned in the composer's word on the back of *Asiana* scores, this piece requires a good technique, a powerful sound and a disciplined use of articulation. And of course, like with any other piece, you should be personally involved with the piece, to express yourself through it to give it an element of life that can not be written in the scores.

At the end of the second evening of semifinals, the judges announced the three finalists to be Laura Klemke of Germany, Marco Sartor of Uruguay and Benjamin Beirs of the U.S. Also, composer Nicola Starcevic awarded a prize to contestant Guido Sánchez for giving the best overall performance of the piece.

Many of the semifinalists performed a citywide series of community outreach concerts over the course of Thursday and Friday morning and afternoon. 'We asked each of the contestants to come prepared to perform twenty minutes worth of solo music, in addition to the concerto and set piece, for this opportunity,' says Artist Co-Director Joanne Castellani.

These concerts included performances for cancer patients at the Roswell Park Center Institute, public concert held at local area Barnes and Noble Booksellers, an educational concert at

North Tonawanda Middle School, Grand Island High School and Orchard Park Middle School, a *Guitarra Dia* concert presented in Spanish and English at Holy Cross church, concerts and masterclasses held at the Buffalo Academy for Visual and Performing Arts and a concert held at the Chautauqua Institution.

'As far as organization and resources go, this is the best competition out there,' says returning contestant David Gálvez. 'All the competitors shared the same outlook and most of us do want to come back. I had a great time and enjoyed very much the company, the accommodations and the events that we took part in. Since the first edition of this competition, the organizers have always pour their hearts into this competition. The 2006 competition was basically the same, this time they worked more on the outreach activities or "guitar days" so each semifinalist had their own individual activity to attend.'

Guido Sánchez, who played at Roswell Park and then another concert in Chautauqua, says, 'Both were 1-hour concerts and they were awesome. At Roswell, I played for cancer patients, and it was one of the best experiences of my life in terms of being able to "help" people with my music. One of the patients came to me afterwards and told me, "I thought I was out of smiles but your music gave me one. Thanks for putting a smile on me today.'" That, for me, is millions of times more worth than money.'

The concert I performed at Chautauqua was another highlight. I played a full programme of varied repertoire, including Nikola's piece, for a crowd of around 300 people in a very nice venue. There were some guitarists from the Fredonia guitar department, including the teacher, and they all enjoyed it a lot.'

The judges took a Thursday morning trip aboard the Maid of the Mist, a boat tour which traverses the river at the foot of Niagara Falls. Later that same afternoon, the contestants banded together for a visit to Cave of the Winds, an on-foot trek past a Hitchcockian population of low-flying seagulls which flock and roost near the water-drenched wooden platforms, which sit 18 storeys below and behind the Falls.

Finals took place Friday evening in Kleinhans Music Hall to a sold out crowd. The Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, under the direction of conductor JoAnn Falletta, performed an opening of Astor Piazzolla's *Tangazo* before introducing the first finalist of the evening, Laura Klemke of Germany. Klemke performed the Villa-Lobos *Concerto pour Guitare et petit orchestra*, wearing a full length lavender satin gown. Benjamin Beirs of the USA followed her performance after a film presentation which offered the audience a filmed interview glimpse of his personality, as they had done for Klemke earlier. Beirs performed Castelnuovo-Tedesco *Concerto in D major for Guitar and Orchestra, Opus 99*, his first-ever performance with an orchestra. Marco Sartor of the



Guido Sánchez and Nicola Starcevic.

USA performed the Rodrigo *Concierto de Aranjuez*, which landed him the Audience Favorite award, later that evening.

As the judges convened, the BSO performed Alberto Ginastera's 'Four Dances' from *Estancia*. The finalists and judges gathered on stage with conductor JoAnn Falletta announcing the awards: third place went to Benjamin Beirs, second place, along with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra Musicians' Choice Award of 2008 went to Laura Klemke, and the Grand Prize was presented to Marco Sartor.

