

# This Issue's CD

In this issue, *Guitar Review* is enclosing a CD featuring the music of two young guitarist-composers, Sébastien Vachez of France and Boris Gaquere of Belgium. The following interviews were conducted to provide a glimpse into the personal aesthetics of these promising and talented artists.

## An Interview with Sébastien Vachez

by Stephen Griesgraber



*You've studied with Roland Dyens and Désiré Dondeyne—how have these individuals influenced your work?*

Actually, my primary guitar teachers were Jean-Pierre Chauvineau and Pierre Goliot in the conservatoire of Troyes (France) and later Vladimir Mikulka and Gérard Verba in two different conservatories in Paris. Of course, I also studied harmony, counterpoint, fugue, and analysis. I have studied with Roland Dyens in masterclasses and summer workshops and also I learned much from him by listening to his concerts and recordings; reading and playing his compositions and arrangements. How could one not be influenced by such a great artist? By creating a personal and innovative guitaristic language, he extended the possibilities of our instrument much as Barrios, Villa-Lobos, and Brouwer had before.

As a composer, I think the main things I learned from Roland were to be open-minded to all different musical styles (classical, contemporary, jazz, popular, etc.) and to consider the guitar as a "colors instrument." Like a painter, I think the range of colors are an invaluable means of expression. The blending of those colors is why I often include in my music specific notation concerning tonal effects, just as I do for dynamics or articulation. Roland also encouraged me to use open tunings to further extend possibilities, to change atmosphere and to avoid the ubiquitous E and A minor!

*What is the motivation for pursuing composition as well performance? Do you feel that there is a growing trend toward classical guitarists performing their own compositions?*

Combining composition, performance, and teaching is quite natural for me. I think they are complementary activities and I enjoy the balance they provide. When I look to the past, prior to the twentieth century most musicians were instrumentalists (often playing several instruments), composers, and teachers. In contrast, my generation is crowded with brilliant performers but few of them are composing. Fortunately, I occasionally meet more complete artists of the new generation,

musicians from my "guitarist-composer family" such as Atanas Ourkouzounov or Boris Gaquere, who create their own universe, their own repertoire. Maybe in the United States I still have "brothers" to discover.

*Have you written for other instruments and if so, how has it influenced your approach to writing for the guitar?*

I mainly compose for the guitar or around the guitar because it is the instrument I know the best. I recently composed a piece for flute and guitar (*La Ballade d'Irina*, published by Doberman-Yppan) and I wrote a version for guitar and string orchestra of *Scherzo-Tango*. I have also written many arrangements for the trio "Couleurs Tango" (bandoneon, guitar and bass guitar) in collaboration with the bandoneonist Fabien Packo.

I am increasingly attracted to chamber music including guitar. I try to set off all its qualities and to find a good balance between the guitar and the other instruments. However, as an intimate instrument, sometimes the guitar needs to be supported by amplification—when it is played with bandoneon or orchestra for example. But good solutions can be found if the material is well orchestrated and a good sound engineer is involved. You can then enjoy all the details and it prevents the guitarist from constantly playing at the top of his dynamic range (which is not very exciting for him/her indeed!).

*How would you characterize your compositional aesthetic? Your compositions are tonal and many of them are influenced by dance. What about these languages and forms attracts you?*

As I told you before, thanks to Roland Dyens, I listen to all musical styles and I try to absorb them like a sponge! However, I'm much more influenced by twentieth century music such as French impressionism, jazz, and Latin American music. Some of my favorite composers are Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, Villa-Lobos, Takemitsu as well as Jobim, Miles Davis, Piazzolla and Dyens.

It is true I often use a tonal language but sometimes I do prefer to think in terms of “emancipated tonality.” By that I mean I do not always employ chords for their traditional tonal or harmonic function but rather for their color. Furthermore, I like to use some other modes like “limited transposition” modes (for example in *Rêve en Vert*).

Generally speaking, I never forget that the guitar has popular origins. That’s why, as you have noticed, my compositions are often influenced by dances, as in *Scherzo-Valse*.

*What are you working on now musically?*

I am preparing two recording projects. The first is with the trio “Couleurs Tango.” The recording will feature arrangements of traditional tangos as well as works by Piazzolla, and of course, my own compositions. The other project will be dedicated to Brazil with pieces by Roland Dyens, Boris Gaquere, and of course, my own works. Boris and I have also planned to record a couple of pieces together for this CD, so I am glad you brought us together for this issue of *Guitar Review*!