

## Guitare Alla Grande 2013 by Heather Morand Clark

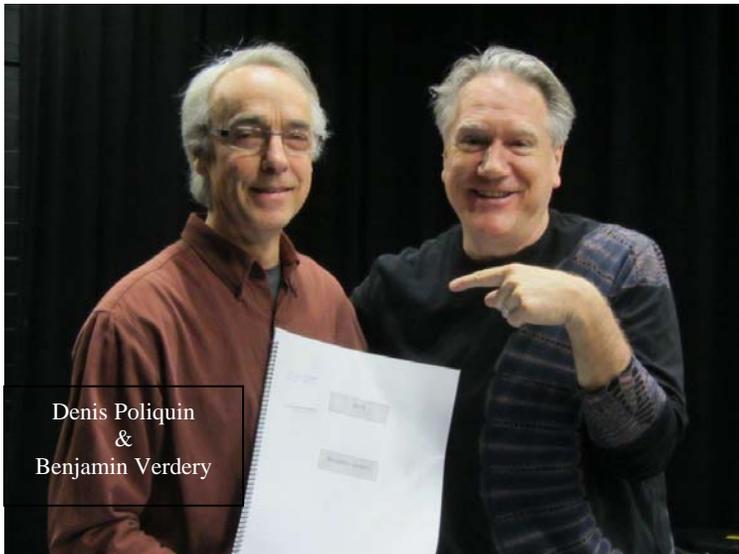
April 14, 2013

### Guitare Alla Grande - Ottawa Canada - February 14-17, 2013

It was with a good deal of anticipation that I set off for the Guitare Alla Grande festival in Canada's capital city of Ottawa. This four day festival takes place in mid-February, when all of us need a little break in the middle of our cold winter. The Guitare Alla Grande Festival, a collaboration of the School of Music at the University of Ottawa, Cambrian College (Sudbury), the Conservatoire de Musique de Gatineau, and the Ottawa Guitar Society, is now in its eighth year, and its success is growing. Alla Grande is, without doubt, an event to look forward to every February.

This year's invited artists included Fabio Zanon of Brazil, Benjamin Verdery of the US, and Canadian artists Jerome Ducharme, Patrick Kearney, the Canadian Guitar Quartet, Trio Alla Grande, Duo Vice Versa, and composer Patrick Roux, as well as ensemble conductors Denis Poliquin and David Gaudreau.

The festival began with a full day presentation by Benjamin Verdery. In the morning, he spoke about the art of transcription, and how to arrive at an accurate arrangement. He drew upon his many years of experience both playing arrangements, and being an arranger, to discuss some of the issues that must be addressed when trying to best keep the spirit and feel of a work alive when set to its new medium. Of particular study in this talk were Ben's arrangement of the Blue Danube waltz by Strauss, and his settings of Jimi Hendrix songs. The aim of the Strauss arrangement was to stay very true to the original, whereas the Hendrix music was approached in a different way. Verdery preferred to take themes from the songs and put them together in a mix to create something that almost resembles a new composition.



Denis Poliquin  
&  
Benjamin Verdery

Ben's second lecture focused on the relationship between the performer and the text of the music, especially urtext editions. Ben focused on the Villa-Lobos studies, particularly the differences between the published edition, from 1953 (Max Eschig) and the 1928 manuscript that has recently surfaced. In parallel, he examined his working relationship with living composers who have dedicated works to him, and presented their answers to various questions on the topic of performers straying from the dictates of the written text. The lecture did not profess to have definitive

answers, but was rather a very interesting and thought provoking examination of this relationship. The lecture did draw a few important conclusions: performers should start with a detailed reading of the text, and they should study, consult, ponder questions and proceed with utter respect of the form and traditions when making decisions. In the end, however, the performer must stand behind his or her choices.

The opening concert of the weekend was, as in prior years, performances by the students of the University of Ottawa, Cambrian College, and the Conservatoire de Musique de Gatineau. The performers were soloists, duos, a quartet and an octet, playing new music published by festival sponsor Les Productions D'Oz. Composers included Benjamin Verdery, Claude Gagnon, Thierry Tisserand, Jurg Kindle, Carlos Rivera, Arnaud Dumond, Annette Kruisbrink, and festival director Patrick Roux.

Friday's very full schedule included a master class with Fabio Zanon, with many of the same students receiving advice on their works-in-progress. The Maestro Alla Grande Guitar Orchestra, made up of students from the three participating institutions, under the direction of Denis Poliquin, rehearsed for three hours, as did the approximately fifty high-school-age girls of the Virtuoso Alla Grande Guitar Orchestra who had come in from Montreal towing a trailer full of guitars behind their school bus!

