INTERVIEW WITH SEBASTIAN STENZEL

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by Greg Hanson

On a radiant spring day in the Bavarian capital of Munich I had the pleasure of speaking with Sebastian Stenzel, a rising young German classical guitar maker. Sebastian picked me up at the Munich train station and after a trip on the U-Bahn and a short walk to his house, we spent morning and afternoon chatting in his workshop. It was Sebastian who really started the interview, wanting to know how I had come across his name. I told him that I'd heard of him in an internet discussion forum. Someone seeking advice on-line about buying a concert guitar was told of a guitarist who had canceled an order with a world famous guitar maker after having played a Stenzel guitar. This piqued my interest and Sebastian graciously agreed to an interview.

Which guitar makers have influenced you the most?

My first model was a guitar built by Antonio Mateu, a luthier from Barcelona, from whom I've yet to see any other instrument other than this guitar. A collector once told me that Mateu had mostly made bowed instruments and only a few guitars. To look at it from the outside you could see that the guitar was roughly made, as if cut by a kitchen knife, but from the inside it was well conceived and constructed professionally—a fantastic instrument. Once it was played (and praised!) by Alexandre LaGoya until it came into my father's possession where I, of course, always had access to it. The sound of this guitar certainly left its mark on me. Its striking tonal characteristics continue to be very important to me: substancial trebles that have body with much warmth and modulation capability, and a sonorous bass.

The second instrument was a guitar by Marcelino López, a guitar maker from Madrid. As far as I know, he worked in the shop of Hernandez y Aguado for a number of years and then struck out on his own. Perhaps it's no coincidence that López is also a guitar maker who later occupied himself with the construction of bowed instruments. The guitar was tonally very similar to Mateu's , characterized by very full trebles, but on the whole, more powerful and with more transparency. López' guitars are optically quite impressive and have a softly tailored waist much like a Baroque guitar. I liked that very much and although not quite so extreme, I've adapted that soft curved waist for my plantilla (the outline of the body).

Since I've succeeded in building a guitar, which I, at least, find better than the López, I really don't have any models in the strict sense of the word. I think that I've developed a well-defined sense of the tone I'm looking for which I don't particularly attach to any instrument anymore. The influences I get now are mostly detailed in nature. By looking at certain construction approaches by other guitar builders my understanding of the function of different components deepens and the clarity and consistence of my own concepts are put to the test. In the last few years, however, I've made very few changes in construction.

You've mentioned that you have a certain tone, a certain sound in your ear. Is it even possible to describe in words what exactly you're hearing?

It is, of course, always difficult to speak about tone. Some people simply refuse to do so. It is very difficult, but for that same reason, we should try. As I mentioned earlier, it's very important that the

tone have a body. For me that means that the tone has plenty of volume in the middle frequencies. I'm looking for a tone that's really a guitar tone. There are guitars, especially some modern ones, which sound more like a piano or a harp than a guitar. Historically, I'd say I'm strongly oriented towards Torres, looking for his type of sound which has often been described as "sonorous," even though the word "sonorous" doesn't mean much other than "pleasant sounding".

It's also been quite common to describe sounds as vowel formants. Violin makers are in agreement that a strong a-formant is decisive for the tone quality of a violin. In my opinion, this is also true for the guitar. With the guitar there's also the o-formant, which I think is the tonal aspect which is commonly described as "sonorous," maybe because the word "sonorous" contains the vowel "o." This is especially important for the bass and what produces the dark coloration. There's a tendency in French guitar construction towards the u-formant among builders like Friederich and others. I personally don't like that very much, but as always, it's a matter of taste.

Perhaps the most decisive factor is that there is some sort of individual sound character. I find it very important that the modulation be good and that the individual tone can be formed, especially in its dynamic, so that one can create the impression of a growing tone. And that, of course, is the greatest weakness of plucked instruments. For that reason it's extremely important that the guitar be able to produce this effect—it's one characteristic of a master guitar.

In an information sheet about your influences you quote Heraclitus, "Polymathie noon echein ou didaskei." "much learning does not teach understanding." How does this relate to your work?

It describes exactly the situation in which the guitar maker constantly finds himself. He can and has to exhaust all the scientific sources available to him to make the instrument better and to learn which elements of construction have which influences. He has to know the statics and understand the basics of physics. But even all that's not enough. He has to study the old masters and gain from the experience of other guitar makers by trying to understand their concepts. And when he's done all that, there still comes a moment when he just has to make a gut decision, "do I position the braces this way, or make them a bit different? Do I make the top a tenth of a millimeter thicker or thinner?" These are all decisions that in the end can't be made scientifically or if one could, their solution would be so complex that no builder would take the trouble to do so. I find this apparent contradiction intriguing, that after all that we've learned, in the end your sense of feeling is what makes the decision. It's not really a paradox, but rather a synthesis.

