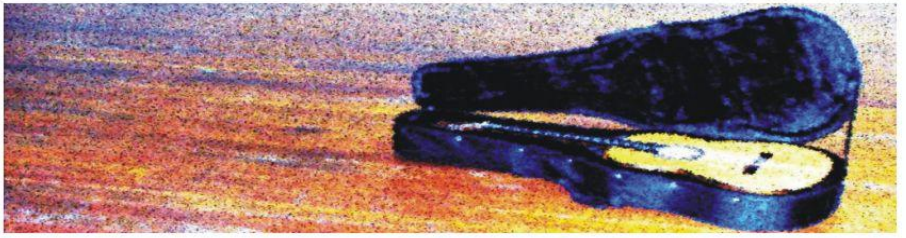


Christchurch Guitar Society



SOUNDBOARD

August 2011

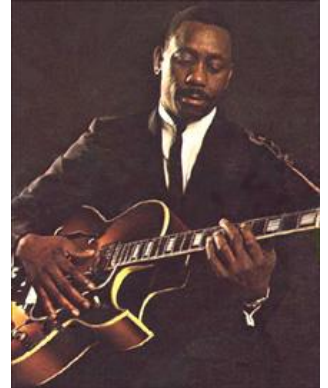
The Newsletter of the Christchurch Guitar Society

President – Alan Dixon

Secretary – Kenny Daly

Treasurer – David Smith

Committee Members – Julie Scales, Gillian Calvert,
Kathryn Treeby, Roger Welsh, Paul Zdrenka



Mission of the Society –

To promote playing, education and friendship for players of all styles of guitar in and around Christchurch and to expand interest in the guitar in the general community.

President's Notes

Dear members

Remember practice does not make perfect. Good thoughtful practice makes perfect. Or as near as it's possible to get.

I am pleased to announce the results of the vote for the website, the majority of votes received were in favour of the free website.

I will in due course get in touch with Tim Watanabe to formally request he goes ahead with the website that he has offered us.

Alan

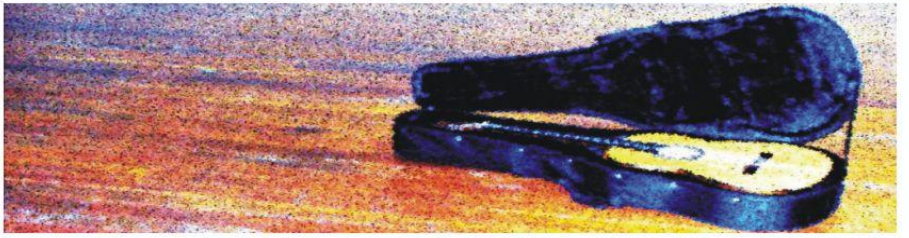
Prelude for Thought

Compare playing the guitar to speaking or any activity requiring an idea leading to action.

Having learned to speak at a young age we can usually do it without consciously manipulating the appropriate muscles and vocal chords. There may be times with unfamiliar or difficult words where we have to make more of a conscious effort.

This can serve as a model for making music where the idea comes to mind and the fingers, via the instrument, bring the music to life. It follows that the techniques for playing must be continually honed in order that the music emerges and the ideas are expressed.

The words of Andres Segovia spring to mind: (edited) "To acquire a firm technique on the guitar the student should not neglect the patient study of scales....faulty hand positions will be corrected and



finger strength will gradually increase. Thanks to the independence and elasticity which the fingers develop one will soon acquire a quality which is difficult to gain later: physical beauty of sound. I say physical, because sonority and its infinite shadings are not the result of stubborn will power but spring from the innate excellence of the spirit.”

David Smith

Some Thoughts on Technique and Musicality

Mark Webb

I thought I'd write a short essay on this subject to share with the more serious players in our group, although the casual hobbyists among us may also benefit from these experiences and insights. Of course, it would be possible to write volumes on this subject, as others have, but here I'd just like to identify and briefly outline some points of particular importance.

Once you have been playing for a few years and have basic command of guitar technique, you have probably had occasion to ask yourself why professional guitarists sound so good, especially when comparing your own rendition of a particular piece to, say, a studio recording.

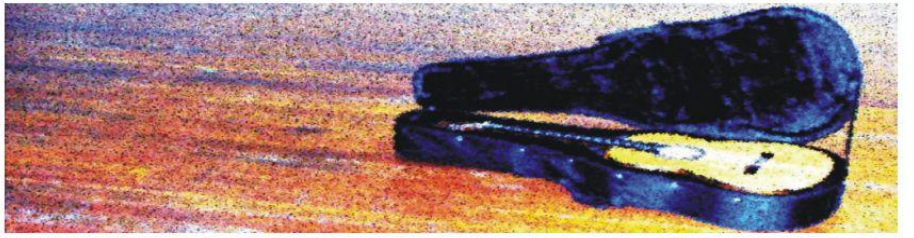
Putting aside the obvious factors such as acoustics, the quality of the instrument, and so on, it should be clear that the player is making the principal difference. If that were not true, then all you'd need to be a great guitarist is to have a sound knowledge of technique, a nice instrument to play and an acoustically-friendly room to play in!

