

Guitarist

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Stephen Kakos



photo credit: Robert Owen

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MINNESOTA GUITAR SOCIETY MISSION STATEMENT

To promote the guitar, in all its stylistic and cultural diversity, through our newsletter and through our sponsorship of public forums, concerts, and workshops.
To commission new music and to aid in its promotion, publication, and recording.
To serve as an educational and social link between amateur and professional guitarists and the community.
To promote and help create opportunities for Minnesota guitarists and players of related instruments.

Society News & Notes

Thank You...

...to **Paul Hintz** for his tenure as newsletter editor, and for all the fine work he did during the production and post production of this newsletter.

Welcome...

...to **Jerry Kosak** who begins his tenure as newsletter editor. His job description also includes production and post production work. Anyone who would like to lend him a hand is more than welcome to do so. Feel free to contact Jerry at <jerrykosak@qwest.net>

2003—2004 Sundin Hall concert series

Acoustic Guitarathon

Saturday, September 20th

Santa Fe Guitar Quartet

Saturday, October 25th

Ana Vidovic

Saturday, November 15th

Jazz Guitarathon

Friday, December 5th

Fingerstyle or Jazz player TBA

Saturday, January, 24th

Dimitri Illarionov

Saturday, February 21st

Paul Galbraith

Friday, March 19th

Thursday, March 18th, masterclass 7:00-9:30

Carlos Perez

Friday, May 7th

Saturday, May 8th, masterclass
(time TBA)

Classical Guitarathon

Saturday, May 22nd

Volunteer Opportunities

We need some help. Time commitments are minimal. Rewards are great. Here's what/how:

Newsletter. We need one person to help with mailing and another to help with distribution.

Refreshments. We need one person to help bring and set up refreshments for Sundin Hall concerts next year.

Fundraising. We need two people to help us diversify our sources of support.

Publicity. We need two people to help us build our audience by getting the word out about our concerts.

call 612-677-1151 to help

Classifieds are on page 8.
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Directions to Sundin Hall on the Hamline University campus

From I-94, head north on Snelling Avenue in St. Paul, past University Avenue to Hewitt Avenue. Turn right, the Hall is on your left a half-block east of Snelling. Free parking is available one block past the hall, in lots off Hewitt (on your right) or off Pascal (1 block north).

Welcome to *Kakos Country*

An interview w/ classical guitar maker Stephen Kakos

by Robert Owen

This past March while lying on a sunny beach in Playa del Carmen, Mexico I found myself thinking about guitars – not just any guitars, but fine classical guitars made by my friend Stephen Kakos. Stephen began making guitars in the mid 70's after abandoning plans for graduate school. Nearly 30 years and over 200 guitars later, Stephen's considerable talents at guitar making are in full bloom. I contacted Stephen by e-mail for this interview.

RO: How did you learn to build classical guitars?

SK: I'm mostly self-taught. I read what I could find about guitar making and met many luthiers. I am good working with my hands and I seem to have an "eye" for detail and an "ear" for tone. Therefore, my first instruments were successful. The first guitar I made was built as a diversion from academia. I also wanted to learn to play guitar, so I decided to build a guitar for myself. This guitar, a classical, grabbed me. The work was challenging and satisfying. It was like a puzzle. Balancing all the variables to produce a fine instrument appealed to my mind. The physical work involved appealed to my senses. My feeling of satisfaction was completed when a player purchased the guitar to use as a tool for making music.

RO: What guitar builders did you encounter early in your career?

SK: I first met violin-maker John Wons in Madison, he didn't so much teach me anything, but by not tossing me out of his shop, he encouraged me to continue. I imposed myself on the likes of Rose Augustine, fellow guitar makers Bozo Podunavak and Robert Ruck as well as Jim Sherry, a wood supplier and importer of Ramirez guitars. No one really sat down and instructed me, rather, they affirmed what I was doing. I did learn from the builders whose instruments I've examined and those I've read about. It's very pleasurable rummaging around inside another luthier's guitar trying to figuring out how he has solved the puzzle.