I think it's of utmost importance for a guitar maker to come to grips with both—the physical investigation of the instrument and his own intuition. The ideal sound that he has in his head must be the guiding light, so to speak, that directs all decisions. Torres put it beautifully and it's quoted in José Romanillos' biography of him. Torres was asked, "Don Antonio, you ought not to go to your grave without revealing the secret of you guitars for posterity": and looking at us, smilingly [Torres] responded: "Father, I am very sorry that a man like you also falls victim of that idea that runs among ignorant people. Juanito (that is how he addressed me) has been witness to the secret many times, but it is impossible for me to leave the secret behind for posterity; this will go to the tomb with me for it is the result of the feel of the tips of the thumb and forefinger communicating to my intellect whether the soundboard is properly worked out to correspond with the guitar maker's concept and the sound required of the instrument."

In this letter from Juan Martínez Sirvent, a close friend of Torres published in "Tárrega" by Emilio Pujol, Torres puts his finger right on the heart of the matter. While working on a top, he tests its stability, and that's what I do as well. I hold the top and bend it. There's a point where the top has

some give to it, but still has enough strength, enough guts, and that's the ideal point that you've just got to feel. Friederich measures the flexability, others tune the top to a certain note, it´s all the same thing. That's what Torres meant.

What is for you a good guitar, what characteristics does it just have to have?

In the first place a beautiful timbre, a beautiful voice, and capability of modulation. Projection in both small and large rooms is also important. There are instruments that project only in large halls and others that sound good only in more intimate settings. Volume has, of course, a lot to do with that. Playability is extremely important to me. And something that's often swept under the table is craftsmanship. In the last years I've seen some expensive guitars that have lasted only a few years, either because of shoddy craftsmanship or too thin tops, and that's unacceptable to me.
The attack should be easily modified at different frequency levels to produce an interesting tone. Lastly the tone should be transparent and balanced enabling polyphonic voicings. Last but not least there should be a good balance over all strings and all frets.

Any luthier worth his salt wants to make instruments of the highest quality, but to do that, he needs a lot of time. How do you strike a balance between those demands and the challenges of marketing your guitars?

I used to to think I just needed to build good guitars and guitarists would break my doors down. I had to learn that's just not the way it is. I also think the situation is more difficult now than ever because there's never been a time when there are so many good makers. Nevertheless I see the future very positive because there's a steady demand for quality instruments, and in this world of ours getting more and more automated and industrialized, there's a growing demand for authentic products. If you look at it this way, products like hand-made guitars, which are better than anything that industry can produce, are growing in value. It's certainly not the right profession for someone who wants to earn a lot of money fast and assure himself a secure income. I can only advise anyone seriously considering this profession to be aware of that. On the other hand, if someone really wants it and is ready to invest many years learning, it's possible to earn a living at it. I, personally, found it very motivating when I got to know colleagues who were earning a decent wage for there work. It was only then that I noticed how much I'd been affected by this cliché of the starving artist and tried then to free myself from that mentality. It's always been a sort of tightrope walk. Marketing has been difficult for me, and it's still something I don't really like to do, but I've learned to accept that it's part of the process.
It used to be that there were only three or four big-name guitar makers and three or four great guitarist and otherwise middle-of-the-road talent—those times are gone. Now there are very many really good players and makers, and that means that marketing plays an increasingly important role. For me it's nevertheless a balancing act, because marketing demands a sort of "going-out-of-oneself." When I build a guitar, however, for me it's a creative process from within, for which I need a sort of protective space. I find it difficult to do both at the same time, but you have to be realistic and somehow find a happy medium. I'm looking forward to the time that I hope will come when I don't have to devote as much time to marketing. I don't want to deny my artistic side...

...by suddenly building twenty guitars a year instead of nine or ten.

Exactly. I simply can't build more than ten a year. Well, maybe I could, but I'd have the feeling that I'd be exhausting my soul. I don't have this feeling at all when I do repair work. Those are "bread and butter" jobs which are great fun when they're challenging. But my guitars are kind of like my children. I just can't pour out as many as I want. Some people might see that as a sign of unprofessionalism...

...or just the opposite!

