

He then played the 9th to 12th bars, made a comma and then proceeded with the 13th to 16th bars; a breath; and straight on again to the end of the first movement.

When I pointed out that other players do not make "a breath" in these places he asked me to imagine a melody instrument and an accompanying instrument playing the piece—a violin and a piano he suggested. "I am sure," he added, "the violin would not go straight on in these particular places." He added that one must play as one would sing a melody. "Imagine the way a melody would be sung and then play it on the guitar that way."

Coming to his interpretation of the Villa-Lobos "Prelude" I said I thought the first movement was a little halting, being used to hearing it played like this (and here I demonstrated the usual manner). He then played it beautifully *his way*, saying that was how he preferred it.

Then I criticised the speed of the chords in the second movement but he said it was the way it was written, as reference to the music would show! When I started to say "But Segovia plays it like. . . ." he interrupted by saying that although he had a great admiration for Segovia, he did not have to play like he does: adding it was not necessary for him to listen to a Segovia record and try to copy it.

UNIVERSAL GUITAR

He said he was pleased with the reception he received at the Wigmore Hall and when I asked what he considered was the present position with regard to the development of the classical guitar, in Spain and the rest of the world, he replied that it was the same in Spain as in every country of the world. "The guitar is no longer Spanish," he added. "It is universal!"

Regarding practise: he said that scales were of the utmost importance. One should hear the sound of the notes as well as playing them. It is not enough to have a guitar and play scales. *How* one plays them is the important thing!

When I suggested that what he meant was the phrasing and the sound one should produce in the playing of scales, he took the guitar and illustrated contrast by playing the run in the major part of "Fandango" ("Suite Castellana") by F. Moreno Torroba (bars 16 to 23) following the chord of B Major. Once he played it *molto legato* and

then again *staccatissimo* with real hard attack. He added that he always played scales with three right-hand fingers, not two!

Here followed a demonstration of scales played with three fingers at the rate of a crotchet equalling 158—which is really fast. During the fifteen seconds he played non-stop, demonstrating the scale run, I estimate he produced 158 notes!

Finally, in answer to my question, he said it was impossible to give a list of study music, "it is advisable to study *all good music*," he said.

I thanked Narciso Yepes for the patient, friendly and straightforward manner in which he had answered my questions and I hope readers of this column will be, like me, a little wiser than before.

Two Recitals

By JACK DUARTE

THE list of famous guitarists to visit London during this concert season was augmented by the first appearance in this country of Narciso Yepes on Friday, March 17th in the Wigmore Hall. His name has been known to us for many years but his playing has been known only by his recordings of the Rodrigo Guitar Concerto and one solo LP.

Technically speaking he is clearly amongst the best two dozen soloists in the world and, in evaluating him, we can apply only the highest standards. An artist who presents himself in the Wigmore Hall automatically invites high-level criticism—as he walks on to the platform he joins the great musicians of the past and the present and it would be wrong to greet him with the same enthusiastic indulgence he would meet in a parish magazine.

The acute reader will by now have sensed that Yepes' first appearance was not wholly satisfying.

The recital began soberly with an interesting and, to us, new "Fantasia" by Mudarra, alternating between sparse counterpoint (and even monody) and arpeggiated passages of surprising dissonance for their period. A certain waywardness in the soloist's rhythmic pulse was disturbing.

Then followed a "Spanish Suite" of eight pieces by Gaspar Sanz, not the least interest in which was as a source-

study; most of the themes have been transmuted (and frequently ennobled) by Rodrigo and used in his "Fantasia for a Gentleman," of which there is such a marvellous recording in the Segovia "Golden Jubilee" Album.

On the whole these pieces were well played, with a fair range of tone colour, and they provided a vehicle for Yepes to show the incisive clarity of his ornamentation. Some carelessness in damping open basses marred the second piece and in many pieces there was a curious abruptness about phrase-endings that robbed them of their proper sense of fruition.

The third item was the now-famous "Sonata in E Minor" (Longo 352) by Domenico Scarlatti, in Segovia's transcription (although only transcriptions by Yepes were acknowledged on the programme), already heard this season from Segovia, John Williams and Alirio Diaz.

Yepes' reading was weak, rhythmically erratic and totally unconvincing. To add to this, his guitar was out of tune almost throughout.

The out-of-tuneness persisted through the next piece, "Zapateado" by Albeniz (Mateo, not Isaac), spoiling what was otherwise a broad hint that this was the kind of music to which the soloist was best suited.

FAULTY TUNING

When a third work in succession, the Sor-Mozart Variations, was given with faulty tuning, we began to wonder how any sensitive musician could possibly play for so long, so badly out of tune; remembering the great artists who would have taken steps to correct it long before.

Once again the work was a veritable "war horse," inviting comparison with the readings of practically every other soloist one can bring to mind. Yepes did not emerge well from the exercise. Fine performances of the work are much too freely available on record or in the flesh to lend any value to poor ones from artists of international repute!

