

Matanya Ophee's Contributions to Soundboard Magazine

A Retrospective

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2022 MARKS what would have been the ninetieth birthday of the pioneering guitar historian Matanya Ophee (1932–2017). With this anniversary in mind, we take the opportunity to survey and highlight his significant contribution to the pages of *Soundboard* magazine.

Over a thirty-six-year period, from 1976 to 2012, Ophee contributed scholarly articles, curated editions of music for *The Guitarist's Album* (bringing to our attention guitar composers who were little known at the time), wrote in-depth publication reviews, and engaged in a catalogue of letters to the editor (some amounting to short essays in themselves).

Ophee was a prolific writer. His scholarly articles appeared in all international guitar journals and magazines of the time, and once the Internet became a viable platform, he took the opportunity to publish further articles on his own Editions Orphée website (under the acronym *G.A.L.I.*—*Guitar and Lute Issues*; the articles are now archived at <https://www.digitalguitararchive.com>). To this, we can add the numerous prefatory essays found in his Editions Orphée publications. His final publication, *Essays on Guitar History* (Columbus, OH: Editions Orphee, 2016), collects twenty-one essays (most published previously, some with revisions; a few previously unpublished). While Ophee's *Soundboard* contributions represent only a portion of his research interests and published work, the fact that over half of them are included in his *Essays* anthology attests to the value he placed on those particular topics, and on *Soundboard* as a platform to express them.

Soundboard Articles

Ophee's writings bookend the early days of guitar scholarship on the one hand and the establishment of the contemporary guitar-musicological field on the other. Nevertheless, even in his earliest articles we notice the trademark signs of his approach:

they are expansive, fastidiously and eloquently written (even though English was not his first language), meticulously sourced, and rigorously argued. His conclusions often provoked fierce debates, some of which continue to this day.

His inaugural twelve-page *Soundboard* article, “Guitar Chamber Music, Why? One Amateur’s View Point,” serialized in four parts between 1976–77, took an in-depth look at the role of the guitarist as chamber musician in the context of the musical mainstream of the time (along with a reevaluation of the term “amateur”). This was his only article that dealt with such practical guitar-related matters.

In 1981, following a five-year *Soundboard* hiatus, Ophee embarked on an extended series of historical guitar-related topics. The first, “Who Wrote ‘La Sentinelle,’” deals with the authorship of a well-known early nineteenth-century romance traditionally attributed to Mauro Giuliani. This was followed by a controversial two-part investigation into the role Francisco Tárrega played in the formation of the modern guitar. A significant article followed in 1982, “The Memoirs of Makaroff: A Second Look,” an article that provides important information regarding J.K. Mertz and the mid-nineteenth century guitar-politic.

A second hiatus of five years followed; then in 1987, *Soundboard* published his article “The Story of the Lyre-Guitar,” which provided a comprehensive account of the guitar-variant that well-to-do women cultivated in the early nineteenth century. This was followed by two 1990 articles dealing with the French five-string guitarist Antoine Lhoyer: “Will the Real Giuliani Please Stand Up?” and “Antoine de l’Hoyer (1768–1836?): A Detective Story and Check List of his Works.” In this pair of articles Ophee first confronts the conundrum presented by the fact that Lhoyer’s 6 Exercises for the five-string guitar (op. 27, Paris 1812) and Giuliani’s 6 Preludes for the six-string guitar (op. 83, London 1817) consist of the same pieces. In the second article, Ophee relates all that was known regarding Lhoyer at the time. And in 1991, Ophee contributed an extended feature review of Astrid Stempnik’s ground-breaking study of mid-nineteenth-century guitarist-composer Josef Kaspar Mertz, whose music was only slowly beginning to reenter the consciousness of guitarists of the time.

After this review, Ophee wrote nothing more for *Soundboard* for fifteen years, as he was publishing his research through *G.A.L.I.* But in 2006, he contributed a seventeen-page study that is one of his best-known: “Fernando Sor and the Russians.” His final *Soundboard* article appeared in 2011 (barring a one-page addendum to “Fernando Sor and the Russians,” published in 2012). This thirteen-page article, “Some Commentaries on Sor’s Concert Music,” consists of an informative series of annotations on all of Sor’s long solo works: it was originally intended to form the preface to a volume in Chanterelle’s Sor series, but that volume was never published.

The Guitarist’s Album

Ophee also contributed extensively to *The Guitarist’s Album*, a long-running *Soundboard* feature curated by a variety of guest editors. In just short of twenty contributions, Ophee surveyed not only little-known historical works but post-historical

and contemporary works as well. Some of his prefatory commentaries amount to short essays in themselves. Beginning, innocently enough, with a *Rondo Allegro* from Molino's *Grande méthode*, Ophee soon introduced items much more off the beaten path: a *Lyrische Suite* by Rudolph Süß, a little-known early twentieth-century Austrian guitarist-composer (a second *Lyrische Suite* by Süß appeared in a subsequent issue); Carlos Pedrell's quite extended *Al atardecer en los jardines de Arlaja*; Bobrowicz's virtuosic *Grand Polonaise*, op. 24; Legnani's *Scherzo ossia quattro variazioni*, op. 10 (for one finger of the left hand); Terzi's evocative *Nevicata* and *Imitando l'arpa*; the Lhoyer-Giuliani *Exercise-Prelude* "conundrum"; a six-movement pastiche *Partita im alten Stil für die Laute* by Heinz Bischoff (1898–1963) (presented in the form of a quiz, readers being invited to identify the composer); and—reflecting Ophee's long-standing interest in the Russian seven-string guitar—music by Alexandrov, Ivanov-Kramskoi, Khrennikov, Sokolovski, and Vyssotsky. Among women guitarist-composers, he promoted the music of Athénais Paulian (1802–75) and Elsa Just (1894–1919); among contemporary composers, he introduced us to significant works by Roberto Sierra and John Gordon Armstrong.

