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Guitar

August/September 2002 • No. 47

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CAMINO LATINO

LIONA BOYD
OSCAR CASTRO-NEVES
ULISSES ROCHA
NELSON FARIA

NO. 47 • \$5.95 US / \$9.95 Canada



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Liona Boyd

LIONA'S LATIN

By Bill Piburn

Liona Boyd, a.k.a. "The first lady of the guitar," has always challenged the perception and boundaries the Classical music world has imposed. She has not only established herself as a respected concert artist but has taken the classical guitar to new audiences through recording and touring with artist such as Chet Atkins, Gordon Lightfoot, Eric Clapton, Steve Morse and Tracy Chapman.

Liona has always loved and respected the classical tradition but does not accept any mind-set that restrains her art in any way. Liona continues her spirited journey with her new Latin recording, *Camino Latino*.



Photo by Mark Moxon

“
*The guitar has been my
 passport to the world*
 ”



PIBURN: How did the guitar come into your life?

BOYD: My father was born in Spain and as a young family, we would sometimes vacation there to see my grandparents. My parents decided to bring a guitar back as a souvenir. It was a very cheap guitar; I think it was ten dollars. At first my father did not want to bring it back because he had to carry it on his back as we crossed on the ferry. My mother persisted, so he brought it. It hung on a wall in our home for several years. When we moved back to England from Canada, the guitar was given to some friends who ran a summer camp. When we returned to Canada they gave the guitar back; and again it hung on the wall. At age thirteen my parents asked me what I wanted for Christmas. I knew we were not that well off so I never asked for very expensive presents. It was the sixties when guitar folk music was everywhere and I thought, “Hmm...a guitar would be nice.” So they gave me the guitar. You never know how a Christmas present can change your life.

What was the first thing you learned on the guitar?

My mother taught the first little melody to me. It was a melody that they used to play on a xylophone to call

people when meals were being served on the ship [laughter].

So every time you played, the family showed up to eat?

[Laughter] I took some lessons in Toronto but I was not that enthusiastic. It wasn't a love affair at that point. Then my mother took me to a concert to hear Julian Bream, the great English guitarist. That was the epiphany. That was the moment I was captivated by the guitar. I was spellbound.

So through his playing you felt a musical connection.

Yes, it just drew me into the instrument. I decided I needed a better teacher and I found Eli Kassner. He was the best-known teacher in Toronto. He didn't have a lot of time for new students but he heard me play my simple little Aaron Shearer Method Book 1 pieces. I suppose he was sufficiently impressed to take me on. As I studied, he recognized I had some unusual talent because he used to have me come late, after his other students, so he could give me extra time. He knew my parents didn't have much money so he gave me double time for the same amount. After a while he encouraged me to enter some little competitions, which I won, and a few years later suggested I take a master

class with Julian Bream. He also had me play for the Toronto Guitar Society. It was a very active society that used to have visiting guitarists such as Segovia, Narcisco Yepes, Alirio Diaz, Oscar Ghiglia, and Julian Bream. So whenever they came to Toronto, I would get a chance to play for them.

Were you always composed when playing for these great guitarists?

No, when I played for Segovia the first time, I played too fast and did not use his fingerings. He got very upset! Subsequently, I played for him in New York a couple times. It was an honor to get advice from the old maestro. I also played for Presti and Lagoya. I first took master classes in Québec and Nice, France with Alexander Lagoya who invited me to study privately with him in Paris. I spent two years there. It was a great opportunity — I learned French and got to travel around Europe. I've been very lucky that I had instruction from many great teachers. I have gained something from each one.

From Lagoya, I learned a lot about technique and he instilled in me his ideas about being as expressive as possible within the limitations of the guitar. The guitar does not have the power of the piano or the repertoire of the violin. Its beauty lies in its



Left: Chet and Liona in L.A., 1994

subtleness of color and tone, I learned not to be afraid to exaggerate and sometimes get a real nasty metallic tone in contrast to a very beautiful, sweet tone. I remember I studied French Impressionistic music. Some of the time I found my own repertoire; I didn't always want to follow in the footsteps of my teachers.

Eli Kassner always wanted me to play a lot of contemporary music. He never taught me Tarrega and all the romantic music that I love, I really don't play contemporary classical music now but I guess it was good training.

Do you feel more of a connection to the Spanish guitar?

