

# The Guitar Garden

Newsletter of the New Jersey Classical Guitar Society

September 2021

*Thanks to Jim Tosone for suggesting the new name for our newsletter, and for his persuasive reasoning: "Since we are a New Jersey Society, it pays homage to the fact that we live in the Garden State. And our society is metaphorically a garden, in which we plant seeds, nurture each other, and help each other grow." ♪*

## September Meeting

Our next meeting will be on **Saturday**, September 11 at **4:30** p.m. at the Westminster Choir College. Weather permitting, we will first meet outside for refreshments, then move into The Robert L. Annis Playhouse for performances. We require attendees to be fully vaccinated, and masks will be required while inside. We'll send a reminder, directions, a campus map, and a request for program information a few days before the meeting. The Choir College is located near downtown Princeton and can be reached by Route 206 from most locations.

We're hoping that this meeting marks the beginning of our return to in-person meetings, but will continue to monitor the Covid 19 situation on a month-to-month basis. Please let us know if you would be able to host a meeting in the coming months. Locations near northern Route 287 or east of there on Routes 78 or 80 are most convenient for many of our members. Locations that permit a reasonable amount of social distancing are particularly desirable. ♪

## The New Jersey Guitar

**Orchestra** will start their season with a meeting on September 15. Please see their newsletter for further details:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Wk\\_xdnlgOJaWL\\_RXHmlZxwzSrsT30B4GD/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Wk_xdnlgOJaWL_RXHmlZxwzSrsT30B4GD/view) ♪

## The Renaissance Vihuela

By Rick Florio

As many of you know, I acquired a replica of a vihuela from our friend, Steve Walters, a few years ago and have been playing and performing with it since. This article is my attempt to share what I've learned about the instrument, the music written for it, and the rewards and challenges of playing one. If anyone is interested, I can provide citations for scholarly publications on topics related to the renaissance vihuela.



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*What I find most satisfying in playing this music on a period instrument (albeit a replica) is that it comes as close to what we believe it sounded like to listeners of the time.*

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The instrument originated in Spain in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. It has no relation, by the way, to the similarly named instrument employed in Mexican mariachi music. While the lute was the predominant plucked instrument elsewhere in Europe, the vihuela and the so-called Spanish guitar (first 4 then 5 strings) seem to have been more favored in Spain. Only a few original vihuelas survive in various states of preservation, being housed in various museums. They vary in terms of size and scale and degree of ornamentation, but all have a somewhat similar shape with a body that is less narrow at the waist than the modern guitar.

Ultimately the vihuela evolved into a stringed instrument with six courses (pairs of strings fretted simultaneously). It is most likely the case that all the paired strings were tuned as unisons. This contrasts with the lute, in which some of the lower

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## July Meeting

We usually take the summer off, but Stella Kosim and Robert Vierschilling, who have been participating in our Zoom meetings from Washington state were visiting New Jersey. So we took advantage of the opportunity to get together to meet them in person.

### Program

#### Valerie Nelson

- Etudes – Fernando Sor
- Solitudine – Luigi Oreste Anzaghi

#### Robert Ey

- Divenire (To Become) – Ludovico Einaudi, arr. David van Ooijen

#### Helen Shi-Yuen

- Gran Vals – Francisco Tárrega

#### Jeffrey Wilt

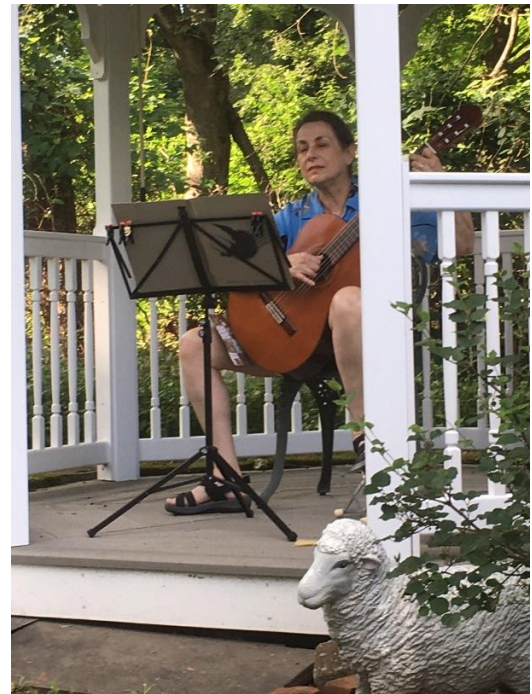
- Julia Florida – Agustin Barrios Mangore
- For My Love – Per-Olov Kindgren