From the catalogue of Ophee's contributions to *The Guitarist's Album*, we reproduce here works by Molino, Paulian, Just, Pedrell and Süß, works that deserve and still await our attention. Ophee's written introductions, though relatively brief, are included here not only to shed light on the individual composers and the music, but also to share the scholarly curiosity, sincerity, and yes, wit that characterized the writings of this often controversial and iconoclastic guitar historian.

Writings in *Soundboard* by Matanya Ophee (Ordered Chronologically)

Articles

- "Guitar Chamber Music, Why? One Amateur's View Point" (serialized in four parts, 12 pp). Part 1, vol. 3, no. 3 (August 1976): 42–47; part 2, vol. 3, no. 4 (November 1976): 82–83; part 3, vol. 4, no. 1 (February 1977): 22–25; part 4, vol. 4, no. 2 (May 1977): 35, 52.
- "Who Wrote 'La Sentinelle'" (5 pp). Vol. 8, no. 2 (May 1981): 75–79.
- "The Promotion of Francisco Tárrega: A Case History" (serialized in two parts, 12 pp). Part 1, vol. 8, no. 3 (August 1981): 153–58; part 2, vol. 8, no. 4 (November 1981): 256–61.
- "The Memoirs of Makaroff: A Second Look" (8 pp). Vol. 9, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 226–33.
- "The Story of the Lyre-Guitar" (9 pp). Vol. 14, no. 4 (Winter 1987–88): 235–43.
- "Will the Real Giuliani Please Stand Up?" (6 pp plus scores). Vol. 17, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 80–87.
- "Antoine de l'Hoyer (1768–1836?): A Detective Story & Check List of his Works" (5 pp). Vol. 17, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 33–37.

- “Stempnik on Mertz” (*Soundboard* Feature Review) (7 pp). Vol. 18, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 75–81.
- “Fernando Sor and the Russians” (17 pp). Vol. 32, nos. 3–4 (2006, combined issue): 13–29.
- “Some Commentaries on Sor’s Concert Music” (13 pp). Vol. 37, no. 2 (2011): 26–37, 44.

The Guitarist’s Album

- Molino, François. Rondo Allegro (from *Grande Méthode*, op. 46) (with a two-page preface). Vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 77–81.
- Süss, Rudolph. *Lyrische Suite*, op. 23. Vol. 14, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 196–201.
- Pedrell, Carlos. *Al atardecer en los jardines de Arlaja* (a substantial five-page piece). Vol. 14, no. 4 (Winter 1987–88): 282–87.
- Bobrowicz, Jan N. de. *Grand Polonaise*, op. 24 (a substantial seven-page piece with a two-page preface). Vol. 15, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 60–68.
- Ohcawara, Yosie. *Japanische Gitarrenmusik*: Prelude; Era Karpati, *Ungarisches Lied*; L. Mozzani, *Élans du cœur*; Heinz Bischoff, *Zwei Weihnachtslieder*: Susani; J. Aguirre (ed. Segovia), *Vidalita*. Vol. 15, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 144–49.
- Terzi, Benvenuto. *Nevicata* and *Imitando l’arpa*. Vol. 15, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 236–41.
- An anonymous six-movement ‘Baroque’ Suite in the form of a quiz for readers to identify the composer [*Partita im alten Stil für die Laute* by Heinz Bischoff (1898–1963)]. Vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 74–78.
- Süss, Rudolph. *Lyrische Suite*, op. 24. Vol. 16, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 63–71.
- Sierra, Roberto. *Toccata y Lamento*. Vol. 16, no. 4 (Winter 1989–90): 58–63.
- “Will the Real Giuliani Please Stand Up?” Lhoyer, Exercises 4 & 5 (with a four-page introduction. Vol. 17, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 80–87.
- Alexandrov, Nikolai Ivanovich. Etude. Vol. 17, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 71–73.
- Ivanov-Kramskoi, Alexander Mikhailovich. *Tarantella*. Vol. 17, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 61–65.
- Just, Elsa. *Ständchen* (guitar trio). Vol. 17, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 55–60.
- Khrennikov, Tikhon Nikolaievich. *Svetlana’s Lullaby*. Vol. 18, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 57–59.
- Paulian, Athénais. *Airs et Variations*, op. 1 (an eight-page piece in brilliant style written by a woman guitarist-composer contemporary to Sor). Vol. 18, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 52–61.
- “In Defense of Luigi Rinaldo Legnani (1790–1877),” *Scherzo ossia Quattro variazioni* op. 10 (for one finger of the left hand). Vol. 18, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 60–65.
- Vyssotsky, Mikhail Timofeevich. *The Spinster*. Vol. 18, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 59–63.
- Armstrong, John Gordon. *Ghosts: Desert Winds*. Vol. 19, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 63–67.
- Sokolovski, Marek. *The Post*. Vol. 19, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 59–62.



About the Author

STANLEY YATES completed postgraduate studies in guitar performance at the University of Liverpool and the University of North Texas and is professor of music at Austin Peay State University, Tennessee. His research, published in several languages, includes articles dealing with the unaccompanied string music of J.S. Bach and its performance on the modern guitar, Villa-Lobos manuscript sources for the guitar, the early guitar concerto, the sonata styles of Fernando Sor, and the adopted Albéniz guitar repertoire. Along with a range of didactic works and arrangements, his published work as editor includes classical-period guitar concertos by Vidal, Doisy, and Viotti-Doisy, the collected sonatas of the early nineteenth-century Viennese guitarist-composer Thomas Wenzeslaus Matiegka, and the collected music of the English late-Victorian guitarist-composer Ernest Shand.

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