



PHOTOS: THÉRÈSE WASSILY SABA

From left: Fabio Zanon, David Russell, Shin-ichi Fukuda, Bernard Maillot, Alvaro Pierri, Manuel Barrueco and Robert Brightmore.

## KOBLENZ INTERNATIONAL GUITAR FESTIVAL & ACADEMY CELEBRATES ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY

By THÉRÈSE WASSILY SABA

**F**ROM 21–28 May 2012 the Koblenz International Guitar Festival & Academy held its 20th festival. The Opening Night Concert began with some important speeches by the long-standing supporters of the Festival, including Prof. Dr Joachim Hofmann-Göttig, the Mayor of Koblenz, Mr Herbert Laubach, the Director of LOTTO-Rhineland Palatinate and Dr Richard Koch-Sembdner, President of the Koblenz International Guitar Society e.V.. The concert featured the two teachers at the Koblenz

International Guitar Academy: Aniello Desiderio and Hubert Käppel. Hubert Käppel has been a part of every festival for the past 20 years and so chose to play the very same programme that he had performed at the first festival in 1993. Starting with a powerful performance of *Canticum* by Leo Brouwer, his recital also included an unforgettable performance of Hans Werner Henze's *Memorias de 'El Cimarrón'*. Henze's work tells the story of a runaway slave called Esteban Montejo and Hubert Käppel narrated the story in German at the same time as the playing the complex guitar part. Henze used many different techniques to create the atmosphere of the story including tap-

ping rhythms on the guitar, playing the guitar with a violin bow, and has the performer make sounds by whistling and clicking his tongue. It was a demanding piece but Hubert Käppel's performance was excellent.

In the second half of this recital there was absolute silence in the hall as Aniello Desiderio began to play the *Fandango* by Aguado. Starting with a gentle *pianissimo*, his light and delicate articulation was captivating and his sound resonated throughout the hall; he produced an equally beautiful tone quality in Coste's *Le Depart*. Brouwer's *Rito de los Orishas* was played with an acute sense of drama, building tension with the repeated bass notes, which sounded truly menacing. Aniello Desiderio gave the German première of

*Toccata & Elegie* by Georg Schmitz. The *Toccata* is fast-moving and has a restless tension which holds your attention, creating an expectation of something unknown. The *Elegie* provides that unknown something and a pleasant sense of peace in this musically articulate and lucid work.

On the following evening Shin-ichi Fukuda played a full programme of Brouwer, Takemitsu and Bach. He began with a beautifully atmospheric performance of *Hika – in memoriam Takemitsu* by Leo Brouwer, followed by his transcription of J. S. Bach's *Cello Suite No. 3*. Shin-ichi Fukuda's phrasing is very musical and he has a strong personal connection with the music as he plays. It was a pleasure to hear Brouwer's *Homage to Takemitsu*, which was based on the



Hubert Käppel after his performance of the Henze.



**From left: Prof. Ingeborg Henzler, Vice-President of Koblenz International Guitar Society e.V., Herbert Laubach, Geschäftsführer LOTTO-Rhineland Palatinate and his wife, Aniello Desiderio, Dr. Andino, Vito Contento.**

*Concerto da Requiem* – Shin-ichi Fukuda premièred this latest Brouwer Concerto at the Koblenz Festival in 2008. He played Takemitsu's *All in Twilight* and then Bach's Cello Suite No. 6. It was an impressive programme.

The standard of the evening recitals remained high throughout the week. Alvaro Pierri also gave a very musical performance, which seemed to be inspired by the Muses, playing *Sonata al la Española* by Joaquín Rodrigo, *Variaciones sobre un tema de Fernando Sor* by Miguel Llobet, three pieces by Eduardo Sainz de la Maza, *Sonatina* by Lennox Berkeley and *Ricercare* by Dusan Bogdanovic. The standing ovation at the end heralded many welcome encores.



**Alvaro Pierri giving a masterclass.**



**Warming up for the Mass at the City-Kirche, a young guitarist, Aniello Desiderio, Judicaël Perroy, Alexander Ramirez, Gerhard Reichenbach and David Russell.**

Manuel Barrueco also received a standing ovation for his excellent performance. He played a transcription of cello suite BWV 1007 by J. S. Bach, five sonatas by Scarlatti, *Little Lute Music in Memory of John Dowland* written for him by the Ukrainian composer Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky, a selection of pieces Albéniz and Granados, and everything he played was so musical and refined and with a depth of understanding that made a strong impact.