Beirs says, 'My overall experience at the Falletta competition was as I expected -wonderful. I definitely plan on coming back, as concerto competitions are more fun to do than solo competitions. I think it has something to do with the extra support from the institution of the orchestra. There is also the additional support of WNED, the public TV/radio station in Buffalo. I think that's what made this competition so special - the combined of energy from Joann Castellani and Michael Andriaccio on the guitar end of things, Joann Falletta with the orchestra and Donald Boswell, president and CEO of WNED.

'Of course, as important as all of the institutional and logistical support was, what mattered the most to me was the musical experience I had performing with the orchestra, which was more fun and rewarding than I could have possibly imagined. For my first appearance with a major orchestra, I couldn't have asked for a more sensitive and understanding conductor, as well as a very high level of playing from the musicians themselves. I felt so comfortable saying exactly what I wanted to say musically, even with all the pressure from the competition, not to mention the fact that there were about 2,400 people in the audience, which was the biggest crowd I've ever played for. It was such a rush and such a joy!'

Beirs is studying this summer in France as part of a studio exchange programme between Peabody Conservatory and the Paris Conservatoire. He will be touring with his guitar duo, Duo Transatlantique (with French guitarist Maud Laforest) until January 2009.

'I loved the opportunity of playing with the BPO and would dearly like to do it again!' says Laura Klemke, whose brother Samuel Klemke, had competed in the inaugural competition. 'I really felt welcome from the first day of the competition because everybody seemed so excited about us participants. It was great to feel welcome before even having the chance to play because it gave the feeling that people would like your guitar playing. That made me feel more like giving a concert than competing, which I prefer.'

Klemke is preparing to record Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Well-Tempered Guitars* as a duo with her brother Samuel, in addition to completing examinations at school.

'I felt this year's competition had a couple of remarkable improvements from previous ones,' says Marco Sartor. 'The hospitality room, with breakfast and lunch included, was a great idea. Also, the filmed contestant interviews introducing each finalist to the audience - I hope this feature becomes permanent.'

'As a suggestion, which I think future contestants might like - on the semifinal nights, those who play

fourth or fifth might like to catch a later ride to the hall, so they do not have to wait backstage for so long. This of course would mean they miss the rehearsal for the announcement of the finalists but I wonder if having a rehearsal for this is really necessary. It's just a thought. I have been through this competition twice to know that it does become too long of a wait if you get to the hall at 6 PM and you are required play at 10:00 PM.

'Other than that, the event runs extremely well and there is a friendly atmosphere throughout the entire week. Competitions naturally carry a lot of stress but we spend time bonding with each other, the staff and the community and this relieves a lot of the tension. And, of course, after visiting the Niagara Falls or eating some good buffalo wings, you realize that guitar is not all and there are greater things in life.'

Sartor will be teaching at the Charleston Academy of Music and has plans to play concerts and record in duo setting with his former instructor, Marc Regnier. He is especially look forward to performing with the Virginia Symphony and the BPO in 2009 and recording the CD through Fleur de Son label as part of winning the Grand Prize package.

For further details of the 2009 JoAnn Falletta Composers Competition, submission details for the 2010 JoAnn Falletta International Guitar Concerto Competition and archived videos of the 2008 semifinalist performances, the website is: <http://www.fallettacompetition.org/>

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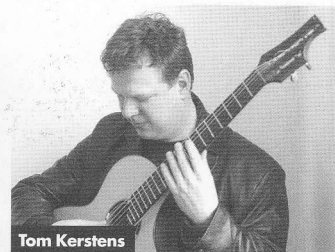
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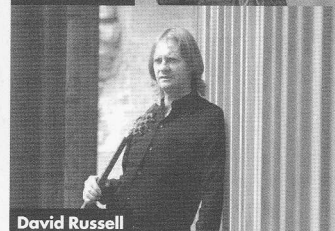
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