...but that's the way I feel about it. I think it's important that guitar makers exchange ideas on this. Especially because the market's so tight, it's often a tricky situation to speak openly to colleagues who in the end are your very competitors. Nevertheless I think openness between colleagues is way to go, just because it's good to know that you're not alone, your colleagues go through the same things you do. It's also a question of personal inclination. I know colleagues who would rather do marketing and are very successful, even if their instruments aren't as good as by those who hardly ever venture out of their workshop.

How would you characterize the atmosphere here in Germany among your colleagues? Of course there are "trade secrets" that each maker keeps for himself, but do you have the feeling that you can turn to a more experienced maker if you needed to?

Yes, I do, but on the other hand I've experienced a certain hesitation in the air when the conversation turns to details about construction. I'll talk about everything I do except for two things.

That you're not going to reveal today either!

That I'm to going to reveal today either! You have to understand that a guitar maker's knowledge and experience is his real assets and he just can't throw that around. What I don't like is when that's unspoken. I'll tell you there are things I'll talk about and things I won't talk about, and then my colleague knows where we stand. I'm in touch with colleagues with whom it's always a pleasure to exchange ideas, and there are others with whom it's more difficult, but that's surely the way it is all over.

How experimental do you have to be? What can you learn from guitar to guitar?

To experiment is a luxury. I can't afford to experiment to the extend that I would like because I am bound to fulfill the expectations of my customers. As a rule they order an instrument that should be as good or better than the one they've tried. At times, when I wasn't making a living from the sale of my instruments, I had more time to experiment. Thank God I found the right path for me during that time. In my apprenticeship I was able to try out a lot of things, because my mentor was himself quite new to the profession and I profited from that a lot: nothing was fixed yet. During those years I was able to try out all the basics for some ideas about which construction concepts fit what I was after. In the past few years, I've made very small changes, small enough so that the customer wouldn't notice if the changes hadn't produced the desired effect. Or if I'm building a demonstration model, for example, I have more freedom to try out something new. I'm also more and more sure of what I do and when I make a change I know what I'm looking for and what the result is going to be. What I don't know is to what extend the result will be evident.

And with market the way it is, you really can't afford that.

That is a problem. I can hardly afford to build a guitar that I'll have to throw out. Thank goodness that's never happened. I can pretty much tell what sort of risk I'm taking with a small change in construction. When you have a clear idea of what looking for in tone, then there's a direction in your development. If there's a direction in development, in the worst case scenario there'll be a small setback, but that's not so bad, if what you've been doing before has been good. Without a definite direction, you're just stabbing in the dark.

Does your concentration on spruce top guitars come from you or your customers?

It has two sources really. The best guitars I've seen and which have influences me were of spruce and had those singing trebles that only good spruce top guitars have. The best cedar guitars don't have the modulation capability that spruce has. The second reason is that I love to work right from the start with my wood. When I buy a trunk and debark it and the sap is still in the wood, it's wonderful to experience the wood as a living material. It's a different thing working with a cedar top from a trunk somebody has felled somewhere in Canada. That doesn't mean it's poor quality wood, I just like getting to know "my" tree, so to speak. It also helps me retain a greater consistency in the quality of my work.
I much prefer to work with wood from a tree I've picked myself because only then can I be sure that it'll be sawn in the highest possible quality. That's not really as much a problem with cedar as it is with spruce, because there are still many Canadian Red Cedar trees which have grown straight, practically without branches. Their shear size alone enables you to get great quartersawn pieces. Spruce is another story because it's difficult to get good quality. I prefer spruce from the north side of the Alps. It's colder and shadier there and the climatic conditions favor a shorter growth phase which means that the lighter part- of the growth rings are very prominent and the darker part- of the growth rings are very narrow. For me that's the mark of quality in spruce you can find in the higher regions on the north side of the Alps. But even then, there are marked regional differences. Unfortunately the tree stands are so diseased that only a few trees reach an age where they're thick enough to be used as guitar soundboards.

Are there harvesting restrictions? The case of Brazilian rosewood is well known.

No, because spruce is not in danger of extinction. There are restricted logging times, however. This past spring, for example, there were heavy storms that left a lot of loose wood in the forests and so it was forbidden to cut healthy trees. Trees that are suitable as tone wood are a rarity anyway. I purchased my last spruce at an auction, where the best trees of the winter- from the Bavarian Alpine region were auctioned off. It's a great way to find excellent wood. It drives prices up, but it's still much less expensive than the highest quality woods from a tone wood dealer who would sell me a spruce top for about $75. Working from my own trunk, that same top costs me about $5, but then again you have to figure all the time and work I then have to put in getting that wood into a rough form for the top. And there's a lot of waste from branches and resin pockets. If you factor that all in, it might be more economical for me to buy from a wood dealer, but then I'd surely have woods from different trees and would have to adjust and work around that.

