

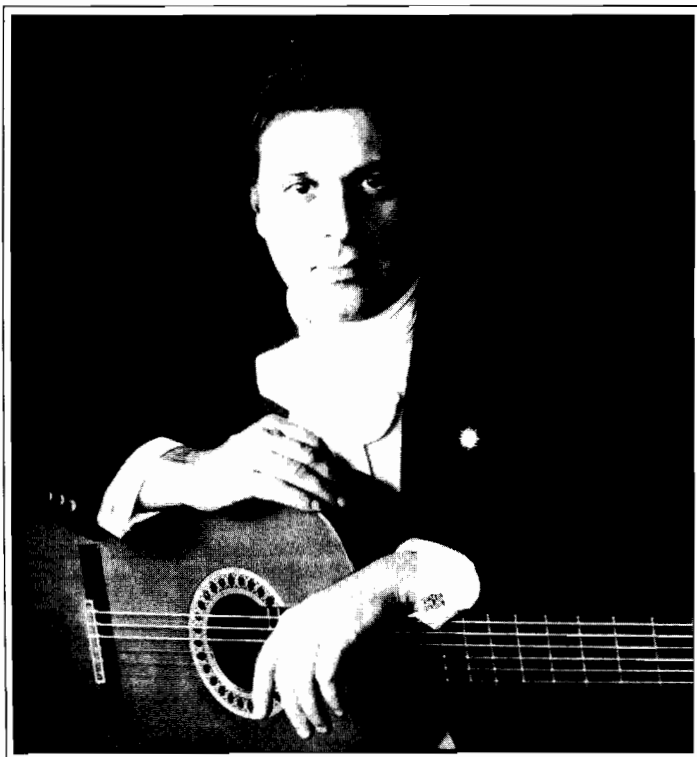
# ANGEL ROMERO

*In late August 1982 Angel Romero was in London in order to record a concerto. He telephoned me, and we met for dinner, after which we sat in the foyer of his hotel near Swiss Cottage and talked. What followed was not a formal interview, guided by prepared questions: but a spontaneous conversation which, rather than rearrange in logical order, I have preserved more or less as it unfolded, trying to preserve some of its informality. Angel Romero is a man of abundant good humor — he laughs a lot — but you can't write that down.*

*I don't remember you playing in London before, except for recording sessions.*

**Angel Romero:** Some time ago, maybe when you were out of town, we snuck into London and played a quartet concert in the Queen Elizabeth Hall — about twelve years ago. Maybe I dreamed it!

*There's hardly a time when one of you isn't here. I know. I love London. Although a Spaniard I feel extremely comfortable here; sometime I want to get a flat and live here.*



*Courtesy Classical Guitar Magazine*

*When did you leave Spain?*

In 1958. I'd just had my birthday. The day I began my sessions this time, recording the Giuliani Op.30, I had my 17th — no, I wish (on one leg) — I turned 36 on the 17th August. I'm two and a half years younger than Pepe.

*Did you begin the way Pepe began, playing flamenco?*

No I did not. I began singing flamenco, which didn't do me a bit of good on the guitar. We started basically from my father — when I was about six or seven years old I played a bit of flamenco, nevertheless not as

seriously as Pepe. I was more interested at the time in the classical pieces, so was Pepe. Of course Celin too — he taught us both when my father was out concertizing. He's the oldest — he's 42.

He's the one who doesn't seem to make solo records. He's made a couple of duo albums with Pepe, but he's been our elder brother, he feels very protective towards both of us and he has held his ground, waiting for both of us to make our moves; now he's going to do some solo recordings.

*There are a lot of Romeros on record...*

Too many! Maybe we should change our names.

*Your musical tastes and horizons — earlier on you were saying you don't like 'funny noise music'. Where do the 'funny noises' begin?*

Well you know, I take music like food. In essence it's food for my soul — without trying to be too romantic with my words. But, being absolutely honest, it's like food — if something doesn't taste good and doesn't titillate my taste-buds then I don't follow it. I figure I can eat only so much food in my lifetime, so I should enjoy it.

*Don't you find your taste changing?*

I do. I like carrots — I used to hate carrots. The other day I was absolutely shocked by Schoenberg; I never was fond of him. I heard a composition of his for orchestra and choir and it was thrilling, it gave me chills. Taste does change but I don't believe in rushing it; it's something that happens naturally, something that matures. Speaking about that — variety — what I have in front of me (*earlier in the evening I had given him a copy of my list of works — JD*) — do not take this out: I am sitting here with Mr Duarte in the lobby of my hotel and I just had my mouth drop to the floor, because I have known for some years you are a prolific writer, but my God! This brochure — it's unbelievable, like a wonderful menu. Out of this I'm going to get a lot of coverage because I certainly want to play it.

