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# 'Yet another guitar recital filled the Wigmore Hall': The Popularization of the Classical Guitar in Britain, *c.*1950–*c.*1970

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**Abstract** The popularity of the classical guitar in Britain surged between 1950 and 1970. The virtuosity of elite professionals led by the pioneering Andrés Segovia and the new stars Julian Bream and John Williams earned the classical instrument considerable purchase within the wider culture. Above all, it inspired thousands of largely middle-class, male, relatively young and urban amateur players, attracted not simply by the instrument's intrinsic appeal but also by the opportunity offered to display a fashionable modernity and sophisticated connoisseurship. However, although securing for the classical guitar a much-enhanced musical role, these enthusiasts also created an often inward-looking specialist culture.

Writing in the fretted-instrument magazine *BMG* in 1943, the classical guitarist J. L. White informed readers that,

> The Spanish guitar makes little appeal to the English people as a classical instrument, but does attract just a few individuals who become ardent enthusiasts […] It would therefore be well for players of the classical guitar to cease expending their energy in 'casting pearls before swine' and to develop instead such activities as will tend to bring them closer for their mutual satisfaction.[1]

Its devotees, he argued, should simply stay loyal to *BMG* and huddle together for warmth in any specialist societies they might find. While some disagreed with his strategy, none disputed his assessment.[2] There had been no significant British-based concert-hall guitarist since the death of Madame Sidney Pratten in 1895, and despite

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The quotation that forms the title of this article is taken from an anonymous review entitled 'Herbert Garcia', *The Times*, 7 November 1966, 14. A prestigious London concert venue, the Wigmore Hall then had a capacity of about 600. I am grateful to the anonymous referees for *JRMA* for their very helpful suggestions and advice.

[1] *BMG*, May 1943, 142–3. Founded by the music publisher and instrument dealer Clifford Essex and published between 1903 and 1976, *BMG* (*Banjo, Mandolin and Guitar*) was Britain's leading fretted-instrument magazine.
[2] *BMG*, August 1943, 217–18; September 1943, 234–5.

the interest generated by the visits of Andrés Segovia starting in the 1920s, no sustainable audience for public performance.[3] The instrument was entirely absent from the conservatoire, and when, in 1948, the prodigiously talented Julian Bream arrived at the Royal College of Music (hereafter RCM), he was assigned to the piano and asked not to bring his guitar into the building. Private teachers were at a premium, with fewer than 40 advertising in *BMG* in 1951, and tutor books, published music and gramophone records were rarities.[4] Moreover, as one contemporary remembered, the guitar in any form was decidedly 'a specialist instrument'; 'If you wanted to purchase a guitar there were only a handful of shops to meet your needs.'[5]

Yet gradually during the 1950s and much more rapidly in the next decade, the 'classical', 'classic' or 'Spanish' guitar – the labels were interchangeable, with the first increasingly preferred – became ever more a characteristic element of the contemporary soundscape. Both Bream and John Williams, respectively British-born and (from the age of ten) British-raised, not only became nationally and internationally renowned concert and recording artists but also generated a considerable following well beyond the specialist guitar and broader classical music communities. Little surprise was expressed at Williams's appearances on the prime-time TV show of the popular entertainer Val Doonican in 1967 and 1972.[6] A growing body of young guitarists arrived on the concert stage, encouraged by the examples of Bream and Williams and benefiting from a significant expansion of teaching provision in schools and conservatoires. By 1970, a contributor to *Gramophone* could suggest that the high cost of a re-released Bream album 'may simply indicate how easily the record companies can sell guitar records these days'.[7] Above all, the period saw the classical guitar taken up by thousands of amateurs who fuelled a growth in its sales and facilitated its penetration of the wider public culture by their championing of the concerts and recordings of the leading professional performers who had so often been their initial inspiration. 'Casting pearls' was worthwhile after all.

As Paul Sparks has claimed, the guitar, irrespective of its long-established popularity, 'has retained a remarkably low profile in the written history of music'; indeed, that very popularity has been a probable cause of its falling largely 'beneath the radar of respectable musicology'.[8] Despite critics and commentators frequently granting the classical variant the highest status within the guitar family, it has not escaped this wider fate. Serious study of its history, often written by practising guitarists, has certainly grown. Harvey Turnbull and Graham Wade laid important foundations in general surveys in the 1970s and 1980s, while Stuart W. Button's analysis of the

[3] Stuart W. Button, *The Guitar in England, 1800–1924* (London: Garland, 1989), 125–87.
[4] Tony Palmer, *Julian Bream: A Life on the Road* (London: Macdonald, 1982), 25; Julian Bream, 'Foreword' to Stuart W. Button, *Julian Bream: The Foundations of a Musical Career* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), xii, 109, 113. Bream did eventually play the guitar in student concerts, however.
[5] Ivor Mairants, in *BMG*, February 1957, 118.
[6] *BMG*, April 1967, 214; *Guitar*, September 1972, 31.
[7] *Gramophone*, April 1970, 1644.
[8] Paul Sparks, 'Editorial', *Plucked Strings*, ed. Sparks, special issue, *Early Music*, 46/1 (2018), 1.

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nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English guitar world and the recent rich studies of the late Georgian and early Victorian era by scholars associated with the Consortium for Guitar Research have much enhanced our understanding.[9] Nevertheless, historiographical interest remains modest in scale and has yet to embrace the second half of the twentieth century. Although biographical studies of Bream and Williams – two of the most acclaimed British-based musicians of their generation – have appeared, they and their instrument are conspicuously absent in general histories of British music.[10]

Such neglect is unfortunate because it not merely marginalizes the instrument but also prevents guitar studies from contributing to wider musicological debates. This article in essence explores how, why and with what consequences an instrument that had barely registered in the national consciousness for over a century became highly attractive to certain social constituencies at this juncture in British history. It suggests that the most fruitful answers are located in the instrument offering (mainly) younger, well-educated, middle-class males the opportunity to perform – both literally and metaphorically – a fashionable and intellectually distinctive form of modernity. Their collective embrace helped lift the guitar from obscurity, not least by stripping away many of its earlier domestic/feminine associations, though it also led many practitioners into often unhelpful musical cul-de-sacs and failed to remove the 'middlebrow' label that had long attached to the instrument and much of its specialist music. The study of the classical guitar thereby connects with, and sheds light upon, many of the central historiographical themes that drive contemporary scholarship. The instrument's mid-twentieth-century history underlines both the centrality of class and gender as key explanatory categories and music's critical function as a site for the making and demonstration of wider cultural values and meanings. It reveals the importance of virtuosity as both actuality and aspiration in the construction of musical tastes and hierarchies. Finally, it allows for the consideration of other significant territories not touched on above, including the place of musical education, the role of the media and the importance of tactile and timbral qualities in the shaping of musical preference. The guitar, in other words, constitutes a fertile aspect of the wider musicological field and not simply a self-contained element within it.

This article focuses on a period that saw the classical guitar move from the very margins of British musical life to become, if not part of the mainstream, a vibrant subculture capable of finding space within it. At the broadest level, it stands as a contribution to the guitar's modern history more generally. Acknowledgement of the instrument's extraordinary emergence from the late 1950s is a musicological

[9] Harvey Turnbull, *The Guitar from the Renaissance to the Present Day* (London: Batsford, 1974); Graham Wade, *The Traditions of the Classical Guitar* (London: John Calder, 1980); Button, *The Guitar in England*; *The Early Romantic Guitar*, ed. Christopher Page, special issue, *Early Music*, 41/4 (2013); and *Plucked Strings*, ed. Sparks.

[10] Button, *Julian Bream*; William Starling, *Strings Attached: The Life and Music of John Williams* (London: Robson Books, 2012). Graham Wade, *The Art of Julian Bream* (Blaydon-on-Tyne: Ashley Mark, 2008), provides a detailed record of Bream's performances, recordings and editions.

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commonplace, and yet for all the valuable recent work in guitar studies it remains precisely that – taken for granted and unexplored.[11] Although this study demonstrably opposes any supposition that the guitar's many worlds were mutually exclusive, detailed individual analysis of them does present a manageable way forward for the larger task. More specifically, it provides a social and cultural history that charts the broad contours of the classical guitar's popularization, identifies the key musical, social and economic factors behind that process and explores the cultural meanings it generated within post-war Britain. Given the symbiotic relationship between professional and amateur performers, it is essential to examine both groups. However, although discussion of elite players and their impact upon the wider public forms an important element, this article concentrates especially on what one newspaper termed the 'spare-time Segovias' whom they encouraged,[12] analysing both the demographic structure of this important new constituency in terms of class, gender, age and geography and the distinctive musical habitat that it generated. The instrument's post-war popularity was international in scope and many issues discussed here were not peculiar to Britain. However, the British example does provide one case study against which a larger body of comparative studies eventually can be set.

## The guitar and the classical guitar in Britain from the early nineteenth century

The roots of modern British classical guitar culture reached back more than a century. This section outlines that broad history while paying special attention to the late 1940s and early 1950s and the establishment of firm foundations for the instrument's full-scale revival. As throughout the entire study, classical guitar is placed in the context of the wider guitar family with which its status was always intimately connected. On some occasions it was eclipsed by its relatives; on others, it drew kudos and personnel from them or earned a position of particular privilege over them. The popularization of the classical guitar can never be disentangled from this larger process.

### *From 'la guitaromanie' to the dance-band age*

It was the so-called *guitaromanie* (guitar mania) – so prominent a feature of European musical life from about 1815 until 1840 – that first established the modern six-string guitar in Britain, attracting foreign professionals as performers and teachers and stimulating amateur engagement with it as a vehicle for both instrumental performance and song accompaniment. Part middle- and upper-class fashion statement (notably among women, for whom the guitar's delicate sound and suitability for domestic use was deemed highly appropriate), part embodiment of Romantic ideals concerning

[11] *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed. Victor Anand Coelho (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Kevin Dawe, *The New Guitarscape in Critical Theory, Cultural Practice and Musical Performance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

[12] *News Chronicle*, 24 December 1956.