In completing the first half of his programme, Narciso Yepes followed Alirio Diaz in essaying the great "Chaconne" by Bach. This is a task, both musically and technically, that can be successfully performed only by those of the highest calibre and Yepes failed utterly to justify the inclusion of this work in his programme. There al-

ready exists a magnificent transcription of the "Chaconne" by Segovia (also recorded by him) and this was used by Diaz who, though he did not attain the highest musical authority, at least brought to the work a technical sureness and power.

Yepes made his own transcription—and one can only wonder why he did it. Both rhythm and tempo were erratic in the extreme and the former was frequently distorted to the point of parody.

Bach wrote this towering work as a continuous flow of variations and it is usual to play them so, with only one or two small pauses at critical points. Yepes chopped them up and introduced pauses at the end of most variations that completely destroyed the flow and growth of the work, reducing it to a series of fits and starts. Add to this persistent out-of-tuness and the result is one of the most dreadful travesties of great music we have heard in many years.

The second half of the programme found Yepes on rather happier ground, though the playing of Villa-Lobos' "Prelude No. 1 (E Minor)"—another over-worked piece—was heavily over-drawn and its phrasing verged on what would, in humbler circles, be termed "corn."

NEAR DISASTER

Ponce's "Sonatina Meridional" was little better and in the last movement it came perilously close to technical disaster on one or two occasions. Far better was "Rumores de la Caleta (Malaguena)" by Albeniz, probably the best-played item of the evening. This was, to be very English about it, exactly his "cup of tea."

The improvement was maintained in Falla's "Hommage au Tombeau de Debussy," this being marred only by viciously bad intonation on some long notes of fairly low pitch.

Several things pointed to the likelihood that Yepes uses fairly light stringing on his guitar and, in using a fairly strong vibrato on some notes near to the nut, he pushed the notes wildly out of tune. He used the method common amongst great players for notes close to the nut, *viz.*, to move the string *from side to side* and though the amplitude did not appear excessive the effect on intonation was distressing.

"En los Trigales" (in the wheatfields) by Rodrigo (already familiar through

his recording of it) has, again, the vivacity and movement that suit Yepes' technique and approach and, but for some splodges of apparent carelessness, this was amongst the evening's better moments.

The final item was a first performance here of "Song and Dance No. 1" by a young Spaniard, Ruiz Pipo—written for Yepes. The music was slight and in a conservative idiom but the writing was skilful and guitaristic. The soloist did not realise fully the poetry of the *Song* but he played the *Dance* with great verve and to good effect.

The first encore was a *dance* from the "Three Cornered Hat" by Falla (a real "rabble rouser" if ever there was one), with lots of heavy strumming and fret-rattling. There followed the worst performance of Tarrega's "Tremolo Study" I can recall; the main virtue of which was its galloping pace.

HEARD ENOUGH

At this point I left, having heard enough—but there were two or three further encores for an audience which was fairly restrained in its reception until the end of the programme—at which point "encor-itis" set in. This is a disease to which guitar audiences are peculiarly prone and, as long as a soloist will continue to add to their "moneys-worth," they are prepared to greet him with delirium.

In summation, Yepes is unquestionably a great technician, one of the greatest in the world, though not truly in the very top class. His tonal range is fairly wide (though he does not always put it to as much use as he might) and his volume, adequate on average, ranges from the almost inaudible to the patently forced. He is at his happiest in music that moves along with plenty of "business," particularly when he can strum to his heart's content. His single-note technique is rapid, though not overly powerful, and it lacks the definition and beautiful clarity of that of, say, Diaz.

On the musical front he is *not* a great interpreter. His rhythm and tempo are erratic and his phrasing often verges on the eccentric. He is, moreover, curiously uneven in that he interprets well one moment and excrably the next. Bass notes are frequently clipped and others left to ring, undamped, into succeeding passages where they do not belong—he uses, incidentally, much more left-hand damping than is usual amongst

players of high calibre. Phrases often peter out, summarily ended, with little thought for consummation—almost as though he loses interest in them just before they reach their conclusions.

In the main, his interpretations lack any feeling of authority or intellectual power and, despite a liberal vibrato, he seldom achieves any real warmth of feeling. His playing glitters like sparks but, like those sparks, has little heat content.

Guitar audiences love display and "Spanishery" (a couple of *rasguedos* and they are "gone" beyond recall) and he will doubtless continue to succeed with them. For the musician, however, there is little to satisfy, spiritually or intellectually, and a great deal to irritate.

Conversation amongst the audience both during the interval and after the concert, showed that both guitar enthusiasts and musicians were present—as well as those who manage to be both these things!

* * *

THIS season has been an all-time record for guitar recitals in London (and there is still more to come) and the latest contributor, Manuel Lopez Ramos, was a *complete* stranger to us; not even his reputation had preceded him! On March 8th he gave his maiden British concert in a sparsely-populated Wigmore Hall. At 32 years of age he has reached a definitive stage in his development and he may be fairly measured by what he is now doing.

His programme was a curious one: there were many familiar works but the unfamiliar ones were of slight substance and scarcely justified their inclusion.