The evening concert was a launch of the CD *Comme un Tango* which features the music of Patrick Roux. Patrick's eldest daughter Anne Sophie spoke at length about her father's music career, informing us that when he first applied for admission to the Conservatoire de Musique de Gatineau he was told he didn't have sufficient technique or training to make a career in music. Rather than give up and pursue a different profession, Patrick persevered, and ironically now, as well as being a very well-respected composer, teacher and performer, he is the guitar teacher at that very same institution! Anne Sophie concluded her tribute by saying that she draws on this story a lot when she needs inspiration and determination in her own life.

Most of the performers from the CD were featured during the evening. We had the current incarnation of the Canadian Guitar Quartet, Philip Candelaria, Julien Bisailon, Bruno Roussel, and Louis Trepanier, who were joined by Patrick Roux and Denis Donegani, since they had performed on the recording. Patrick Roux performed a solo, as did Jerome Ducharme, Patrick Kearney and Fabio Zanon, and finally Trio Alla Grande. The CD was of course sold afterwards, and since all artists were present, the queue for signatures was considerable!

Saturday there were master classes given by both Jerome Ducharme and Patrick Kearney. The annual "Welcome Back" concert in the afternoon, by a University of Ottawa or Conservatoire graduate, was by Duo Vice Versa, with guitarist Julien Bisailon and flutist Pascale Margely. Both are alumni of the Conservatoire de Musique de Gatineau. They performed the Grand Sonata for Flute and Guitar by Mauro Giuliani, and music by Roux, Assad, Michio Myagi and Chris Dumigan.

Saturday evening's 'headliner' concert was by Brazilian guitarist Fabio Zanon. Says festival organizer Louis Trepanier; "I thought it very interesting to hear, in Fabio's playing, very beautiful qualities reminiscent of Segovia. There was something in the presence of his sound and the elegance of his turn of a phrase that reminded one of Segovia. Also, I really think that Fabio Zanon is the guitar's Georges Cziffra. His towering command of the instrument and intense stage presence really remind me of the Hungarian pianist."

Works performed included 7 Lessons by Henry Purcell, Variations and Fugue on Folia de Espana by Ponce, Granados, Albeniz, and Brazilian composer Marco Pereira.

This year's culminating events, the luthier fair and closing concert, took place at the Canada Aviation and Space Museum. This venue, recognized as one of the most beautiful museums of its type, was chosen because one of the pieces being performed required a projection screen behind the guitar orchestra. The presence of so many guitars certainly garnered attention from people who had come to look at the aircraft! Luthiers set up their booths in front of some of the world's most priceless aviation treasures.

As Patrick Roux explained to the audience at the beginning of the concert, ensemble playing is a large part of the music education in the schools participating in this festival. This afternoon there were performances by duos, trios, quartets and two orchestras, and included were a flautist, and violinist. In one of the previous concerts there had also been a guitar-saxophone duo. This demonstrates the versatility of the instrument in various chamber ensemble settings, and it is encouraging to see new music being written for these combinations of instruments.

Highlights of this final concert were the performances by the two festival guitar orchestras. The Maestro Orchestra under Denis Poliquin performed Classical Medley by Poliquin, which was a compilation/arrangement of many well-known classical guitar compositions. The Virtuoso Guitar Alla Grande Orchestra under the direction of David Gaudreau, made up of a large group of girls from l'École Secondaire Marguerite-De Lajemmerais in Montreal, performed *Around the World* by Patrick Roux, with video accompaniment. Four of Patrick's students, Gabriel Beauchemin, Julian Geisterfer, Roberto Martinez-Lissow and Simon Rivet, had created videos to depict the four movements, which were homages to sun, water, forest and people of the world. The videos were edited by Martinez-Lissow and projected on the screen behind the orchestra. The fact that the orchestra was able to keep time with this was extraordinary, especially the first movement which incorporated tango dancing!

An Ottawa photographer at the event, Richard Lawrence, decided to have a bit of fun with the orchestra and a life-size cardboard figure of Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield. The resulting photo shows Hadfield at the back of the guitar orchestra holding a guitar, as if he is part of the event. The photo was sent to the Canadian Space Agency to be forwarded to Hadfield on the International Space Station!

At the Guitare Alla Grande Festival each year, it is inspiring to see such a high level of musicianship and dedication in all these young people, and such obvious enjoyment of both listening to and playing classical guitar. There were so many activities packed into a few short days, to quote Louis Trepanier, this really is the little festival that could! It keeps growing and getting better with every year.