

# 4<sup>th</sup> IberoAmerican Guitar Festival 2010



By JULIA CROWE

THE 4th Iberoamerican Guitar Festival opened on a hot, humid evening this past June at the Embassy of Mexico in Washington, DC under the guidance of Artistic Director Berta Rojas and the President of the Iberoamerican Cultural Attachés Association, Patricia Abdelnour. The three-day long festival honoured Mexican composer Manuel Ponce (1882-1948) with two dozen guitar concerts held at the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian by artists representing Spain, Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, France, Chile, Portugal, Guatemala, Ecuador, El Salvador, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay and Argentina.

The opening concert featured Spain's Margarita Escarpa, who performed a programme of Brouwer's *Paisaje cubano con campanas*, followed by a comparison of Manuel de Falla's *Le Tombeau de Claude Debussy* and Claude Debussy's *La Soirée dans Grenade* and *La Sérénade interrompue*. Escarpa explained that this set illustrated the analogy of reciprocal influences the composers had upon one another, as De Falla had been inspired by Debussy's piano pieces and Debussy's music had been informed by flamenco (Aside from Manuel Ponce and Federico Torroba, De Falla had been the third non-guitar playing composer to write works for the guitar during the early 20th century). Escarpa's playing had been effortless, fluid, clean and thoughtful with an impressive dynamic range and colour, all conveying subtlety, dimension and clarity to the voicings in each piece. Much enjoyed had been her lyrical and nuanced transcription of Albéniz's *Granada*, *Córdoba* and *Cataluña*.

The Manuel M. Ponce Quartet, comprised of guitarists Gerardo Díaz de Leon, Víctor Gardoqui, Arturo Hernández and Raúl Zambrano, performed a programme that reflected Ponce's musical influences, starting with M. Bernal Jiménez' spirited, ponticello-coloured *Vice Royal Quartet*, which had been dedicated to Ponce by the composer. The quartet performed Ponce's music entitled, 'In the 18th Century, Baroque to Classical,' starting with his sonorous and languid *Prelude in E*, *Balletto*, *Allegro* from *Sonata Clasica: Homage to Fernando Sor* in addition to Ponce's *Sonata Romantica: Homage to Schubert*. The quartet distinguished themselves as fine players with scholarly thoroughness to their programme, which included pieces Ponce had written during the 20th Century Mexican nationalist movement, closing with a transcription of a later contrapuntal version of his *Prelude in E*.

Segovia had said Ponce must be considered the fundamental non-guitar playing composer in the history of the instrument. Ponce, who was born in 1882 in Zacatecas, Mexico, learned piano and pursued his musical education in Mexico City, Bologna and Berlin before eventually moving to Paris in the 1920s to study with the French composer Paul Dukas (who wrote *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, made famous by Disney's animated film, *Fantasia*.) In Paris, Ponce delved



Carlos Barbosa-Lima.

into exploring the impressionistic style with his compositions before returning to inspiration derived from the music of his homeland, where he continued his career as a composer and a music journalist. His collaborations with Segovia produced pieces that have become a staple in the guitar repertoire, such as the renowned guitar concerto, *Concierto del Sur*.

Segovia, who was also friends with violinist Fritz Kreisler, had learned of Kreisler's gag of writing virtuosic small pieces for the violin and attributing them to long dead master composers as a way of diversifying the appearance of his programme. (Irresistible aside: the author of this article had been college room-mates with Kreisler's grandson, who plays bass guitar.) Possibly, due to the lack of Baroque transcriptions, Segovia's desire to perform rather than research, and his need to establish the guitar as the natural descendant of the aristocratic lute and vihuela, Segovia asked the composer to write him several Baroque style works for the guitar and attribute them to Sylvius Leopold Weiss. The sad part to this story is that Ponce had not been credited as the



Carlos Moscardini.

true author of these works, along with those attributed to Scarlatti, until long after the composer's death and, as transcriptions made from Segovia's recordings of these works had been considered as material in the public domain, Ponce did not receive royalties.

Musicologist Leonara Saavedra, who teaches at the University of California Riverside and is writing a book on

Mexican music for Oxford University Press, lectured on Ponce's contribution to the Mexican Nationalist Movement. The Manuel M. Ponce Quartet had given an afternoon presentation on the progression and trajectory of Ponce's career and his, at times, challenging but productive working relationship with guitarist Andrés Segovia.

Bolivian *charango* player José Mendoza and guitarist Gerard Verba substituted at the last second for Carlos Barbosa-Lima's scheduled masterclass, a switch incurred by travel delays. A traditional Bolivian fable was narrated to young attendees, followed by a hands-on demonstration of the *charango* with instruction by Mendoza.

