

Florida Guitar Festival all about joys of music

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For the first time in Tallahassee, 60 guitarists from all around the state will strum together and present music like composer Sergio Assad's seminal work, "The Walls" as a classical guitar orchestra.

Ben Lougheed, a Ph.D. candidate in music guitar performance at Florida State University and director of the Florida Guitar Festival, is at the helm of the upcoming event, which will take place Oct. 5-7 at FSU's College of Music.

Though it began four years ago as a small series of performances arranged by community members, Lougheed has seen the festival grow into a nationally and internationally attended event.

He is excited to present this new component as guitar orchestras are growing in popularity. The composition they will play, "The Walls," is a five-movement piece that explores the guitar via famous walls throughout the world. Lougheed says it will be the first time it has been played in Florida, and only the second time worldwide.

"Every culture throughout history has some kind of plucked string instrument, and the guitar can emulate those," says Lougheed. "There's one that emulates the Chinese pipa and another that emulates a hora. It's a phenomenally incredible work."

Lougheed grew up surrounded by music in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He listened to Mozart in the womb and at age 6 started playing the guitar. He went on to attend the Johns Hopkins Peabody Institute in Maryland where he received instruction from world-renowned musicians like Julian Gray. It was during this time that he transitioned from playing guitar as a hobbyist to becoming a professional, and learning how to prepare, practice, memorize and present pieces.

He credits his hometown instructor Mary Lou Roberts for giving him the foundational knowledge he needed to succeed on the instrument. Roberts taught him from age 6 through high school. Around his sophomore year, Lougheed took a lesson from a guitar professor and by the end of the session was offered scholarship money and a spot to start in the fall.

"I said, 'No I can't drive yet, that's why my mom is here,'" laughs Lougheed, who was only 15 at the time. "But, that got me more seriously thinking that it could be a possibility."

Though he's dabbled in other genres like rock, pop, and country for gigs and cocktail hours, Lougheed remains enchanted with classical guitar music. He



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If you go

What: The Third Annual Florida Guitar Festival

When: Oct. 5-7, times vary

Where: Florida State University College of Music, 122 N. Copeland

Cost: Free except for final concert

Contact: For more information, call 734-845-2474 or visit <https://floridaguitarfestival.wordpress.com/>.

says the emotional depth of the compositions are both fulfilling to listen to and play as a performer. At the moment he's tackling Astor Piazzolla's "Invierno Portena," arranged for solo guitar by Sergio Assad.

Before he even picks up the guitar, Lougheed will notate his finger placement on the strings, a time-consuming measure that helps him to play more quickly and with more accuracy later

on. Then it will be a couple weeks or months of playing at slow tempos, exercising muscle memory, listening to other players via CD or online and getting the feedback from his instructors or recordings in order to improve.

"The guitar is one of those instruments that can change its color," says Lougheed, describing the sound's tonal qualities. "It can get very dark to very bright, almost like from a viola to a trumpet. Knowing when to implement and use those colors in the piece can help it to progress."

Teaching is where his passion truly lies. Lougheed shares his love of classical guitar with students at FSU as well as locally in private lessons and Tallahassee schools. When it comes to philosophy, his ideas around guitar are strung together from the many instructors who nurtured his own progress. The underlying theme he hopes to pass along to students is cultivating an attention to artistry. Lougheed emphasizes a relaxed, upright posture and correct fin-

ger positions to promote longevity in playing guitar.

Borrowed from his FSU mentor, Bruce Holzman, Lougheed hopes students will carefully listen to their own playing so that they can distinguish correct sounds from one another; and from his teachers at Peabody, it's about knowing there's more than just the notes, too.

"Even with my youngest kids, I want to make sure that they're making their music musical so it has dynamics and when they're finished that they stand up and smile and take a really nice bow," says Lougheed. "I'm very big on making sure that there's no gaps in a student's learning and they're given things that will challenge them and help them grow, so that they'll succeed along their journey of learning."

In terms of methodology, Lougheed learned through the Suzuki method and uses it when he teaches. The method trains the ear so that people learn music the same way they learn language—through immersion. He's been inspired and surprised by standout students who come into their lessons having already learned the piece he's assigned in addition to a few songs ahead of him in the book after experimenting and listening to them on their own.

Lougheed hopes attendees to the Florida Guitar Festival will find a similar positive energy and environment.

"A lot of times competitions and festivals like this can feel cutthroat," admits Lougheed. "A lot of people can leave in a downtrodden mood because they didn't play as well as they wanted to."

As festival organizers, Lougheed says they have made it their to coordinate not only an informative weekend, but an enjoyable one, too. From concerts by solo performers, master classes, lectures, and the competition, there is no shortage of free-to-attend events for those interested in learning more about the classical guitar. Lougheed says the only ticketed event will be the final performance on Sunday night at Opperman Music Hall.

"I like sharing the music," says Lougheed. "I don't want to sit by myself, I want to share it with my students, with the classical guitar community, the classical guitar world, and those in Tallahassee who haven't heard a classical guitar orchestra. It's so important and means so much to me."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).