

B B C . Guitar programme - Reginald Smith Brindle

Q. We have known of you mainly as a composer for orchestra and for chamber music. How did you begin to write for the guitar?

A. Well this is a long story. First I was an architect, but way back in the 'thirties I was a jazz semi-pro, specializing in sax. But I liked to play any instrument. In fact when we played in the old 'Melody Maker' band contests, I won two prizes - one for clarinet, the other for guitar. At a certain point a single gramophone record of the jazz guitarist Djano Reinhardt fell into my hands - 'Moonglow' - and of course his improvised playing was a revelation. But by 1938 I had discovered classical music, gave up jazz and aspired to be a ~~xxxxx~~ cathedral organist.

I had an awful lot to learn, so I never put hands on a guitar again until during the war. In the army I was mostly abroad - in the desert and then in Italy. As one can't live in a creative void I used to compose a lot, but in the desert there are no pianos or organs to play on. This <sup>is</sup> where I discovered that the guitar is the only portable orchestra that exists. So if you can <sup>imagine</sup> me with a guitar in one hand, a revolver in the other and a stick of dynamite between my teeth, you have my portrait at that time.

Q. What music did you play?

A. That was the trouble. I knew nothing of the classical guitar repertoire at all. Not a note. So I had to make up my own music. Perhaps this was a good thing. Perhaps this was the real way to discover what the guitar can really do.

Q. When did you meet guitarists?

A. Later on in Italy. Not when the fighting was on. But when things in a place settled down, the local music shop could put me on to a guitarist, and I made friends everywhere. Of course there was no music to be bought, but we all made manuscript copies of each other's music and in a couple of years I had quite an extensive library.

Q. What influenced you most at that time?

A. When I first went to Florence I met a brother architect called Giuseppe Gullino, who was Italy's greatest authority on Italian lute music. He had already published several volumes and it was this music which really attracted me, for it has such a noble, pure quality. Of course I began to compose similar pieces, and I have

chosen one of these to include in this programme. This is a small piece called 'Chorale and Variants' which I wrote in 1944. You can imagine how pleased I am to have been able to publish it in the first volume of my Guitarcosmos 35 years later. Of course it is by no means faultless, but I think it has stood the ~~test~~ test of time fairly well...

PLAY CHORALE AND VARIANTS.

Q. Did you continue playing guitar after the war?

A. Not right away. I tried at first to get back to the organ, but my hands were so rigid I had to give up. I then tried hard with the guitar, but when I went to Segovia's first master-class in Siena around 1950, I realised I could never have enough technical facility. I was over thirty and it would have been futile to persist. In any case, at heart, I was a composer and there is simply not enough time in one day to practice the guitar and compose as well. In any case, I was too self-taught even to be able to hold the instrument properly.

Q. Did Segovia help you with technique?

A. Naturally. In those days he insisted a lot on basic exercises - scales, arpeggios, and so on - to improve technique. The next two short pieces from Guitarcosmos are the kind of thing he insisted on. The first is a very short exercise to improve student's left-hand legato playing - the left hand has mostly to play three notes each time the string is plucked. The other piece is to develop the right hand instead, with rapid tremolos on one string only, most of the time ...

PLAY BACK 1 P17. LEFT-HAND LEGATO 2

p27 TRIPLETS

Q. What is the real objective of Guitarcosmos?

A. By the early 'fifties I had already progressed into very modern methods of composition. I was living in Italy where the 'avant-garde' way of composing was the only decent thing to do. But I was strongly aware that I was going into a world far out of reach of almost all guitarists. In fact I thought guitarists were so backward musically that by 1956 I gave up guitar composition altogether. When I began again in the 'seventies I thought it very important to build a bridge - to publish volumes which could bring students to an understanding of modern music by gradual steps. So I composed the 3 volumes of Guitarcosmos in such a way that technical development is achieved in parallel with a gradual exploration of modern

musical styles. Much of the music is deliberately simple, yet it has not only a musical, poetic objective, but a cultural one as well. For instance the Suite N°2 from the second volume takes the student quite smoothly into chromatic territory while at the same time exploiting guitaristic devices such as the legato glissando and barré in the first piece and two-part close counterpoint in the second. Particularly in this second piece, we are moving towards the atonality so typical of 20th century music, but I think students should find it agreeable, even attractive. In other words, the crude harmonic stress of modern music has been made more palatable.

#### SUITE N°2, BOOK 2

Q. What pieces are in your own guitar style?

A. These only come in towards the end of the third book, particularly with a number of duets. But there are solo pieces coming near to my own natural style, though I have kept them simple. For example, the 'Suite in 3 Movements' is quite simple technically, but the real performance problem is in the interpretation. I regard music as emotion transmitted from one person to another, but if the intermediary - the performer - has not the right intuition and emotive sympathy, the whole operation is a failure. The three movements are inspired by Garcia Lorca, who has influenced all my guitar music. The titles are 'The Dark Earth', 'Night Immobile' and 'Festa Rossa'. The interpretation of 'Night Immobile' is the real problem here - there are so few notes, spaced out so far, that to paint the picture of a silent, frozen landscape is not easy.

#### SUITE IN THREE MOVEMENTS

Q. We know you more as a composer of symphonic music and chamber music. Have you any other activities closely concerned with the guitar?

A. Yes, I have transcribed and published quite a bit of Italian lute music of the Renaissance, but more recently my attention has turned towards doing some really authentic editions of more recent guitar music. For example, even a well-known composer such as Sor is represented by such unscholarly editions that I have republished some of his principal compositions in what I hope is a really correct manner. We will end with some music from Sor's

'Studies Op.29' which has been largely overlooked simply because Segovia left it out of his publication of these pieces

STUDY (or Studies ? ) Op 29.

Q. Before we end, I wonder if you can give us some idea of what future you think there is for the guitar.

A. I don't think the present vogue is just a passing phase. In my own time I have seen the instrument emerge from almost complete obscurity and become almost the most popular instrument. And it is world-wide too. My music sells just as well in Tokyo as in New York - in fact more so. I think there is a very genuine love for this magical instrument, and I think the guitar's own poetic qualities will ensure that it never dies.

I would like to stress one thing, however. Though we have excellent teachers nowadays, I think the technical evolution of the instrument still has very far to go. If we compare it to the violin, it is just about at the Paganini stage. Violin technique settled down in various stages or plateaus, - late renaissance, Corelli, Bach, Paganini, Heifetz, Kreisler, Menuhin and Post-Menuhin. Nobody still dares to play one of the best modern violin pieces - Bartok's solo Sonata - and the guitar is nowhere near that stage. There are just one or two guitar pieces which stretch out into the future, but I do not think they will be played till the next century. But even though I think the guitar has very far to go, I ~~think~~<sup>believe</sup> it has a great future, and will be as esteemed as any other instrument.