Good spruce can be a bear to find because of its irregular growth patterns—it can twist in different directions, on the inside maybe to the left, in the middle to the right, and the outside back to the left, and that makes it difficult to judge from the exterior, even if it's already been cut and you can see the cross-section. You've got to rely on experience a little bit of luck. Cedar is not such a problem and I could certainly get good cedar from a wood dealer. Because of where I live it would be a lot more difficult to get a whole trunk of Canadian cedar. The wood that is sent to Europe is usually meant to be used for construction or furniture and most often is of inferior quality.

What's does an average day look like for you?

I do 90% new instruments and only a few repairs. Up to this past winter I'd make three instruments parallel to each other, but then I noticed that in the long run it seemed a bit too much like a production line. I couldn't concentrate on an individual instrument the way I wanted to. Now I make one at a time which isn't as effective, but to compensate for that, I try to prepare necks, bridges and other individual

components, whose dimensions are fixed beforehand, ahead of time for several guitars. It requires a bit of planning, so that the neck, for example, is there when I need it. That means that I'm working on the next guitar while I'm finishing the last. It's a new rhythm for me but I have the feeling that it benefits the quality of the instruments.

There are always interruptions, of course, by telephone calls, but also by marketing work, writing articles or preparing presentations, and customer service. Then there are those days when I never make it into the shop or am too busy with paperwork and I hate those days. I'm often happy when I know that can work a whole day in the shop with no e-mails, no messages on the answering machine, and nothing on the agenda.

When someone buys a guitar from me it's not like he pays for it, takes it home and that's it. I look at myself as a companion for the instrument. Of course I do the individual set up, but also track the further development of the guitar. There are often little details which make for a more contented customer, like helping find the most suitable strings and such. For me it is a matter of course that smaller service needs are included in the purchase price.

Let's talk a bit about your 12-hole bridge. Why have you opted for that type of bridge?

Basically my bridge is a traditional bridge, that is to say, a bridge with tie block and a variable bridge bone. My bridges have a so-called lip in the rear which prevents or at least impedes the string end having contact with the top. It's important to me that the bridge be light. My bridges typically weigh between 16 and 17 grams and I make them exclusively of Indian rosewood, primarily because of the weight. Most luthiers use Brazilian rosewood. If you'll permit an aside here, I'd like to say that when talking about individual components of the guitar you can never say that this is better than that, because it all depends on the overall concept of construction. So a bridge made of Brazilian rosewood might easily be the right choice if it makes sense in the overall concept. I like to say that the bridge is the „gearing" of the guitar because it transfers the string vibration to the body. A heavy bridge supports and improves the sustain simply because of it's larger mass and brings about a longer turn-on time of the tone. There are, however, some minus points of a heavier bridge which affect the attack and modulation. I always make my bridges of tangentialy-sawn wood so that the annual rings run parallel to the top because of the greater flexibility that the bridge has that way. Quartersawn would be stiffer and emphazise its function for the structural stability. I'm really not sure how important this is, but I believe that even elements whose direct influence is perhaps not provable, taken as a whole, they do have an effect.

My bridges are relatively small—17 cm long and 29.5 cm wide. The width is standard, but the length is relatively short. It's important that the bridge ends are free, and by that I mean that there are no fan braces running over the bridge ends which would bring about a dampening effect.

It's important that strings sit well over the bridge. For a time now I've been using the so-called double-hole system for two reasons. First of all for aesthetic reasons. I think it looks elegant and second, it allows more pressure to be put on the bridge bone. You just have to be careful that the angle of the string is not so acute that the wound bass strings are bent too much. I think that high string pressure on the bridge improves the quality of tone.

The fit of the bridge bone is very important. It has to be perfect—not too tight so that it sticks, but not too loose either. When the bridge bone is stuck it compromises the trebles, especially the high E-string. I can't explain why that is, but I discovered it accidentally and it's confirmed itself since then over and over. Sometimes I can perform it like a trick, when a customer complains that his high E

string is dull. I file for about 30 seconds, put the bridge bone in again, restring the guitar, the string sings again, and the customer thinks I'm some sort of magician. But sometimes little things like that have an enormous effect.