I particularly enjoyed David Russell's performance of *Suite No. XIV* by Sylvius Leopold Weiss. He managed to recreate a very lute-like sound on the guitar and he played the melodies beautifully. Equally beautiful were the four pieces by François Couperin: *La Convalescente*, the fast and light *La Sophie* with a bell-like resonance, *L'Épineuse* with its attractive melodies and *La Pantomime*. He balanced the programme with three modern Latin American pieces: *Pampero*, *Barcarola* and *Jugueteando* by Jorge Morel and *Sandy's Portrait* by Sergio Assad.

Eliot Fisk played the traditional matinee concert on Pentecost Monday, which is a public holiday in Germany. Eliot Fisk is a unique musician on the guitar. He gave a spirited concert and in the quieter moments one could enjoy his high-quality musicianship, however, he would soon move into full power, which pushed his technique into the 'out of the control' sound zone and the tone quality suffered considerably. Half of the audience did not return after interval.

As well as the evening recitals there were 4pm recitals, which each lasted one hour and again the quality of performance was high, with solo recitals given by Goran Krivokapic playing Bach's *Partita No. 2 in D minor*, BWV 1004 with musical maturity, virtuosic but not ostentatious, and strongly felt closeness to this music that almost makes you feel that Bach wrote the piece for him; Marcin Dylla, who gave a picturesque performance of *In the Woods* by Toru Takemitsu, excellent Lieder by Schubert and a beautiful tone quality in *Valses Poeticos* by Granados; Fabio Zanon premièred a *Suite* written in 1926 by Raymond Moulaert and played lyrical pieces by Sor, Moreno Torroba and Mignone; Zoran Dukic played an unforgettable *Fantasia* by Telemann and ended the recital with an exquisitely sensual performance of *Invierno Porteño* by Piazzolla; and Rafael Aguirre, who won First Prize in the Koblenz International Guitar Competition 'Hubert Käppel' 2010 gave such a musical and powerful performance with pieces by Debussy, Albéniz and Paco de Lucía, that he was given a standing ovation.

One of the 4pm concerts given by the young Bulgarian guitarist David Dyakov, who won First Prize in the Koblenz International Guitar Competition 'Hubert Käppel' in 2011.



**Philharmonie, conducted by Leslie Sukanandarajah.**



**David Russell giving a masterclass.**



**Manuel Barrueco giving a masterclass.**

Part of that prize is the recording of a CD with KSG Exaudio, so his recital was a CD launch-recital of that recording called 'Il Diabolo'. The virtuoso violinist and composer Niccolò Paganini was often referred to as 'Il Diabolo' (the Devil) and David Dyakov recorded four of Paganini's *Caprices*: No. 4, No. 9, No. 11 and the well-loved No. 24 and played these pieces at a furious speed, just as one would expect from a very young player! The recording and recital also included Bach's *Partita No. 2 in D minor*, BWV 1004, ending with the impressive *Ciaccona*.

The 'Friday Night for Guitar & Orchestra' concert featured two guitarists, Aniello Desiderio and Joaquín Clerch, performing with the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, conducted by the young Sri Lankan Leslie Sukanandaram, at the Kurfürstliches Schloss. Joaquín Clerch played his own piece called the *Concierto de Cáceres*. Clerch's composition used the full resources of the orchestra, which created a *forte* throughout; the focus of the composition seemed to be more on making a lot of loud sounds with the orchestra rather than achieving a musical communication. As such it was not always easy to hear the guitar part because of the overpowering orchestral part, which is not what one expects from a guitarist/composer. Aniello Desiderio gave the première of the new version of John McLaughlin's *Europa: Thieves and Poets*, which he dedicated to Aniello Desiderio. This work was

sensitively orchestrated and there was a good balance between the guitar and the orchestra. The orchestra played very well and clearly had a lot of respect for the visiting conductor, despite his young age. They also played two overtures by Carl Maria von Weber excellently well; one could see that Leslie Sukanandaram had an understanding and love of this repertoire through his conducting.

On Saturday a lunchtime performance of renaissance music was given at the Liebfrauenkirche, an ancient church in central Koblenz, with the guitarist Russell Poyner playing his arrangements of Mass settings by Alonso Mudurra, interspersed with the choir of the church, ending with the organist, Manfred Faig playing a work by Johann Pachelbel. The Koblenz Guitar Festival is held every year during the religious feast of Pentecost, or Pfingsten as it is known in German.

