

John Williams Interview – June 1, 2004

The full text (almost) of a three-hour conversation with John Williams in June 2004 (originally published in a heavily abridged version as “Venezuelan Adventure: A Conversation with John Williams” in *Fingerstyle Magazine* (No. 55, Dec. 2004).

“Calling from his London home, John Williams spent three hours talking to Stanley Yates on topics ranging from recording technique to playing technique, from Andres Segovia to Pete Townsend...”

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1 South American Music

SY: *The current recording of Venezuelan music, El Diablo Suelto, has been out for about six months now and has been very well received, particularly by guitarists. From a personal perspective, it’s great to hear the Diaz arrangements recorded, as well as the lesser-known items by Antonio Lauro, but probably the thing that stands out the most, especially for listeners who might not be familiar with the traditional Venezuelan versions of this music, is the cuatro accompaniment that’s used on several tracks.*

JW: Right. Those were done quite *ad hoc* in a way, on the spare of the moment. I think it’s important to remember that traditionally the guitar, along with the cuatro, the harp, the bandore and the maracas, are the instrumental mainstay of all Venezuelan music. So, with some exceptions where the music is particularly harp music or particularly guitar music, a lot of the traditional music is quite interchangeable when it comes to instrumentation and you can put together any group or combination of instruments or play them as solos only. A lot of the harp music transcribes very easily for guitar and in fact in many cases is often played on the guitar, and probably *vice versa*. So, when I was doing the recording, after waiting several years for Alirio’s editions to become available in their most complete form and I finally assembled the pieces I wanted to record—which for the most part excluded some of the most well-known I and others had recorded often before—when I actually got the list together it was at the front of my mind that it would be nice to have the flavor of the cuatro in some of the more traditional dance-like movements simply because it says so much about the character of Venezuelan music. And it was a question of deciding how many pieces and whether to bunch them together at the beginning or the end and all the attendant risks: if you have too many of them it overshadows the main solo character of the record, etc. Eventually I got onto a happy balance of three of four pieces...

SY: *...spread out throughout the recording, which works really well...*

JW: ...in the end I think it did work out really well, especially coming out of them. I managed to find a way of coming out of them without feeling empty, which is always a problem.

SY: *Yes, a recording of this type, which contains 20 or so short pieces, all basically in the same style, can be a difficult listening experience, no matter how beautiful the melodies may be...*

JW: Exactly, and also finding enough slow, melodic pieces to contrast with the fast dance-like ones. So, I phoned Alfonso Montes, who wrote the lovely little piece at the end, to ask him about a cuatro player I was trying to get in touch with—a person I already knew but had lost contact with. He didn’t know how to get hold of him, and neither did a few other people I asked, and during the conversation he told me that he played the cuatro himself, which I didn’t realize because he’s mainly a guitarist....So, in the end it was the best of both worlds because playing a cuatro part to some of those composed pieces isn’t quite the same as playing a traditional cuatro part with the rather simpler harmonies. Being a very good musician

and composer he was able to work out on cuatro the kind of harmonies in what would otherwise be solo pieces. So, although he's arranged the cuatro part, the part I'm playing is almost exactly as arranged by Alirio Diaz or composed by Lauro, depending on the piece.

SY: *Using the cuatro in this music is kind of analogous to playing a jazz standard with a rhythm section as opposed to as a chord solo. The rhythmic underpinning is hinted at in the solo version but one may not be fully aware of it; hearing the accompaniment for real changes ones approach to playing the solo version.*

JW: It does, and it improves it too! A lot, because it gives you the character the solo version has grown out of. So, it was a thrill for me and it helped now that I play those pieces solo. For instance, for the piece *Alma Llanera* we hit upon the idea of starting out with solo cuatro chords for a few measures so that now, when I'm playing it as a guitar solo, I start out strumming those chords on guitar.

SY: *Yes, I know what you mean. I love the Lauro piece Nelly, and after the little introduction I like to strum the downbeat G-chord—one strummed chord that gives a flavor that stays in the listener's mind. The Lauro pieces always seem to me to take the longest time to practice but only last about a minute and a half each!*

JW: That's right, I know exactly what you mean! He's a one for that, Lauro. I met him quite often in the late 1970s...

SY: *Yes, I wanted to ask you about that. I recall when Lauro came to London I heard a radio broadcast he gave for the BBC and on a couple of pieces his daughter accompanied him on cuatro.*

JW: That's right. In fact, *Nelly* was one of the ones they used to play.

SY: *And you were instrumental in bringing him over to England?*

JW: Yes. Paco Pena and I decided to bring him over to London for a Wigmore Hall concert in I think 1978. We met him in Castres in France, and I'd also gotten to know him in 1976 when I went over for the Alirio Diaz Guitar Festival in Caracas. It was on the strength of that that we decided to bring him over to London when he visited Castres. It was great meeting him in Caracas, where I was also given a cassette by the *Trio Los Cantores*. They had a singer called Maristani and a guitarist called Perez Diaz—who was a teacher at the school of music in Caracas, and he assembled a cassette full of old tunes with *Los Cantores del Tropica*, in which Lauro used to play the top guitar part and sing bass voice.

SY: *Lauro's music is very direct and lively with beautiful melodies, and often a nostalgic quality as well that seems to harken back to maybe the melodies and harmonies of the 1930s and 1940s...*

JW: It does, yes.

SY: *On this subject of South-American music, I was thinking about the Argentine guitar scene, which has been very vital throughout the 20th century. Did you ever play any music by Eduardo Falu and those kinds of people?*

JW: No, that's a little bit more specialized. I have met him, several times, and Paco Pena played with him a few times, and he's a wonderful singer and player and I got to know him quite well on various visits here and there. But it's not a style I would join with because what he does is so connected with his own singing. I know he's composed a few pieces but I haven't examined them really.

SY: *I've only seen a few pieces. They seem very folk based, rather than urban, which I though was quite interesting. I understand that a lot of stuff published over there never gets out into the States or into Europe. But there's a whole other Argentine guitar scene which is a bit more contemporary in its style of harmony. I'm thinking of people such as Juan Falu, Guastavino, Cardoso, Ayala, etc.*

JW: Guastavino I recorded years ago...

