

PERFORMANCE TODAY

Meet Jason Vieaux, PT Young Artist-in-Residence

Q: Welcome to PT, Jason. Can you start by telling us a bit about your family? Do you come from a musical family, or are you an oddity in the lot?

Vieaux: I'm originally from Buffalo, NY, and my father is a service technician for a local appliance company and my mother is a secretary. I have an older brother and younger sister. As far as music in my family, I'm sort of an oddity, although I think my father has a very good ear, he can harmonize melodies, and apparently his father could play piano by ear. My great-aunt Irene (my father's aunt) played piano for a silent movie theatre.

Q: When did you first pick up the guitar? Was there a particular guitar tune you heard that inspired you to play?

Vieaux: From the time I was 3 years old I was addicted to my parent's record collection, which contained no classical music at the time. I fell in love with the Beatles, and I have very early memories of listening to my mother's soul records and singles (Aretha, Wilson Pickett, Sam and Dave, Temptations, Four Tops, etc.). I also listened to a few of my Dad's modern jazz records; before I started studying classical music, that was his music, he wasn't into rock n' roll. When I was 5, my mother bought me a 3/4 size classical guitar, probably because she couldn't afford a piano, and a year later I took music reading lessons with a local jazz guitarist named Joe Perry for a month or so. When I was 8, The Buffalo Guitar Quartet came to my school for a lunchtime concert, and my Mom (she was working as a secretary there at the time), asked one of them if they gave private lessons, and I then started formally studying guitar with Jeremy Sparks.

Q: Do you remember the moment you knew you wanted to become a professional musician?

Vieaux: After my first recital, when I was 12. My family and I were already pretty serious about it at that time.

Q: Have you experienced with styles other than

classical?

Vieaux: I played jazz guitar while in college and for a couple years after to help pay bills. When I was growing up in Buffalo, I would play any riffs that I liked in rock n' roll music on my classical guitar by ear, just screwing around.

Q: So you attended the Cleveland Institute of Music and are now head of the guitar department. Do you think it essential for a career-bound musician to attend a conservatory, or would one benefit just as much from a broader liberal arts education?

Vieaux: I feel, in retrospect, it was very necessary for me to be surrounded by the highest level of young musicians possible; not really to motivate me, but to be inspired by others and learn more about music. I don't think it's the best way for everybody, but I was (and am) very single-minded in purpose, so for me a conservatory was very healthy, I felt right at home.

Q: What guitarist and/or teacher has most influenced your playing?

Vieaux: All my teachers had a lasting impact on me. Jeremy really instilled in me the importance of organized practice and development of technical issues; scales, arpeggios, studies. If I didn't have 10 Giuliani Arpeggios mastered per week, I was (gently) reprimanded and made to do them again for next week. He also introduced a very simple system of practice that I teach to my students and still use today. John Holmquist was like a mentor to me at CIM, very intuitive, he really helped me to develop musicianship, as well as practicing and technique. I also studied with David Leisner for a summer at Bowdoin, and his concepts of taking care of your muscles and relaxed playing are very valuable to me. As far as players, David Russell was perhaps the biggest influence and inspiration because my parents and I got to hear him live a few times in Rochester. We had never seen (and I still haven't seen) anybody so unified with the instrument, like it was a third arm or something, just an amazing performer.

Bream, Williams and Parkening were my favorites on record; I didn't learn to appreciate Segovia's incredible artistry, impact and importance until much later. When I was in my teens, I found his freedom with rhythm unsettling.

Q: How important is it for a developing musician to participate in competitions?

Vieaux: I don't really know whether or not it's essential for musical development or having a professional career. All I know is that it was helpful for me, because I really didn't have any connections to the music business, and perhaps doing well in competitions got my manager (for example) to at least pay attention to what I was doing as a musician. The competition process sometimes has little to do with actual music-making or the music business; it can be a real crapshoot, but in my case I was able to use it to my advantage, business-wise. Winning the GFA Competition in 1992 was a real confidence booster, the first baby-step towards becoming a professional, and the 53-city tour (as part of the first prize) that followed was essential to my development as a performer and communicator. That's also when I felt that I could really handle the rigors of travel, because it felt relatively easy to do the traveling bit.

Q: You have a successful collaboration with flutist Gary Schocker. What is it about the guitar and flute that make them an ideal pair?

Vieaux: The flute, unlike the oboe or violin e.g., is a less focused sound. There are more overtones, it's a more diffused sound, acoustically "dirtier", if you will. A violin or oboe can overpower the guitar if not careful, but the flute and guitar are more similar in their organic sound; therefore their sounds tend to blend better. Plus, there's plenty of good music for it.

Q: Some critics have said that the classical music recording industry and major labels are in trouble due to the availability of MP3's and other developing technologies. What's your opinion? What do you think about digital technology as it relates to music? Have you played

around with these new formats of listening to music? (MP3's, web streaming, minidisks, etc?)