Yes, in my past life I must have lived in Spain or Latin America somewhere. I have a great attraction to the music of Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Spain. The guitar is so much part of their culture. That is why I enjoy playing in these countries so much. The people grow up with the guitar and identify with it. I have made most of my career in Canada where the classical guitar was not that well known. So I feel like I have contributed to the awareness of the classical guitar there. I've played thousands of concerts in Canada, in every little town and village and certainly every major city dozens of

times. I started around 1975 so that's about twenty-seven years of touring. I did deserve the Order of Canada medal they gave me! Especially since most of my tours were in the Canadian winters! [laughter] It has been an interesting and rich life I've had because I have traveled and played all over the world. It has opened doors to so many personal encounters as well. The guitar has been my passport to the world. It's a great calling card; everyone seems to love the guitar.

I would think those who play would be interested in hearing what you do and those who don't play wish they did. [laughter] That's right! The world is divided into those who play the guitar and those who wish they did! [laughter] But they do not realize how difficult it is to play classical guitar and the commitment you have to make. However, the beauty of the guitar is that it can be simple, just strumming chords as an accompaniment to a singer. That's wonderful! I enjoy singers with guitar accompaniment. Just simple folk songs, there is nothing more beautiful than the human voice with the guitar.

The guitar can be deceptive, can't it? It really is, you think it looks easy but it's not. The classical music stage

requires every single note to be played accurately.

When you studied with Lagoya did you learn to play off the right side of your nails?

Yes, but that damaged a lot of people's hands. I no longer play this way but there are still remnants of it in my technique.

You've been a pioneer in taking the classical guitar to new audiences.


Yes, that's why I've toured with Gordon Lightfoot and Tracy Chapman. Recently I played a big Cuban celebration in Miami. It was an audience of 6,500 Cuban Americans. I was the only non-Cuban performer but I received a great reception. I want to reach the Latin market with my new recording. I hope to play more in South America.

You have never seemed to worry about the reaction of the classical world; some of them can be a bit stuffy.

That drives me crazy! I lost the classical world when I played with Chet Atkins. I thought it was a great opportunity. I loved it; Chet has been one of my heroes but it was amazing that the classical world stuck their noses up in the air. They also thought it was

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TIZZANA ORSINI



Diana Falckner

“
*It has
been an
interesting
and rich
life.*
”

Left: Lina circa 1974

unforgivable that I toured with Gordon Lightfoot and played in hockey rinks with huge speakers! The audiences were as many as twenty thousand people a night and I knew I was introducing the classical guitar to a new audience. We played in front of hundreds of thousands of people! Then when I had my rock band in the '80s... when I spiked my hair, wore leather pants and played standing up, they knew I was a lost cause!

I've always felt that as far as exposing a large number of people to the classical guitar, the Beatles and Chet Atkins did more than any classical guitarist. That is very well said! That's absolutely the truth. I don't know why the classical world can be so snooty. I find that even today, the guitar society people never come to my concerts. I think they almost boycott them. Then I think they all got furious with me when I got classicalguitar.com but hey, I went after it.

I understand Japan has been a successful market for you.

Yes, I did ten sold-out concerts in a row in Tokyo. It has been a few years since I have been there but I hope to return. I recorded a live album there. They

recorded three concerts and I used concert number two for the album. They are real aficionados in Japan.

Obviously, when playing with a rhythm section, you do not use your Ramirez. I use a Vasquez Rubio cedar top that has an RMC pickup made by Richard McClish. I had a Countryman microphone when I toured back in the '80s but it kept feeding back. Strunz and Farah advised me to go with the McClish and I've been very happy with it. Sometimes when I do a solo in the concerts I'll switch to the Ramirez and just use a Shure SM81 microphone. I place it about six inches in front of the guitar. I also use it when I play with symphonies.

Are you able to adjust quickly when switching from one guitar to another? Oh yes, it seems to make no difference whether it's a long or short scale guitar. I just like a high action. I used to have a very high action on my Ramirez, now I'm a little lazier and use it less. I do have the Buzz Feiten tuning system on several of my guitars. The only problem is you cannot change brands of strings once the guitar is tuned this way. I mostly use Savarez strings. On some of my guitars I use D'Addario.

I like D'Addario; they have a long life. Yes they do but I love the polished bass strings that Savarez makes. I also use them for recording. I usually do not use the polished 6th, because it's a little dead, I only use the fourth and fifth strings. I used to use the silver strings but I now use the polished copper.