SY: *The piece for guitar and strings?*

JW: Yes. I'm not sure Argentina has the same kind of musical tradition as Venezuela, which is very integrated and continuous where the popular music of the last 150 years has become part of the traditional music. We don't know a lot about how the musical styles of the 17th and 18th centuries—for instance the African rhythmic influence—have affected the instrumental styles. What we do know is that by the 19th and certainly the early 20th centuries all of those different influences had created a single new characteristic which is unmistakably Venezuelan. I find that with Argentine popular music—you've either got the tango and a lot of stuff which is either simple traditionally Indian based or it's very Hispanic. But you don't find music that's got the mixture that Venezuela has—in fact all the Caribbean countries—with this terrific rhythmic interest. In Argentine music it's pretty simple really: the tangos in two; you don't have the dynamic that Venezuelan music has. You don't have it instrumentally, like you have with the harp and the cuatro.

SY: *It's interesting how Venezuelan music has resulted in this kind of polyrhythmic style.*

JW: And that's African and it goes throughout the Caribbean doesn't it. It is very much African and you don't get it so much in the indigenous music and you don't get it in European or Spanish music.

SY: *On the topic of South American music, you've made two recordings of the music of Agustin Barrios, one of which was the first major recording of his music in modern times. I was curious if you'd heard Barrios' own recordings by the time you made that first recording.*

JW: I don't think I had, no.

SY: *How did you come across that repertoire?*

JW: About half a dozen of the pieces people had before that time. Alirio Diaz had given me two or three of them back in the fifties when I was a young student, when I first met him. But the bulk of the music was brought over by Carlos Payet from San Salvador—then a young medical student and now a guitarist and composer—and he just came through London. He knew I'd expressed an interest and had played one or two pieces and he had a whole collection; a combination of photocopies and old editions and he gave me the whole pile and said you really must look at this! And that's where that came from.

SY: *You've recorded and performed an incredible range of music, but South American music is something that has been a fairly constant interest with you. It fits very well with some of the obvious characteristics of your playing style: your strong sense of rhythm and forward movement. But I was curious if there was something else about your connection to South American music, or is it just that you happen to like it?*

JW: I think it's what you just said, that I like it. I first went to Sienna, Italy in 1953 at age 12, and Alirio Diaz was there (and also all subsequent years during the 50s) and I stayed in touch with him—most of the students were 10 or 15 years older than me—and I always gravitated toward that music, for all the reasons that we all do. But I suppose they were very formative years for me, being that young.

SY: *It's something you got into early on and it stuck with you. Not many guitarists have embraced this music. Julian Bream, for example, seems to have recorded next to nothing from South America.*

JW: Right. Well, Villa-Lobos is a great favorite of his, as everyone. I'm a great fan of Villa-Lobos, and I think he's a fantastic composer. Unfortunately, I don't think his best music was for guitar. I suppose Villa-Lobos is one—Manuel Ponce from Mexico and Ginastera would be others—who basically were writing European music. It's got a local flavor—especially in Villa-Lobos' case, and I wouldn't want to be misunderstood here with his *Bachianas* and all his study of Brazilian folklore—however, most of his

compositions are in a sense European. His guitar concerto is in a European form, with sonata form and a cadenza, and he's written preludes and studies and things like that, but I think his greatest music is in the Bachianas series. And I don't think—and I don't want to sound pompous about it—the soul of the guitar, the expression, romanticism and the wide range of color is caught by Villa-Lobos in the same way. Certainly Ponce doesn't. His expression is very much in a sentimental 19th century sense.

SY: *It's very French.*

JW: Yes, and Segovia liked that a lot. But it's not at all the romance and the beauty of, let's call it, folk music or traditional music. And Barrios, for all that he was again writing for a classical guitar often in European forms, but his inspiration was definitely folk music.

SY: *Yes, pieces such as Cueca are obviously folk based and he sounds quite different and maybe more confident than the other things he wrote.*

JW: That's right, and the same goes for Venezuelan music and Chilean music. I've played Villa-Lobos and I've recorded the concerto and the preludes—I'm not downing it— still, I tend to think that in terms of guitar music as an on-going tradition, for me, it's found more in the traditional music of the different countries.

SY: *Yes, that's interesting. The pieces in the Suite Populaire Bresliene are titled choros, but there doesn't seem to be much about them that sounds like actual choro music.*

JW: Exactly! The choros [no 1] is full of artifice. It's only vaguely got the rhythms in part of it, and even those rhythms are pretty misunderstood I'd say by most players, from what I've heard. They're nothing like the rhythms that are in a real choro. And things like the Suite Brasileira—they're nice little pieces but they're nothing of the imagination of Barrios or Lauro. If you compare *Romanza* of Lauro with any one of the pieces of the Suite Bresiliera, for me it's a different world.

SY: *Something that occurs to me on this topic of Villa-Lobos guitar music, in the context of a more general comment, there's just so much going on in a typical guitar piece that guitarists I think have become accustomed to thinking that if something is worth playing it's necessarily going to be difficult to play. When I think of a piece such as Villa-Lobos Prelude no. 4, for example, full of open strings, a beautiful melody that's easy to play, do you agree that as guitarists it can be very easy to overlook the beauty of the expression in a piece that seems so easy to play.*

JW: I hadn't thought of it like that, but I do see what you mean. Actually, the Preludes are very nice pieces, and he does have this ability to make the guitar sound very big and sonorous. He has great flair and the personality that comes through is lovely. I'm not downing him at all and I wouldn't want to be misunderstood in that way.

SY: *The Concerto is a strange piece isn't it.*

JW: It really is a misfire, unfortunately. It has lovely moments, a sentimental slow movement and the first movement's not bad, and the cadenza that he wrote afterwards is quite good.

SY: *I do like the cadenza, but it's a little strange being plonked in between two movements rather than actually being within a movement.*

JW: It is. Well, that would work alright; it perfectly introduces the theme of the last movement, which is great.

But the whole piece collapses. Terrible!

SY: *Yes, it just suddenly stops doesn't it, as though Villa-Lobos just got another commission and had to wrap it up.*

JW: Absolutely!

SY: *The guitar just seems to be full of these kinds of "what could have been" situations.*

JW: That's right!

2 "Cross-Over" Projects

SY: *Could we talk about some of your, for want of a better term, "cross-over" projects...*

JW: Yes, I do understand; we have to use these horrible terms. Another one now is the term "World Music." Do you know Banning Eyre from Boston? He writes a lot on Afro-pop. He's written a great book called *In Griot Time: An American Guitarist in Mali*. You must get that. He went to Mali to live and study for six months with the guitarist Djelimady Tounkara. Anyway, I mention him because he asks, what does World Music really mean? From our Western vantage point it usually means "music from somewhere else!" The things that I've done that can be categorized using those terms over the years, the description usually comes afterwards. I've spent nine or ten months each year in London—I never have traveled a lot throughout the year—so all my musical experiences and things I decide I want to do happen because of the musicians I meet here in London. Things like the group Sky, or working with John Dankworth and Cleo Laine, all those things have come through natural day to day things. Johnny Dankworth and Cleo Laine had a little educational course and they asked if I would come up and help with that, one thing leads to another and we end up doing a couple of albums and a lot of concerts. Sky was a group of musicians I knew from totally different musical backgrounds, but in London we all tend to meet each other from time to time, so these things happen. They're not always one hundred percent successful all the time, I realize that. But that's just the way it goes.

