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## MARILYNN MAIR

[Read first Marilynn Mair CGOW session](#) - July 20, 2003



Back when we first started tossing around ideas for guests to represent the mandolin community on this forum I suggested to Glenn that Marilynn Mair would be an outstanding choice, based on her consistent standard of excellence in performance and her untiring support of Our Favorite Instrument I'm delighted that her time in the CGOW spotlight is here, and encourage all who are interested in contemporary mandolin music in America to send in their questions.

Concert performer, recording artist, professor of music, mother of two musically talented kids, director of America's pre-eminent summer school for

mandolin and guitar—any one or two of these can be a full-time job, but Marilynn manages to do them all. Here, from her Web site (<http://www.marilynnmair.com>) are some excerpts from her biography:

"Ms. Mair began her mandolin studies with Hibbard Perry in Providence, Rhode Island, and continued them in Vienna with Professor Vincenz Hladky, of the Vienna Conservatory. She also studied in Germany with mandolinist, Takashi Ochi, and with Sigfried Behrend, guitarist and director of the German Mandolin Orchestra. As a performer, Ms Mair has continued to develop mandolin technique and repertoire, and has commissioned, recorded, and performed works by many important contemporary composers, including Ernst Krenek, Guido Santorsola, Evan Ziporyn, Daniel Pinkham, Ann Carr Boyd, Sigfried Behrend, David Jaffe, and others.

Best known for her performances and recordings of chamber music, Ms. Mair has also, in recent years, become increasingly involved in the field of Brazilian music, performing and recording "choro," an early-20th-century style of Brazilian jazz that features mandolin. She has researched choro extensively, and her articles on its history and music, published in Mandolin Quarterly and elsewhere, are some of the most complete available in English.

In addition to her solo career, Ms. Mair directs and performs in a number of chamber groups. She founded and directs "Enigmatica," a mandolin octet specializing in Baroque, Brazilian, and contemporary music. She also performs and records with the eclectic "World Caf  Quartet." Ms. Mair is the Artistic Director of the American Mandolin & Guitar Orchestra, a group whose membership spans North America. She performs in a number of duos with different musicians, including Brazilian pianist Luiz Simas, and guitarists Sasha Lisnichuk, Robert

MARILYNN MAIR  
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Paul Sullivan, and Andrew Mah.

Ms. Mair is actively involved in continuing and developing the American classical mandolin tradition. She directs the annual American Mandolin & Guitar Summer School, a national forum for mandolin and guitar instruction, now in its 18th year. She is also a regular columnist for "Mandolin Magazine," and "Mandolin Quarterly," writing on mandolin technique and history, and reviewing CDs.

Ms. Mair is a Professor of Music at Roger Williams University, in Bristol, Rhode Island."

-- Max McCullough

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**Q1**

Q - I hate to keep beating this horse but your hand position has me stumped. Your description the last time around sounds to me like your hand and arm are floating 2-3 inches above the strings and nothing is anchored. The description in the "William Place" book appears to support my understanding.

I tried to play allowing my arm to float like that and cannot seem to get the hang of it. First, do I understand the arm/hand position correctly?

A - Well, better to beat the horse than the mandolin, I guess... Y'all don't cut a girl the slightest slack here at Comando! It's been 4 months and you're back to the tough questions from the get-go. How about a couple of ditzy questions like "what's your favorite color and the astrological sign of your favorite composer," just to get the typing limbered up? Nope-- the hardcores are back to the thorny issues of right-hand technique!

Classical mandolinists don't really float our right arms, although I do like the angelic analogy. Classical mandolinists play mandolins w/ raised pickguards. If you have a vintage instrument that previously belonged to a bluegrass player, yours may be missing. If I was a mandolin-demo video model, I'd sit with my right arm hanging straight down from the shoulder. Then, I'd raise my hand up, bending my arm at the elbow, keeping the elbow in place, to slightly more than a right angle. Then, keeping my elbow in place, I'd swing my hand down to the face of the mandolin, curl the fingers in lightly, put a pick between my thumb and index finger, and, as I pick down and up, drag my pinkie on the pickguard. (Yes, you do need a pickguard, otherwise your pinkie will be stretching too far to reach the mandolin face and tense up your hand too much). You don't plant your pinkie, just brush it across the surface of the pickguard. It'll act as a sort of fulcrum to allow you to move from one string to the next or judge your depth and keep it consistent, especially on the tremolo.

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**Q2**

Q - What advantage does this position provide over the typical bluegrass method of letting the palm brush the strings behind the bridge?

A - The main advantage is being able to develop a tremolo that can go on into infinity and modulate tone and volume expressively and with precision. If tremolo isn't an issue for you, then really any right hand position that doesn't lock your wrist or plant your hand on the mandolin face will work.

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**Q3**

Q - If one decides to switch picking styles, do you have a feel for how long it takes to get back to the current comfort level using the classical position?