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music's capacity to stimulate the imagination, it gave the instrument a hitherto unknown status.[13] However, from its zenith in the early and mid-1830s interest declined rapidly, not least because of the piano's ever strengthening position as the essential domestic musical accoutrement for women and girls.[14] For much of the period until the 1920s, British guitar culture comprised an extremely modest amateur classical tradition and a minor component within popular music. The instrument featured in some minstrelsy and blackface acts, but was most prominent within the female-dominated amateur mandolin and guitar orchestras that flourished from the mid-1880s and the banjo, mandolin and guitar bands that followed in the next decade.[15] The guitar's generally inferior status within the fretted-instrument world, let alone the larger musical one, was made glaringly apparent by its being comfortably outnumbered within these ensembles and reduced mainly to accompanying its more favoured colleagues.[16]

The late 1920s and 1930s witnessed a definite improvement in its standing. Interest in the classical guitar was stimulated by increasing visits from European concert artists, above all Segovia, who made a remarkably well-received British début at London's Aeolian Hall on 7 December 1926 and then returned regularly (and not exclusively to the capital) throughout the period until 1938.[17] Although his influence was in its infancy, Segovia was as central to the establishment of the classical guitar as a serious instrument in Britain as he was throughout the world, and with every enthusiast of note recording their debt to him, he was laying key foundations for the post-war resurgence. Again, although it was only a small body and one markedly disinclined to proselytization, the Philharmonic Society of Guitarists (hereafter PSG), founded in 1929 by the Russian émigré Boris Perott (1882–1958), provided British devotees with their first organization specifically dedicated to the classical guitar.[18] Interest expanded more significantly in the field of popular music, as is exemplified by a vogue for the Hawaiian steel guitar and the displacement of the banjo as a dance-band rhythm instrument by the plectrum guitar. Again, the genius of the Belgian jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt (1910–53), Bream's first guitar hero, inspired interest among many existing and potential players. Nevertheless, for all its progress by the early 1940s, the idea that within less than two decades the guitar would become 'the most popular instrument, at

[13] Button, *The Guitar in England*, 2–123; Andrew Britton, 'The Guitar and the Bristol School of Artists', *The Early Romantic Guitar*, ed. Page, 585–94. On the possibility of a wider class base, see Christopher Page, 'Being a Guitarist in Late Georgian England', *Plucked Strings*, ed. Sparks, 3–16 (pp. 6, 12–13).

[14] Cyril Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History* (London: Dent, 1976), 17–18, 92–3; Page, 'Being a Guitarist in Late Georgian England', 15.

[15] *The Stage*, 7 July 1882 and 29 June 1883; Button, *The Guitar in England*, 140–87; Paul Sparks, *The Classical Mandolin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), esp. pp. 44–8, 87–98, 157–61; Sparks, 'Clara Ross, Mabel Dowling and Ladies' Guitar and Mandolin Bands in Late Victorian Britain', *The Early Romantic Guitar*, ed. Page, 621–32.

[16] Sparks, 'Clara Ross, Mabel Dowling and Ladies' Guitar and Mandolin Bands', 629.

[17] *The Scotsman*, 8 December 1926; Graham Wade and Gerald Garno, *A New Look at Segovia* (Pacific, MI: Mel Bay Publications, 1997).

[18] Button, *Julian Bream*, 13.

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least in Europe and America […] since the piano became the symbol of musical aspiration' was unimaginable.[19]

### *The post-war guitar boom and the re-emergence of the classical guitar*

The explosion of interest in the guitar generated by the emergence of skiffle and rock 'n' roll from late 1955 rendered it entirely imaginable. Although hard sales data remain elusive, Ivor Mairants, a leading guitarist and guitar dealer, believed there to have been a fivefold increase between 1955 and 1956 alone.[20] Stories of 'guitar mania' became staple narratives in the popular press, with the *News of the World* reporting that one Manchester dealer had sold 100 instruments in a day and the *Daily Mirror* claiming: 'One London firm alone have 2000 unfulfilled orders for guitars […while] thousands of would-be guitarists here are pestering music shops in vain.'[21] The classical guitar might initially appear far removed from this extraordinary cultural moment, but it could only benefit from the excitement that surrounded the instrument more generally: the London guitar teacher who was 'inspired by Segovia and skiffle' was far from unusual.[22] Understandably, these dramatic developments of the mid-1950s dominate current understanding of guitar history. However, for all their impact, they must not obscure the fact that British guitar culture had already begun to expand significantly in the immediate post-war period as several styles began to attract growing constituencies under the influence of a resourceful recording industry, a buoyant post-war market for live performance and the enthusiastic endorsement of specialist writers.

Three of the emergent forms were of special importance for classical guitar. Flamenco gained a considerable popular following as leading Spanish dance troupes drew capacity audiences to major concert and theatrical venues across the country. Their guitarists were frequently hired to perform in some of London's more modish cafes and restaurants, where they helped to inspire the growth of what Mairants – himself a convert – saw as one of the most notable areas of increased guitar sales in the early 1950s.[23] By 1956, the guitarist Peter Sensier could note drily that one could find

[19] Roy Brewer, *The Guitarist's Notebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 97.

[20] *Daily Mirror*, 8 April 1957. Most guitars were imported, but the instrument was never listed separately in relevant Board of Trade documentation. Total imports under the heading 'wind and string', presumably its ascribed category, rose from 44,000 in 1954 to 300,000 in 1958, an almost sevenfold increase, with an especially steep rise from 123,000 to 264,000 between 1956 and 1957. It is impossible to know how many guitars might have been included here, but the data does at least provide a possible indication of sales patterns. *Annual Statement of the Trade of the United Kingdom with Commonwealth Countries and Foreign Countries* (London: HMSO, 1960), vol. 2, schedule D.23, 436.

[21] Billy Bragg, *Roots, Radicals and Rockers: How Skiffle Changed the World* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017), 303; *Daily Mirror*, 8 April 1957.

[22] Ed Lee, 'Bringing the Guitar into your School', *Pop, Rock and Ethnic Music in School*, ed. Graham Vulliamy and Ed Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 91–101 (p. 91).

[23] The visit to the 1950 Edinburgh Festival by Rosario y Antonio (Florence Pérez Padilla and Antonio Ruiz Soler) was a defining moment. *Daily Mirror*, 8 April 1957.

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'flamenco snobs in almost any Espresso coffee-bar' in the capital.[24] Folk music, broadly defined, formed another important strand, with the American singer-guitarist Burl Ives attracting huge audiences during his British tour of 1953.[25] The so-called 'troubadours', singer-guitarists who performed both traditional and composed songs drawn from across the globe, provided a more local stimulus. Among the most famous were John Gavall (1919–99), ultimately best known as the pioneer of classical guitar education in British schools, but also a broadcaster and club entertainer; Elton Hayes (1916–2001), a popular recording artist and variety performer from the late 1940s who was probably the first ever British popular entertainer to have been associated exclusively with the guitar; and Victoria Kingsley (1900–2000), a RADA-trained actress, classically trained guitarist and Cambridge University-educated linguist capable of singing in 16 languages.[26] Although initially enjoying a far narrower reach than flamenco and folk, blues also began to establish a following, with the African American musician Josh White a notable early influence. He first toured Britain in 1950, and his virtuosic playing generated much positive critical attention.[27]

These new currents raised the instrument's overall profile and helped build communities of guitar enthusiasts who could cross back and forth between different styles. For classical guitar more specifically, these enthusiasts were important in opening pathways to it by sensitizing British guitarists to acoustic, fingerstyle techniques. This is to downplay neither the number of plectrum guitarists featuring in the expanding early 1950s guitarscape (including those using electric instruments), nor their crucial role in the rediscovery of the classical guitar; *BMG* saw them, indeed, as 'the most fruitful source of new players of the Spanish guitar' in the late 1940s.[28] However, the new interest in fingerstyle expanded possibilities. Although involving not inconsiderable differences in technique and repertoire, flamenco and classical were close enough aesthetically to allow some crossover of both performers and listeners, with many of London's flamenco venues happily featuring classical players. Inspiration could also flow from less immediately obvious sources. Ives, for example, provided the initial encouragement for Robert

[24] *BMG*, September 1956, 302. Sensier, one half of the influential duo Dorita y Pepe, was a central figure in introducing yet another specialism, that of Latin American guitar, into the contemporary musical environment. *Guitar*, April 1973, 20–3, and November 1977, 2; Maurice J. Summerfield, *The Classical Guitar: Its Evolution, Players and Personalities since 1800* (Blaydon-on-Tyne: Ashley Mark, 1996), 218; Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival, 1944–2002* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[25] Philip James Bone, *The Guitar and Mandolin: Biographies of Celebrated Players and Composers for these Instruments* (London: Schott, 1954), 181.

[26] Gavall was born Guy William Hugh Walters and known to friends as Hugh Walters. *Classical Guitar*, February 1990, 22–5; Summerfield, *The Classical Guitar*, 349; interview between the present author and Gordon Crosskey, 25 January 2019 (partial transcript available from the present author). In 1952, Gavall compiled what his publisher claimed to be the first collection of songs with guitar accompaniment to appear in Britain for half a century. *BMG*, March 1952, 142; August 1952, 262; December 1952, 52 and 84. For Hayes, see *Gramophone*, July 1952, 43, and April 1954, 449; and Bone, *The Guitar and Mandolin*, 165–6. For Kingsley, see *Guitar News*, June–July 1953, 1–3; and Bone, *The Guitar and Mandolin*, 187.

[27] Roberta Freund Schwarz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Styles* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 35–9.

[28] *BMG*, May 1951, 174.

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Spencer (1932–97), eventually an influential classical guitarist and player of historical fretted instruments more generally, to take up the instrument.[29]

For all this wider activity, the classical guitar revival was ultimately dependent on developments within its own milieu. Technological innovation was significant, with Albert Augustine's invention of the nylon string in 1946 as an alternative to, and very quickly a replacement for, its gut precursor vital both in defining the moment at which the instrument began to resurface across the western world and in stimulating its subsequent popularity. Virtually unbreakable, stable and losing little if any warmth of tone, nylon strings were by 1950 rapidly becoming an affordable, reliable norm.[30] Live performance was similarly key. Segovia recommenced British tours in 1947, drawing ever larger and more reverential audiences who from the early 1950s were also able to obtain an increasing body of his LP recordings.[31] Visits from other foreign players, most notably France's Ida Presti in 1951, reached smaller publics but still helped raise the instrument's profile. Above all, the immediate post-war period finally saw the first significant steps in the re-establishment of a sustainable indigenous classical guitar culture in which both elite performers and a vigorous community of amateurs eventually could flourish.

Central to this was the sheer hard work of J. L. White's 'ardent enthusiasts', of whom four – Wilfrid Appleby (1892–1987), John W. 'Jack' Duarte (1919–2005), Peter Sensier (1918–77) and Terry Usher (1909–69) – were especially important.[32] Appleby was the only amateur among them, with the others full- or part-time professional dance-band plectrum guitarists in the vanguard of those inspired by Segovia. Although all performed publicly with varying degrees of regularity, their greatest contributions came within the fields of teaching, arrangement (Duarte, alone, would eventually become a notable composer), journalism and administration. The Manchester-based Usher, providing a much needed counterbalance to what was then often a London-centred activity, became a highly influential figure in the north of England; one contemporary noted that in the 1950s 'there must have been very few orthodox Spanish guitarists north of the Trent who were not pupils of his or pupils of his pupils'.[33] At a time when suitable music was rarely available, Usher also helped widen horizons through his arrangements of Bach for guitar duet;[34] and Sensier's transcriptions of Byrd, Purcell

[29] Summerfield, *The Classical Guitar*, 228.

[30] Turnbull, *The Guitar from the Renaissance to the Present Day*, 79. Essex was advertising light and heavy gauge sets for around 15s. (75p) in *BMG*.

[31] Bream did not release a guitar album until 1956. Williams's recording début came in 1958.

