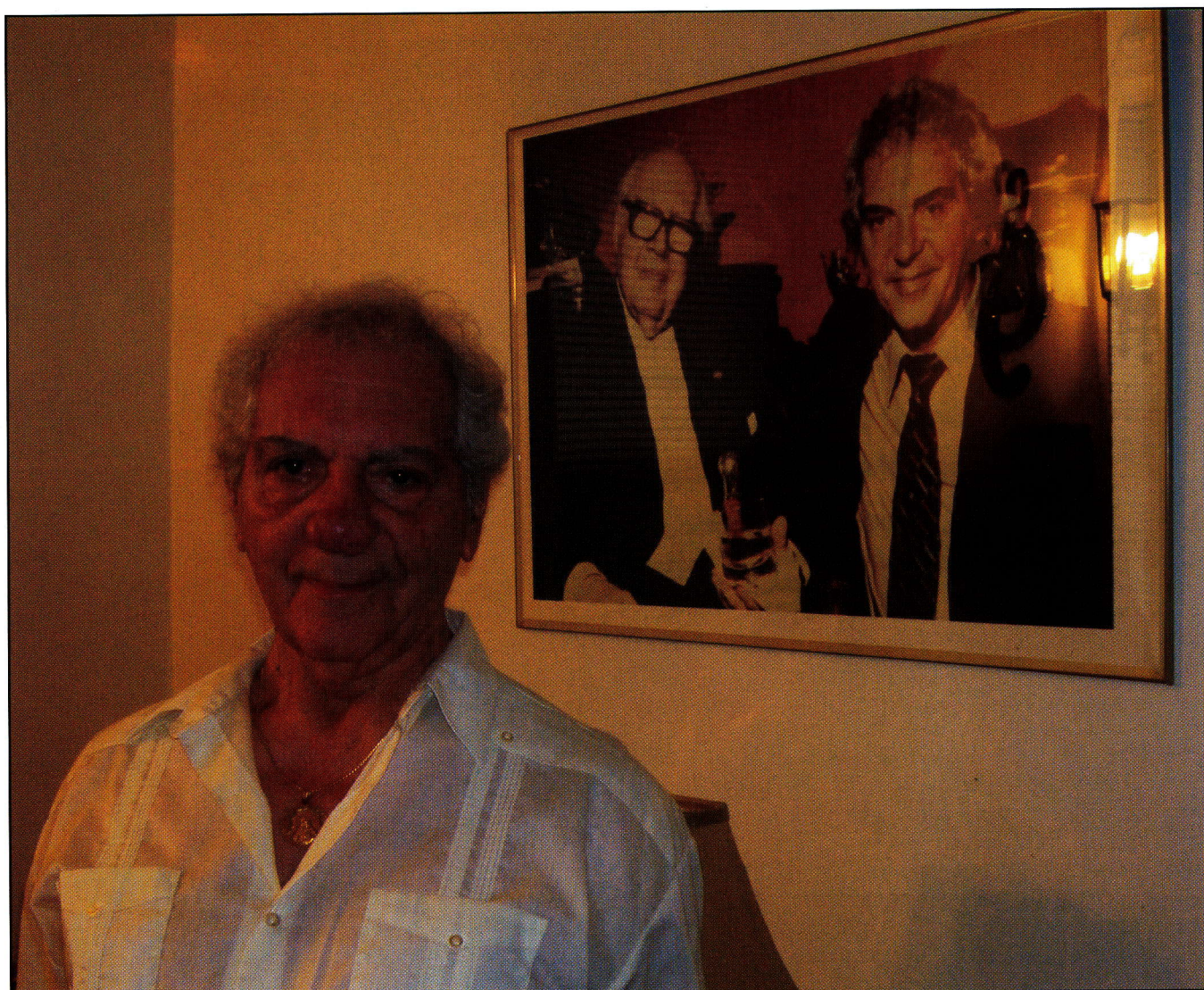


# A CONTINUING CONVERSATION WITH JORGE MOREL

By ANA MARÍA ROSADO



*Jorge Morel at home, and in the background pictured with Segovia.*

PAN-AMERICANISM is the operating word when trying to describe the scope of Jorge Morel's inspiration as a composer. His works cover a wide swathe of territory, from reflecting the spirit of the southern tip (Cono del Sur) of South America as an Argentinean, to embracing the jazz and blues inflected idioms he partakes from his chosen hometown, of almost 40 years, New York City, with stops in Brazil, Cuba and Puerto Rico along the way. His musical creations can be classified in three main categories; the original works for solo guitar, the arrangements and transcriptions of popular and classical music, also for solo guitar, and the larger works for guitar, several guitars, and guitar with other instruments. *Latin Images* for orchestra is one of his rare works not to feature the guitar.

In the first category, solo pieces, we find a substantial number of pieces that challenge the

player with brilliant finger-work and with intricacies of rhythmical style. His most dominant influence comes from the folk rhythms of Argentina: the *chacarera-malambo* complexes that play with the alternation and juxtaposition of 6/8 and 3/4 meters in very idiosyncratic ways, and the *tango-milonga* 4/4 metric strains. Also in this solo category we find pieces that capture the essence of Caribbean music, with its emphasis on the *clave*, or additive rhythmic code, and the use of the anticipated bass line so prevalent in the Cuban *son*. and rumba complexes and in their progeny, the *Salsa* repertoire. Other pieces in his solo production are more classically inspired, following stylistic trends and forms derived from European music. Morel's transcriptions and arrangements are exemplars of virtuosic conception as they translate music from one medium: orchestral, piano



or vocal repertoires into the sonic micro cosmos of the guitar.

A comprehensive list of all Morel's work would necessarily be very long, as he is a very prolific composer. We need make a special mention, however, of his works for guitar and orchestra: *Fantasia de la Danza*, *Concierto Rapsodico*, *Romance Criollo*, *Fantasia Latina (two guitars)*, *Rapsodia del Sur*, *Rapsodia del Plata* and *Suite del Sur*. They are as a whole an important contribution to the repertoire of an instrument still struggling to gain its long overdue recognition within the great instrumental traditions of the Western world.