You often see quite intricate ways to improve the compensation. A classic is the so-called back-filed bridge bone for the G-string, but it's become less of a problem when using a carbon G-string, because the compensation averages out with the other strings. Back-filing does make sense, however for nylon strings. My bridge bone runs straight at slight angle so that the low E-string is compensated at 0.75 mm more than the high E string. Any remaining inaccuracies are compensated by the improved fret spacing I use and are certainly below the production inaccuracies of the strings themselves. I've tested hundreds of strings and was not happy with the result. I see a lot of room for improvement here.

I form the under side of the bridge exactly to the arch of the top of my Solera. In the Spanish tradition the doming (?)of the top is created by pressing the -struts into this mold while gluing them to the top. It's - like a flat bowl. By doing that the stability of the top is improved enormously and allows a thinner wood strength than if you were working with a flat top. In addition the arch dampens the lower resonances of the top if favor of the higher oscillation modes.

Is the headstock a factor in the overall concept of the tone of the guitar? As a lay person, I'd say no, but you think otherwise.

Yes, it does, and to an extend, which continues to amaze me. Many guitar builders have seen what happens when they try to convert a flamenco guitar with peg heads to one with machine heads. You generally have a dissatisfied customer because the guitar just doesn't sound the way it did before—especially not very flamenco! It's been my experience that a small headstock benefits the overall sound. I've shortened the heads on a number of guitars and without exception the guitar became more open and capable of modulation.
Of course the neck is coupling in with both the strings and the soundboard, and its resonance frequencies depend on its length, weight and stiffness. It is hard to imagine that the head can influence at least to any appreciable level the sound projection except maybe in the high trebles—especially when you consider that machine heads are not a closed surface. I think it is rather a matter of resonance-absorbtion.
I make my necks of Honduran cedar, (cedrela odorata) where there are fluctuations in density of up to 50%. There's Honduran cedar which is very heavy, almost like African mahogany. I prefer wood of middle density for my necks—not too heavy and not too light. But for flamenco guitars I take the lightest wood that I have because it favors the lower harmonics of the tone and a quick attack. You have to remember that the string as a vibrational generator not only is in contact with the bridge, but also the saddle and frets, and a goodly portion of this energy is transferred from these points. This relates more to higher frequencies though, because the neck is too stiff to transmit lower frequency vibrations. For this reason, the neck has great influence on the timbre of the guitar. But as I've said before, it depends totally on the overall concept of construction.

I'm looking at your master of crafts diploma on the wall. What does it mean to be a master craftsman in Germany and do you then feel obligated to train apprentices?

In Germany we have something called the Handwerksordnung (*Skilled Trade Ordinance*) which has its roots in the guild system of the Middle Ages. It's usefulness is debateable and it is on shaky legal ground. It leads to the absurd situation that a talented instrument maker needs an examination in order to be permitted to work independently. I know master craftsmen, who in my opinion aren't, and I know guitar makers who don't have this exam, but who are without a doubt a master of their

profession. But that's the legal situation in Germany. The advantages are that the apprentice spends three years under a master and provided he has a good workshop, he can learn more than in a school for instrument making. After that he generally spends three to five years as a journeyman and then is allowed to absolve the master exam. One nice thing about this system is that the journeyman must build a so-called journeyman piece, and then a master piece that are then evaluated as part of the examination.
But I think the existing system is a control of market access which as far as guitar building is concerned, is totally senseless. We're dealing now with an international market in which no builder can survive without branching out beyond the horizons of his own region. At this level no one asks whether I have a master of crafts diploma. I'm all for the repeal of this ordinance. But it's a nice piece of paper that you can hang on the wall!

You prefer French polish but you critizise the technique traditionally used in Spain.

Ah, one of my favorite topics. French polish is really a cover term for a wide variety of finishing techniques. What I mean by the Spanish tradition is the filling with pumice powder and shellac followed by bodying up with shellac containing wax which results in a very, very soft and sensitive lacquer.
I have strong objections against the use of polyester lacquer and polyurethane lacquer, both widely used on factory-made guitars, but also by smaller workshops. I find polyurethane finishes simply too stiff and hard. Polyester has a lousy adhesion and is - except in modern electrostatic spray rooms - applied in extremely thick coat. Both types of laquer have a strong dampening effect on the instrument, which can´t be counteracted by thinning the wood without jeopardizing the long term developement of the guitar, because the laquer doesn´t give any structural stability. Generally it's just not an appropriate laquer for musical instruments.