RO: How have guitarists' opinions of your guitars influenced you?

SK: That is difficult to answer definitively. It's sometimes very difficult to get an opinion from a player other than they like it or they don't. And if they don't they will usually just be polite. Also different players like different things. But over the years I've pieced together what I can. There are some players who have been very picky about certain details in action or feel, and in trying to satisfy them I've developed certain qualities in my guitars. In the end you really have to satisfy yourself.

RO: I understand that Pepe Romero had one of your guitars for a while...

SK: Yes he did. Every once in a great while I "force" myself on a well-known player. Sometimes it works out. I showed him a silver fir guitar at a master class and he liked it. He took it and had it for a while. He sent it back and

asked for a cedar instrument, which I have to admit I never built.

RO: Are your new instruments sold through any guitar dealers?

SK: Not right now, but I have sold through dealers in the past. Recently, I've been selling directly from the shop, and have not had a surplus. I'm not inclined to project myself upon the "market." I don't advertise. I figure if the instruments are good they will sell themselves.

RO: One distinguishing feature of your guitars is the bridge design. What influence on the sound does it have?

SK: It is difficult, sometimes, to pinpoint exactly the effect a particular element in an instruments design will have. In the case of the bridge, the alteration of the back edge was a thought I had played with for over a year. The back edge of my bridge is slightly curved and therefore perpendicular to the fan bracing beneath. My reasoning is that this bridge shape, with reduced mass at the ends, will more efficiently radiate the vibrations to the large area of the soundboard.

RO: What have you learned from hearing your guitars, as well as other guitars, played in Sundin Hall?

SK: There is a different sound; there are different requirements of an instrument in a large space. What may sound good in a living room may not make it in a hall. Usually the first half of a concert for me is spent listening to the instrument. I largely miss the music! An interesting phenomenon is the difference in the sound of various guitars tends to disappear after a few minutes of listening. The ear adapts and concentrates on the relative sound changes of the moment.

RO: Are you saying that the basic sound of a guitar is less important than it's ability to modulate sound?

SK: They are both essential. One of the elements of a guitar's quality is its ability to modulate sound. Other elements are volume, sustain, timbre and all sorts of little intangibles that make up the guitar's character. Those intangibles, I believe, are actually the imperfections in the sound generating system. If it were a perfect system, say a solid body electric guitar generating a sine wave or whatever waveform you chose, it would be consistent, pretty by design, all the volume and sustain you want but ultimately I think not a very satisfying, or musical, sound. The room acoustics can add another element into the equation.

RO: For you, what is a good guitar? What characteristics does it have to have?

SK: I used to like a guitar that had some great and outstanding characteristics, perhaps a quirky guitar. Now I prefer something more reliable, predictable. There has to be adequate volume and dynamic range, a quick response, a good return on the energy investment and color. A good guitar must have character

