

PETER FLETCHER
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1.) When did you begin to play the guitar and why did you choose the classical style?

I began taking lessons when I was six. Two years later it was recommended that if I learn the classical style of guitar playing, then all other styles would come easier. So I began with the classical style and loved it. Soon I heard some recordings of Christopher Parkening and decided to make it my career. These early years of discovering the guitar were some of the best days of my life.

2.) What was your practice schedule as a young player learning classical guitar?

I began serious study of the guitar when I started with the classical style. John Sutherland was my first teacher and I continued with him through college (he was and still is the head of the guitar department at the University of Georgia). At first I practiced about an hour a day. When I reached my teens, I was doing three hours a day, seven days a week. In high school, I practiced three or four hours every day after school. It was pretty tough, because I took on quite a challenging academic load at St. Pius High School (advanced mathematics and much outside reading). In college, and when I did my Masters Degree at the Eastman School of Music, I practiced about six hours a day.

3.) How is classical guitar different from other styles of guitar playing?

Classical guitar is pretty much done in the style of Andres Segovia. Nylon strings are used and using a combination of flesh and fingernails on the right hand produces sound. The left leg is elevated by way of a footstool, and the palm of the left hand is held parallel to the fret-board.

It's a polyphonic instrument, which means that you can play several independent voices (melodies) at the same time. A melody can be harmonized, and it is possible to play contrapuntal music, like fugues and canons. In the end, the classical guitarist has a lot of choices in the type of music he decides to play; he has more freedom for expression.

Classical style is by far the most challenging, but it is also the most rewarding.

4.) What kind of guitar do you own?

I play a 1987 Robert Mattingly guitar built in Long Beach, California. It has a cedar top, but holds all of the characteristics of a spruce guitar - clarity and a velvety mid and upper register. Mattingly was known for hand-building about two guitars a month and his instruments were fast becoming a successful new breed of American Luthier until his death in 1990.

5.) What have been your favorite performance venues?

I prefer churches and chapels, although I have played in some very nice concert halls, such as Memorial Hall in Cincinnati. I like spaces with a lot of echo and reverb. I feel that this gives the sound more body and an extra dimension; the guitar is a quiet instrument to begin with.

Something very special happens when an audience is completely silent in a classical guitar concert. New York critics refer to this as the "Segovia Hush." To that end, I would be very happy to perform in churches exclusively not only for their great architecture but also for their great reverb. In comparison, many U.S. concert halls are dead, meaning they have no reverb and the sound doesn't go anywhere. Churches and chapels tend to give the extra boost that is needed: a wall of sound that provides body and sonority.

6.) How much practice is required to maintain your skills and furthermore, realize the full potential of classical guitar?

At this point in my life, every day is different, but I usually practice six hours a day. I do a lot of abstract memorization away from the instrument.

7.) How did you decide on Frederico Mompou as the focus of your latest release and what inspired you about him to record his music?

I originally sent Centaur a recording of the "Suite Compostelana" for them to audition. They approved it and suggested that I re-record the suite along with some transcriptions to fill an entire Mompou album. I chose the "14 Canciones y danzas" because they work so well as guitar transcriptions, and because I felt an affinity for them.

8.) What are your favorite selections from both of your releases, *The Art of Classical Guitar* and *Frederico Mompou*?

*Hmmm... that's a good question. From *The Art of Classical Guitar*, the "Cavatina" from the *Deer Hunter* is a very good effort. And I like most of the *Moreno Torroba*. The *Praetorius* and*

Mudarra were recorded when I was 19 (my first time in a professional studio). They certainly have a lot of verve - probably an overabundance of testosterone!

Tracks 11 and 12 from the new Centaur Release, which are extraordinarily profound, were actually recorded on September 11th, and seem to resonate with the overall tragedy of this event.

Tracks 8, 9 and 10 are most precious to me because they are so light-hearted, witty and playful - a wonderful portal to Mompou's inner-child.

Tracks 16 and 17 work extremely well in concert, probably because they fit the guitar so perfectly. They are based on medieval "cantigas" which are pieces written in praise of the virgin Mary, so they are the most spiritual selections on the album.

9.) Who is Federico Mompou, and what type of music did he compose?

Mompou was a Catalan composer who died in 1987. He was born in Barcelona but lived in Paris for 20 years. His music is not easy to describe. The most basic premise of his aesthetic was recommencement (to start all over), a quest for pure simplicity vis-a-vis his own childhood. Pianist Carmen Bravo, his widow, agrees that while his style is very much his own, it has an overall French flavor. His exquisite treatment of harmony and obsession for simplicity is comparable to the jazz pianist Bill Evans. Mompou believed that music was not a laboratory product based exclusively on technique but something very deep and fundamental that only come from rich life experience and meditation. His music is basically tonal and lyrical. It can be very joyful and extraverted, but usually very sensitive and sometimes tinged with sadness.

10.) What is unique about your October 13th concert in Decatur??

The program will consist of music from three centuries. I will be playing my own transcriptions of the piano music of Mompou and Satie; music that has never been performed on guitar before, but the music fits the instrument almost perfectly. The last selection, "Koyunbaba," is one of the most unique works written for classical guitar in that the entire instrument is tuned to a C# minor chord. Every string is tuned down a half step, resulting in a very eastern sound (the composer lives in Turkey). It is a favorite amongst audiences, and a major tour de force.

11.) When did you get interested in transcribing and who taught you?

It's really what everyone learns how to do because the guitar repertoire is so limited. In fact, numerous sources from earlier centuries testify to the historical authenticity of transcribing

(arranging) music from one instrument to another, so no matter what the musicologists say, the custom is perfectly justified. I'm pretty much self-taught although I look at Segovia and Williams and their projects to make sure that I am on the mark.

With Centaur Records, I wanted to do an all-Mompou project, which would have to include transcriptions, since he only wrote about 20 minutes for the guitar ("Suite Compostelana," tracks 1-6 and "Canciones y danza #13," track 20). During the Mompou project I realized my true love for the transcription process. It involves deciding which pieces will work for the guitar, finding the right key to transcribe them to, and solving the many problems in making a transcription sound good on the guitar. Sometimes you have to change the notes fundamentally to be in the real spirit of the piece on the different instrument. Moreover, it's important that we recreate the spirit of the music in the arrangement and not be relentlessly faithful. For instance, octaves are wonderful on the piano, but they do not always sound good on the guitar. Thickness is almost never a good thing on the guitar, so I almost always play a solo line in place of octaves. In addition, textures sometimes have to be inverted - the melody put on top of the accompaniment, and vice versa. The end result is that my transcriptions are not imitations or photocopies - they are new creations.