A good possibility is the use of a good nitrocellulose lacquer. There are many of these, and that's why I stress a good one. High quality nitrocellulose lacquers are those which require a lot of work—six coats at least, sanding between each one. I need about 15 hours or longer for such a finish which is a lot more than I need for a really good French polish – about 10 hours. Ten years ago I needed three times as long. If you've got a good nitro-lacquer and apply it thin, the elasticity that the lacquer needs will also be there.
The French polish that I use is every bit as hard as a good nitrocellulose lacquer and just a bit more sensitive to moisture and sweat and certainly nothing like the lacquer containing wax commonly used in Spain. The reason for this is that the wax, which is a natural content of shellac, never really hardens and keeps the lacquer soft. The worst are the ready-made shellac mixes that are designed to enable even a lay person to make a piece of furniture shine, and not for bodying up a lacquer finish from the bottom. I've done quite a bit of research into the finishing techniques of the 19th century, the golden age of spirit finishes, as it were, and it's clear to me that a lot of that knowledge has gone by the wayside. After some experiments, I came up with a laquer which I call "English polish" based on recipes by that name used especially for export to the colonies and were developed for the harsher climatic conditions found there. I hope I've made clear that shellac or French polish is not a product, but rather a collective term for everything that somehow contains shellac.

Another advantage to French polish is that there's no other lacquer that can be so successfully repaired, retouched, and refreshed. The customer should know that French polish needs a certain maintenance and after a few years a touch-up on those places where arm rest, but that's not a big job.

For me there's no other lacquer that has such beauty. That's certainly a matter of taste, but I view the guitar within the context of guitar making as an organic whole—more in the physiological than

chemical sense of the word. French (or my English-) polish is the only lacquer that gives me the feeling of this organic unity with the instrument while all other lacquer techniques have to be added from the outside and don't really bind with the instrument organically. It has a beauty that don't want to do without—maybe also because it took me a lot of time and effort to learn on my own.

Which woods do you prefer for sides and back?

I prefer to work with Indian rosewood, because I find it provides the ideal combination of openness of tone and warmth in the darker tones, but also a brilliance in the trebles. You have to remember that the preference for Brazilian rosewood comes from a time when guitars were still played with gut strings. At that time luthiers tried to draw out as much brilliance as possible, and Brazilian rosewood with it's more metallic sound components is great for that. The use of modern strings has fundamentally changed that situation.

Beyond that it's very difficult to obtain quality Brazilian rosewood nowadays. If you find it quartersawn you'll pay a mint for it. For some reason guitarists still prize Brazilian rosewood which I think arises more from insecurity than from the assurance that it's really the best wood. Many well-know guitar makers would rather work with Indian rosewood—Friedrich, Fleta, and Romanillos to name a few.

I also like sides and backs make of walnut. The guitar I made for my master diploma was of walnut. Walnut is between sycamore and rosewood tonally. Walnut has the openness of sycamore and the dark richness and warmth of rosewood. It's somewhat more simple in tone though and doesn't have the richness of nuance and brilliance in the trebles that a good Indian rosewood has, but especially because of this openness it's a wonderful wood for concert guitars. There are big difference in quality of walnut though, especially regarding density and richness in the trebles.

How do you solve the problem of determining the price of your instruments?

For many luthiers it's difficult to get the price for their instruments that they deserve so that they can making a living from their craft. I think it's primarily a psychological problem. How can you explain otherwise that the price level for violins is at a completely different level even though the builder's experience and time spent on each instrument is comparable? Another problem for guitar makers is that all the costs of a one-man enterprise have to be carried by the instruments, and that's not particularly an economically favorable situation. I believe that a lot of guitar makers suffer a bit from this "starving artist" mentality and by doing so, trip themselves up. As far as prices for high quality instruments are concerned, it's not a matter of $250 more or less, because guitarists who are willing to pay top prices are usually looking for their "dream guitar" and for them it doesn't matter too much if the guitar costs $250 more or less. But for the guitar maker, $250 per instrument can make the difference between "to be or not to be." I think that the profession's increased exposure to the Internet will bring about a lot of changes. It used to be that a guitar maker knew relatively nothing about the guitars and prices of his colleague down the road, but now he has access to such information and can make comparisons. This will lead to stiffer competition, but I see it in the long run as a positive development, because it will be easier for guitar maker to receive apropriate recognition. As I said, I think it's mainly a psychological problem how a guitar maker values his own work, which brings us back that split situation between existence as an artist on the one hand, and the necessity of being a businessman on the other.
I think the „golden age" of the classical guitar is yet to come and we are right at it´s beginning. I am sure Torres would be proud of us.