[32] For Appleby, see Button, *Julian Bream*, 64–5, 133–9. In the early 1950s, Duarte remained essentially a plectrum guitarist, but he was to become one of the most influential figures in the classical guitar world not merely in Britain but also internationally. Graham Wade, 'Jack W. Duarte: Composer and Writer', *Manchester Sounds*, 3 (2003), 119–37; *The Guardian*, 31 January 2005. For Sensier, see note 24 above. For Usher, see *BMG*, June 1969, 289, and August 1969, 370; and Summerfield, *The Classical Guitar*, 243.

[33] *BMG*, August 1969, 370.

[34] Usher originally arranged these pieces for plectrum guitar, but on publishing some of them in *BMG* added the important rider that he and Duarte often played them fingerstyle. *BMG*, October 1943, 19; July 1943, 196–7; April 1952, 181; April 1953, 171.

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and other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century composers played a similar role. All four men had columns in *BMG* at various times, offering advice on technique and practical musicianship and helping to mould the tradition of 'self-help' tuition crucial to the many players lacking access to specialist teachers.

Appleby was particularly active within the classical guitar's early administrative structures, although his achievements were mixed. Initially influential within the PSG, his insistent and belligerently argued belief (returned to later in this study) that the classical guitar was the 'true' guitar and all others merely 'novelty' or 'debased' variants led to a messy resignation in 1951 and his founding the rival International Classic Guitar Association.[35] With or without him, the PSG remained a small organization, focused heavily on London in terms of activity and membership; its eventual renaming as the London Guitar Society (hereafter LGS) in 1959 seems fitting.[36] Nevertheless, its meetings, monthly bulletin, members' concerts and well-stocked library of specialist music (Bream's father was once librarian) gave some shape to the rather inchoate post-war classical guitar world. It also provided crucial practical help both to Bream at the very outset of his career (organizing concerts to showcase his talents, helping to smooth his route into the RCM and providing him with useful financial support) and later to Williams.[37] Appleby's International Classic Guitar Association had little function beyond serving as a mechanism for the production of the bi-monthly *Guitar News*, which, while derided by some for its celebratory and unquestioning approach, was Britain's only dedicated classical guitar publication.[38] At a local level, Appleby founded and Usher co-founded, respectively, the Cheltenham and Manchester guitar circles in 1946, and several similar bodies followed, including the Welsh and Liverpool circles (both 1951), the Classic Guitar Society of Glasgow (1954) and the Bristol University Guitar Club (1955).[39] These were early examples of what became a modest but valuable network of organizations offering an important forum for performance, discussion and sociability for the more ambitious and advanced performers and a conduit for the establishment of the guitar into communities outside London. As such, they quietly helped to embed the instrument in British musical culture.

This nascent guitar tradition was boosted in April 1952 through the establishment by John Williams's father, Len, of the Spanish Guitar Centre in London's Soho. Len Williams (1910–87), whose interest in classical guitar stemmed from his friendship with the Italian guitarist and luthier Mario Maccaferri in the 1930s, had recently returned from Australia, where he had emigrated after a career in the pre-war London dance-band world.[40] Combining teaching with the sale of guitars and related

[35] *BMG*, May 1951, 165 and 174; Button, *Julian Bream*, 133–9.
[36] *BMG*, April 1959, 185. Following a reorganization in 1954 effectively ceding control to Len Williams, the PSG kept its title only out of deference to Perott and it was changed soon after his death. *Classical Guitar*, June 1990, 55.
[37] *BMG*, June 1952, 232; July 1952, 257; and March 1954, 142; Button, *Julian Bream*, 36–9, 109.
[38] Duarte provided a highly critical perspective in *Classical Guitar*, February 1990, 54–5.
[39] *Guitar News*, August–September 1951, 6; December 1954–January 1955, 7; June–July 1955, 17.
[40] Starling, *Strings Attached*, 10–12.

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equipment, the centre soon garnered some 200 students, both a revealing testament to the already growing interest in the classical guitar, at least in London and the south-east, and a stimulus for it. The centre also encouraged provincial imitation, commencing with the inception of the Bristol Spanish Guitar Centre in 1954 by Michael Watson, a one-time student of the London original.[41] At the heart of Len Williams's decision to return to Britain was the desire to find a European base from which to build the career of his ten-year-old son, John. There could be no better motivating force for British classical guitar than the emergence of outstanding home-grown or home-nurtured talent, and the young John Williams and the slightly older Bream were more than capable of providing it.[42] The playing of Desmond Dupré (1916–74), both as soloist and as accompanist to the countertenor Alfred Deller, had excited much interest in the late 1940s and early 1950s,[43] but it was the dramatic arrival of Bream (1933–2020) and Williams (b. 1941) that really captured imaginations. The London-born Bream, who had moved from plectrum to Spanish guitar at the age of 11, made his concert début in Cheltenham in 1946, and in the next year appeared on both BBC radio and the corporation's infant TV network, as well as making his formal London début only two days after his fifteenth birthday.[44] Williams in his turn performed for the PSG in 1952, aged only 11, and played in concerts in both Bristol and Manchester just three years later.[45] There was enormous interest in their progress, symbolized by Bream's appearance on the cover of *BMG* as early as 1947. Britain had teenage guitar heroes several years before the arrival of rock 'n' roll.

## Spare-time Segovias: identifying the amateur classical guitarist

By the mid-1950s, the British classical guitar world, although still modest in scope, was in its most robust health for a century. As it expanded and flourished, it was, as will be seen, more than capable of connecting with wider publics who neither played the instrument nor had any specialist knowledge of it or its music. At its very heart, however, were the amateurs who, as always, comprised almost its entire body of practitioners. Following a discussion of the guitar's growth within the larger context of expanding post-war leisure activity, this section attempts to give a sense of the scale of the amateur community and to analyse its demographic structure in terms of class, gender, age and geography.

A body of elite professional performers did emerge from the 1950s as specialist tuition commenced within conservatoires and colleges. Both the Guildhall School of Music and Trinity College (both in London) had appointed professors of guitar and

[41] *BMG*, June 1952, 234, and September 1952, 285; *The Guardian*, 2 December 2011; Starling, *Strings Attached*, 69–79.

[42] Williams had been born in Australia to a mother of Australian-Chinese heritage, but although his Australian nationality was unquestioned, he was happily granted an honorary British identity.

[43] Dupré swiftly moved to the lute and viol.

[44] Button, *Julian Bream*, 16–22, 38–40, 92, 99. For informative obituaries for Bream see, for example, *The Times*, 15 August 2020; <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2020/aug/14/julian-bream-obituary>; and <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/julian-bream-dead-classical-guitarist-a9671946.html>.

[45] *BMG*, May 1955, 193; Starling, *Strings Attached*, 87, 113.

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mandolin offering non-examinable courses to (mainly) female amateurs as early as 1887 and 1897 respectively, and the Royal Manchester College of Music made Usher its first 'tutor for the guitar' in 1954, although his role was part-time and students were few in number.[46] However, it was the establishment of the Guildhall's first formal classical guitar department under the Austrian-born Adele Kramer in 1958 that began the modern era of conservatoire guitar education. In the same year, Hector Quine replicated her initiative at Trinity College, and in the next, at the Royal Academy of Music, London, while in 1960 Williams became the RCM's first guitar professor.[47] By 1968, some 80 students were enrolled at London conservatoires alone as the guitar became 'a relatively strong minority instrument'.[48] Although not all of the new generation of guitarists were products of this system (Michael Jessett, for example, who joined Williams as a professor at the RCM in 1964, was largely self-taught), it was this new opportunity for serious study that enabled individuals such as Gilbert Biberian (b. 1944), Carlos Bonell (b. 1949), Julian Byzantine (b. 1945), Anthea Gifford (b. 1949), Barry Mason (b. 1947), John Mills (b. 1947) and David Russell (b. 1953) to reach the concert platform.[49] Nevertheless, according to the informed contemporary estimate of the performer and teacher Wade, as late as 1971 barely a hundred people earned their living entirely from the classical guitar (teaching was the main source), with a slightly larger semi-professional group including such luminaries as Usher and Duarte combining substantial guitar work with other full-time occupations.[50] Almost universally, however, playing the classical guitar was a private and not a public pursuit.

The growth of classical guitar as a leisure pursuit was part of a much wider expansion of recreational activity within the highly conducive post-war socio-economic climate. The working week was reduced from a norm of 44 hours in the late 1940s to 40 by the mid-1960s, while average earnings for both weekly-paid and salaried staff rose by about 130% between 1955 and 1969, comfortably outstripping inflation and significantly increasing spending power.[51] Within this favourable context, classical guitars were generally inexpensive. Costly items for the most serious – a small number became collectors – and the most status-conscious were available: in the mid-1960s, Mairants advertised a José Ramírez concert instrument for £215 and the Bristol Spanish Guitar Centre priced half of its stock at between £50 and £200. However, far cheaper but perfectly acceptable beginner's models were readily available, and Mairants, who set high standards for the instruments he sold, marketed several in the range 10–14

[46] *Guitar News*, June–July 1954, 5. *BMG*, May 1954, 191; interview between the present author and Crosskey, 25 January 2019. Students saw him privately rather than at the RCM.
[47] *Guitar News*, August–September 1954, 17, and July–August 1958, 6–7; Starling, *Strings Attached*, 140; Quine obituary, *Daily Telegraph*, 18 January 2015.
[48] Michael Stimpson, 'The Guitar in English Musical Education', *British Journal of Music Education*, 2/1 (1985), 51–68 (p. 53).
[49] *BMG*, March 1964, 206, and August 1971, 372 and 377. All have biographies in Summerfield, *The Classical Guitar*.
[50] *BMG*, March 1971, 190–1.
[51] Arthur Marwick, *British Social History since 1945*, 3rd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), 114.