An indefatigable creator, Morel, whose career spans well over six decades, continues to work towards the goal of improving the guitar's repertoire and the level of performance by writing pieces for young players, the *Young Guitarist* series published by Mel Bay in 2009, to instruct them in the style of Latin music and at the same time improve their technique and musicality. The three books are dedicated respectively to solo, duet and quartet pieces and contain titles such as *Milonga*, *Pampero*, and *Waltz*, among *Preludes*, *Canciones* and *Studies*. Another book published this year is *Classic Guitar Solos in Latin American Rhythms*, also in the Mel Bay catalogue, whose *Milonga Urbana* and *Milonga Campera*, *Tango*, *Malambo*, *Bossa Nova* and *Baião* are more technically demanding and musically sophisticated, geared towards more advanced players.

In 2007 a book dedicated to the life of Jorge Morel was also published by Mel Bay: *The Magnificent Guitar of Jorge Morel, A Life of Music* by John McClellan and Deyan Bratic. Interspersed between the interview style questions by the authors are essays and reflections by Morel and his daughter Francesca, photographs that span his life from Argentina to NYC, and a trove of pieces, some new and others reprinted here. It's the kind of text that Julian Bream has seen printed in his life as well, homages to transcendental figures in the history of the guitar. Another significant book came out the same year, a compilation entitled *The Very Best of Jorge Morel, Volume 1*, published by Ashley Mark in the UK, that brings together 15 of his most popular pieces previously published separately. *Latin Serenade, The music of Jorge Morel*, with himself and guest artists performing his compositions for solo, duets and ensembles is his latest recording project, currently in development and produced by Luthier Music of NYC.

An important premiere will take place in London on November 11 2009; the Eden Stell Guitar Duo will perform *Latin Serenade for the City of London*, commissioned by Maurice Summerfield, at a banquet to celebrate Mr. Summerfield's induction as Master of the Worshipful Company of Musicians (Musicians Livery Company) in the City of London. Mr. Morel dedicates this work to the Worshipful Company of

Musicians, inspired no doubt by the Company's track record of supporting young musicians. With roots in an ancient craft guild, the Musicians' Company is the only City of London Livery Company devoted to the performing arts. Many famous composers and musicians have been associated with the Company, as liverymen or award winners, including, among many others, Lennox Berkeley, Peter Maxwell Davies, William Walton, Michael Tippett and Julian Bream.

