

Interview with Classical Guitar

I met Johannes about ten years ago in my home town of New York City. Till this day I cannot recall how or why we got together but what I do remember was someone telling me, "you have to meet this extraordinary German guitarist" who was in New York for a few days for a Carnegie Hall Performance. Glad I listened. After that initial meeting at Roccas restaurant on Thompson street, I came to know Johannes well. Most importantly I realized he is a champion of the guitar; not just a guitar player. His Hersbruck Guitar Festival held in Bavaria annually in late August has drawn an incredible stable of guitarists including Maestro Carlos Barbosa-Lima, Eliot Fisk, Leo Brouwer, Pepe Romero, David Russell and Pavel Steidel, literally just to name a few. Johannes' touring schedule grows more extensive every year to the point that he has informed me that he can no longer has time to teach privately or at the University that much. Instead he would rather direct his Guitar Festival and continue to record and his recording output has been steady as a rock. It is at this juncture that I call upon his latest recording project; Johannes Tonio Kreuzsch, Hommage à Heitor Villa-Lobos on which Johannes records the Preludes and some Etudes by the Brazilian Master using original manuscripts and rarely if ever heard pieces by Villa-Lobos that I begin this interview with Germany's greatest concert guitarist.

Lawrence Del Casale: Johannes, before we get into your latest recording let's discuss your outstanding work as Artistic Director of the Hersbruck Guitar Festival. It is a festival that has clearly made its mark on the International guitar scene. It almost seems that all guitarists on the European Festival circuit want to make that last stop at Hersbruck before the Fall concert season begins. Discuss please the growth of this festival and where you plan to take it.

Johannes Tonio Kreuzsch: Eight years ago I was asked to undertake the artistic director of the International Guitar Festival in Hersbruck. Before that time I had already directed and founded other guitar festivals in Germany (f.ex. in Munich). The festival in Hersbruck started rather small with just a few artists and some workshops. When I agreed to run this festival I wanted to establish a special festival inviting some of the most exciting guitarists from a wide range of genres to present a week of „undiluted guitar“ with all possible colours and facets of tone and sound. It is a great pleasure for me to be able to invite appreciated guitar colleagues and friends. When I put together the program I'm more interested to look for artists, who have a new and exciting approach than looking for the well-trodden paths. In the past years we had guitar stars like Tommy Emmanuel, Leo Brouwer, Pepe Romero, David Russell, Carlos

Barbosa-Lima, Alvaro Pierri, Eliot Fisk or Hopkinson Smith – to name just a few, but I'm always also presenting young exciting artists, which might be not so know to the general public. I have also composers in residence at my festival lecturing about composing and the festival commissions new works, which are premiered during the festival. Over the last years I was also proud to present artists, which had never played solo in Germany before like Bill Kanengiser or Carlos Barbosa-Lima. Also the astonishing Brazilian guitarist Yamandu Costa played one of his first concerts in Europe in Hersbruck and recieved a record contract after his Hersbruck performance.

Next to the concerts and guitar classes, all over the week there are exhibitions, lectures, sessions, master classes, workshops and lessons at the festival center. I have extended the seminars. There is more of it, now under the name „Hersbruck Music Academie“, containing lectures like "Right Practice", "Deseases of musicians avoid and heal", "Issues to interpret early music", „Improvisation for Classical Musician“ etc...A great thing is also, that students are able to apply for scholarships to get financial aid in order to be able to participate at the festival. There are also plenty of possibilities for students to play in public during the festival week and they can also recieve an official review from the local newspaper.

My idea of the festival is to present a melting point of different styles and inspiring artists, where students and musicians all over the world can learn from each other and benefit from the different musical approaches. We have always also a great Jazz ensemble at the festival, which is available at the final night to jam with. It is always great to see, if also Classical players are open for this experience. One time for example, we had the great lutenist Robert Barto at the festival playing a wonderful all Weiss program. It was absolutely memorable, when he took up the electric guitar at the final night to jam with the jazz-band!

If you are interested to get more informations about the festival, than please visit:
www.gitarre-hersbruck.de

LDC: The last time we spoke you commented on your teaching schedule and how you could no longer teach as there is such a demand on your time to perform, record and plan the Hersbruck Festival. How did that develop?