SY: *Looking through your discography you seem to have started these kinds of projects around 1970.*

JW: Well, I played at Ronnie Scott's jazz club in 1969, which is when I met John Dankworth and Cleo Laine. It's a long time ago!

SY: *The thing I noticed is that the discography is very mainstream classical repertoire throughout the 1960s and then suddenly branches out into a whole bunch of different kinds of things. You've mentioned that this was partly a result of the musicians you were meeting at the time, but I was wondering if you were feeling at all constrained by the solo classical guitar repertoire at that point.*

JW: I think in hindsight one might say that, but I also think it would be putting the cart before the horse. Playing at Ronnie Scott's and meeting John Dankworth and Cleo Laine came about because of a particular happening. In 1968 or 69 I played for Africa Freedom Day—the 20th anniversary of the founding of the African National Congress. It was at the Albert Hall and it was a very big do. That's when I first met Ronnie Scott, and Johnny Dankworth and Cleo Lane. I'd been to Ronnie Scott's old club a number of times. I'd also worked with Patrick Gowers—have you come across that name?

SY: *Yes, he's someone I wanted to ask you about actually because you played the electric guitar on one of his pieces. Can I ask you about that?*

JW: Very embarrassing!

SY: *Was it really. I assumed you played with the fingers rather than with a pick.*

JW: That's right. It would sound very dated now, and it was ferociously difficult too. Actually, that's the concerto, which was for acoustic guitar.

SY: *Which pieces were for electric guitar then?*

JW: It was the *Rhapsody*, which was for electronic organ, 2 electric guitar parts and classical guitar. I actually did a whole season at Ronnie Scott's on that. I had a tape which had the electronic organ and the two electric guitar parts and I used to play the live classical guitar with it. It was pretty good actually, pretty dramatic.

SY: *You also played some electric guitar with Sky?*

JW: A tiny bit, only when the track really needed it and where the part suited a fingerstyle technique. I never used a pick. The principal reason I did it was out of interest to discover what one might do using the classical right-hand technique.

SY: *To the classical player the electric guitar is a very different animal.*

JW: It was, and I'll tell you I had a lot of difficulty, one of the things being I couldn't resist using my fingers to play dynamically and of course the pickups, the limiters and the compressors don't work that way...

SY: *You were using rest-strokes on the electric guitar!*

JW: Well, I don't use much rest stroke, but the way I pluck is quite hard so every now and again it just got out of control. I don't think I recorded with it, but I used a Gibson RD Artist, which had dynamic pickups and that was very good because the sound didn't collapse when I played it hard. But I never really got to grips with it. I think it had potential, but I didn't go into it enough.

3 The "Classical" Guitar and Guitar Education

SY: *That kind of leads me to something else I thought might be interesting to have your views on. We've been through this kind of "respectable concert instrument" period, commissioning pieces, performing "serious" works, performing in the same kinds of venues as mainstream classical instrumentalists. It seems to me that there is something about the guitar that it essentially remains in a way outside of that mainstream. Perhaps it has something to do with the popular aspect of the guitar that gives it its own life. After all of the work of Segovia, yourself, Julian Bream and others, the classical guitar seems ultimately to be this slightly separate thing.*

JW: I wouldn't say it's an either or situation. I think this is something the guitar is and has that is extra. It's not so much an alternative. I think that what we call the classical guitar still has a place for giving recitals. People do still love to come along and listen in that classical sense to a guitarist playing the range of classical repertoire, with all the colors and the quite that goes with the classical recital situation. I just don't think that is the only situation that we should concentrate on. In this way I think it connects to our wider view of music. In this way, I think the guitar is a very special instrument. Within the, let's call it, the "Western classical establishment" it has been a kind of assumption that when all is said and done classical music is the best. I hate all these buzz words, but it is a kind of post-colonial hangover. There are many different religions and they all have equal value according to the culture and the society they come from and what they express, and it's the same with music. You don't suddenly get, as if by magic, a culture that answers everything and that is universal in itself. Nothing is that encompassing, including classical music. European classical music, that tradition is rhythmically very, very simple compared to most other music. We have the harmony and the "great counterpoint," and we are taught at music college to have a view of musical evolution that tells us that in the beginning was rhythm, and that's for the primitive people; then

the birds came along with song, which we imitated; then we had the “great harmony” and we have this massive tripod that makes man universal and all conquering...

SY: *A very imperialistic attitude...*

JW: Exactly. But the thing is, although people will laugh at it rather embarrassedly when you say that, they actually do think that. In this way I think the guitar is really, really unique. I think the guitar is a fantastic instrument if you sit quietly and just listen to a Bach sarabande and then if you stick it with a cuatro or with the congas or something it's great as well.

SY: *The classical guitar career doesn't really exist in the same way it did 20 or 30 years ago and I feel that if guitar students are able to study and play a broader range of styles they have a much better time of it, not to mention have more fun.*

JW: Without question! Being happy with what you're doing is the most important thing anyway, but in the long run they're going to have better and wider employment opportunities if their own music is wider based. They should be just as happy if they go along to a café or club or whatever it is and join in banging out A and D for an Irish group or banging out a few rhythms for something else.