I guess you have to make a choice between a bright, great sounding string and one that doesn't squeak. Yes, Julian Bream didn't seem to mind the squeaks, but it disturbs me to hear a squeak in the middle of a beautiful musical phrase. I hate to keep editing them out of the recording.

Pretty soon the editing can sound unnatural.

It can. I prefer to play just as cleanly as possible. However, everyone edits a little. The easiest recording I edited was my live recording from Tokyo. I edited the night after the concert. I remember staying up all night eating sushi and chocolate! [laughter] My new recording *Camino Latino* was recorded in a much different way. I played to a track. The rhythm section was laid down before I played. It was a complicated recording, done in layers. We had twenty-three musicians

Carretera Libertad

(Freedom Highway)

Richard Fortin

Muted Struming

TAB

4 4 0 7 9 7 6 2 2 2 1 0 2 0 1 2 1 2 2 0 2 4 2 0 7 9 4 7 5 5 7 5 3 7 5 3 5 4 2

F#m D E C#m D 1st time

2nd time, play 8va

TAB

4 6 7 4 5 4 7 6 5 7 7 7 7 5 4 7 4 7 5 3 6 4 6 5 4 7 5 7 10 10 12 14 12 10 9 12 10

D E C#m D 2nd time, top line

1st time play bottom line

TAB

7 6 7 4 5 4 7 6 5 7 7 7 7 5 7 5 4 7 5 7 6 4 6 5 4 7 5 7 10 10 12 10 9 10 9 10 12 10 11 9

F#m B E F#m

1st time play bottom line

TAB

11 9 9 9 9 7 5 0 10 10 10 10 9 7 10 10 10 10 12 10 10 12 2 4 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 7 7 7 7 5 4 5 7 5 4 2 0 2 4 5 4 2 5 8 8 9 9 7 5 8 6 10 10 10 10 9 7 10 7

C#7 B F#m D B

TAB

12 9 10 12 11 12 10 14 13 10 13 10 9 10 9 7 9 7 9 5 4 7 4 5 6 7 4 3 7 5 6 7 5 4 7 5 7 3

C#7 F#m D B C#7

TAB

4 0 6 6 7 4 5 4 7 4 0 7 4 5 7 5 4 7 6 4 7 6 7 3 5 4 0

31 *F#* *Corda* *B-*

D.S. al Coda

T
A
B

36 *C#7* *B-* *C#7* *B-*

T
A
B

41 *C#7* *B-* *C#7* *B-*

T
A
B

46 *F#* *D* *B-*

T
A
B

49 *C#7* *A-* *F#* *D-*

T
A
B

52 *E-* *A-* *Rubato*

T
A
B

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Tocatta Cruz



involved. I think the album showcases the other players as well. Their amazing speed using a pick, mixed with my more traditional classical playing is a great contrast. I think it's the best album I've ever done. It's available through my website and is now in general release.

Who are the guests you're referring to? Al Di Meola and Steve Morse. Other guitarists with a flamenco background are Strunz and Farah, Luis Villegas, Johannes Linstead and Jesse Cook.

Richard Fortin produced the recording?

Yes, he's a genius. I have worked with him for years. He wrote several of the pieces. He also wrote my "Concerto of the Andes." Richard composed several pieces for the new album, I believe about twenty; I picked four. Because I want radio play, I added a vocalist named Innis. He's a Latin singer and is very well known in Mexico but not yet in the United States. I'm hoping he'll be the next Ricky Martin! We worked with an Argentinian producer in Miami and Innis did a great job.

You wrote the song he sings.

Yes, I have always enjoyed writing poetry and I loved the challenge of writing a lyric in Spanish!

Today is the one-year anniversary of the passing of Chet Atkins. Will you share some thoughts on Chet? He gave the world a beautiful gift with his music, it is a great loss and I miss him. My husband and I were just listening to one of his CDs in the car yesterday. Chet loved the guitar and always wanted to learn something. He helped me not only with making the record *The First Nashville Guitar Quartet* but he also got me on the *Today* show and *Nashville Now*. I also met Lenny Breau through Chet. I was very sad when his failing health took his playing away from him; it was heart breaking. I'll always miss him.

You're at a point in your life that you do not have to play the guitar. Yes but I can't imagine not playing. It's been my whole life; I just love it.

F6

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