JTK: I do teach but not on a regular basis. I hold for example workshops and masterclasses. Within the last years my touring schedule became much more demanding and I also need the time to prepare my publications. Next to my work as the artistic director of the International Guitar Festival in Hersbruck, I also founded – together with my brother the Jazz Pianist Cornelius Claudio Kreusch, the Munich based concert series „Ottobrunner Konzerte“ (see: www.ottobrunner-konzerte.com). This series is not a guitar series – although we had guitarists like Ralph Towner, LAGQ, Pepe Romero or Badi Assad performing. We have great artists or ensembles from Jazz to Classical like The Hilliard Ensemble, Klaus Doldinger or The Berklee Allstars performing. Also here the idea is to present contrast between different styles. We contrasted for example a classical pianist playing Bachs „Goldberg Variationen“ in the first part with a great Jazz pianist improvising in the second part. Next to the concert we also have Meet the Artists conferences as well as workshops and masterclasses. This year f.ex. the Berklee College of Music visited our series and they also hold 3 days of auditions for European applicants at our venue.

Concerning my concert schedule, I have several projects, which I do perform with. I´m doing concert with my own music, which is a mix between composition and improvisation. This program can be heard for example on my CD „Crystallization“. Another of my actual solo-projects is my „Hommage à Villa-Lobos“ program. Over the last ten years I did researches with all different manuscripts of Villa-Lobos and all kinds of other sources related with his works. I first recorded his 12 Etudes and based my interpretation on this research. From this research I developed a lecture, which I hold at universities and festivals. I just published a new CD containing his Preludes and some of his widely unknown pieces from the manuscripts. Other programs of mine are the duo with my wife the violinist Doris Kreusch-Orsan or the crossover trio, I have with my brother Cornelius Claudio.

LDC: When we meet I remember you telling me about the Villa-Lobos project and how you had access to the Maestro’s original manuscripts. Quite frankly I was thinking; “another Villa-Lobos recording?” After I listened to your CD I was blown away. Please explain the impetus and fruition of this project.

JTK: When I had for the first time the 1928 manuscript of the Etudes in my hand, it was like a revelation! I realised, that the printed editions were not really reliable and that I would need to investigate much more research in order to get closer to what the composer intended. This manuscript from 1928 f.ex. proves impressively just how well Villa-Lobos knew the guitar. He elaborated the fingering for the musician in great detail. Also the intended dynamics are even more closely specified and he makes use of a lot of additional agogic indications, which later were left out. There are three manuscripts of the Etudes, handwritten by the composer, which deviate widely from each other. The first manuscript was presumably written between 1924 and 1928 and is part of a bequest from the family of Lucília Guimarães, the composer’s first wife. Whereas the Etudes 2, 5, 10 and 12 are neatly drawn, the others seem to have been sketched out quickly. In 1928 Villa-Lobos wrote another manuscript of the Etudes ment for

publication. This time, the manuscript of the Etudes was very carefully executed. Villa-Lobos sent this manuscript to Max Eschig in Paris for publication. The contracts between the publisher and the composer were concluded in October, 1928 and January, 1929, but the pieces remained unpublished for some time. When Villa-Lobos returned to Brazil, supporting Vargas's politics, the contact with Eschig was interrupted, possibly for political reasons. In December 1939, the composer still asked him for author's copies, not knowing that Eschig had never published his work. After World War II, he resumed contact with Eschig. In 1940, Villa-Lobos had already made new copies of individual Etudes, since he did not own the manuscripts anymore. Later, he left the copying to his second wife, Arminda. In 1947 and 1948, she copied the whole cycle.