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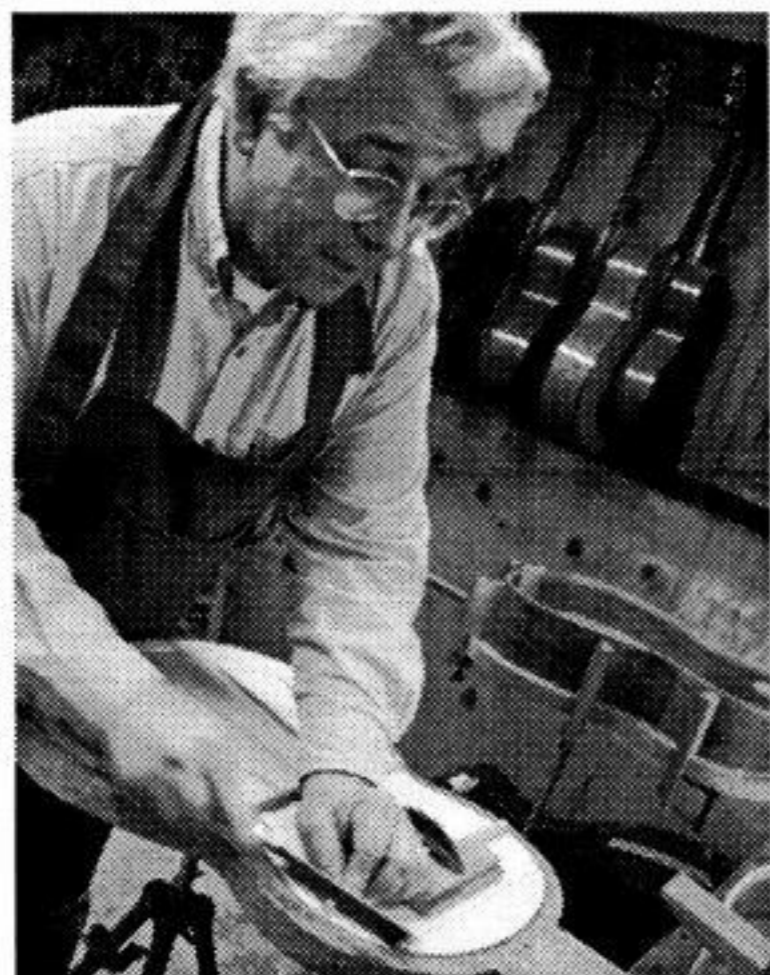
continued from page 3

and an ability to express a variety of tone colors and therefore emotion. I also work for a good bass sustain.

RO: What about a great guitar? Can you describe how you can tell if you've really hit the mark?

SK: There is an added bit of energy, response, all the good qualities in spades. It is sometimes not really obvious. The stringing of a new guitar for the first time is a bit of a drama. There is an anticipation born of the intent and labor, the tactile involvement in the woods, the long finishing process, touching, taping and listening. Sometimes a guitar will exhibit that energy initially and then it will fade. Perhaps wood was not thick enough in this one spot. Another instrument may be lackluster initially, but after a few days come into its own. The "greatness" is in there, hiding, I just have to find it. And then there is the interaction with the player. That cannot be discounted.

RO: I heard that you kept the first guitar you made. Have there been other special ones you have been unable to part with?



Kakos at work in his shop

SK: And I only have three fourths of that guitar. Somehow I lost its soundboard! I don't have any others. The completion of the instrument is someone actually buying it, and making music on it.

RO: How experimental are you? What can you learn from guitar to guitar?

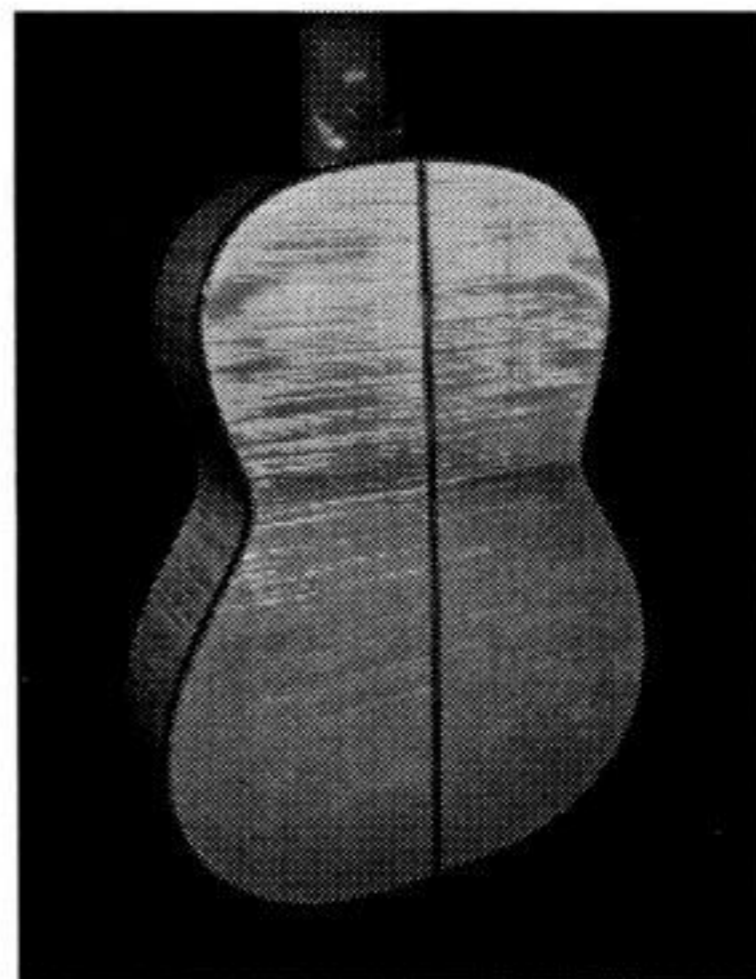
SK: Experimentation is always taking place to some extent. We find our mode of expression and work within it. I like fairly traditional materials and forms. I try to avoid synthetics for aesthetic and health reasons. Repetition is also important to test your results. You learn everything from guitar to guitar, your mistakes, and your successes. Sometimes the learning can come years later when a guitar returns to the shop for repair. I may see a way that I can make an alteration that, with the original configuration, improves things greatly. I will then go back to my notes and study the guitar and others built at that time and adjust my thinking.