*I'm a bit older than you are (AR: Two years? JD: It depends when your birthday falls) but I hope I haven't stopped yet — haven't closed my mind and decided that music is here and non-music is the other side of that line.*

Well you are a creator. I don't limit things, talent limits me to being able so far to interpret within my 'degree of interpretation'. But I have so many ideas about life itself, I express them through music — but I wish I could write something. I never write, it's almost as though I'm afraid.

*Do you improvise?*

Yes, I do, but sometimes in a very frightening way; I improvise in the middle of a Bach fugue.

*When you forget?*

That's right. On the concert stage — and then it's very frightening, that's when the cold sweat comes out. But improvising for its own sake, that's a very difficult art and I have done this. When I have improvised on stage I have said nothing, I have sat down and started to improvise. Then, if the audience likes it I say: 'Ladies and gentlemen. I have just improvised on such and such a theme'. If they don't like it, if the applause is low, I make up a false name of a composer and say: 'Forgive me for having forgotten to tell you who wrote it before I played it'. If you promise to be good I'll never put your name on it — 'this was a sonata written by my dear friend John Duarte'. Right after we were talking about where does music stop and noise begins.

*The Romeros have been closely identified with Spanish and romantic music. When one moves 'backward' and plays Bach romantically it can be all wrong.*

You've never heard my Bach? It's good. It's very stolid (*said with a smile — JD*) — no it's not; I play Bach as I feel it — maybe you like it, maybe you don't. I don't believe in romanticizing music for the sake of being romantic.

*No, I'm sure it's something in your own nature.*

Exactly. You know who was extremely romantic in his playing of Bach? It was Casals.

*If you play baroque music in proper baroque style it is in a sense very romantic — not in the later sense but very expressive; expressiveness is what it was all about.*

Yes, right.

*Bach wasn't just a kind of musical mathematician.*

No, just listen to some of the sarabandes, they are unbelievable.

*How about moving forward ?*

I am looking forward very much to new music — I mean music that could have been around for quite a bit, but new to me.

*Come to think of it, you don't seem to play much of Ponce's music.*

No, but I recently played the Sonata with harpsichord with Igor (Kipnis). I've been quite busy with so much repertoire but I haven't yet played everything of my choice. I'm still in the middle. It's like being in an ocean, still getting to the other side: I'm still paddling. I haven't played any Villa-Lobos either.

*I can't remember you or Pepe playing any music from south of Florida.*

No. I used to play some Lauro, but there are so many fabulous things that it's hard to keep a foot on everything. But it isn't that I've discarded the idea. I absolutely will cover it.

*What guides your choice?*

When I was very little I loved Mozart, Sor and a lot of composers, but I took only a few and I'm still learning how to play them. I'll be learning until I die — I mean that sincerely. So, instead of being a jack-of-all-trades and good for nothing I want to analyze everything I'm doing. I've taken a lifetime — mine, so far — trying to play works like the Sor Variations (*Op.9 — JD*) and pieces that are so-called 'standards' and workhorses but have been very much mutilated. I'm not talking about technique, I'm talking about the lack of understanding of the flow of the melody, the sequence of phrasing, the harmonic ambience of the piece. If you think of a piece in that way, which I really do, it takes an endless amount of time — even though I can learn a piece and perform it after one week.

*What goes through your mind when you play?*

I'm trying to analyze myself while I'm playing, I'm creating a mood — a thought — but it's difficult because you're doing it with someone else's tools. When I'm playing I get almost a sense of embarrassment, like walking on ice. I'm of a positive nature but at the same time I don't want to do wrong. I don't mean to blow a scale. Because if I do, that's *nothing* — the next one will come out — the real sacrilege is the one of not having taken the time to analyze the piece, the lack of seeing what the piece is about, the negligence. That's what I would give the 'ticket' to —

like a policeman. There's a lot of people who will cover a lot of repertoire and they play anything from Bach to Lauro; a lot of people and even critics will say 'My God! This man has advanced into so many areas of music!'. But no, he hasn't. I don't like to bite more than I can chew.

