Foreword

When Sharon Isbin reaches for her guitar, closes her eyes, and begins to play, her music casts a spell. From the very first notes, her deep immersion in the music and her practiced and precise touch on the instrument allow her to cut right to the heart of the piece she's playing—and of the listeners themselves. In those moments, it doesn't matter who the composer is or what style or genre the piece is in; the communication is pure, visceral, and transporting.

In addition to hearing Isbin perform, I've had the good fortune to work closely with her in my role as editor of *Acoustic Guitar.* Her Master Class column, in which she answered readers' questions, appeared in our premier issue in the summer of 1990 and in every issue for the next four years. Although Isbin is a "classical" guitarist, it became clear right away that as a writer she cut through the categories of style and genre just as she does as a player. Many of the issues that she discussed are equally applicable to a steel-string strummer and to an aspiring classical player. The readers of *Acoustic Guitar* picked up on this quality in Isbin's work right away, and what ensued were four years of wide-ranging and thought-provoking exchanges that form the basis of this book.

Reading over the 50 collected questions and answers in the *Classical Guitar Answer Book,* I'm struck by how much Isbin's commitment and caring shine through. There's a lot of inspiring advice to be found in these pages—as well as plenty of calls for hard work and dedication—that make me want to open my guitar case and get on with the quest of becoming a better musician. Onward and upward . . .

—Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers

Introduction

Doesn't *everyone* play the guitar? Whether it's folk, country, bluegrass, Latin, jazz, rock, or classical, it seems that just about everybody strums, picks, or plucks a little. There are more than 15 million guitar players in the United States alone. The guitar is the most commonly owned instrument in America; it adorns the richest and the poorest of households, standing as a proud symbol of culture that transcends all class boundaries.

Why is the guitar so popular? It is an ideal instrument of self-expression, and unlike most other instruments, it sounds complete without any accompaniment. Cradled in your lap, the guitar becomes an extension of your physical being and soul. Its gentle tone offers a soothing refuge from the cacophony of modern life, and you can take it anywhere. The guitar also brings people together. As a partner in chamber music, its harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic strengths provide a beautiful complement to voice and other instruments.

Whether you play guitar as a hobby or professionally, the more you know, the better you become, and the more joy music can bring to your life. Success requires not only a love of music, but dedication and discipline. Everyone has at least some degree of talent, and the keys to realizing that talent are knowledge and hard work. If you wish to achieve your full potential, you must learn as much as possible about technique, practice skills, interpretation, memorization, performance psychology, and music in general. As you develop your skills, you'll gain the confidence and ability to take on new challenges and reach higher goals.

Being a great player, however, is about much more than just technique. You also must have something special and compelling to say. Though artistic personality can't be taught, you can cultivate the qualities that allow it to flourish: curiosity, a sense of adventure, creativity, sensitivity, and integrity. A skillful and intelligent guiding hand is important early on, as is wisdom and care in advanced study. One must never stop being a student and must always remain open to learning from the infinite world of life's experiences.

In the pages that follow, I take great pleasure in sharing some of the knowledge, insight, and secrets I've uncovered in more than 30 years of performing and teaching. May this book open new doors of potential and understanding, and challenge and inspire you to seek ever higher levels of music making.

—Sharon Isbin