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guineas.[52] Often substandard but still usable models were obtainable even more cheaply, and hire purchase and a buoyant second-hand market also eased financial burdens. Yet again, the growing hobby of guitar making provided an often satisfying avenue to ownership. *The Woodworker* published a monthly guide to Spanish guitar construction as early as 1955, and in 1957 A. P. Sharpe produced his highly regarded *Make your Own Spanish Guitar*; this reached a fourth edition in 1970 having already sold 14,000 copies.[53]

Overall, the guitar sat comfortably among other common consumer durables. Advertised prices for mid-range items in one northern English provincial town in 1965 listed adult three-speed bikes at £16, made-to-measure men's suits at £10 18s., larger portable radios at £25 and Polaroid colour cameras at £30.[54] Guitars were affordable luxuries of the day. They were also supremely well suited to changes in the nature of British housing, as a rise in the number of dwellings in private ownership from 31% of stock in 1939 to 47% by 1966, along with much improved levels of comfort and amenity more generally, combined to make the home an ever more important focus for leisure activity.[55] In Sensier's phrase, the guitar was arguably 'the ideal instrument for modern urban life' – both quiet and portable (unlike the piano), and rarely dominating a room (or an entire house) in a physical or auditory sense.[56]

### *Measuring the classical community*

It is impossible to know how many classical guitarists emerged within this second wave of *guitaromanie*, not least because it is equally impossible to determine exactly what defined one: the instrument's relative cheapness saw many more bought than actually played with any regularity or measure of competence. Those who saw their playing as serious leisure indulged in it with some purpose, but even so it is impossible accurately to enumerate a pastime largely rooted in individual or small, semi-private group activity and thereby largely hidden from the historical record. Fragmentary numerical data can be found, but they are too scattered and partial to form the basis of detailed analysis. In 1955, *The Times* claimed the existence of about 10,000 'more or less serious' players, while ten years later the manager of London's Spanish Guitar Centre stated that it alone had trained about 15,000 'competent students' between 1952 and 1965. Unfortunately, it is unclear how the former estimate was reached, and the latter is unverifiable.[57] Rather than focus on raw numbers, the approach taken here is to establish broad

[52] *BMG*, September 1965, 415; December 1963, 66–7; January 1964, 141. Multiplication by 20 would give an approximate contemporary cost for all items discussed here.
[53] Albert Percy Sharpe, *Make your Own Spanish Guitar* (London: Clifford Essex Music, 1957). *Guitar News*, January–February 1967, 11; *BMG*, December 1970, 108. Guitars were sometimes made in school carpentry lessons for later class use. John Gavall, 'The Guitar: An Evaluation', *Musical Times*, 95/1341 (November 1954), 596–7.
[54] All prices derived from *Halifax Evening Courier*, May 1965.
[55] Chris Cook and John Stevenson, *The Longman Companion to British History*, 3rd edn (Harlow: Penguin, 1996), 121.
[56] *BMG*, August 1963, 354.
[57] *Guitar News*, December 1954–January 1955, 14; *The Observer*, 11 July 1965.

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indications of the overall scale and patterns of growth of the key specialist services, especially teaching, which allowed the classical guitar to flourish.

The evidence suggests a substantial growth in the overall number of practitioners, particularly in the 1960s. Again, detailed instrument sales figures are unobtainable, although one well-informed commentator reported a sevenfold increase in classical guitar retail between 1963 and 1968.[58] The rise in the number of guitar-related publications, however, is extremely clear. The appearance of Sharpe's *The Story of the Spanish Guitar* in 1954 was an early indication of the instrument's growing visibility,[59] although in 1957 Clifford Essex still advertised only three tutor books for the instrument in *BMG*. Just five years later, however, the company informed readers that 'we have so many tutors for the Spanish Guitar that we have listed them on a separate leaflet'. By November 1963, the magazine could also advertise 22 'albums of solos for the Spanish Guitar', ranging from the *Tárrega Album* fingered by Luise Walker to arrangements of popular musical standards by Geoffrey Sisley in his *Me and my Guitar*.[60]

Perhaps most telling was the marked increase in the availability of formal tuition. In terms of private teaching, *BMG*'s advertising listings, although in no sense offering a definitive record, provide useful indicative material. The overall number of individual teachers offering at least some level of classical teaching rose only slightly from 37 in 1951 to 42 in 1961, but doubled during the next decade to reach 89 by 1971. Moreover, the number of dedicated classical specialists had risen from just three in 1951 – Alexis Chesnakov and Sensier in London and Usher in Manchester – to 23 by 1971. Similarly, the number of multi-staffed specialist classical guitar centres advertising their services rose from five in 1961 to 12 by 1971.[61] This expansion was paralleled by major developments within the state education sector.[62] Experiments with the guitar in the school classroom began in the early 1950s, but it was the work of Gavall, first as a music teacher in the Midlands and then as music adviser (from 1963 to 1972 senior adviser) to Yorkshire's West Riding Education Authority, that provided the major catalyst.[63] Working for an organization with an unusually strong commitment to arts education, he was allowed to create six full-time peripatetic classical guitar tutorships between 1961 and 1966, and to appoint to them musicians of the highest calibre: Gordon Crosskey, his first recruit, was to become professor of classical guitar at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, and one of Britain's most highly regarded guitar teachers. By 1972 – after which year local authority reorganization dramatically reduced the scheme's effectiveness – about 1,000 West Riding primary

[58] Margaret Campbell, 'Everybody's Instrument', *The Times Educational Supplement*, 24 May 1968, 1741.
[59] Albert Percy Sharpe, *The Story of the Spanish Guitar* (London: Clifford Essex Music, 1954).
[60] Back-page advertisements in *BMG*, September 1957, May 1962 and November 1963.
[61] All figures based on September editions.
[62] For classes in private schools, including Cheltenham Ladies College and Dartington Hall, see *Guitar News*, December 1954–January 1955, 17.
[63] Gavall, 'The Guitar', 596–7; *Classical Guitar*, February 1990, 22–5. For his early work at the George Salter Secondary Modern, West Bromwich, see *Radio Times*, 8 July 1955, 7.

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children were taught the classical guitar each week, with older children also able to access Saturday morning adult classes. Gavall's tireless evangelizing helped lead to provision, admittedly often less well sourced, in a number of other authorities.[64] It is impossible to measure the extent to which these child musicians continued their playing into adulthood, but at the very least the development of school tuition in the 1960s is a further and vital demonstration of the classical guitar's much enhanced status in Britain and its growing acceptance as a serious instrument.

Most significant of all was the growth of guitar teaching within the local authority adult evening classes that were so prominent within the post-1950 British educational landscape.[65] Adult guitar classes in which a variety of styles were subsumed had existed from the late 1940s, but by the later 1960s demand for specialist classical teaching had grown strongly.[66] The policies adopted by the Inner London Education Authority (hereafter ILEA) demonstrate this powerfully. Although the number of actual classes offered cannot be ascertained, *Floodlight*, the ILEA's annual evening class guide, did list all adult education centres where some level of guitar tuition was available. While in 1965–6 only three of the 42 such institutions specifically offered 'Spanish guitar', by 1968–9, 23 out of 45 did so, with three more advertising 'classical guitar'. (The reason for the differentiation is unclear and may well have simply reflected different naming procedures across institutions; by 1974, 'classical' had been uniformly adopted as the generic term.) Within three years, Spanish/classical had increased from just 7% of advertised guitar tuition to 57%. Moreover, of the 18 instruments available for study by ILEA adult students, Spanish guitar now stood second only to the piano in terms of level of provision.[67] Judged by this evidence at least, the late 1960s marked the moment when the classical guitar reached entirely new levels of popularity and exposure. Given the relatively generous supply of competent teachers in the capital, London's provision was probably above average, but classes appeared across the country and could generate high levels of interest; 70 people enrolled for a beginners' group at one Liverpool centre in 1968.[68]

The importance of adult classes lay in their ready availability – in many areas they often provided the only option for tuition – and their extraordinary cheapness. A nine-month session of weekly ILEA classes in 1969 was priced at only £1 15s. at a time when equivalent private individual tuition would have cost about £100.[69] Many

[64] See, for example, *BMG*, March 1966, 199, for Southampton; and *Guitar News*, March 1968, 32–3, for Redbridge, Essex.

[65] John Lowe, *Adult Education in England and Wales: A Critical Survey* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970), 53–8. Overall provision grew by 50% from 1956 to 1966, with 1.4 million students attending Local Education Authority classes by the latter date. On music classes, see *Adult Education in 1961: The Yearbook of the National Institute of Adult Education* (London: National Institute of Adult Education, 1961), 6, and John Hursey, 'Music', *Adult Education and the Arts*, ed. David J. Jones and Alan F. Chadwick (Nottingham: Nottingham University Department of Adult Education, 1981), 24–31.

[66] *Making Music*, spring 1964, 10–11; Campbell, 'Everybody's Instrument'.

[67] *Floodlight*, 1967–8, 62.

[68] *Guitar News*, June–August 1968, 10–11.

[69] *Floodlight*, 1969; *BMG*, January 1970, 124.

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critics were justly concerned by 'evening centre syndrome', whereby teachers, faced with large bodies of students of varying ability and expectation, had to choose between giving a series of brief and inadequate individual tutorials or teaching whole groups at an often very slow pace.[70] Nevertheless, although many classes were rendered largely ineffective and drop-out rates could be high, the difficulties were not insurmountable, and imaginative ways were often found to engage large numbers in useful activity.[71] For all its faults, the evening class represented the main formal educational route to classical guitar and, by bringing it to a large new constituency, was a major force for its popularization.

### *Class*

The social and demographic structure of the classical guitar playing constituency can be categorized broadly as middle-class, male, relatively young and urban. Analysis is once again somewhat hampered by paucity of source material, but with leading amateur and professional performers generally typical of the larger body of practitioners from which they were drawn, their biographical data, combined with other supporting material, provide an instructive way forward. The guitar's middle-class milieu was obvious from the earlier twentieth century. Among those active from the 1930s and 1940s, Perott was an eminent heart surgeon, Appleby a philatelist, Usher (after a period as a dance-band guitarist and instrument salesman) an assistant town clerk with Manchester Corporation and later the publicity and information officer for the City of Manchester, while Duarte was a research scientist. In terms of the first professional performers, Dupré was an Oxford graduate who worked as a research chemist before going to the RCM, and Spencer was initially a librarian.[72] Bream, the son of a freelance commercial artist, was from a more modest lower-middle-class background, but that appears to have been fairly untypical.[73]

The continuity between the social backgrounds of these pioneers and those taking up the instrument in the 1950s and 1960s is striking. The *News Chronicle*'s depiction of 1956 guitar mania as comprising 'young factory workers who want to emulate Lonnie Donegan' and 'middle-aged professional men with a yen to be Segovia' was a little too journalistically neat, but harder evidence does suggest that this categorization of the classical guitar's class base at least did have some foundation in fact.[74] Chesnakov described his London-based pupils in the earlier post-war period as 'professional people, intellectual types', and although he was not necessarily equating occupation

[70] *BMG*, November 1969, 46–7; December 1969, 107–8; and January 1970, 124; *Making Music*, spring 1975, 4. See also Lee, 'Bringing the Guitar into your School', 94–5.
[71] *BMG*, December 1969, 107.
[72] For Perott, see Summerfield, *The Classical Guitar*, 181; for Appleby, see Button, *Julian Bream*, 35; for Usher, see Starling, *Strings Attached*, 14, and *BMG*, February 1961, 150; for Duarte, see *The Guardian*, obituary, 31 January 2005; for Dupré, see Wade, *Julian Bream*, 15; for Spencer, see Summerfield, *The Classical Guitar*, 228.
[73] Summerfield, *The Classical Guitar*, 349; Button, *Julian Bream*, 16; *Daily Telegraph*, 18 January 2015.
[74] *News Chronicle*, 24 December 1956.