To mark the 20th anniversary of the Festival a Festive Mass for Pentecost was held in collaboration with the Arnsteiner Patres in the City-Church at the Jesuitenplatz on Sunday 27 May 2012. The Catholic Mass was celebrated by Pater Martin Königstein, in German, English and Spanish to accommodate the international congregation who completely filled the church and flowed out onto the cobblestoned square of the Jesuitenplatz. The parts of the Mass, the Kyrie eleison, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei were sung in Gregorian chant by the Vocal Ensemble of the Koblenz Guitar Academy and after each, guitar solos were performed by David Russell, Aniello Desiderio, Gerhard Reichenbach, Alexander S. Ramírez and Judicaël Perroy; the young guitarists from Junior Guitar Academy, conducted by Günter Schillings, gave an excellent performance of Weiss's *Chaconne* arranged for guitar orchestra, with support from the other Junior Guitar Academy teachers Russell Poyner and Tobias Kassung. The collection during the Mass went to support the 'ONGD David Russell y María Jesús' charity, which builds water wells and schools.

The Finals of the Koblenz International Guitar Competition 'Hubert Käppel' 2012 were held at the Kurfürstliches



**Prize-giving at Café Hahn, from left: Günter Forsteneichner, flower girl, Georg Schmitz, Konrad Ragosnig, Chia-Wei Lin, Hubert Käppel, Giuseppe Zinchari, Anton Baranov, Berti Hahn.**



**Goran Krivokapic in concert.**



**Marcin Dylla in concert.**



**Russell Poyner and the Vocal Ensemble of the Liebfrauenkirche.**

Schloß on Sunday 27 May 2012. The competition winners were: First Prize: was not awarded; Second Prize: Chia-Wei Lin (Taiwan); and Third Prize: Anton Baranov (Russia). The Premio Joaquín Rodrigo for the best interpretation of a work by Joaquín Rodrigo was awarded to Giuseppe Zinchiri (Italy). The international jury was headed by Univ.-Prof. Konrad Ragossnig – who celebrated his 80th birthday in May – and also included Hubert Käppel, Judicaël Perroy, Alfred Eickholt, Goran Krivokapic, Alexander S. Ramírez, Robert Brightmore, Lucio Matarazzo, Ansgar Krause, Gerhard Reichenbach, Dale Kavanagh, Max Op den Camp, Günter Schillings, Tobias Kassung and Thérèse Wassily Saba.

The jazz venue Café Hahn and its owner, Berti Hahn, has been involved with the festival from the beginning, hosting

the Sunday evening jazz performances which have included many outstanding artists, such as John Abercrombie, Philip Catherine, Frank Haunschild and the flamenco guitarist Gerardo Nuñez. Their programme this year, called '20 Years of the Koblenz Guitar Festival at Café Hahn', featured guitarists Joscho Stephan and Torsten Goods, Rudi Linges (keyboards), Thomas Kukulies (percussion) and Nico Brandenburg (electric bass). The Prize-giving ceremony for the Koblenz International Guitar Competition 'Hubert Käppel' took place during the interval at Café Hahn.

The list of guest guitarists giving public masterclasses is very impressive and long: David Russell, Manuel Barrueco, Eliot Fisk, Shin-ichi Fukuda, Alvaro Pierri, Goran Krivokapic, Marcin Dylla, Joaquín Clerch, Fabio Zanon, Judicaël Perroy, Zoran Dukic, Rafael Aguirre, as well as Robert Brightmore, Alexander S. Ramírez, Gerhard Reichenbach and Ansgar Krause. Aniello Desiderio gave a public masterclass with the students performing Joaquín Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*, accompanied by the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, conducted by Leslie Sukanandarajah. Pavel Shamshura did his final public examination with the orchestra for the Koblenz Guitar Academy during the festival.

The flamenco guitarist Rafael Cortés gave a matinee recital in a trio with his son and a percussionist. Rafael Cortés has an incredibly fast technique and pleased the enthusiastic audience by playing covers of a number of Paco de Lucía's most successful pieces.

Many guitar makers exhibited their instruments, including: Michael Wichmann, Gert Petersen, Antonius Müller, Kazuo Sato, Curt Claus Voigt, Mario Gropp, the Canadian Daryl Perry, Jens Towet and Stephan Schlemper. Michael Macmeeken's Chanterelle shop was always busy. Other special visitors at the festival were Bernard Maillot and Philippe Durand of Savarez and Prof. Thomas Offermann of D'Addario Strings; both companies support the festival and the competition.

The next Festival will be from 13–20 May 2013 in the newly-rebuilt Rhein-Mosel-Halle, the Kurfürstliches Schloss and the halls of the Ehrenbreitstein Fortress.



**Joscho Stephan with Torsten Goods and the Acoustic Rhythm ensemble at Café Hahn.**



**Georg Schmitz, Russell Poyner, Tobias Kassung, Günter Schillings and the guitar ensemble of the Junior Academy.**

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