SY: *Traditionally in the academic guitar community these kinds of things have been avoided like the plague, almost as though if you learned to strum chords you will never be a classical player, which is such a shame*

JW: That's right. It's a shame, and it's actually the opposite. But it's just a question of time. There's a lot of very encouraging things starting. There's a lot of growing feeling in various educational organizations, such as EGTA over here. The guitar always was a very popular instrument, medieval, Renaissance strumming chords for dances, etc., which is its natural technique. To play contrapuntal music we of course need a classical right hand, and we need to have all that for nineteenth-century music, but we mustn't forget that its origins are as a four-stringed popular instrument. I don't think it's an instrument that's as it were, been invented and grown like a child growing up from 1750 through the nineteenth century until you've got Segovia in the twentieth century and then you have a full-grown guitar, which is what we're brought up to believe. But actually, the guitar existed hundreds of years before. Nowadays we have people like Jose Gallarda del Rey who, when you hear him play Sanz, even on a modern guitar, he's really got the style down; or Jim Tyler playing the old Baroque guitar. That, I think, should be our guide to start with. I was chatting about this with Alfonso Montes recently, and he told me that after we'd been talking about this last year he and his wife Irena had started a festival of about 80 children aged between 7 and 10 who had never picked up a guitar before and he had them all playing on the top three strings of the guitar as though it was a cuatro; all they had to do was just put a finger down on the g or on the c to get a little triad of g-major or c-major and then they could get the feel of strumming rhythms on those strings. I think that's got to be the way to start; instead of putting some poor kid on their own in a room and giving them a Carcassi study so that they're bored to tears. Horacio Salinas of the group *Inti-Illimani* is doing a similar thing at the music school he directs in Santiago; they're introducing all the folk and popular styles of guitar playing of Latin America into the basic academic curriculum. And that's going to happen everywhere. The problem, of course, is finding the teachers who can do it.

SY: *Right, there can't be any change until the teachers are in place to actually deliver the material. That has to happen I think through the current crop of students who are in college now and who will be taking pedagogy courses; these are the ones who potentially will go out later and teach this stuff. But then again, we need the materials to give them in the first place, so it's a bit of a problem.*

JW: That's right.

SY: *Just to return to your own career with respect to this, as far as I'm aware you were probably the first major classical guitarist to start taking on all kinds of non-mainstream projects, which kind of broke down*

the idea that one was either a classical guy or one was not. I'm not sure people realize how influential that was.

JW: It's certainly a good reason to do it, but it wasn't my intention as such. I have been aware, especially over the past ten years, of the affect it has had, and that a lot of people are doing these kinds of things now which I started doing 20 or 30 years ago. In the main sense it doesn't matter whether I was first or not. It's nice to think that things I believe in and really like are coming to be the norm and are coming to be natural. That, for me, is a greater satisfaction.

4 Nineteenth-Century Guitar Music

SY: *I came across a website that contained a massive list of all the pieces you've recorded.*

JW: Oh, that's the good one! There's a very bad website under my name through Sony, but this is one based in Birmingham in England. It's about twenty pages with interviews and all sorts of things. It's very good isn't it? Amazing! The bloke turned up in London once at a concert. I met him for two minutes and that's it. He just does it because he's a fan.

SY: *Yes, it's a wonderful resource. It's laid out there, everything you've actually put down on disc. Something I noticed looking through this, that was a bit surprising, was that you've actually recorded very little of the nineteenth-century repertoire: the Mozart variations and the studies by Sor and a couple of Giuliani pieces – the sonata and the Handel Variations. Of course, most of the nineteenth-century repertoire was recreational, music to make money through publishing and so forth, but there some, at least I think, worthwhile items. I was just a little curious if that was something that just worked out that way or if you had some thoughts about it?*

JW: I think it's just one of those things that just worked out that way. There are a number of pieces that I really enjoy other people play, and probably if I'd come across them thirty years ago, like some of the Mertz pieces, that I probably would have played them. But it a question of there being so many other things now that I'm involved with that I don't have the time. I really need to work on something that is focused rather than just playing odd pieces. It's not that I have any critical views of it at all, on the contrary, the Giuliani Concerto I've recorded twice now. I think that really is a wonderful piece of music. It has little bits of the genius of Rossini in it. It's really a very, very good piece from all points of view; especially the full version which I now play is fantastic. Think Sor is a fascinating person, from his biography, but the music, when it comes down to it, the solos (I think the duets are great), but there's something about...

SY: *There's something intellectual about Sor's music. It doesn't have that wonderful Italian melodic sweep to it at all, but it is kind of composed music which takes a bit of work to get something out of it.*

JW: Exactly. It seems to me very contrived in a sort of neo-German style, in its chromaticism and harmonies.

SY: *Something that occurs to me, and this goes back a bit to what we were saying about Villa-Lobos, and thinking more about people like Giuliani, you get a page of music that can be all in C-major with no accidentals and it's all in the same rhythm, and you think well, where's the music in this. But then we read the reviews of Giuliani's performances on those salon concerts and the reviewer is saying Giuliani was the best thing of the entire evening. Which makes us want to work out how he played his music, how was he bringing this music alive? I think we've really lost the tradition and we have to find out again how to play it.*

JW: Absolutely, and in fact the answer is a little bit too long of a discussion for this—next time you're in London we can talk about it— but you've put your finger right on it when you talk about Giuliani's music often long on the same key for a long time, and that sort of thing. I think the popularity of Sor in the

classical guitar world has very much to do with the assumptions of the wider classical world that more modulation, more chromaticism, more harmony is better. It really doesn't follow. You can get more magic sometimes in a composer going through C and G7 for a page than a composer going through five keys. And that's a little bit the problem. I find Sor a bit contrived. It can be very good, and there are some little gems, especially some of the studies, which are absolutely beautiful.

SY: *The studies are certainly among his best pieces, or his most successful pieces, I should say, but there are some very good big pieces.*

JW: But the sweep of Giuliani's concerto, the whole development section in the first movement, which myself and others, to our shame, had cut out for so many years, is absolute genius.

SY: *It's very interesting because it makes one wonder what else Giuliani could have written had there been more of a market for things like that.*

JW: Absolutely. Unfortunately, his solo music is not as versatile or as interesting as Sor, but maybe one should look closer at it.

SY: *I have the feeling that with this music—obviously, not all of it—is a lot better than we might think it is once we work out how to really bring it to life.*

JW: That's right.

5 Contemporary Composers

SY: *Returning to your discography, and some things that I've really enjoyed personally, the Dodgson pieces for example...*

JW: Yes, I've done a lot of Dodgson. Dodgson is a composer, of all the English composers, I've really admired.

SY: *Very underplayed...*

JW: I think he probably is. He's played more in England. The thing is, it's not only his guitar music, but the wind music, piano music, the piano quartet, piano sonatas – they're wonderful.

SY: *There's such a wonderful rhythmic aspect to his music...*

JW: He has a lovely combination of this sort of very English, lyrical elegiac thing, but mixed with this wonderful rhythmic dynamism, as you said. It's very energetic, as he is a person. He's 80 and he's just the same as he was 50 years ago.

