

Preview

Classical Guitar Weekend: a conversation with Cleveland guitarist Jason Vieaux

by Mike Telin



On Thursday, May 23rd beginning at 8:00 pm in CIM's Mixon Hall, Classical Guitar Weekend kicks off its 2013 edition with a recital by [Jason Vieaux](#) that features the music of Paganini, Piazzolla, Ponce, and Sor. Vieaux, who heads the Cleveland Institute of Music's Guitar department and serves on the faculty at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, will be joined by his CIM colleagues violinist Jinjoo Cho, violist Jeffrey Irvine, and cellist Melissa Kraut.

On Friday, May 24 beginning at 9:00 am, also in Mixon Hall, Vieaux will lead a master class via Distance Learning. Guitar students from the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Royal Danish Academy of Music will perform on and off site via CIM's innovative Distance Learning audio/video hook up and be coached by Jesper Sivebak, head of the RDAM guitar department.

Since winning the Guitar Foundation of America's International Competition at the age of nineteen, Jason Vieaux has earned a reputation for putting his expressive gifts and virtuosity at the service of a remarkably wide range of music.

Some highlights of this season include concertos with the symphonies of Houston, Toronto, Spokane, Augusta (GA) and Silicon Valley, a performance of the Lukas Foss Concerto for the New Hampshire Music Festival, duo recitals with acclaimed harpist Yolanda Kondonassis and accordion/bandoneon virtuoso Julien Labro, solo recitals in Austin, at the Mannes School of Music and California's La Guitarra Festival, and another Curtis On Tour sojourn, this time to South America.

Someone who is never afraid to try new things and continually embraces the latest technology, in May 2012, Vieaux launched the *Jason Vieaux Guitar Academy* in partnership with Napa, California-based ArtistWorks Inc., an unprecedented technological interface that provides a one-on-one online study exchange between Vieaux and guitar students around the world.

The *Jason Vieaux Guitar Academy* is part of the [ArtistWorks Classical Campus](#), the first and only interactive, worldwide online learning community for classical musicians, offering aspiring professionals and enthusiastic amateurs the unprecedented opportunity to take lessons with esteemed soloists, conservatory teachers, and principal players of leading orchestras including the Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Pittsburgh Symphony.

Founded in 2008 by former AOL executive David Butler and former financial executive Patricia Butler, ArtistWorks, Inc. is the leader in a new generation of online learning platform.

We spoke with Jason Vieaux about his latest pedagogical endeavor and began by asking him how he was adjusting to the new way of teaching.

Jason Vieaux: [laughing] There was a period of a month or two once it launched back in June where there was a flood of about 80 students right away. And now that I don't really stop performing or teaching, there was a period of learning how to get into a rhythm of making the videos. But by August I had gotten into a rhythm and it's feeling pretty good now.

Mike Telin: How many students do you have?

JV: We have over two hundred students.

MT: Oh my!

JV: But what reduced my stress level was when I figured out that you can do one video a day, which takes about fifteen minutes. You watch the video and write out a bullet point page of things you're going to cover. I go into my studio and film it then you can compress the video and upload it while you are practicing.

MT: Are all the videos of the same quality and format?

JV: The quality of the video does depend on the student. To be as inclusive as we are I can teach any student of any level from anywhere in the world. Then you have to allow the student from India to submit it from his iPhone. My response is in 1080 DPI. But we are allowing students to upload video from their phones.

MT: What is the greatest thing about the school?

JV: Several things — and it took me a while to get my head wrapped around it. Obviously I don't have the vision that David Butler has because if I did I would have written the interface with America Online back in the 80's as well as this one.

But because of what the site allows, the reach is incredible and it's high quality all the way through. Then there is the curriculum. 85% of the subscribers do not even submit videos, they are subscribing solely for the information that is on the site, and that information

continually expands because any student can view any video of any student and my responses at any time.

MT: Tell me about the curriculum.

JV: It's like an online tutorial of things that I believe about classical guitar technique, instruction and interpretation, musicianship, all those kinds of things. Right now we have a core curriculum of over two hundred lessons that I film in Napa. And that will keep increasing so this body of knowledge begins to emerge.

While my school is part of the guitar academy it is also part of the classical academy so my students can also visit the electric guitar teacher Paul Gilbert's site.

The other advantage is it is not a master class and it is not a one-to-one lesson which in many cases including mine, can be very expensive. Now there are advantages to one-on-one lessons and I would never claim that ArtistWorks can do everything because there are things that only real-time lessons and master classes can offer.

However for those students who get nervous — for example when I am performing, say, in Los Angeles, I will get a call from a student wanting to have a lesson with me. And they show up and they're shaking. They will have spent all this money on a one-hour lesson and their right hand is shaking uncontrollably.

With this format students can take their best shot. If it doesn't go well the first time they can take another shot and submit what they feel is an accurate representation of their playing and then I can teach them from there rather than me trying to figure out if they were just nervous or not.

This kind of thing is easier to figure out with my students at Curtis and CIM because there is that student-teacher relationship. But if I'm seeing a student on a one-off it's difficult for me to tell if it's a good performance for him or not. So I think that is another big advantage.

MT: So the students do vary in ability?

JV: Yes, from the beginning student in Iceland to an advanced student from France I can still teach them as individuals, the interface and the interaction is very flexible. The back and forth between videos allows me to be flexible and to teach everybody just as I would if they were in my studios.

MT: Were you hooked on this idea from the beginning?

JV: It took me a few phone calls with them. There is a gap in the understanding of what this is and I didn't understand it at first either. At first I didn't think they knew who I was and I was trying to explain to them that I play 50 to 60 concerts a year in addition to teaching and at least in classical guitar I am fairly visible. And they said yes, that's why we're contacting you. I thought, how would anybody have the time to do this unless they devoted a full time job to it? They were looking for one person per instrument per style as

well as someone who already has a certain level of [name recognition] so they can get subscribers. The thing that sold me was the fact that 85% don't send videos. The other thing was that Billy Cobham is the Jazz Drum teacher.

Yes the skepticism is going to be there and there is a gap that needs to be filled over time and it will be. The entire ArtistWorks academy already has thousands of students around the world. And it is just a matter of time because it spreads through word of mouth.

MT: And now almost a year later you've adjusted to the new schedule?

JV: I have been able to assimilate this into my regular work schedule. As I explained to both CIM and Curtis, if anything this can be a great recruiting tool because its marketing reach is far more extensive then anything I can think of in classical music because you are a member of a far more accessible family.

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