#### Jeff Griesemer

- Ookpik Waltz – Frankie Rodgers, Arr. Jeff Griesemer

#### Stella Kosim

- Allemande from the First Lute Suite BWV 996 – J. S. Bach
- Gavotta Choro – Heitor Villa-Lobos



*Vihuela, continued.*

pitched courses are typically tuned in octaves. Tuning is accomplished by means of friction pegs as with a violin. The most popular tuning scheme is like the modern guitar with two exceptions: everything is a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> higher in pitch, and the third course is a half-step lower. In other words:

G C F a d g'

It is possible to play vihuela music either using the original tablature or in a transcription for the guitar given the similarities. One can drop the G string to an F# and employ a capo at the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret to obtain a similar sound. However, given the vihuela's smaller size, lighter construction, and paired strings, the guitar's timbre is someone different and the volume that can be achieved much greater.



Guadalupe Vihuela

Instead of metal frets as on today's instruments, the vihuela's consisted of pieces of gut tied around the its neck (as with the lute). As the strings were of made of gut, this enabled the player to make adjustments to address intonation issues. Modern replica instruments use a combination of metal wound and nylon strings, but still employ tied frets for an authentic esthetic and feel.

There were a handful of composers for the instrument, some of whom may be familiar to classical guitar players. This is because some works of the era have made their way into the modern guitar replica. One example is the arrangement of the Spanish folk tune *Guardame Las Vacas* by Luis de Narvaez. The most well-known is probably Luis Milan, whose pavans are also popular contributions to the music of the guitar. Other composers of note were Enriquez de Valderrabano, Alfonso Mudarra, Miguel de Fuenllana, Esteban Daza, and Diego Pisador. As with the stereotypical "renaissance man", most were minor nobles and/or were accomplished in multiple fields of endeavor (authors, lawyers, etc.).

Their collective output is contained in a fairly small collection of works, fewer than a dozen publications. One of the best known is *El Maestro* by Luis Milan, published in Valencia in 1536.

The compositions themselves fall generally into a handful of categories:

- Original instrumental music in various forms: *Pavana* (based on the dance form known elsewhere as the Pavane); *Fantasia* (a lengthier work of greater sophistication); *Diferencias* (i.e., theme and variations); and *Glossa* (a more highly ornamented version of a piece designed to highlight the player's skill).
- Pieces based on a liturgical theme (e.g., Kyrie or Agnus Dei) often by other famous composers (i.e., Josquin des Pres)
- Songs, sometimes in recognizable forms such as the *Villanico* from popular theater

Compositionally, counterpoint and syncopation feature in various degrees according to the skill of the composer. Hemiola rhythm is also common in this period, recognizable in modern terms by the alternation of measures in 3/4 and 6/8 time (think: *America*, from *West Side Story*). Their original musical notation doesn't perfectly align to our conception of time signatures or grouping of notes into measures. Modern musicologists have invested a great deal of scholarly effort to *interpret* the notation and *fit it* into our modern system so that it can be more easily understood and played.

Vihuela players performed using right hand fingerstyle techniques as with the lute. Ornamentation does not appear to have been as elaborate in terms of notation, discretion likely given to the player. The left hand frets the strings of a course together. Barres are employed as with other similar instruments. For the left hand, one



Quito vihuela

needs to get used to the feel of the tied frets, and with the need to stop both strings of a course cleanly. It is important that the right-hand nails not be too long, and it would probably benefit the player to use the “thumb under” approach as do lute players. I haven’t been able to adapt to it. The scale of the vihuela is different from the guitar, and so having both hands working in synchronization within a smaller space can be tricky.

As mentioned previously, much of the vihuela’s repertoire has been arranged for the classical guitar. My personal preference is to play directly from those arrangements, with the understanding that the notes I am reading are a minor third lower. It takes practice to adjust for the third course being a minor second lower, which is the equivalent of tuning the 3<sup>rd</sup> string to F# on the guitar.

What I find most satisfying in playing this music on a period instrument (albeit a replica) is that it comes as close to what we believe it sounded like to listeners of the time. The physical characteristics of the instrument, its tuning, and how the player gives voice to the music combine in a way that can’t be duplicated. I don’t believe it

*necessary* that music from our past be played on period instruments, but doing so gives us a context by which we can better understand and appreciate it. J

Some resources I can recommend for anyone looking for more on the vihuela:

Maestros of the guitar (<http://www.maestros-of-the-guitar.com/vihuela.html>) has videos of performances on the vihuela.

Wikipedia article: (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vihuela>)

Frank Koonce, Renaissance Vihuela and Guitar in Sixteenth Century Spain, Mel Bey Publications, 2008. Find on Amazon [here](#). Great historical background information on the vihuela, along with a collection of transcriptions for the classical guitar.



Luca Signorelli