SY: *Takemitsu, which is just a fabulous recording of yours, is one of few contemporary composers that yourself and Julian Bream both got stuck into. Did the two of you have some kind of tacit agreement not to play the same repertoire? In the sense that as Bream was at the Royal College with Dodgson but didn't play his music perhaps because it was written for you. And by the same token, I don't think you've played many of the items associated with Bream: Walton, Berkeley, Britten, etc.*

JW: That's right. But it's very strange. Julian and I have to some extent different musical tastes and we've concentrated on different things. I love to hear people play the Britten Nocturnal, or example, I really do. It's a piece I've never played...

SY: *You've played through it though, of course?*

JW: Once – a long time ago. But other English composers, and in particular Dodgson, say more to me. I don't like being judgmental about anything, and I don't like making assumptions, so and so's a better composer than so and so...I just know what I like...[laughs]

SY: *That makes a lot of sense, to associate with composers and commission music from composers you actually like!*

JW: That's it, and sometimes it's successful and sometimes it isn't. I just find that the quality in Stephen's [Dodgson] music, whether it's the concerto...I mean, Dodgson wrote the first concerto in the 1950s and Julian never took it up and I gave it a first performance on the BBC about 1957 or 58 and then recorded it, and the second concerto and other pieces. In fact, there's quite a few of Stephen's pieces that I haven't played and at one point I deliberately didn't play his music too much because I didn't want it to get around that "old JW" is always playing Stephen Dodgson's music and no one else does. So I thought that if I rather craftily and cleverly ease off for a few years while other people play it as well he won't look like a composer that only one person plays. I've given premieres of two of his works in the past few years...

SY: *You recently did a concert of his music...*

JW: We did his birthday concert and I played various things. I think it's wonderful that he's written so much for guitar and that a lot of people play it – not enough though. If we take Walton, who is a very famous name as a composer who has written some of the great pieces of English music: the Bagatelles are nice, they're nice light, little pieces...

SY: *And very hard for it...*

JW: They're very hard, yes. But I think Stephen's has written five or six solos that have more to say, to me. So, I don't subscribe to this sort of holy thing of the "great composers." They don't always write great guitar music.

SY: *The Dodgson pieces are very idiomatically written, even though he isn't himself a guitarist. With some composers, and the best example too me is Manuel de Falla, you would swear that he must have been able to play the guitar to write so idiomatically; he latched on to the fourths and the open strings of the guitar, etc. But it's such a tricky thing. Some composers write wonderful music but it can be so awkward for the guitar.*

JW: It's a strange thing. A lot of composers make a big, big meal out of how difficult it is to write for the guitar and I usually say to them just write what you think you want and we'll alter it afterwards; don't go and limit your language.

SY: *Do you give composers any other advice?*

JW: No, I tend not to. With Stephen Dodgson, he always knows what he wants. There's an occasion that we often remember that really funny. He wrote some lovely songs, *4 Poems of John Clare*, wonderful songs, and there was a chord in that, which is still there. You're in D tuning and you've got the first finger at the 12th fret over the D and the G, your second finger on E-flat, and your third and fourth fingers on B-flat and D – it's a five-string chord. When I first saw that I didn't know what it was and I said to him, "look Stephen, I've got you at last – you've written a chord that can't be played." And he said, "no, no, you just finger it like this!" He's an exception; he always knows what he wants. Peter Sculthorpe, for example, we usually go through what he's written and every now and then he'll prefer a slight alternative because of the sound. Though, again, he usually writes what can be played.

6 Transcriptions

SY: *Your catalogue also contains a lot of transcriptions. I recall, maybe back in the 70s, that you would often publish the transcriptions, I think with Boosey & Hawkes, but then nothing for twenty years or so. Obviously, there are a lot of guitarists who would be very interested in them...*

JW: Well, I'm going to look at all the things I've done and work out a way of doing them. The reason, and I don't think I've been entirely right about this, was that first of all publishers wanted a lot of fingering and I'm very much against having too much fingering because it ends up with students playing fingering rather than music. However, I think I've been a bit extreme on that because sometimes guidance, especially for the early grades, is good. But I've also thought that a part of studying guitar should be about how to adapt or tread from, for example, keyboard music. SO, for that reason I never published the Scarlatti sonatas, which I played a lot, because I thought students should be able to read that and adapt it themselves. And when it comes down to things like Bach suites, which actually are already written for fingerboard, albeit the lute, you're talking only about fingering; it's not a question of transcribing or arranging. So the only things I did for Boosey & Hawkes were things I thought needed a bit of imagination. Things like Cordoba by Albéniz. And maybe I should just do a few more...

SY: *But in a sense, there are two aspects to this. One is that a lot of players would probably like to study your fingerings, as well as perform your arrangements. The other thing is a didactic aspect where, as you say, you don't want students reading what amounts to a tablature.*

7 Composing

SY: *Over the years you've done quite a bit of composing. I haven't heard the film score you wrote, but it must have been a fairly large undertaking.*

JW: Well, it wasn't, really, The reason I took that on, and it was quite a long time ago, something like 25 years ago, is that it was not a lot of music. It was a small budget Australian film—quite a sweet film actually.

SY: *Was it scored, or was it solo guitar?*

JW: I had the money to spend as I wanted, and I only had about twenty minutes of music to write, and if you include the title tune which was repeated once at the end as well as in the middle, there wasn't a lot to do. There were four or five substantial sections, one of which was repeated two or three times in different versions, and then just tiny little phrases, eight bars here, four bars there. I've played such a lot for films that I kind of knew the mechanics of how to do it. I really loved doing it. In fact, the score is really nice. I love to tunes, they're good. I used guitar, flute, string quartet and double bass, and there was a recording of it released in the 1980s.

SY: *Something I find interesting is the idea that if one goes to college to study to be a performer, composition is something that is not particularly strongly encouraged. Yet we all want to create. But if one isn't a trained composer or didn't start quite early, it's quite difficult to write extended, developed pieces. On the other it's fairly straightforward for someone with a good ear and decent taste to come up with pretty good material. Since you've been doing this over the years, some things for Sky, the Aeolian Suite for guitar and strings and the things on the Magic Box recording...*

JW: I've also been writing some things for my new trio.

SY: *... have you ever considered writing a set of study-type pieces for the guitar?*

JW: Well, there's so many of those already that I haven't...

SY: *Yes, but most of them aren't very successful because the music is less than engaging for the students, or it's too difficult. I don't think there aren't that many successful sets...*

JW: Maybe I should think about that. In the past, I've had in mind several projects that would involve a bit of writing, though maybe not in that way. Again, like with the Magic Box group, there's a need for a certain type of piece, or there's a certain combination of instruments, or a need for a virtuosic piece, or whatever, and that's what sets me going with an idea. It might be just a few notes then I find it just develops of its own accord. If I sat down and decided I was going to spend more time composing – if I can use that word – and I'm sure I will, I have plans for various projects but they're not focused at the moment.