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and mental disposition with educational level, the prevalence of graduate professionals among the ranks of guitarists was noteworthy.[75] When a teenage Crosskey, himself studying for a maths and physics degree at the Royal College of Science, London, began classes at the Spanish Guitar Centre in 1959, his fellow students included both Julian Andrews, a Cambridge language graduate and later a senior figure in the British Council, and Erasmus Harland, eventually a world-renowned paediatrician.[76] In a revealing comment on social context, Margaret Campbell argued in the late 1960s that 'in the university towns, the classical guitar is a "natural"', noting in particular the 50-strong Cambridge University Guitar Society, founded in 1959.[77] Wade was an ex-president, and Malcolm Weller, founder of the Newcastle Classical Guitar Centre and by profession an urban planner and property developer, was another prominent member.[78] Again, Eric Hill and Gerald Garcia, both eventually professional performers, honed their skills while chemistry students at Leeds and Oxford universities respectively.[79] Away from purely university-centred activity, a middle-class social tone still largely prevailed. The six guitar societies active in the London area in the 1960s were all based in relatively prosperous, usually suburban locations, while the secretaries of similar bodies elsewhere in the country also tended to live in suburbia.[80] The founding committee of the Liverpool Classical Guitar Society in 1968 included Brendan McCormack, a publican's son born in a working-class district of the city, as well as (rather more typically) a university lecturer, a grammar-school teacher and the head of music in a college of education.[81]

The classical guitar's growing popularity was sometimes accompanied by narratives stressing its universality, with Usher claiming in 1964 that it was now being 'played by people in all walks of life from princes to dustmen',[82] and Campbell entitling her 1968 survey of British guitar 'Everybody's Instrument' (see above, note 58). The 1960s undoubtedly saw some widening of its social base as the result of growing educational opportunities. The lower middle class, always especially strongly represented within the world of adult education, would have been the most likely beneficiary, but working-class students could also be attracted, Crosskey recalling that one regular attender at his local authority class was a corporation truck driver. He also stressed that many of the South Yorkshire pupils in the 1960s were from working-class (especially mining) communities, and they clearly offered the instrument a new constituency,

[75] *Daily Mirror*, 8 April 1957; see Chesnakov's obituary in *The Stage*, 9 February 1984.
[76] Interview between the present author and Crosskey, 25 January 2019; see also Andrews's obituary in *The Independent*, 4 August 2010; and for Harland, see <https://history.rcplondon.ac.uk/inspiring-physicians/philip-sydney-erasmus-gregory-harland> (accessed 28 January 2019).
[77] Campbell, 'Everybody's Instrument'.
[78] Summerfield, *The Classical Guitar*, 362; *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 22 January 1970.
[79] *BMG*, April 1966, 209; <http://classicalguitarmagazine.com/gerald-garcia-a-lifetime-of-music-and-the-love-of-sharing/> (accessed 15 December 2018).
[80] The London region societies were located in Hampstead, Hendon, Nonsuch Park, Purley and Wood Green.
[81] *Liverpool Echo*, 27 October 1968 and 15 November 1968; <http://liverpoolguitar.org/> (accessed 22 January 2019).
[82] *BMG*, January 1964, 113.

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other manifestations of which can occasionally be glimpsed. In 1974, for example, 'a fitter' wrote to *BMG* for advice on protecting his nails while at work, and, of course, his request points up a potentially troublesome practical issue for those in some manual trades.[83] Future detailed local research may well refine this picture still further and show a wider range of occupation than is recorded here. Nevertheless, claims of universality were actually describing a widening of interest rather more than any fundamental change in the core constituency. The popularization of the classical guitar did not equate to its democratization.

## *(Re)gendering*

The predominance of males within the ranks of classical guitarists is extremely significant, given the extent to which the instrument had so strongly been gendered as feminine. Indeed, in the earlier nineteenth century, its association with the domestic, feminine environment had added powerfully to a wider sense of the guitar as mere appendage to genteel social life and thereby unfitted for the serious demands of the concert platform.[84] To describe the classical guitar world as essentially male is not to deny women's continued engagement with it. Five of the eight founder members of the Cheltenham Guitar Circle in 1946 were women, as were eight of the 28 PSG members captured in a photograph of 1948.[85] The later sporadic photographic record similarly identifies them as members of, for example, the London Spanish Guitar Centre and a Liverpool evening class in the late 1960s.[86] It is also likely that female participation was increasing by the early 1970s. Although the dataset is small, analysis of the candidates passing the Spanish guitar diplomas offered under the aegis of *BMG* shows females, probably often teenagers and children, taking 30% of awards in 1966, but fractionally more than 50% by 1971.[87] Nevertheless, women appear to have been a minority for most of the 1950s and 1960s, and were often treated decidedly as such. A cast of exclusively male critics, writers and technical experts infused the classical guitar and the discourses around it with a strong sense of masculine authority. *BMG*, *Guitar News* and, at the end of the period, *Guitar* were invaluable sources of help and inspiration for their readers, but the male voice – not infrequently ponderously disputatious if

[83] For the social structure of adult education classes, see Lowe, *Adult Education*, 241–3, and E. M. Hutchinson, 'Adult Education: Sale or Service?', *Adult Education: The Year Book of the National Institute of Adult Education (England and Wales)*, 1970–1, 2–11 (p. 7). There is some evidence that music classes had one of the lowest rates of working-class participation, although many of these will have been history and appreciation rather than practical sessions. See Lowe, *Adult Education*, 252; *BMG*, March 1974, 25; and interview between the present author and Crosskey, 25 January 2019.

[84] Erik Strenstadvold, '"We Hate the Guitar": Prejudice and Polemic in the Music Press in Early Nineteenth-Century Europe', *The Early Romantic Guitar*, ed. Page, *Early Music*, 595–604. For the 'lady guitarist' in graphic art, see Frederick V. Grunfeld, *The Art and Times of the Guitar* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), 215. For the career of Eliza Chichester (1798–1859), see also Sarah Clarke, 'An Early Victorian Amateur Guitarist', *Early Music*, 47 (2019), 99–111.

[85] *Guitar News*, November–December 1968, 7; Button, *Julian Bream*, plate 14 (between pp. 108 and 109).

[86] Campbell, 'Everybody's Instrument'; *Guitar News*, June–August 1968, 10–11.

[87] There were just 15 candidates in total in 1966, and 75 in 1971.

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Appleby or Duarte were in full pomp – was never questioned. More broadly, the instrument was regendered as masculine in a number of ways. The early tribulations of Anthea Gifford, eventually a highly respected concert-hall recitalist, show the extent to which traditional associations had declined by the late 1950s. Her Bristol secondary school initially opposed her studying classical guitar, because, as Gifford recalled, it 'felt it wasn't quite ladylike for some reason'. She was able to decline the proffered alternatives of learning the flute and studying the guitar for vocal accompaniment only owing to the strong support of her parents, and she remained the school's only female pupil, her peers not 'feel[ing] it was quite their instrument'.[88] Such attitudes were not universal, with the West Riding Education Authority's scheme actively embracing girls from its inception. They were, however, powerful.

Gifford's youthful experience aligned quite markedly with other aspects of classical guitar culture. Male players clearly enjoyed a near monopoly on public performance. Although there was no active hostility to women performers (Presti was greeted with critical adulation whenever she played in Britain), few British players had the chance to emulate Gifford, who was the only major female professional British concert performer before the early 1970s.[89] This is perhaps not unexpected given that, even in the more sympathetic environment of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, the few aspiring concert artists were mostly male. More surprisingly, a similar situation appertained in the field of amateur performance, a territory once reasonably open to females through the medium of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century society soirées and charity concerts.[90] Restriction of opportunity was certainly evident within the LGS in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Women players were not entirely unknown at the society's monthly concerts, with June Pierce (a student of Len Williams, frequently his duet partner and eventually his third wife) and Stella McKenzie (a London-based teacher and LGS secretary) reasonably regular participants. However, of the 21 individuals playing at LGS events between January 1961 and January 1962, only six were women, and of these only two were 'straight' classical guitarists, the others being vocalists using guitar accompaniment. Analysis of programme structures at the Cheltenham, Purley and Hampstead societies in the 1960s tells a similar story.[91]

Women were also under-represented in classical guitar teaching. Kramer's critical role in conservatoire-based education has been noted; her eventual successor at the Guildhall School of Music in London, the Australian Blanche Munro, had been appointed as professor at the London College of Music in 1959; and Kathleen Lamb took up a post at the Birmingham School of Music in 1960.[92] However, these were prestigious exceptions to the rule. Just six of the 89 individual teachers advertising in

[88] *Guitar*, January 1973, 16.
[89] See, for example, *BMG*, March 1962, 174–5. For the early career of Cheryl Grice (b. 1953), see *BMG*, March 1974, 3.
[90] *The Stage*, 22 March 1894, 26 April 1894 and 7 June 1900.
[91] Starling, *Strings Attached*, 81–2. Information derived from reviews in *BMG*, January 1961 to January 1962, and in *Guitar News*, January–February 1960, 26; September–October 1967, 37; and March–May 1969, 20.
[92] *Guitar News*, October–December 1959, 15; January–February 1960, 9.

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*BMG* in 1971 were women, and while the multi-staffed guitar centres and studios often employed them (Sadie Bishop, Lorna Gray, McKenzie and Pierce all worked with Len Williams in the 1950s), this hardly altered the situation. Indeed, as late as 1990 women still comprised only some 15% of teachers advertising in the period's major specialist magazine.[93] This is all the more noteworthy given that music teaching was very much a female stronghold from the mid-nineteenth century: 1951 is the last occasion on which it is possible to identify music teachers as a distinct group within the official government census returns, and women made up some 75% of their total number.[94] This dominance did not translate into the guitar world.

The regendering of the instrument in the post-war period was partially a function of its extremely marginal position in the first half of the twentieth century. By the 1950s the guitar was unfamiliar to most people, and Gifford wondered whether her teachers, unaware of its history, simply overestimated the degree of physical strength required to play it.[95] Practicalities, albeit culturally constructed, added further difficulty. The musicologist Mavis Bayton has acknowledged that the need to cut the long fingernails that were (in her phrase) 'one of the norms of traditional "femininity"' was a barrier to guitar playing of any sort, and the peculiar requirement of the classical guitarist to have nails short on the left hand but kept longer on the right may have presented particular fashion problems.[96] Two wider factors, however, had the greatest impact. The popularity of the electric guitar from the mid-1950s, with its connotations of aggressive male sexuality derived from both playing style and the music associated with it, helped to code the guitar *per se* as masculine. Within the classical field specifically, as the instrument gained an ever higher public status, it shed any remnant of its subordinate position as a woman's preserve and became an entirely acceptable vehicle for male musical aspiration.

### *Age*

The overall age profile of the British classical guitar community at any one time was always mixed. A substantial body of practitioners began in middle age and beyond. Appleby was in his late forties when he took it up; one London-based adult education teacher recorded a typical age range in his classes of 16–60; and *BMG* ran a long-running technical column by James O'Brien that declared itself to be aimed at the self-taught player who was 'getting a little long in the tooth'.[97] While hardly a term of sociological precision, O'Brien's phrase usefully drew attention to the fact that the guitar could be found later in life, and commitment to it was often long-lasting.