He opened with fair caution, playing the "Frescobalda" Variations of Frescobaldi and one could write off the flaws to the "warm up" and, perhaps, to initial nervousness. A "Sarabande" by Alessandra Scarlatti was well played, with good taste, but the much-played "Gavotte" that followed was taken rather quickly, with some moments of carelessness and some purple patches of aggressive vibrato.

Disaster was to follow. The "Chaconne" of Bach began quietly and intelligently but when it began to make demands on technique it fell to pieces in no uncertain fashion. One rapid run of single notes, approached with unwise abandon, was comprehensively

missed in an almost amateurish scramble. There was some evidence his musicianship was equal to a workmanlike and intelligent shaping of the work but technically it was quite beyond him. His scale technique is notably weak and as his velocity increases his volume and tone diminish in direct ratio, to the point at which very rapid passages become almost inaudible.

Three guitarists, all making their first appearance here, have essayed the "Chaconne" and only Diaz survived acid test; the others foundered on this massive rock and were ill-advised to expose themselves.

After a short interval Mr. Ramos returned to play the whole of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's "Sonata." The first and weakest movement was given mechanically (almost without pause or shape) and a fraction too quickly. Much more at home at the slower tempo, the soloist gave a better account of the second movement and followed this with his best playing of the evening in the third. This was firm and shapely and showed a modest degree of authority. The final *Vivo ed Energico* was not suited to his technique and it suffered inevitably from the fact that Segovia and John Williams have virtually made this piece their own property. The work as a whole is slight.

The second half proper began with "Alba" and "Postlude" by Hans Haug, only just made known by Segovia's recording released a few days before. Technical demands are modest, the music is agreeable but unremarkable, and we agree with the critic who said it would make a nice background to a drink in the sun.

ROUSED THE AUDIENCE

Nothing of substance followed but "Music Box" by Sageras (unknown here), with its Tarrega-like trickery of left-hand *pizzicati* and simultaneous harmonics, roused an audience whose response had hitherto been lukewarm. This frothy and fluttery little novelty would have been even better had Mr. Ramos' technique been sufficient to make it audible with comfort.

Ponce was unworthily represented by a folkly little "Scherzino Mexicano;" the rest was in the warhorse category.

Mr. Ramos is a curiously-compounded artist. Often he plays with real insight and musicality, though never with authority and stature; at other times he plays without apparent feeling, almost as though his only end-



MANUEL LOPEZ RAMOS

point is the final bar. His volume is not great but he has a good variety of tone. This is a direct consequence of his right-hand position and action. Too often he bursts forth with a few notes that are coloured with a frenzied vibrato—one of these marred the ending of even the Frescobaldi Variations—and his Latin temperament tends to show through at times in the less amiable ways. The serious musical approach rubs shoulders disconcertingly with the *musica tipica*.

Here then is an interesting, capable, player not lacking in warmth of feeling or without thoughtfulness but he is *not* of the first rank and cannot for a moment be classed (as his publicity suggests) with that small select band whose "Pope" is Segovia.

Learning with Lucas

By JACK WHITFIELD

(Continued from last month's issue)
(A series of monthly lessons for plectrum guitar beginners, using as text-book the Nick Lucas Method).

A READER following this course puts forward a good idea to solve the problem of studying duets when there is no one on hand to "duet" with. He finds that a friend with a tape recorder is only too pleased to help him.

Sometimes he records the solo part and plays the accompaniment "live"; at other times, *vice versa*. The former is the most natural and effective way of doing it but he finds his recordist friend

(an enthusiast for correct balance and other technicalities) gets fun out of the *vice versa*!

A real recording fan welcomes new problems and new sounds to deal with and I pass on the idea to other students who have no playing partner, pianist or tape recorder of their own to help them with duet work.

Now back to the book and this month's practice.

First week. Page 21. Here are three melodious pieces that will provide something of a relief from the technical studies of last month. I must confess at first I was impatient with the author's trick of leaving the student to find out the titles of his solos—but on second thoughts I can see the value of it. So I will leave you to identify the tunes—all well known—by playing them.

In the first piece, get the emphasis on the bass melody and remember what has been said earlier about holding down left-hand fingers until it is necessary to move them for another note.

The second piece is musically very simple but do not be deceived. It requires good plectrum control and I recommend that instead of playing down strokes throughout they should be only used for the chords—with up strokes for the single notes.

In the third solo, however, play all down strokes and watch the instructions as to volume, which is increased by taking a slightly tighter grip on the plectrum and striking with a little more power.

SECOND PART USEFUL

Second week. Page 22. "The Circus Man" is a straightforward duet but you will find the second part useful as a guide to vocal accompaniment—note the single-string passages leading from one chord to another. This piece introduces a bridge passage, the device used to indicate repetition.

The study at the top of Page 23 is in semiquavers. Here you have to play four notes in one beat and the counting method indicated is a satisfactory guide. If you find this difficult, count as four in a bar—playing two notes to each beat—but remember they must sound as groups of four. In the bars of quavers, there would be one note to each beat.

In the solo at the bottom of the page, make sure you allow the "tied" notes to ring out for the required duration.

Third week. "Cider Barrel" on Page