Guitarist Alfredo Muro, who was pre-selected for the Latin Grammys in 2009, performed a set of Peruvian folk music, including Pedro B. Perez's pianistic-sounding *Vals Amarraditos*. Peruvian cajon player Víctor Padilla joined Muro onstage for Chabuca Granda's *La Flor de Canela* and four spirited African-Peruvian pieces, *Zapateo*, *Marinera*, *Lando* and *Festejo*. In the spirit of the moment, Padilla delighted the audience by jumping upright with an impromptu, graceful dance. Muro's original flamenco composition, *In Tientos*, conveyed a *malagueña*-like sensibility. He switched to playing the delicate-sounding *charango* for Daniel Robles' *El cóndor pasa* and then returned to the guitar, delivering a lovely rendition of both Pixinguinha's *Rosa* and Ary Barroso's *Aquarella do Brasil*, with light percussion along the soundboard of the guitar and rhythmical finger brushing against the strings to fade away the last notes.

Guitarist Héctor Osaky and mezzo-soprano Beatriz Méndez of Bolivia performed classical music from Bolivia, including solo guitar works of Alfredo Domínguez (*Por la quebrada* and *Zapateo*) and Yupanqui's *Romántico quechua* with extended pizzicato, spritely harmonics and long glissando transitions on the guitar, contrasted by the warmth of Méndez's voice. Osaky, who studied guitar with Eduardo Fernández, Gentaro Takada, Alex Garrobé and Juan Carlos Laguna, performed Humberto Viscarra's *Tramonto* with a somber wistfulness. Méndez, a graduate of the National Conservatory of Music in Bolivia and Osaka



Marlachi band.





**Rafael Scarfullery.**

Alfredo Cáceres of Guatemala was joined by percussionist Behzad Habibzai to perform a set of mostly original flamenco fusion which incorporated elements of jazz, Brazilian music, salsa and pop. Cáceres won the National Jazz Competition in 2004 with his composition *Colores urbanos*, and he performed on the 2009 Grammy-nominated album *Bajo el sol* as part of the Russ Hewitt Band. Cáceres and Habibzai performed amplified in the cavernous open arena of the Museum of the American Indian, capturing a massive audience as guests entered the front door. Cáceres performed his

compositions *Suite para Tita I y II*, *Reflejos de tu sonrisa* and *Peregrinaje de Kali* in addition to a traditional Guatemalan song by Paco Perez, *Luna de Xelaju*, a deeply nostalgic tune with a strong, dance-like rhythm.

In contrast, Agni Durden of Ecuador followed this set on electric guitar with Joe Calvo on drums, Edwin Vasconez on bass and Diego Lascano on electronic devices. The group filled the hall with the ambient, post-progressive, Andean Nu-Metal and Post Industrial rock sounds. Durden works as both a guitarist and producer and has been recognised by *Rolling Stone Magazine* in addition to sharing the stage with well-known rock groups like Suicidal Tendencies, Coheed, Cambria and Apocalyptica. He is currently working on a fusion of post-progressive rock with Andean music using traditional instruments, such as the *queña* (Andean flute), *zampoñas* (pan-pipes) and *bombo* (a drum made of a hollowed-out tree trunk), all processed through software technology.

Classical guitarist and Fulbright scholar Walter Quevedo-Osegueda of El Salvador performed a programme of Agustín Barrios's *La Catedral*, followed by Spanish composer Leonardo Balada's modern *Lento con variación*, Ponce's rondo-structured *Allegro non troppo* from *Sonata III*, Salvadoran composer Germán Cáceres's 8 *variaciones sobre 8 notas* and Brazilian composer Marlos Nobre's *Entrada y tango Op. 67*. His playing reflected a quiet, serious and scholarly intensity. Quevedo-Osegueda's first guitar teacher was José Cándido Morales, a student of Agustín Barrios Mangoré's and, since 1995, he has been a conductor of the Guitar Orchestra of the María Escalón de Nuñez Foundation which performs in El Salvador and Honduras.

Ruben Seroussi of Montevideo, Uruguay, performed Ponce's dramatic and lyrical oeuvre, *Variaciones sobre 'La Folia de Espana'* y *Fuga* and Uruguayan composer Abel Carlevaro's pensive *Aires de vicalita* and milonga-based *Aires de malambo*. Seroussi, who has received the Israel's Prime Minister Prize in Composition, is a senior faculty member at the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music at Tel Aviv University as composition studies coordinator and guitar instructor.



**Manuel Ponce Quartet.**