SY: *Obviously, you must be aware that something that just every guitarist would want to see – thought I'm sure it will never happen – would be something from you dealing with playing technique. I guess by now you would have written something along those line if you were going to do it...*

JW: I would have, yeah...

SY: *...so, that's probably not going to happen, but it would be nice.*

JW: Well, I think there are enough pieces in the repertoire even if they're not in books of studies. There are enough pieces which have the main elements of technique in them, tremolo, scales, chords, arpeggios. The academic sort of progression from easy to difficult studies I actually don't think is necessary. Not being an academic teacher, I don't want to put myself on the line to be critical of all the institutions which base their teaching on that, but I really think it's not necessary. You can take really attractive nice bits of established pieces that people love to hear. As long as it's not for something like a four-year old, where the hand really is too small. You can take something like the Romance [*sings*]; the first part of that makes a good study. You can take bits of *Koyunbaba*, which are really, really easy. One can take little bits of many things like these, which is much better than churning through C and G7...

SY: *Along the lines of the orchestral excerpts other instruments practice...*

JW: Yes, I think there needs to be a little bit more research done on getting attractive things to listen to.

SY: *I think that's the key for students, especially young ones; getting them music which is appropriate for what you're trying to achieve didactically but also that sounds cool to them, that they're interested in, and want to play. The Carcassi doesn't really do it anymore...*

JW: That's it – most studies, people don't want to play.

8 Recording

SY: I'd like to ask you a little bit about your recording technique. You seem to prefer to record in a studio as opposed to an ambient type environment.

JW: I do, but that's simply because it's been the easiest, most controllable choice I have here in London with one or two really good studios and a couple of engineers I've worked with a lot, one on particular who now lives in Australia, though I can get him over for big solo projects. His name is Mike Studru, and he's credited on nearly all my solo records, like "The Great Paraguayan," the second Barrios recording and the Venezuelan record. When I have to record with an orchestra or a group of musicians, where the sessions are spread out over a long period of time, I can't really get him over from Australia for long enough. So, It's only when I can condense the period into a week or two. I do like the sound of some ambient places,

and the studio I've used mainly in the past ten years is actually a converted church. That's Air Studios, it's called "the Hall," Lindhurst Hall. It has a wonderful sound and things are recorded there straight as they are...

SY: *The ambience that is on the recordings is actually from that space?*

JW: That's absolutely it, nothing else at all. Studios are also very controllable for acoustic and I just like to be able to get the guitar very focused and I like to get a sound which I feel is particularly suitable for the musical content. I wouldn't necessarily have the same sound for a Bach suite as I would for Barrios, for example.

SY: *Which factors would you change?*

JW: Well, it would depend. I can say that when Mike S. and I got together for say the Venezuelan music I'd say I'd like a warm sound but I also want a very lively sound. But I don't want so much echo that you lose the immediacy. So I'll give him a few briefs like that and he'll work on that and he'll crawl around on the floor while I'm playing and try to capture it. And we both agree that it's both a technical and a musical thing for records. It's nice to get a dynamic which doesn't have to be compressed for CD pressing. There are a lot of funny things going on with CDs these days. And the other thing is that we record analog still.

SY: *Yes, and then transfer it over to digital...*

JW: There have been one or two departures in the past for practical considerations where we've used some new Sony digital recording technique like the 20-bit interface. Now it's single-bit mapping, which is very good. But the analog has still got the depth and naturalness. And we've spent a whole day getting the sound. You know what it's like usually, the musicians just go in and they muck around with the microphones for an hour or two at the most and that's it. But we spend the whole day going through little samples of things to really make sure that everything's coming through.

SY: *Everybody has the idea that you just walk into a studio, play a piece, and then go home...*

JW: That's right, they do [laughs]. Also, and this is very important, I record continuously. When I'm solo and can produce myself, which I can't always do when it's with orchestra and things because you can't always concentrate on the intonation from the wind, and the various things that happen with an orchestra, you have to someone in the box checking all that. So, I usually have an assistant producer, or a just a producer. The movie album I did myself because it was all tracked, bit by bit. But with a concerto I usually have a producer in the box. Solo, I do on my own and I don't generally edit between takes, which is one reason I hate having a producer there, and I hate giving tapes to a producer cut up. I mean, I'm the judge of what's best, you know.

SY: *I don't like to have a lot of takes because you then have all these decisions to make and can never really decide what's best. If I do something I don't like, I'll just stop and pick up right from that point and stitch it together.*

JW: Well, that's exactly what I do, just like I'm practicing. I stop-start all the way through and then I just close up the gaps...

SY: *so you have the same feel all the way through a take...*

JW: Exactly.

9 Technique

SY: *Here's an interesting question, to me at least. I'm now 45 and I'm thinking, "how much playing time do I have left?"*

JW: *[laughs] don't say that, I'm, 63!*

SY: *Well, that's an amazing thing because we hear the recent Venezuelan music recording and it's obvious you aren't slowing down one bit! We start to think about keeping things going and prolonging our playing careers as long as possible, especially on the guitar because it's such a physically intense thing to get around on. Has your playing technique changed much over the years?*

JW: I can say that I've been aware of that over the last...I think playing with the different groups, such as Sky, all had an effect musically and technically on my playing, bit by bit. As a classical player, having been brought up like that, it's not just the mentality but the actual technique that gets stuck in the fingers, there are certain things that become limitations and they're actually quite difficult to erase and it's one reason that I'm so forthright about guitar teaching should include traditional and popular techniques. I wish I'd had the benefit of that younger. It was a different age then, and I'm not being critical of anyone, people just weren't aware of it back then. But they are now. So, I'm more and more aware of it and I think that even though it started maybe 15-20 years ago with me it's more and more noticeable for me how much there is for all classically-based guitarists to learn from popular styles. It's a question of how rhythm, goes into your body, how you feel it, how you respond to it. Even if it's a simple four in bar Irish reel, or whatever, how do you play those A and D chords? Chords with just a fifth in them, not even a third, just keeping the rhythm going. How do you play it? Most classical players look at it and say "that's easy, it's just um-cha-um-cha." But actually getting the feel of the rhythm, what part of the beat...