Here I would like to ask Jorge Morel a few questions in an attempt to understand his amazing life force and the motivations that make him continue to work so hard at a time when others would simply bask in their past glory; and to continue the dialogue we started in our first interview back in 1991...

**Ana María Rosado:** *Not only do you write music with the energy of a young man, but the music itself is fresh sounding as well.*

**Jorge Morel:** Thank you. Maybe the energy of my music at this stage of my life comes from my spirit, I try to keep it young.

**AMR:** *How do you keep your ideas so relevant, do you listen to much music?*

**JM:** I listen to a lot of music, not only from the guitar for my work, but mostly for my own enjoyment. I like to listen to composers like Gershwin, Ravel, Debussy, of course, the great Spanish tradition: Manuel de Falla, Albéniz, Granados, the works of Joaquín Rodrigo for the guitar, Villa Lobos... well, I would need to mention a lot more, they all give me great pleasure and their music encourages me to keep writing.

**AMR:** *Does your inspiration hail from the guitar world or from popular music?*

**JM:** My inspiration? I don't know exactly where I get it from, I think a little from the guitar world, some from popular music, and the rest from all my travels. My ideas sometimes come from a simple pattern, whether melodic or harmonic, but mostly harmonic. Sometimes when I am relaxing with the guitar in my hands, I hear a rhythmic pattern, if I like it, I write it down and take it from there, it doesn't work every time, but when it does, I'll go all the way to accomplish what I want. I did not like my early compositions very much, I thought they were too simple, but soon I discovered that by developing that simplicity in the structure of my pieces, through melody, harmony, rhythm, I could accomplish something good and still remain simplistic. Of course, I also had to study and read many books.

**AMR:** *You have recounted in casual conversation how the world of the classical guitar did not recognise you when you were younger, nor even consider you a 'real' classical performer because of the music you played. Do you feel validated now that guitar has embraced its folk origins, especially*



with the Latin American repertoire, and is there a feeling of 'sweet revenge' from the acclaim you now enjoy?

**JM:** Yes, of course, but I would not call it sweet revenge, maybe just a nice feeling. The prejudice of certain people of the early days, with regards to my playing, was due to a complete ignorance of that literature and a misunderstanding of the nature of my arrangements.

**AMR:** You have been visionary and prescient in your approach to repertoire, now it is habitual to see concert guitarists playing transcriptions of tangos, even rock & roll, and compositions based on popular forms, but when you were starting this was the exception. You said in our earlier conversation that this was by default, not by design; you were just being true to your musical heritage and your musical preferences. How much of it was also due to a perceived intransigence in the classical field as well, or to the embrace you enjoyed early on from jazz musicians?

**JM:** Well, yes, I was always true to my musical heritage, I did not feel I had to play what every other guitarist was playing at the time, I believe the best way to please an audience is to please oneself musically first. Both the classical guitar world and my relationship with Jazz has helped me develop this way of writing.

**AMR:** Your concern with young people's musical development extends to your teaching: you perform with your students, even record with them and give them opportunities to develop their talent with your active mentoring. Is this something you enjoyed as a student and are you now passing this on to the young players you are in contact with?

**JM:** Yes, it is the legacy of my teacher, Pablo Escobar, who was always helping me and giving me opportunities to play. He would take me to his radio programme and perform with me, how can you forget all that!

**AMR:** This new series of books for young guitarists seeks to fill a huge void in the repertoire for easy to moderate pieces for students that are not the usual fare of Carulli-Carcassi and some of Giuliani- Sor.

**JM:** These three new books had been an idea of mine for some time, but they were also requested by some of my friends who are active teachers.

**AMR:** Some of the pieces like the Prelude in the book of solo pieces do not have a connection to folk idioms and the Dotted Study from that same book is perhaps a little too long for young players. How do you know what is really easy to play?