Unfortunately, it is not that easy, and more understanding is needed in order to unravel this apparently simple process.

On the technical side, there are four aspects of playing that I'd like to mention, that account for much of the gap between professional players and us mere amateurs:

- 1) Rhythm – true rhythm doesn't necessarily mean metronomic (or regular) rhythm. Instead, it involves a sense of **beat** – whether the music is speeding up or slowing down, it is vital that a sense of beat be maintained. It is apt to think of it as the music's **backbone**. In practice, this simply means plucking the **first beat** of each bar a little harder than the others, and keeping these beats steady and predictable.
- 2) Dynamics – operating within the rhythmic framework, these are the accents, the pianos and fortes, the dolces and ponticellos, etc. and are often indicated in the score. Many players take liberties here, as they should, because this gives your music the final personal touch, and if done in the right way makes the music 'come alive'. Attention to these details can make a huge difference, giving the player and the audience a more satisfying experience.
- 3) Damping – It is often necessary to damp strings, for two reasons. The first is to preserve the time-value of the notes being played. The second is to stop strings from producing unwanted overtones that muddy the sound and cause dissonance. Strings can be stopped

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using either the left hand or the right (just make sure you aren't touching any harmonics when doing so). Paying attention to damping will make your sound clearer and give the music an added coherence.

- 4) Legato – For those not familiar with this term, it means 'played in a smooth and continuous way'. Technically, this means giving all the notes their **full time value**, or near as you can get it. In terms of how you move your hands, it generally means leaving your left hand/fingers in position until the **last possible moment** before moving to the next position.

A noticeable problem with many guitarists is **anticipation**; that is, cutting off chords/notes prematurely with the left hand by moving the hand/fingers too early. An easy way to remedy this is to slow down the tempo a bit, so that you'll have enough time to get it right. Also, it's important that your left hand is securely in place **before** you pluck any strings.

Of course, technique is not the only component of making music, but it is the most important one, in that it is the most fundamental. Without a sound technique, proper musicality can never be fully realised, however enthusiastic the player is. This doesn't just apply to classical music, but to any musical style. You have to learn to walk before you can run!

I would like to close this essay by recalling a particular revelation I had about this many years ago, and have since changed the way I play from that day on.

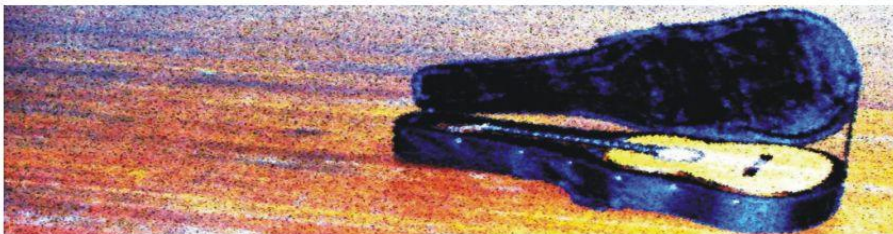
I was practicing a piece of music one afternoon, which I also had a studio recording of, and I was wondering about how to make my rendition more exciting. Apart from the LP version being much faster than what I was comfortable with, I noticed it had a certain lilt in the way it was played (you could almost dance to it). I also noticed rapid changes in tone-colour, something I'd only occasionally tried, and on this recording really added to its magic.

I had listened to this particular track many times, so I knew it off by heart. Also by then I'd memorised the score and was able to play through it. So, I thought, I'll have a go and play it like he does, speed and all!

Playing like this was something new to me, and I was somewhat reluctant to go ahead with it. In hindsight, the reason was based on my fear of 'letting go', since I was very used to playing in a careful and controlled manner. But in the end I realised I wouldn't come to any harm by experimenting a little, so off I went.

Not surprisingly, the results of my minor adventure were uneven, to say the least, and I'd estimate that I only managed to hit maybe half of the notes/chords properly. But I could also hear that some fleeting passages were clear and dynamic, in a way that I'd never managed before. I was impressed and excited enough by this experience to realise that with a lot of work and patience, I'd eventually be able to play at this new level with consistency. So many years later, this episode still sticks in my mind as a turning point for me as a player, and was my first real foray into what I think of as actual musicality.

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All of us play at our own level, but none of us would have the cheek to say, "I've got this sussed!" As players, all of us are learners, but only some will have the inclination to push themselves higher. I hope that some of what I've written above will provide an impetus and helpful nudge to improve your own playing, and that you will be able to at least glimpse a bit of that wonderful phenomenon that we call musicality.

Isn't that what it's all about?

Mark Webb

Coming Up

Next Session – Sunday 5th August, 7.30pm at Avon Loop Community Centre, 28 Hurley Street

Articles from members are more than welcome, if you have something you wish to share including articles, personal reflections or YouTube links please contact Kenny.