[93] *Classical Guitar*, January 1990, 55–7.
[94] Dave Russell, 'Key Workers: Toward an Occupational History of the Private Music Teacher in England and Wales, *c.*1861–*c.*1921', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, 47 (2016), 145–72 (pp. 150–1).
[95] *Guitar*, January 1973, 16.
[96] Mavis Bayton, 'Women and the Electric Guitar', *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (London: Routledge, 1997), 37–49 (p. 39).
[97] Button, *Julian Bream*, 35; *BMG*, December 1969, 107; *ibid.*, September 1961, 371.

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However, the claim by London's Spanish Guitar Centre in 1965 that most of its 300 students were 'between 18 and 30' probably best identifies the age group that was largely responsible for the instrument's new-found popularity.[98] Most of the guitarists discussed above in relation to the guitar's social constituency had begun playing in their teens and early twenties, and contemporary discussion of the audience for guitar concerts, generally assumed (in the words of one critic) to include many 'budding guitarists', similarly stressed the centrality of this age group.[99] Wigmore Hall recitals by Bream in 1956 and 1957 were 'packed' respectively 'largely by his own generation' and by 'a big audience of young enthusiasts and aspirants'; Williams drew a following that was 'predominantly young [although] not exclusively so' to Cheltenham in 1967; and the local guitarist and lutenist Rod Willmott attracted 'a sizeable audience, mostly of young people' to a Liverpool concert in the same year.[100] This youthful cohort made the classical guitar feel, as it did in so many other ways, decidedly modern.

### *Geography*

While classical guitarists could be found anywhere in the country and in any type of community, the ready availability of teachers, instrument dealers, fellow enthusiasts and live performances inevitably made cities, larger towns and their satellite communities the major sites of activity. London, long the nation's cultural capital, unsurprisingly contained the largest single body of amateur performers. As well as providing the headquarters of the PSG/LGS and spawning at least another six local societies, it enjoyed a scale of teaching provision that testified to high levels of local demand. In terms of private tuition, in 1971 London, in combination with its hinterland of Essex, Kent, Middlesex and Surrey, was home to 40% of all individual teachers advertising in *BMG*, as well as housing several specialist studios: the Spanish Guitar Centre alone claimed 400 pupils.[101] Following the establishment of the Bristol Spanish Guitar Centre, similar facilities opened in a number of major regional centres including Cardiff, Leicester, Newcastle and Nottingham.[102] Other apparently vigorous guitar communities can be identified, with towns in the immediate vicinity of Manchester providing 38 of the 75 recipients of *BMG* diplomas in 1971, of which Bolton alone produced 13.[103] These figures obviously reflect the enthusiasm of local teachers for this particular exam as much as they capture the exact geography of the guitar world, but they do also show that powerful pockets of interest could emerge in provincial society. Rural areas were not naturally conducive environments, with prospective performers almost entirely dependent on self-tuition (admittedly a common element for most

[98] *The Observer*, 11 July 1965.
[99] *The Times*, 29 June 1959, reviewing Segovia at London's Royal Festival Hall.
[100] *The Times*, 1 October 1956 and 30 September 1957; *Guitar News*, January–February 1967, 21; *Liverpool Echo*, 21 October 1967.
[101] *BMG*, September 1971, 119–20; December 1970, 119.
[102] The Bristol centre employed seven teachers by 1965. *BMG*, February 1965, 157–8.
[103] Data abstracted from listings of diplomas awarded, *BMG*, January–December 1971.

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guitarists at some stage of their practice) unless local educational policy proved unusually enlightened.[104] Much of Wade's early teaching career was centred on Holland County Music School in Boston, Lincolnshire, from where he was able to build a substantial body of both child and adult pupils in local market towns and villages, but few authorities could match such efforts, or even tried to do so.[105]

## The cultural meanings of the classical guitar

Finally, to understand why the classical guitar suddenly became so attractive a cultural proposition in the third quarter of the twentieth century, we can turn to an analysis of those factors that increased interest in, and raised the status of, the classical guitar among the wider public, before turning to its appeal to amateur performers specifically. It must be stressed that this chosen emphasis on social and historical context is not intended to minimize the importance of the guitar's intrinsic characteristics. The sheer novelty and affective power of its sound should not be underestimated: Wade's speculation that 'its simple directness appeals immensely in the somewhat dehumanized context of industrial society' is a fruitful one.[106] Kevin Dawe has noted the capacity of all forms of guitar to marry utilitarian considerations of portability, affordability and versatility with the experiential and the sensuous, and not least the opportunity afforded for intimacy between performer and instrument.[107] With the classical guitar, that intimacy – the instrument held tight to the body and all sounds generated solely by the fingers – arguably reaches its apotheosis.[108] It had powerful attractions in any historical setting.

### *The virtuoso next door: displays of the extraordinary and discourses of the ordinary*

The significant enhancement of the classical guitar's audibility and visibility would simply not have occurred without the existence of virtuosic concert performers perfectly fitted to contemporary cultural tastes and habits. Although foreign artists – above all Segovia – were important figures, it was Bream and Williams who had the seminal roles. From the later 1950s, Bream became a highly familiar figure to fans of British classical music. Described by the critic Alec Robertson in 1961 'as the most gifted of our young instrumentalists', he became the recipient of an OBE three years later, aged just 30.[109] His status was much enhanced by his involvement (as lute soloist, ensemble player and accompanist) in the emerging British early music movement, which placed him at the core of a prestigious cultural project; his work with the tenor Peter Pears and with the Julian Bream Consort, which he founded in 1960, was

[104] On self-tuition, see Brewer, *The Guitarist's Notebook*, 54–5.
[105] For details of Wade's pioneering work, see *BMG*, March 1971, 190–1.
[106] Wade, *The Traditions of the Classical Guitar*, xii.
[107] Dawe, *The New Guitarscape*, 21–2.
[108] Brewer, *The Guitarist's Notebook*, 7.
[109] *Gramophone*, August 1961, 107.

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especially important.[110] Recitals on the BBC Third Programme were frequent, and in 1962 Bream featured on the influential BBC TV arts programme *Monitor*.[111] Williams's career took similar shape as the 1960s unfolded. Most important of all, both were willing and able to penetrate more popular arenas. In 1961, Bream was chosen as a 'castaway' on BBC radio's *Desert Island Discs*, an accolade which effectively granted him the status of a household name.[112] This was underlined by his appointment in 1963–4 – alongside Richard Attenborough, then one of the country's best-known actors, and the composer Malcolm Arnold – as a presenter of BBC television's *Gala Performance*, a classical music showcase aimed at prime-time audiences.[113] Williams's appearances on the *Val Doonican Show*, a programme attracting some 20 million viewers, have already been noted, and in 1968 his popularity was made manifest by CBS's decision to make his LP *John Williams Plays Two Guitar Concertos* (recorded with the English Chamber Orchestra) one of only three classical albums among the 21 'great CBS releases' named in their popular press advertising campaign: his companions in the overall list included Tony Bennett, Barbra Streisand and Johnny Cash.[114] He was keeping impressive company.

The popularity of the classical guitar's leading performers and the positive image they created for the instrument more widely was ultimately rooted in an awed appreciation of their virtuosity. At the time when the guitar's role as the key dynamic within popular music gave it great kudos, classical performers stood at the pinnacle of a generally acknowledged hierarchy of guitar styles. This was often crudely expressed in terms of a polarity pitting the 'pure' classical guitar against other 'corrupt' versions. *The Times*'s acid observation in 1959 that Segovia 'made no concession to the idea of the guitar as an instrument to be thrummed by the musically illiterate' typified the trope.[115] It was not solely the preserve of the broadsheet press; discussing Bream's appearance on *Monitor* in 1962, the popular Sunday title *The People* surmised that, 'Youngsters in the modern guitar-plucking mode are hardly likely to leave the coffee bars to look at BBC *Monitor* tonight. All I can say is they ought to – just to hear the "square" who is about the world's top guitarist and gets good money for it.'[116] Four years later, the *Reading Evening Post* described Bream as 'one of the most popular musicians in England. Not surprisingly, he plays the guitar. But unlike many of his younger and more highly charged colleagues, Bream has a wide-ranging talent.'[117]

While performers and fans of guitar-driven popular music genres were hardly likely to accept such value judgments, they were more than willing to acknowledge and

[110] Harry Haskell, *The Early Music Revival: A History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 122–3, 164; David Tannenbaum, 'Perspectives on the Classical Guitar in the Twentieth Century', *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed. Coelho, 182–206 (p. 192).
[111] *BMG*, July 1962, 301 and 326.
[112] Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997), 142.
[113] *Manchester Guardian*, 23 November 1963; *Radio Times*, 6 February 1964. He also performed on the show.
[114] *Daily Mirror*, 21 October 1968.
[115] *The Times*, 29 June 1959.
[116] *The People*, 3 June 1962.
[117] *Reading Evening Post*, 29 March 1966.

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celebrate the levels of virtuosity that classical players could bring forth. Indeed, particularly before the late 1960s, by which time outstanding rock and folk musicians were emerging in significant number, classical players had the most plausible claim to virtuoso status. This is not to deny the earlier existence of highly skilled performers in other fields including Hank Marvin (b. 1941) in British pop music and leading jazz players such as the Americans Charlie Byrd (1925–99), Jim Hall (1930–2013), Barney Kessell (1923–2004) and Wes Montgomery (1923–68), although these were less well known to mass audiences.[118] However, it was the pre-eminent classical players who so often became iconic figures. In November 1963, the Beatles' George Harrison was reported to be enormously disappointed that tour commitments rendered him unable to see his 'idol' Segovia at a forthcoming Liverpool concert, and to have arranged for the maestro to sign a programme for him. While a certain promotional artifice might lurk here, the sentiment was almost certainly genuine: a local journalist commented on the number of 'Beat' guitarists present, 'listening and watching raptly'.[119] Students from an Essex technical college, 'mostly ex-secondary modern school printers', were taken to see Bream as part of a liberal arts programme and were described as 'astounded by the sheer skill of a man who could play a tune and an accompaniment on a guitar at the same time'.[120] Similarly, members of a Midlands beat group were impressed by the lute, guitar and pandura work of Robert Spencer, terming him 'a great player'.[121] Bream's name especially became a popular cultural synonym for the virtuoso guitarist, with one local newspaper citing a performer cheerfully admitting that he was 'no Julian Bream' and another previewing an instructional TV programme by questioning whether viewers 'ever envied Julian Bream and the way he handles a guitar'.[122] Close association with technical skill and virtuosity could also earn the classical guitar high standing in the hands of lesser-known players and in unexpected locations. John Zaradin, one of the Royal Manchester College of Music's first guitar graduates under his birth name of Jack Tetlow, made his London recital début in 1968 having previously performed in the cabaret clubs of northern England as one half of a classical guitar and violin duo. In April 1968, he won the 'top instrumentalist' category in Granada TV's *Firstimers* talent competition, playing in what one reviewer called 'Julian Bream style'.[123] Again, one folk musician reportedly received 'thunderous applause' for the classical solos he sometimes offered at Middlesbrough Folk Club in the later 1960s.[124]

[118] Byrd helped to popularize the 'classical' sound in Britain through his introduction of jazz on the Spanish guitar. His bossa nova *Desafinado*, recorded with the saxophonist Stan Getz, reached no. 11 in the British pop charts in 1962.
[119] *Liverpool Echo*, 15 November 1963 and 23 December 1963.
[120] *The Guardian*, 26 November 1963. Secondary modern pupils had failed the selective 11+ examination and were deemed less 'academic'.
[121] *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 8 July 1965.
[122] *Coventry Standard*, 10 August 1967; *Acton Gazette*, 15 June 1967.
[123] Interview between the present author and Crosskey, 25 January 2019; *The Stage*, 27 April 1967, 28 September 1967, 4 April 1968 and 18 April 1968.
[124] *BMG*, March 1966, 196.