**JM:** I think on the solo book I departed a little from my Latin American roots, and the Dotted Study is perhaps a bit long, but it is not too hard to play, considering the level of students that many schools have today.

**AMR:** In the book of duet pieces the pace seems relaxed with the Danza del Norte, Milonga and Preludio, but then you present the duet version of your Pampero solo that should get things rolling with the 3/4 6/8 juxtaposition. Yet it still seems a simplification of the solo, is it?

**JM:** You are right; Pampero is probably the most difficult but only in terms of the rhythmic pattern and the particular accent that should be given to these pieces. The duets are perhaps the most playable, I like to have the students get together and have a good time while learning about these rhythms, the same goes for the book of quartets.

**AMR:** These three books dedicated to solos, duets and quartets respectively are all in standard notation without tablature, whereas the Classic Guitar Solos on Latin American Rhythms includes tablature versions of the pieces. At least you include the

tablature version after the notation and not at the same time, which I find makes reading music very cumbersome...and extremely annoying. Are the players who study this type of repertoire really in need of tablature?

**JM:** I would not use tablature at all, but I was surprised to find out that there are so many young guitar players that don't read music. My publisher, Mel Bay, advised me that the Latin American Rhythms book should be presented with tablature, that it would be of help to many of the young players, and that it could help in selling the books as well.

**AMR:** You have expressed discomfort with the 'classical guitar' label, what would you then call this instrument we play: classic, as in this book we just mentioned, or acoustic, or nylon-string?

**JM:** Just GUITAR, not that I don't like to use the name classical, but I hear so many styles and lots of different literature today that is not classical. I don't think we will diminish the stature of the guitar by omitting that word.

**AMR:** What is the future of the guitar in your mind's eye?

**JM:** The future of the guitar I believe is in the hands of music creators. Great performers will always be there, great composers are what we need for the future. Can you imagine what the piano would have been without a Chopin or a

**"You perform  
with your  
students, even  
record with them  
and give them  
opportunities to  
develop their  
talent with  
your active  
mentoring."**



Rachmaninov, or an Alberto Ginastera of Argentina in the music of Latin America?

**AMR:** Regarding a performance career with the guitar; we seem to have enough competitions to keep the players busy, but how about real life with the guitar on stage and making a living at it, what do you recommend?

**JM:** A career as a guitar performer can be most attractive, if only we are able to confront the many obstacles of the music business; namely traveling, and most importantly, management. Some of us

are not very good at arranging a concert tour, so if you have professional management you can trust, all the better, but you should learn as much as you can about the business anyway.

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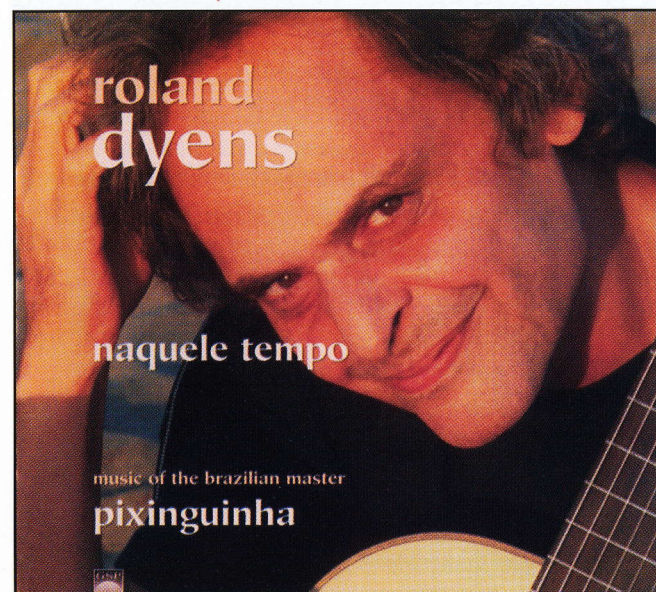
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8	lamentos	4'23	ac studio, san francisco
9	naquele tempo	5'07	mixed & mastered at
10	carinhoso	5'56	gsp, san francisco
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