RO: Why do you usually build guitars in pairs?

SK: Pairs seem to be an efficient use of time and space for me. I have tools, jigs and space enough for two at a time. Experiments can yield results quickly; I can keep track of the variables in two guitars and payday is not too far off.

RO: What woods do you prefer for sides and back?

SK: Personally, I would like to use more varieties of wood. I get a secret pleasure in making a silk purse out of a sow's ear. I would appreciate the sound of a guitar of even the most humble materials. However, in terms of more acceptable materials I use mostly Indian or Honduran Rosewood. Indian Rosewood is of very high quality, sustainably produced and processed in the country of origin and is very reliable. Honduran Rosewood is harder and looks a bit like Brazilian Rosewood. It is more difficult to work but finishes well. I like it quite a lot. There are many acceptable woods that can be used for the guitar. Unfortunately, because of its endangered species status, Brazilian Rosewood is not one of them.



back detail of a completed Kakos

RO: Do you find the wood used for the sides and back has much influence on the sound?

SK: Yes the body woods do have an effect on the sound, but not nearly as much as the soundboard wood and its design. There are subtle differences in sound depending on the density of the back and sides. There are some wonderful Maple guitars out there, and that wood is wildly different in density and feel from Rosewood.

RO: Do you take on special projects other than your usual 6-string guitars?

SK: Yes, I have made 8-string guitars of various configurations, larger and smaller guitars, an 18th century guitar, and a vihuela.

RO: At what price do your guitars start?

SK: My prices are competitive with those of other guitar makers; call for details.

Stephen Kakos lives in Mound, MN and can be reached at 952-472-4732 or email at <KakosG@aol.com>

Local Events

Paul Hintz, Solo 7-string jazz guitar

Sun July 6, 10 AM to noon, Dunn Bros on Grand Ave., St. Paul
Sun July 20, 10 AM to noon, Dunn Bros on Grand Ave., St. Paul
Sun Aug 3, 10 AM to noon, Dunn Bros on Grand Ave., St. Paul
Sun Aug 17, 10 AM to noon, Dunn Bros on Grand Ave., St. Paul

Bob Ockenden with

Milwaukee jazz guitar master **Jack Grassel**,
Friday July 11. Coffee Creek Cafe and Wine Bar. Hwy 7 and Cty
Rd 73, Minnetonka. 8-11 PM.

David Singley, performing with the jazz quartet **Zona**, Sunday,
July 20, 5:30 PM., Peavey Plaza, downtown Minneapolis.