Although the copies of the Etudes made by Arminda were obviously not quite as exact and carefully elaborated as the manuscript of 1928, they were used for publication. The copies were not without mistakes. In addition a lot of performing instructions were missing (tempo, agogics, dynamics, accents, articulation, detailed fingerings etc.) or neglected (f. ex. the different-sized note heads typical of Villa-Lobos, indicating the primary and secondary voices). When the Etudes were published more than twenty years after their origin, the manuscript of 1928 was no longer of any importance. Even if the additional passages in some Etudes (e.g. Etude 10 and 11) were regarded as a preliminary version now obsolete, the variety of instructions by the composer and his very detailed fingerings could have been considered. After my recording of the 12 Etudes I looked for the manuscripts of Villa-Lobos' other guitar music. On my new CD „Hommage à Villa-Lobos“ I perform f.ex. his Preludes on the basis of the manuscripts but also widely unknown pieces like the little Valsa fragment or the unfinished Valsa Concerto No 2, which he composed, when he was 17 years old. In the booklet of the CD there is published an article of mine, which describes my research and the background informations concerning the manuscripts and the origins of his works for guitar.

LDC: On your recording, “Hommage à Villa-Lobos”, you recorded the “5 Preludes” by the contemporary Cuban composer Tulio Peramo Cabrera a composer who is not a guitarist and is a leading and recognized contemporary composer. Peramo Cabrera was a student of Maestro Brouwer, having said that, Peramo Cabrera has written and dedicated works to you including a guitar Concerto. Now in New York speak I would say; “Wazz up wit that!?” but for the professionalism of this periodical I ask; “How did your collaboration with composer Cabrera come about”?

JTK: In contrast to Heitor Villa-Lobos, the Cuban composer Tulio Peramo Cabrera never learned to play the guitar. Nevertheless, he ranks among Cuba's most important contemporary composers for guitar. Since we first met in 1994 at the Havana Guitar Festival, Peramo Cabrera has written various guitar works for me, e.g. compositions for solo guitar, works for guitar and chamber music and concertos for guitar and orchestra. My CD “Portraits of Cuba“, with guitar music by Tulio Peramo Cabrera, released in 2000, has turned out to be a great success. Other guitarists, like Eliot Fisk, Antigoni Goni or Richard Hand have also promoted his works on the international stage. The works dedicated to me include the guitar concerto Tres Imágenes Cubanas, which I first performed at the guitar festival in Havana on the invitation of Leo Brouwer in 1998, and the song cycle Aires de la Tierra, premiered with the mezzo-soprano Nan-Maró Babakhanian in 1999 in New York's Carnegie Recital Hall.

At my Concert Series Ottobrunner Konzerte and the International Guitar Festival Hersbruck, the suite Piezas para violin y guitarra was premiered by me and my wife, the violinist Doris Kreuzsch-Orsan. We are looking forward to the double concerto for guitar, violin and orchestra that Tulio Peramo Cabrera is composing for us. He began his musical career as a singer, studying with Konstanza Kirova at the Escuela Nacional de Arte. From 1973, he studied composition with Roberto Valera at the Instituto Superior de Arte de La Habana, later on with Félix Guerrero, Harold Gramatges and Leo Brouwer. Today, his works for orchestra and chamber music are not only performed in Cuba,

e.g. at the Havana Festival for Contemporary Music and the Havana International Guitar Festival but also at international music festivals, e.g. in New York, Mexico City, Barcelona, Munich or Salzburg. Currently he teaches at the Music Academy in Havana, where he is a lecturer in composition. After the suite *En Tardes de Lluvia*, the *Cinco Preludios Homenaje a Heitor Villa-Lobos* is the second work of several movements for solo guitar that he dedicated to me. I asked him to contribute five preludes to this CD in homage to Villa-Lobos, because Peramo Cabrera's and Villa-Lobos's compositions are both imbued with music of their home countries. When invited by the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and Cardiff University, I premiered the *Cinco Preludios* in Cardiff in 2006. For Tulio Peramo Cabrera, they are "songs without words", referring to traditional Cuban song in the 19th and 20th century. I really love these Preludes and I think they have the possibility to enter the general guitar repertoire. Sheet music of Tulio Peramo Cabrera including his 5 Preludes can be ordered through my publishing company by writing to:
KreuschBros(at)johannestoniokreusch.com .

LDC: As a European based Artist how do you deal with the effects of the ever shrinking classical music market? Do you see a difference between the American classical market and the European classical markets?

