

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



When pianists meet up to talk repertoire, they rarely have to ask one another, “Which version are you playing?” On occasion, a truly consequential choice arises: Brahms and Busoni adapted Bach’s Chaconne for piano in antithetical versions; Liszt’s *Transcendental Studies*, revised by the composer in 1852, are often performed from the 1837 edition; there is even Rachmaninov’s Second Sonata of 1913, revised in 1931 by the composer but reworked in 1940 by Vladimir Horowitz with the composer’s approval. But these are exceptions.

A guitarist, on the other hand, is constantly in conversation with texts. Take that score on the music stand: It might be a work in progress from a composer who doesn’t play the guitar and is asking for suggestions. How to help them find their voice on an unfamiliar instrument? Or it might be a transcription. What are the principles that generated the transcription, and are there competing principles that would yield a quite different result? Or again, it might be a guitar piece from the early nineteenth century. How to know if this is a reliable edition? Finally, it might be a modern score in which everything seems to be prescribed—down to the last damped bass note and squeak of the left hand—but whose rhythmic notation is only an approximation, requiring the player to find an elusive “feel.” But what does that feel entail?

In the face of such practical questions, it is no wonder that in the five academic guitar conferences I attended last year, emerging young performer-scholars were in the majority (both as presenters and attendees), eager to discuss collaboration, new technologies, and performance practice. Nor is it any surprise that this year’s call for papers for *Soundboard Scholar* resulted in the contents of the present issue: a series of case studies and some theoretical groundwork for each of the situations invoked above.

To begin, Erik Stenstadvold explains how Sor’s music came to be printed and disseminated, and what it means to speak of a reliable modern edition. Damián Martín Gil then considers the relationship between two of Sor’s Parisian contemporaries, Carulli and Molino, and the amateurs eager to learn from them.

Moving to the twentieth century, Katalin Koltai explores what happens when the act of transcribing is informed by imagination: perhaps we have all heard a piece of music being performed on another instrument and thought how wonderful it would sound on the guitar. You find a copy of the score and start a transcription, but eventually have to give up, because the notes stubbornly refuse to fit the fingerboard. One solution is to transform

transcription into composition, as one hears in much new guitar music—incorporating another composer’s music into one’s own in the form of reworkings, fragments, and digressions, taking what works and discarding the rest. Koltai shows a different path in which both the music and the guitar are transformed. This article is published on our companion website at soundboardscholar.org.

This same concern with the instrumental interface lies at the heart of Jason Noble and Steve Cowan’s reflection on the composer-performer relationship. Noble, the composer, describes how the guitar invites composition with timbres just as much as with pitches, which are harder for a non-guitarist composer to manage idiomatically. And Cowan, the guitarist, explains how it can be made to happen. As with the music that results from their collaboration, this article speaks with a single authorial voice.

In speaking above of damped bass notes and left-hand squeaks, I was alluding, of course, to the fastidious notation of Roland Dyens. In his discussion of Dyens’s arrangements of jazz standards, Milton Mermikides presents an example of modern data-driven scholarship that amounts to a masterclass in capturing the feel—Dyens’s feel—of jazz. For anyone curious about the relationship between musical notation and what Casals called “natural rhythm,” this article may provide a path for research in any repertoire.

When Mermikides’s article arrived, my first reaction was joy that the scholarly assessment of Roland Dyens is continuing to develop with such energy. It has been four years since we lost Dyens’s unique voice. I could not have known that as this issue was reaching its final form, we would also be coming to terms with the passing of Julian Bream. I am grateful to Fábio Zanon for contributing his moving yet clear-eyed analysis of Bream’s historic achievement.

This issue is to some extent a hybrid of a print and digital product: so many of the examples in these pages demand to be *heard*. Please visit our website, soundboardscholar.org, to find video, audio, illustrations, additional musical examples, and all bibliographies.

I cannot close without expressing my gratitude to Thomas Heck, one of the leading guitar scholars of our time. Tom founded *Soundboard Scholar* and edited five superb issues that have advanced guitar scholarship decisively. Although he has now retired from editing the journal, Tom remains the general editor of the GFA’s Refereed Monographs series. I would like to wish him every success in his work and thank him for his many kindnesses.

—JONATHAN LEATHWOOD