Curtis & Loretta

Sat, July 19 Shakopee, MN
MURPHY'S LANDING 2187 E Hwy 101
952-445-6901 1 PM – 4 PM

Fri, July 25 Hastings, MN
MINNESOTA FOLK FESTIVAL STAGE
at Antique Power Show 2003
Little Log House Showgrounds
6 Miles South of Hastings
We're on-stage Friday from noon till 1:00 PM
info at 651-292-4900 or
<http://www.minnesotafolkfestival.org/antique.html>

Sat, July 26 Owatonna, MN
FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS
Central Park, downtown,
time TBA

Aug 2, 3 Deer River, MN (west of Grand Rapids)
WHITE OAK RENDEZVOUS
218-246-9393

Sun, Aug 3 Remer, MN
CITY PARK, State Hwy 200
Info: 218-566-2695
7:00 PM

Sun, Aug 10 St. Louis Park, MN
VETERAN'S MEMORIAL AMPHITHEATER IN WOLFE PARK
4:00 PM
Info: 952-924-2540 or www.stlouispark.org

Aug 23-24 LaCrosse, WI
GREAT RIVER FOLK FESTIVAL
University of Wisconsin at LaCrosse
608-784-3033 or
www.viterbo.edu/personalpages/faculty/RRuppel/Fest.html

Sat, Aug 30 Shakopee, MN
MURPHY'S LANDING
2187 E Hwy 101
952-445-6901
1 PM– 4 PM

Phil Heywood

Friday, July 18 Ginkgo Coffee House, 8-11 PM
721 Snelling Ave. N., St. Paul, MN 651-645-2647

Robert Everest

Ongoing: Solo performance (Latin American and Mediterranean
guitar and song) at Maria's Café every Sat. and Sun. for brunch -
11:30 AM to 1:30 PM. 1113 E. Franklin Ave. 612-870-9842.

With 6-piece band **Beira Mar Brasil**: The Times Bar and Café,
July 4th, 9:30 PM to 12:30 AM 201 E. Hennepin Ave. 612-618-
8098

With **Beira Mar Brasil**: The Dinkytown, July 16th, 9:30 PM to
12:30 AM. 412 1/2 14th Ave. SE. 612-362-0427

With Bossa Nova group **Trio da viola**: Aug. 7th, Music in the
Garden Series at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum 7 – 8 PM.
952-443-1400.

Jerry Kosak – Solo Finger Style, Blues, and Slide
Fri., July 11: The Coffee Grounds, 1579 Hamline Ave. N.,
Falcon Heights, 8-10 PM.

Sun., July 13: Phalen Lake Amphitheater, St. Paul
1:30-3:00 PM.

Sun., July 20: AcousticFest, Manitowac, WI, 3:15 PM.

Tue., Aug. 5: Normandale Lake Band Shell, 84th St. between
Normandale Blvd. and Chalet Rd., Bloomington, 7-9 PM.

Sat., Aug. 16: Borton Volvo Block Party, 54th/Lyndale Mpls., 5
PM.

Thur., Aug. 28: Dunn on Grand, St. Paul, 8:30-10:30 PM.

Pavel Jany

Every Wednesday 8:00-11:00 PM, **Selmara Abreu** with
Ticket To Brasil
Babalu Restaurant, 800 Washington Ave. N., Mpls.
Fri., July 11, Sat., July 26 and Sat. July 9, 8:00-11:00 PM

Ticket To Brasil: La Bodega, 3001 Lyndale Ave. S., Mpls.
Fri., July 8, 7:00-9:30 PM

Como Lake Pavilion, St. Paul
Evening of bossa nova and Brazilian jazz with **Ticket To Brasil**
sextet, featuring vocalist **Selmara Abreu**.
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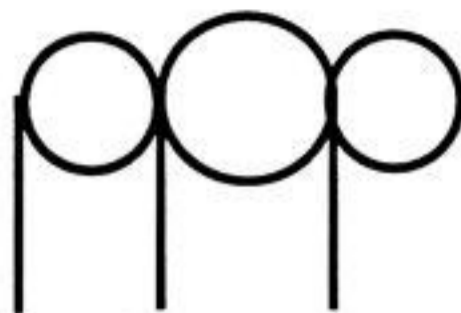
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