JTK: At my festivals I don't really experience this problem that much. It might be, because I always try to present artists or ensembles with uncommon programmes including world premiers or unusual combinations of styles. But the main question concerning this issue in my opinion is how to attract also young people to classical concerts. I'm concerned, that the music as a subject is more and more neglected in school (at least here in Germany) and children decreasingly get the possibility to learn to play a musical instrument. So it is no wonder, that at the end the youth doesn't appreciate classical music that much, since they don't have so much experiences with that. Just if they have the possibility to immerse into the world of classical music by the example of f.ex. their parents or by the experience, how fulfilling it can be to play

together in an orchestra or chamber music group, they would go to classical concerts. During my tours I also sometimes do concerts for young people for example at schools. My program for those concerts is not strictly classical. I mix it with my own music and improvisations. I experience during these concerts, that young people are very much attracted to guitar and that they are excited to realise, that you can play also other music on it besides Rock or Pop. I think the guitar has really great possibilities and if you program your concert in an interesting way, you will always have your public. We have to withdraw Classical music from its elitistic image.

LDC: Following on the heels of the previous question; how has the Internet and iTunes changed your world as a recording artist? Where do you see the classical guitar markets moving? (I know I am asking you to look into a crystal ball)

JTK: Yes, the online market definitely changed a lot. I think, that there are both sides on this. On the one hand it is amazing, how easy one can get a recording through downloading the music. I remember some years ago handling orders of my Cds to countries like Japan or Latin America, where the shipping or bank costs were as high as the costs of the CD itself. Now you just go on iTunes and download the album in a minute. I still work with different record companies, who distribute my Cds physically. Concerning the digital rights I work together with my brother Cornelius Claudio Kreusch, who founded the company MUSICJUSTMUSIC®, which is a global online & mobile music & media aggregation, distribution & licensing network & integrated royalty accounting platform for artists, labels & industry organizations worldwide (see: www.musicjustmusic.com). This is really a great thing, since your music is available worldwide with very easy handling. Those possibilities make the artist much more independent to record companies and artists can decide, which rights they want to keep. Some years ago I did three solo records for the BMG company and sold most of the artist's rights to them. I wouldn't do that anymore, because the new media possibilities give you as an artist

much more possibilities to represent your rights by your own. But on the other hand I still always want to offer also the physical CDs, since there is always a general idea behind an album, which gets lost if one just downloads single tracks. My new CD „Hommage à Villa-Lobos“ contains also an extensive booklet containing my research of Villa-Lobos with all kinds of background informations. This booklet you wouldn't get through just downloading the album.

Concerning the classical guitar, I think we have to assert ourselves through presenting new and interesting programs and approaches. If we just go the well trodden ground, then we will stay in our small guitaristic circuit. If I look at the always growing public of my festival, then I realise, that just maybe 20% percent of the concert goers are guitarists. That shows, that there is definitely a market for our instrument next to guitar specialists. At the last festival I spoke with an older couple, who attended a concert with contemporary music. They told me, that they had bought tickets for the flamenco concert the day before and that they loved it so much, that they decided to come also to the next days concert. They were also very fascinated by the modern music although they usually don't go to this kind of concerts. They said, that some years ago, they wouldn't have liked this kind of concerts, but over the years they were educated through the concerts of the festival. That made

me very proud and happy, because I realised, that you don't have to follow the mainstream in order to create something substantial.

LDC: Let's talk and close with your immediate plans. What are you going to continue to do and what do you want to create in the near future?

JTK: I'm going to finish some new recordings. This year the cross-over record together with my brother Cornelius Claudio Kreuzsch will be finished. It will be a record featuring some really great artists and we just did an inspiring recording session with Badi Assad for that CD. Also my new duo recording with my wife the violinist Doris Kreuzsch-Orsan is on the map. For that we have some fine composers contributing new pieces for us. I'm also looking forward to one of Andy Yorks new CDs, since he invited me to perform some of his Duo music for that. We recorded together in Munich and it was really great fun. I'm composing at the moment new music and working on my second book of Etudes for guitar. There are some ideas for another festival, which I could run, but I have to see, whether it fits into my performance schedule and my responsibility to my work as the artistic director of the Hersbruck festival and the Ottobrunner Konzerte. In any case I'm always looking for something new and challenging to do!