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Wider acceptance of leading classical players was made easier by their embrace within the media discourses of approachability and ordinariness that the cultural theorist Richard Dyer has identified as key to the construction of star quality.[125] Potential depictions of them as precious elite musicians playing an esoteric instrument were removed by their becoming, as in the *Liverpool Echo*'s description of Segovia, 'modest genius[es]'.[126] Bream was a particular beneficiary of such representation, a process rendered straightforward by his unquestionable possession of the desired qualities in relation to both social background and personality. In an early major press profile, the *News Chronicle* was quick to identify him as a 'Battersea-born council schoolboy' with an accent which was 'pleasantly and uncompromisingly London' and as someone who 'may not fit the conventional picture of a prominent musical executant'; and a northern regional paper took pleasure in finding nothing 'high-hat or upstage' about him.[127] That approachability was central to his appointment as a presenter on *Gala Performance*, on which he was praised by one critic for the 'off-hand, easy-going scholarship that makes his pronouncements not only stimulating but unusually fascinating'.[128] From the late 1960s, Williams made his distinctive contribution to the process of familiarization through his ever more informal concert dress code, fashionably long hair and ease of direct communication with audiences.

### *Classical guitar and modern living*

Alongside the promise of skilful display, the classical guitar also offered a sound that increasingly came to be associated with certain currents of fashionable modernity. It undoubtedly benefited from the excitement that surrounded the guitar more generally, but its particular modishness stemmed from its own capacity to suggest new possibilities of consumption and lifestyle. In one important sense, 'Spanish' was perhaps a more apposite label than 'classic' or 'classical'. The period from the early 1950s witnessed the beginnings of mass tourism from Britain to Spain: visitor numbers rose from just 150,000 in 1950 to 624,000 in 1960 and 1.36 million by 1965. Mairants argued that such holidays had 'brought a demand for the romantic music of Sunny Spain', and although this comment referred mainly to enhanced interest in flamenco, the classical guitar undoubtedly gained from the relationship between what was perceived as Spain's 'national' instrument and newly available holiday pleasures.[129] One provincial critic celebrated 'the languors and smouldering passions' so fully evoked in Spanish guitar works,[130] while another described the opening bars of

[125] Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1998), 39–53.
[126] *Liverpool Echo*, 15 November 1963.
[127] *News Chronicle*, 24 December 1956; *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 9 September 1962.
[128] *The Times*, 21 March 1963.
[129] *BMG*, April 1962, 207; V. Boté Gomez and M. Thea Sinclair, 'Tourism Demand and Supply in Spain', *Tourism in Spain: Critical Issues*, ed. M. Barke, J. Towner and M. T. Newton (Wallingford: CAB International, 1996), 68–9. On the guitar and Spanish heritage, see Dawe, *The New Guitarscape*, 164–7.
[130] *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 6 February 1961.

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Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* as 'full of sunshine, flamenco and a hint of the bull-ring'.[131] If blues and rock guitar channelled various relationships between Britain and an imagined USA, their classical counterpart facilitated an exotic connection with a location rather nearer home.

The vogue for things Spanish also helps to account for the growing employment of guitarists in London bars and restaurants. Crucially, these venues, frequently advertising in society magazines such as *The Tatler* and *The Sketch*, were largely patronized by a middle-class clientele and located either in Soho, held within the national imagination to be both 'a Bohemian oasis' and 'a sophisticated component of elite metropolitan leisure', or in other fashionable parts of London such as Chelsea, Kensington and Hampstead.[132] Their adoption of the guitar therefore gave the instrument a new cachet. Although Juan Teijeiro's playlist at Chelsea's Scholar Gypsy restaurant in the early 1960s was reported to comprise 'all the gems from the guitarist's repertory', including Isaac Albéniz's *Granada*, Francisco Tárrega's *Capricho árabe* and pieces by J. S. Bach and Luis de Milán, the power of the guitar in such a setting lay not so much in its music, which was often largely 'background', but in its appropriation as a symbol of progressive urban life.[133] The night-time economy proved the major avenue for such demonstrations of fashionability, although they could spill into other arenas, as when Williams was contracted to play at the modish London furniture company Heal & Son in April 1966.[134] For a far smaller but still significant number, the guitar also came to symbolize aspects of contemporary radical political culture. Len Williams's Marxist views and love of political debate were well known and often occupied much of his students' time. His son, in turn, although in no sense doctrinaire, became heavily involved in a variety of progressive causes, including the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and Amnesty International. His sensibilities appear to have been widely shared, at least within sections of the capital's guitar community, the LGS donating all door receipts from its monthly concert to CND in June 1959.[135] Such associations did not appeal to all the classical guitar's exponents, but they added a potent extramusical attraction for some.

### *Subcultural pleasures and the search for cultural value*

While amateur performers shared many of these enjoyments, the rewards of actually playing were inevitably richer and more varied. At its most fundamental, the classical guitar was quite simply a specialist hobby not dissimilar to the many home-based, often male leisure pursuits, such as winemaking, model-railway building, stamp collecting, photography and (most popular of all) do-it-yourself, which

[131] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 23 July 1966.
[132] Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 197, 222.
[133] *BMG*, January 1964, 181.
[134] *BMG*, March 1966, 'Coming Events'.
[135] *BMG*, July 1959, 256; Starling, *Strings Attached*, 96–7, 133, 331–41.

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flourished in the post-war age.[136] Playing was often a private activity carried out in a bedroom, a spare room, a kitchen or wherever the participant found space and supposedly suitable acoustics, bringing with it the benefits intrinsic to any hobbyist. These might range from the acting out of enjoyable fantasies – many aspirants will have momentarily 'become' Segovia, Presti, Bream or Williams – to the more prosaic satisfactions of filling spare time enjoyably and luxuriating in the small pleasures derived from specialist knowledge and interests. Like so many of the activities noted above, playing the guitar undoubtedly offered the chance of male escape from the confines of a post-war domestic environment in which families, especially husbands and wives, were expected to spend far more time in each other's company as aspirations towards a home-centred leisure were increasingly realized by changes in the nature of housing.[137] It would be valuable to explore women's utilization (or otherwise) of the instrument's potential as a vehicle for domestic independence, but given their minority position within the amateur guitar community for much of the period, such strategies were probably destined to be exercised mainly within the masculine domain.

Beyond these generic attractions, a key appeal of the classical guitar was the opportunity afforded for demonstration of cultural discernment and sophistication. For a minority, adopting it became an overt act of cultural elitism demonstrating a self-attributed intellectual connoisseurship that lifted them above other types of guitarist and, by implication, mainstream culture more generally. In an unflattering review of Sharpe's *The Story of the Spanish Guitar*, Appleby recorded with icy contempt that 'the author is the editor of a fretted-instrument magazine and his name is associated with an Hawaiian guitar band', while his obituary of Usher noted that his 'considerable part in the revival of the classic guitar' came 'in spite of his former association with the plectrum guitar'.[138] In a statement that overlaid racial connotations onto a sense of intellectual superiority, his advice to Duarte when he saw him obtaining certain awkward bass notes with his left-hand thumb was to cease 'nigger-thumbing'.[139] Ronald Simpson, Appleby's close associate in the International Classic Guitar Association, challenged Gavall's observation that the guitar might be highly effective in the accompaniment of community singing, opining: 'It is strange that an exponent of the classic guitar should make such statements.'[140]

These were extreme attitudes, however. More open-minded advocates also saw classical as the 'true' guitar in the sense of its offering the greatest musical rewards, but did so from a far more understanding and generous stance towards guitarists from other traditions: Usher and Duarte, for example, saw such forms not as 'debased', but as

[136] Ian Carter, *British Railway Enthusiasm* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), is a masterly guide to such worlds. For DIY, see Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom, 1951–70* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), 384–5.
[137] Clare Langhamer, 'The Meaning of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40 (2005), 341–621; Carter, *British Railway Enthusiasm*, 203–5.
[138] *Guitar News*, August–September 1954, 14 and 55; September–October 1969, 25.
[139] *Guitar News*, October–November 1953, 6–7.
[140] *Classical Guitar*, February 1990, 55.

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valuable only in limited and specific contexts.[141] Throughout the period, players crossed back and forth between genres, and boundaries between the many different guitar subcultures were always porous.[142] Even the highly conservative PSG was willing to welcome the Trinidadian calypso star Lord Beginner onto its concert programme in 1952 (Bream and Williams were on the same bill),[143] while in 1961 the LGS featured the pioneering traditional folk singer and guitarist Martin Carthy and praised his 'hypnotic accompaniments that far exceeded the outworn three-chord formulae'.[144] Nevertheless, wittingly or otherwise, choosing the classical guitar frequently did imply a search for a certain form of self-realization alert to new trends, distinguishing the player from the more general run of guitarists and exhibiting disciplined, specialist cultural enterprise. Although the relationship between specific social classes and the pursuit of particular types of cultural capital must not be oversimplified, the instrument's appeal to the well-educated middle classes so plentiful among its exponents is understandable.

The classical guitar's intellectual symbolism was, nevertheless, always restricted by its categorization, established from at least the early nineteenth century as 'middlebrow'.[145] The term was not generally used, but there is no doubt that while the music of classical guitar was deemed far superior to the 'thrumming of the musically illiterate', it stood somewhat outside the 'great' tradition of art music. Critics tended to admire classical guitarists rather more than their instrument and what they played upon it. In 1962 the jazz critic Spike Hughes described the repertoire as consisting of 'one or two not very distinguished modern concertos, a few transcriptions of Bach, and an endless number of Spanish pieces which all sound alike'.[146] Although Hughes was operating outside his expert territory and writing with knowing exaggeration, he captured a common theme. Several years earlier, the *Manchester Guardian*'s Colin Mason, always rather lukewarm in his assessment of the instrument, had argued that classical guitar music was often 'of slight musical value, and if played as background music in a "Spanish" restaurant would contribute unobtrusively to our pleasure without distracting our attention from getting the last mouthful of our lobster'.[147] 20 years later, and despite the guitar's far higher profile by then, *The Times*'s critic Stephen Walsh echoed these sentiments when observing of a concert by Bream and Williams that, 'At its best the music glittered like snow in the sun and left as much trace.'[148] Some of the most stringent criticism was levelled at the guitar's canonical late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century composers. Items by Fernando Sor (1778–1839), often proudly referred to within the guitar world as 'the Beethoven of the guitar', were variously

[141] *BMG*, June 1951, 192; *Guitar Review*, February 1961, 22.
[142] Tannenbaum, 'Perspectives on the Classical Guitar', 198.
[143] *BMG*, November 1952, 45; November 1957, 43.
[144] *BMG*, July 1961, 324.
[145] Christopher Page, 'Editorial', *The Early Romantic Guitar*, ed. Page, 555–6 (p. 555).
[146] *The Tatler*, 4 July 1962. For the history of the repertoire, see Wade, *The Traditions of the Classical Guitar*.
[147] *Manchester Guardian*, 14 September 1955.
[148] *The Times*, 1 April 1975.