SY: *Well, one hears Pete Townsend play an A and a D chord and it's a whole different thing...*

JW: Exactly, exactly. You know, that was the first thing I learned, in guitar terms, being in Sky. I was really conscious of that in Sky because Kevin peek could lay down a rhythm ion acoustic steel-string and you'd have to measure it to the millionth of a second where he placed those notes. And you just sat back on it. With a jazz player, you'd probably be leaning forward on it. That sort of subtlety is what the feel of music is about. It really is. And classical people, when they think it's easy and they just play it, they don't realize how short they are.

SY: *And it isn't something one can develop by practicing guitar in a room by one's self...*

JW: No, on the contrary, you've got to get out there and do it. S I'd say, if you take that as a basis, you can then get into the Venezuelan music, feeling those rhythms, the feeling of anticipation and energy that's in that music. You've got to get that across somehow. It's not just speed. You can't play a bambuco, you can't play the *seis por derecho* in 6/8 time all the way through, you've to feel the 3/4 at the same time or it's not going to work.

SY: *You started playing the guitar so early that I imagine you have a completely internalized technique and way of playing. I wonder, and I think probably a lot of guitarists wonder, if over the years you've specifically worked on your finger technique or has it just come from playing music?*

JW: I think that the beginning factor - having been so well taught by my father when I was very young that it's difficult to say anything more about it. It's not that I don't find things difficult, because everything got its level of what you're trying to do with it...

SY: *...once you want to make something special it becomes more difficult, doesn't it...*

JW: That's right. Exactly. But I think that he just taught me very well from the beginning, certain basic things: economy of movement, appreciation of sound. As is known, I'm quite critical of the legacy of Segovia, certainly in terms of the teaching world. Nevertheless, the inspiration and the guide was that sound that he made. That was my father's great inspiration when he was teaching me. It was wonderful.

SY: *Being slightly younger, I don't feel the connection with Segovia that a lot of older players do...*

JW:...you're lucky! [laughs]

SY: *Well, I'd heard lots of recordings of you and Julian Bream before I ever heard Segovia, though I was reading all the time that Segovia was the "God" of the guitar. When I finally heard his playing I was a little confused to be honest. I couldn't really follow a lot of the playing, there didn't seem to be much legato, and the rhythm... From what I can tell, Segovia seemed to have had a wonderful rest-stroke sound, but when it comes to arpeggios and free-stroke it's quite a thin sound whereas in your playing the free-stroke sound is very powerful, it's not necessary to use a rest stroke to get a good sound, which is now, I think, the normal way of playing the guitar.*

JW: I'm very glad you picked that out, not many people pick it up. But that's very true, yes.

SY: *Can you describe your normal stroke?*

JW: Well, to tell the truth, I've never really thought much about it. The thing I remember now, when I was quite young – in my teens – I was aware of some little mannerisms that were to do with sound and technique which were totally artificial but were part of Segovia's sort of trademark, and part of that was in certain ways he did the *apoyando*, the rest-stroke. When he did arpeggios, as you rightly just pointed out was very messy. For example, villa-Lobos study No. 1, he couldn't reach across with his second and third fingers to the top strings because of his hand position. It was always very scuffled. And he used awkward chord changes – this used to always upset me from when I was very young. If he had a sequence of triads, for example, he used to chop at them, as though he was chopping wood, instead of keeping them nice and smooth, which is actually very difficult to do. You've got to somehow damp the string just as you move the finger, like in the beginning of Cordoba where you've got all those chords.

SY: *Legato is such an important quality of beautiful playing, and you project a very wonderful way of legato playing. I say "project" because there are lots of places in pieces where one cannot literally get from one place to another without some kind of a gap somewhere. But something I've noticed about your playing, always, is this kind of half-glissando you do in those situations. Just a slight glissando, and the whole thing is smooth again.*

JW: Exactly! I suppose you could say it's a kind of a trick, but actually it's a very practical one. I think it comes from thinking of the guitar as string instrument when it comes to melodic movement, not a keyboard. So I think always along the string. And what happens on cello and fiddle when you play along one string is that you get some kind of glissando on the way. Voice actually do that a lot of the time, very slightly. It's a variable feast.

SY: *Well, this is wonderful part of your playing, and it's not something I hear too much in other players.*

JW: Well, thank you very much! But it's something everyone could do if they would just think melodically. But the trouble is, they think in positions, changing barres, squeak, squeak, squeak, half a second gap while you get the chord down. And I just re-ringer things in the trickiest ways. And I simplify everything to make it smooth.

SY: *Yes, and I've noticed that you're very skilled at sometimes removing the odd inessential note to make the overall effect more pleasing – which something many guitarists regard as almost sacrilegious.*

JW: I know, I absolutely do that. And the other thing I do which is very important, wherever possible (and it hasn't always been possible to quite recently), I've always either sanded the bass strings a little bit to make them less squeaky, and that's when I got D'Addario to do these lightly polished strings...

SY: ...the recording strings?

JW: No, they're for ordinary playing. They last for ages. I'm just doing my fourth concert on the same set of basses. I use them all the time, not just for recording.

SY: *Another thing about your playing is just how clean and tidy things are, not just in the right hand but in the left hand as well. This horrible problem we have of extraneous noise. On a cello it's Ok because there's so much sound in the actual note to cover it up...*

JW: This goes back to the *glissandi* again. A controlled glissando is a nice sound and trying to not do it and then having a squeak which is out of time when you have to move...very often when people move and there's a squeak, anyone could just make that into a nice glissando instead of a sudden squeak. Sometimes you can't avoid it, a squeak happens that's going to ruin a whole take or whatever. But when everything has been edited and put in sequence, I go through in the mixing booth and wherever it's possible where it's really, really annoying, I take out the worst squeaks electronically. Not in a way that's artificial...

SY: *I think this is very important, especially for non-guitarists who notice these things immediately and ask, "What's that noise?" Why leave that in if you can get rid of it.*

JW: Absolutely.

10 Guitars

SY: *Did you find that when you changed guitars during your career that it had an effect on your technique?*

JW: Yes. Or to put it the other way around, the reason I started playing Smallman guitars in 1980 was because I was finding that my technique was needing something with a more responsive dynamic range and color. I've stayed on Smallman's ever since. He makes slight changes and improvements so every few years I get a new one or two...

SY: *Of course, this was a very big change wasn't it?*

JW: Exactly. Have you ever played one?

SY: *Yes, and I play a Simon Marty guitar at the moment*

JW: Oh yes, a similar kind of thing.