*Some guitarists have the delusion there is a 'standard' repertory they are obliged to play in order to prove themselves. There are no 'musts' — you should play only what you really want to play.*

I want to play Villa-Lobos and I haven't really played Bach, though I want to. When I was very little I used to wait until my father and mother would leave the house so I could put on a record of the Fugue in C major on the organ. I used to put my ear right to the speaker and it would saturate me, make me vibrate. I believe technique on the guitar is a vehicle — rather, it's the track, musicality is the train. A good technique on the guitar is the track; I have laid all the track and I'm waiting for the train. I have a good track, a solid one, and I don't have technical problems; now I want to mature and have an equally solid train. You could be tempted, being in the public eye and concertizing, to fall into the thing of 'I know it all', but I don't know it all.

*So what you're really thinking of is the music.*

Yes, just the music. My ear, my soul knows when I'm not doing justice to it musically and then I don't enjoy it. If you can't do that — think only of the music — you don't have any right to play it.

*Your statement about not worrying if you blow a scale is important. There are two kinds of 'nerves': one is just the excitement, the flow of adrenaline like you had when your father first took you to a theme park, the hype, and that's good — a sign that you are toned up to the performance; the other is anxiety — when you blow the scale you know it is because you were always liable to do it, that you weren't really on top of the piece technically. It doesn't worry you because, as you said, you know it will come out next time, it was just a slip.*

If someone takes notice that I have blown a scale it's because I wasn't putting forth enough music to demand their attention — and for them not to notice it. Either they are not musical and don't listen, only to hear whether I make all the notes or not (that's juvenile) or it's someone who loves music and I've been worried about something else and I have not captivated their mind.

*I wrote an article in 'Guitar Player' magazine on coordination that seems to tie in with what we've been talking towards. It isn't a question of coordinating one hand with the other...*

No, you'd go crazy trying to do that!

*It's a matter of coordinating each hand separately, with the 'time spot', the instant when the metronome in your head ticks and says there should be a note; when you do this, one hand coordinates automatically with the other as a sort of by-product. Pepe (Romero) makes the same point — I referred to his view in my article — but he doesn't call it the 'time spot', he refers to the 'desire for the note'.*

Exactly. Often when I play, if you put a microphone to it, I'm singing. If I sing it then it comes out beautifully; if I play it and I don't sing it, it doesn't come out as well. Today in the recording of the Giuliani I was humming it to myself.

*Time and the eventual issue of the recording will tell whether Angel Romero will emerge as a guitaristic Glenn Gould, joining a 'club' to which Oscar Ghiglia already belongs. Time will tell, too, when and in what way his music-making will develop. Whatever the outcome it will have been reached by an amalgam of the subjective and the objective, for, beneath the boisterously humorous exterior lies a man who takes what he sees as his responsibilities very seriously. We too are waiting for his train to carry him along his well-prepared tracks.*

JD

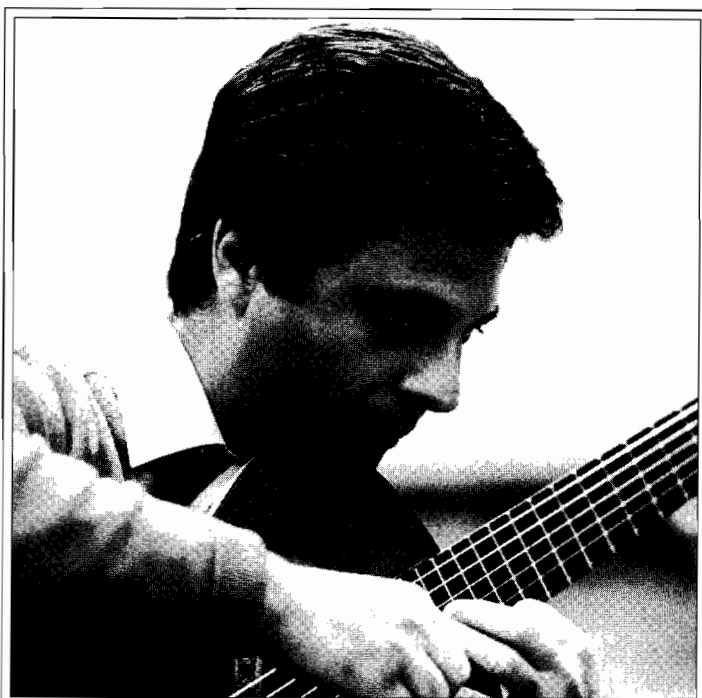


Photo by Reg Wilson