Vieaux: A little bit. I feel that for someone like me, if anything, it helps get the word out a little better. My brother asked me if it bothers me that my Laureate Series CD on Naxos can be heard on Napster, and I said "at this point, absolutely not". I think the new technologies hurt sales more for rock acts like Metallica, because at the close of business day on Wall Street, their label conglomerate's stock needs to go UP. And I suppose that it's not good for more prominent classical artists on Sony and EMI either. The way I feel about it right now, any music that is HEARD, whether it's produced by Mitsuko Uchida or Britney Spears, just like BMI and ASCAP do for radio and TV, the artist should be compensated, I don't care how much money Metallica makes. It's their music, they made it.

Q: Can you tell us something about the music you'll play on PT?

Vieaux: SOLO: I'll play a lot of Latin American music; music from Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico. Composers are Morel, Barrios, larger works Sonatina Meridional by Ponce and Suite del Recuerdo by Merlin. A couple arrangements of Albeniz and some Bach. The music tells the rest.

DUO: More Bach; Gary and I will play a movement from the E Minor Flute and Continuo Sonata that we arranged, great piece. Soovin and I will play a short 4-movement Sonata in G Major. Each of the duos will visit Latin American composers, Soovin and I will play 3 movements from Piazzola's L'Histoire du Tango, Gary and I will play selections from our duo CD "Dream Travels".

There's American music as well, Gary's 5-movement "Dream Travels", and I'll throw in my arrangement of a Pat Metheny ditty. "Dream Travels" takes the listener to five different locales, each piece beginning with a melodic evocation of the area, which then "dissolves" harmonically and melodically, becoming more dissonant, then returning to the main theme. Again, the music explains itself better

than I can. They're beautiful pieces.

SHANGHAI: The Shanghai Quartet are guests on Thursday and Friday, and we play Vivaldi's Concerto in D Major and Boccherini's 4th Quartet, the one with the famous Fandango at the end.

Q: Now for some lighter questions... What's your favorite food?

Vieaux: There's very little that you can put in front of me that I won't eradicate, but my favorites are any Asian food, including sushi; a good steak or prime rib; roasted chicken; greens like asparagus and broccoli; ice cream.

Q: Favorite movie?

Vieaux: "This Is Spinal Tap", "Waiting For Guffman", any "Star Wars" movie, "Young Frankenstein", I like comedies, I like to be entertained.

Q: Favorite TV show?

Vieaux: If I watch TV, I usually watch a baseball or football game, but with cable, TV is a great way to wind down and stop the wheels for a bit before going to bed. Cable has really funny things like 70's game shows, Iron Chef, VH1 Behind the Music is very entertaining.

Q: Favorite haunts in Cleveland?

Vieaux: Jillian's to play pool, Night Town, certain restaurants. I rarely get to go out nowadays.

Q: What could one find you doing in your free time?

Vieaux: This "free time" concept that you speak of, I am not familiar with.....Actually I like to listen lots of different music in my free time, but also hang out with a friend, have a beer, shoot some pool, sleep in. I basically try to use my free time to do NOTHING when I get the chance. When I get a few hours, hiking is not the first thing that comes to mind, although it probably should be.

Q: Could you share with us your top 10 CDs? What's in your CD player right now?

Vieaux: It would take me a week to compile a top-ten list, so below are my favorite classical music CDs (right now, and not necessarily in order), and below that is music I also enjoy:

1. Stravinsky Rite of Spring/Shostakovich #5; Cleveland, Maazel
2. Beethoven Symphonies; Cleveland, Szell
3. Schubert Piano Sonatas; Schiff, Uchida or Brendel
4. Schubert String Quartets, Quintet; Emerson Qtrt (this happens to be the recording I have, I'd like to have others recommended to me)
5. Mahler Symphonies; Boulez, Bernstein, Karajan
6. Strauss Metamorphosen, Death and Trans.; Wiener, Dohnanyi
7. Carissimi oratorios; Gardiner
8. Ravel, Daphnis and Chloe; Berlin, Boulez
9. Haydn Piano Sonatas; Schiff
10. Hindemith, Mathis der Maler; Sawallisch, Philly

-anything by The Beatles, but especially Rubber Soul, Revolver, Magical Mystery Tour, White Album; Steely Dan, Ahmad Jamal, Wayne Shorter, Miles Davis, Weather Report, The Police, Wes Montgomery, Pat Metheny, A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, Led Zeppelin, Jay-Z, Erykah Badu's live record, Sarah Vaughn.

Q: Can you tell us some of the best classical music performances you've attended?

Vieaux: Although I don't share his apparent emotional state, Cleveland Orchestra performed Mahler 2 at Severance Hall a few years ago and I'm pretty sure I saw God. One of the most powerful pieces of music I've heard performed live. Tokyo String Quartet, Mitsuko Uchida playing a Mozart quintet, Rite of Spring at Severance Hall. Live classical music is a real privilege and luxury to me nowadays; if I'd known how busy I would be, I would have taken advantage of it more while studying in Cleveland.

Thanks for talking with us, Jason. Looking forward to your PT performances!