SY: *It's so different and does so many things you can't do on a traditional guitar.*

JW: This is true. It creates a little bit of a stir, as you will have found in guitar circles because those who like the traditional sound find it a little bit different - which it is, from the traditional Spanish sound. But I think musically, anyone who plays with other musicians, which I do a lot, as do Ben Verdery and Carlos Bonnell, etc., they all find immediately that the other musicians, whether it's violinists, cellists, flautists, singers, or whatever, immediately notice that it's musically more responsive.

SY: *Yes, I've had the same experience. Did you use Martin Fleeson guitars for a while?*

JW: I had one of his guitars, a lovely guitar, a sort of pure English sound. I think it was cedar. I used it for a couple of tracks on *Echoes of London* and I might have had it when I did *The Guitar is the Song*. I used it on the *Echoes of London* for the Purcell and Byrd pieces, because it had an English, “lutey” character.

SY: *Before that you were on the Fleta?*

JW: I always played Fleta until I played Smallman. Basically, Fleta and Smallman are the two guitars I’ve played.

SY: *Did you ever play Ramirez?*

JW: I never really liked Ramirez. I find the clearest test of a guitar that doesn’t work for me is one where the bass strings are worn out and then it really then sounds crap!

SY: *I know exactly what you mean, a guitar should still sound OK with old strings!*

JW: All that says to me is what you were hearing in the beginning was the strings, not the guitar. The Fleta was a great guitar and do often tell the story about when I first met Greg Smallman. He’d made a couple of guitars which were Ok, but not great, and I told him, and he came back to me about a year later and told me he’d been giving a lot of thought and he wanted to know – because he really loved the Fleta and thought it was a great guitar – and I thought that was very interesting: a guitar maker coming up to me praising another guitar...

SY: *Yes, that never usually happens does it!*

JW: That’s right, it never happens. He said the sound i made on that guitar was so good that there didn’t seem any point in him making a guitar. And he asked me if there was anything about the sound that I though could be improved. I thought, well, this is an interesting man, so I told him the first string was a little bit percussive, it didn’t have quite the dynamic range, it was quite hard work getting it warmed-up, and that’s where we started.

SY: *With several guitar makers today using innovative designs – Smallman, Marty, Damman - it really does increase the musical possibilities in performance, especially dynamics. You can play quietly and still have a note with actual body and an articulation to it. You play harder and there’s actually more sound rather than what it was before, which I don’t quite know how to describe – you feel as though you’re playing louder but it just sounds different, rather than actually louder.*

JW: You’re absolutely right, and the thing I have to explain when it sometimes comes up in a class or something, and I have to be honest and say so, though ultimately it’s a question of taste, I have to say it’s a more musical sound, in that sense of dynamics. Now, that’s not to say that it’s a more musical sound in terms of quality because that subjective and I wouldn’t dream of being so arrogant as saying that people should like something which they don’t. But it’s definitely more musical in the sense of what you were saying, in the sense of the range of dynamics. The so-called traditional guitar is very percussive. If you play it louder, and listen carefully, you get more attack but very little extra sustain, and in that way the guitar is unlike any other instrument. I’ve done it classes sometimes, if there’s a piano on the stage I’ll play just a C-major triad, louder and louder on the piano and the sustain is also louder. If you do that on a traditional guitar, especially a traditional spruce top, which is very bouncy, you have a very loud attack if you play it louder but the after part of the sound is hardly any louder at all, and that’s to do with the kind of construction and the wood.

SY: *the sustain that’s available on some of the newer instruments is such a wonderful thing to have, to actually hear melody notes ringing that before one could only imagine. I guess instruments develop in response to musical demands, maybe it’s the other way around?*

JW: No, I think you’re right, it’s an on-going conversation between the performer and the maker.

11 Current Projects

SY: *John, what's on the music-stand at the moment?*

JW: Well, there's a number of things, two or three things. I've got a trio we've just started, with John Etheridge and Patrick Bebay, Francis Bebay's son. Patrick sings, plays the sansa, the pigmy flute, congas, piano, sings. He does rather a lot of what Francis did, only a little bit more, though he doesn't play the guitar. We just did our first show last week up in Scotland, so were just getting the repertoire. We're doing some of the same things of Francis's that we did on *The Magic Box*, but of course with vocals now because Patrick can sing them.

SY: *A singer opens the whole thing up to a much wider audience.*

JW: Exactly. It's lovely. The *Magic Box* group, which is five of us, is being phased out over the next couple of months because we've sort of come to the end of the road with the repertoire for that, but we're going to keep the trio going. It works absolutely fantastically. So that's the immediate thing. The other thing that's coming up, and I hope you'll hear a lot more about it – though I don't know what the potential will be for developing it – is with Horacio Salinas, the former musical director of the *Inti-Illimani*. I'm still very much touch with all of them, but particularly Horacio Salinas because we have a lot in common in terms of the guitar. There were a few instrumentals of Horacio's that Paco Peña and I played with them that really could have another life in a different form. We've ended up with the idea of a suite called *Danzas Peregrinas* which is based on four of five of the instrumentals arranging the main melodic parts for three people as opposed to the whole group., which will be me on guitar, Horacio on charango, and Richard Harvey, who plays the pan pipes...

SY: *He plays everything doesn't he...*

JW: He does! He can play on the two main wind instruments – the cano and the zamponas, and it will be with orchestra, and about 25-30 minutes long, and kind of like a triple concerto for three soloists with the orchestra.

SY: *Will there be a recording?*

JW: We're doing it with the London Symphony Orchestra in November this year, we were lucky to get a date really soon because they had a cancellation. But we'll have to wait and see about a recording. Recording is getting so difficult these days, but it certainly would be good...Going back to our educational subject, there are a lot of good charango players around the world, and people who can play the cano or the zamponas that instead of people always wanting to do a solo guitar concerto instead they can get together and do something that shares the solo spotlight. So that's on my music stand...

SY: *It sounds like something that has a lot of programming appeal for orchestras. Any ideas for new solo projects?*

JW: I've got two or three, but I'm thinking about it at the moment, so it's better if I don't talk about it in case they don't come off. But one very interesting project with someone who has nothing to do with the guitar world, a sort of collaboration between us. And a solo project I'm thinking about with a difference. But again, I don't want to say anything about it [*laughs*].

SY: *We can tell the readers there are solo projects in the pipeline?*

JW: There certainly are, yes. It's really a question of at any moment there usually being four or five ideas floating around and it's usually a question of distilling them and getting down to one focus.

SY: *John, thanks for spending so much time discussing these things.*

JW: Not at all, it's been a pleasure!