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deemed 'on the dull side', possessed of a 'certain charm […] yet long outstay[ing their] welcome' and 'trite'.[149] Again, *Lágrima*, by the highly influential Tárrega (1852–1909), a much-loved item comfortably within the capacity of most amateurs, was described in one record review as 'an empty trifle'.[150]

As with all specialist publics, however, there was satisfaction to be derived from outsider status, and these critiques could be appropriated and reworked by guitarists in order to underline their self-image as fortunate cognoscenti in a world with its own pantheon of composers and performers existing happily beyond what some perceived to be 'the gaze of a hostile and indifferent environment'.[151] In a lacerating dismissal of Stephen Dodgson's *Concerto no. 1 for Guitar and Orchestra* (1956) that deemed it 'timid, idealess and memorable only for its irritating manners', the critic Gerald Larner noted the audience's fervent response to the work and took this as evidence of 'how much triviality the guitar audience (a race apart) will put up with for the sake of the familiar sound'.[152] Although the dismissive tone would have been unappreciated, their depiction as a 'race apart' would have resonated with many enthusiasts. Defending the guitar against criticism of its limited possibilities, Usher argued that it was 'the guitar's expressiveness, not its music, which fills the concert halls with guitar-lovers'.[153] In a thoughtful discussion of Carcassi, Carulli, Giuliani, Sor and others who had laid the 'cornerstone' of the modern repertoire, Wade acknowledged not only their weaknesses but also their achievements and the contemporary cultural value they imparted. They provided, he argued, 'a kind of secret society into which guitarists are quickly initiated, mainly through the rituals of playing through studies, pieces and tutors by these gentlemen. For hundreds of beginners as well as more professional performers, the work of these men may have taken up many hours of a lifetime.'[154] The sound of the classical guitar and the specialist music that its devotees worked so hard to execute upon it were what mattered; armed with this subcultural mentality, amateur classical guitarists claimed the pursuit of the middlebrow as a badge of honour.

For some commentators within the guitar world, there was concern that this often inward-looking culture could lead to playing the guitar becoming a specialist pastime in which music making was no longer the defining element. Writing in 1963, Sensier observed: 'I have realised for a long time that the majority of those who take up the guitar take it up as a hobby – and what is more, it is *learning* the guitar, not *playing* the guitar, that is their hobby: and it is playing the *guitar* and not playing *music* on the guitar that is their main hobby.'[155] Continuing in this vein, he was also struck by a frequently demonstrated limited general musical knowledge, not least a widespread inability to sight-read. In the next decade, Wade similarly stressed this tendency to

[149] *Gramophone*, February 1964, 85; *The Times*, 15 January 1974 and 29 March 1977.
[150] *Gramophone*, January 1971, 1191.
[151] Wade, *The Traditions of the Classical Guitar*, 8.
[152] *The Guardian*, 29 April 1969.
[153] *Manchester Guardian*, 21 November 1956.
[154] *BMG*, April 1971, 223.
[155] *BMG*, August 1963, 354.

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introspection, claiming that classical guitarists 'more perhaps than other instrumentalists, often suffer a kind of musical myopia, finding it difficult to relate what they are attempting to do with the broader horizons of music'.[156] An idiosyncratic fixation with the instrument was similarly identified. Gifford described the classical guitar as 'very much an obsessive instrument. I know a lot of lovely people who spend all their evenings practising for hours and hours. I can't think of any [other] instrument that amateurs would do this with.'[157] Wade, in his turn, commented on the regularity with which 'the guitar becomes for the adult beginner a wild obsession', involving excessive practice regimes and consequent neglect of other aspects of their life.[158]

### *The classical guitar and amateur music*

While some exaggeration was doubtless employed in order to provoke a change in attitudes, such observations underline the extent to which classical guitar playing stood outside the wider field of amateur music-making. All of its branches, were, like the guitar, ultimately hobbies, and all shared something of its narrowness and specialist focus: an Arts Council researcher in eastern England in the 1960s noted that within the 19 musical societies examined, only the 'occasional individual' showed 'the least interest in the activities of the others'.[159] What distinguished the guitar, however, was its departure from standard modes of operation. Most amateur musical pursuits have prioritized all or most of the following: the casting of a chosen field as a 'movement' in the sense of it being a force for the public good; public performance, albeit sometimes only within a familial setting; competition against like-minded organizations or individuals, quite often given extra purchase by participants seeing themselves as representatives of local and regional communities; and (to a lesser extent) the gaining of qualifications.[160]

These elements had only the most limited place within guitar culture. At least in institutional terms, its sense of shared fellowship and common aim was well below the level experienced in a self-consciously collective arena such as brass banding, where, as one contemporary commentator observed, 'The first thing they tell you is that this is the Brass Band *Movement*.'[161] As noted, the PSG was only ever a small and far from evangelical organization, and the local guitar circles, of which there were about 30 by the late 1960s, tended to serve the needs of highly committed individuals rather than the playing community more generally. Public performance was beyond the ambition

[156] *Making Music*, spring 1975, 5.
[157] *Guitar*, January 1973, 17.
[158] *Making Music*, spring 1975, 5.
[159] Christopher le Fleming, 'Music Making', *Rewley House Papers*, 4/11 (1963–4), 20–5 (p. 20).
[160] Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) remains the seminal work on amateur music; see also Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840–1914: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 276–7.
[161] Brian Jackson, *Working Class Community* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1972), 22. See also Trevor Herbert, 'Nineteenth-Century Bands: Making a Movement', *The British Brass Band*, ed. Herbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 10–67.

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of all but a handful of players, and although the number of competitions undoubtedly grew considerably, with more than 80 music festivals offering a classical guitar category by 1969, entry was similarly inconceivable for the vast majority.[162] Finally, formal qualifications were both hard to obtain, with graded exams introduced only in 1967 and initially only for higher grades, and little sought. Although the number of registered ABRSM candidates rose from 67 in 1967 to 1,700 in 1975 and 3,373 by 1983, the last figure represented just 1% of all the board's examinees. *BMG* Spanish guitar diplomas had been available for much longer, but (as seen earlier) attracted extremely small numbers and were eventually withdrawn in the mid-1970s.[163]

Much of this distinctiveness flowed simply from the classical guitar being a specialist solo instrument that was, by common consent, relatively easy to start upon but extremely difficult to master. As James O'Brien openly acknowledged in *BMG*, 'There must be thousands of guitarists who just have not the ability to play really well, who are never good enough to appear in public […] They play for themselves and their guitarist friends.'[164] Even exposure within the safe confines of the specialist community could provoke anxiety: Duarte was struck by the extreme nervousness often displayed by adult players within his guitar classes.[165] Prioritizing personal fulfilment above any wider sense of mission or purpose, classical guitarists never needed to develop the organizational infrastructure and accompanying mentalities more commonly encountered elsewhere within amateur music. Amateur performers certainly derived great personal satisfaction from their endeavours, some becoming genuinely talented musicians, and collectively they played a critical role in elevating the place of their instrument within British musical life. If obsession it was, it was worthwhile. However 'cooped up in [their] cold little attic' (in Sensier's teasing words) and lacking the discipline imposed by a looming calendar of competitions, concerts or examinations, guitarists were frequently solo instrumentalists in more senses than they realized.[166]

Examination of the classical guitar's place in ensuing decades is another task entirely, but it is evident that its penetration of the national culture could not continue at its earlier level. The pattern of adult teaching in London is instructive. By the mid-1970s, the dramatic growth of interest in folk music meant that 'folk' guitar was now narrowly the category most commonly offered by the ILEA, suggesting that, although they remained a popular option well into the 1980s, the high point of interest in classical classes had passed.[167] There was undeniably still plentiful growth within the classical guitar community. Although both titles sought to serve an international and not merely British market, the founding of the specialist magazine *Classical Guitar* in 1982 and the revamping of *Guitar* in the mid-1980s as the classically orientated *Guitar*

[162] *Guitar News*, November–December 1969, 20.
[163] Stimpson, 'The Guitar in English Musical Education', 55. For Trinity College's grade examinations, see *Guitar News*, January–February 1968, 24–5, and *BMG*, February 1975, 1.
[164] *BMG*, September 1961, 371.
[165] John Duarte, 'The Private Teacher', *The Guitar: A Guide for Students and Teachers*, ed. Michael Stimpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 16–25 (p. 17).
[166] *BMG*, January 1964, 123.
[167] *Floodlight*, 1974–5, 7.

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*International* signified health and optimism. *Classical Guitar* advertised the services of 236 individual teachers in its January 1990 edition and listed 55 guitar circles, both figures suggesting a steady expansion of the numbers of serious amateur players; the supply of conservatoire-trained professionals similarly continued (and continues) unabated. However, this was very much a subculture unable to sustain the wider purchase that it had begun to enjoy, a situation underlined by the fact that while Bream and Williams remained iconic figures, later performers were never able to replicate their position within the national culture; more than two was a crowd. In July 1990, *Classical Guitar* produced an editorial that, despite a tongue-in-cheek quality, had intriguing echoes of the sentiments expressed by White in 1943. The classical guitar, it argued, was still

> a comparatively out-on-a-limb instrument, sometimes spurned, frequently tolerated, seldom admired by the musical fraternity at large. Thus we start guitar magazines and form guitar circles, much as the early pioneers in the west formed their wagons into circles to protect themselves. Those Indians are hostile.[168]

Classical guitar had emerged in the third quarter of the twentieth century as an exciting novelty that grew in stature because it resonated with contemporary social and cultural currents. Over the next decades its context and thus its position changed. The long but gradually accelerating decline in funding for music and the arts within school and, especially, adult education dramatically reduced its exposure to important potential constituencies. Shifting fashions saw the guitar lose out to other forms of cultural expression and consumption, not necessarily musical, and a whole series of factors reshaped patterns of middle-class leisure in ways that reduced opportunity: longer working hours and increased male domestic obligations were probably two of the most important. Despite the classical guitar being far more deeply embedded in British musical life than it ever had been, from the late 1970s its public visibility was in decline.

[168] *Classical Guitar*, July 1990, 4.

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