A - My advice is: don't switch cold turkey. Have a set of exercises that you practice every day

for a half hour, minimum, using the new technique. When you play tunes you already know, don't worry about it, just play. At some point, if the new technique is useful to you, it will begin to insinuate itself beyond the exercises. You should remember that there are no points given in mando-heaven for discarding a workable technique and martyring yourself to one that is deemed "more correct". Don't change your technique unless your old technique is getting in your way, or you're hurting your arm with too much tension, or you are frustrated with your tremolo, or you want to expand your range of expression. I watch other players all the time to see how they are producing their sound. Sometimes it's to help them improve or vary their sound. Sometimes it's to get an idea for a new technique for my own sound arsenal. Sometimes, as I did with Brazilian music, it's to find a new musical voice to speak with. Sound is cool fun to play around with!

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**Q4**

Q - I've been working on your recent columns in mando mag about tremolo and right hand technique. I've been working on my tremolo for about 2 years now, and its gotten a lot smoother, but not really faster. Is this something that will come with time? Rather a frustrating process. I usually work one piece until the next issue comes out.

A - There are a few ways to approach making your tremolo faster. Here are some things you might try. The point of "speeding up" one's tremolo is actually to increase the density of notes-per-second in a given timespan. Think of it like pixels-- the greater the density, the more precise and subtle your musical shading will be. A faster tremolo will give you more to work with in shaping your tone. So a simple, but surprisingly little-used method of speeding up your tremolo and increasing your note density is to actually slow down the tempo of the piece you are tremoloing. If the tempo is slower, you'll need to add more down-up strokes to fill up the interval of a half note. By increasing the number of notes per beat you'll be building up your tremolo stamina, and giving your wrist practice in staying relaxed for a longer time period. Don't worry if the tempo is so slow at first that it makes you want to scream. As you keep this up, your "motor memory" will inevitably begin to speed you up. If you keep the number of down-ups per beat the same, then your "motor memory" will automatically cause you to increase the density of your tremolo as your tempo speeds up. For this reason too, you should be sure, when you are working on your tremolo, that you never play a tremolo w/ down-ups at 16th-note speed. Be sure you're picking a tremolo note at least at 32nd-note speed-- no matter how slow this means you have to take the tempo. And, yes, it does take time.

But once you have a smooth tremolo it will last a lifetime.

Another technique you can try is to work on doubling your hand speed for a short exercise-- sort of like mixing sprints into a distance workout. Play a comfortable 16th-note down-up for 4 quarter-note beats, and then double your hand speed to 32nd-notes for 2 beats, and then return to 16th notes for 4 beats. Keep the alteration up for a specific time -- maybe a minute. If you can't double your hand speed, then slow down your 16th notes until you can. Get that metronome speed, and work to increase it slowly.

I have to state very emphatically here that you are not to do this to the point of pain, because it can be easily abused and injure you. and you are not to increase your metronome speed quickly-- do it in small increments and be sure you are comfortable at one speed before you move it up a notch faster. Again, "motor memory" will eventually do your work for you.

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**Q5**

Q - Would it be possible for you to post some sound clips of the pieces in your article? I'm not sure if I'm playing them correctly. I'm having trouble with the whole tied-vs-slurred notes, how are they different? Also, is it correct to tremolo a half note that is neither tied nor slurred to another note? My SOP is to tremolo anything longer than a 1/4 note.

A - Posting sound clips-- sounds like a good project for the summer, if I can find some techno-whiz to help me. Volunteers? A "tied note" is one note of a value that can't be written using only one note. An example would be a 2-and-a-half beat note. In that case a half note and an 8th note of the same pitch are "tied" together, and are played as one note. "Slurs" are the same markings, but are used to connect a number of notes of different pitch that

belong together in the same musical gesture or "phrase". As a general rule of thumb-- and certainly in the exercises I write in "Mandolin Magazine"-- all the notes under a slur are connected together, and so, if tremolo is being used in the piece it should be unbroken under the slur and break between slurs. Certainly single notes can sometimes be tremoloed. It's a matter of determining the sound you want for the note, and how it fits with the notes or phrases on either side of it. Some players use a default setting of playing quarter notes with down strokes, using down-up strokes for notes of smaller value, and tremolo for notes of larger value. Start out this way, but be aware that the tremolo is a technique that draws alot of attention, and so it shouldn't be used for an unimportant note, even a long unimportant note. Sorry, but in the end there really is no shortcut for listening, plotting and planning the course of your piece. Two pieces of similar note-values and tempos could use a completely different application of tremolo depending on the character of the pieces and of the performer. It's all part of the artistry of the mandolin.

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**Q6**

Q - I've just been getting into classical mandolin, mostly because my sight reading wasn't up to par, but its getting better. Lots of fun!!!

A - Welcome, and have no fear. Classical mandolin is the coolest-- and so are you for jumping into its exotic temptations.

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**Q7**

Q - I think I have all your CDs now, and since I only recently bought them, I'm still digesting them. I think my current favorite is The Mandolin in the 18th Century. The Beethoven works are incredible, particularly the Adagio in Eb, and I like the Hummel piece a lot, also. I'd be interested in hearing your reflections on the artistic merits of these pieces and on the experience of playing them.

A - First of all, you are a prince among men for buying all my CDs Note to Comandos: My website CD catalogue could sure use a few other princes, princesses, or even a couple of frogs! "18th Century" is my current favorite too, mainly because it is the new child. It is also the fulfillment of a long-held promise to myself to do a good-sounding modern recording of these lovely original mandolin pieces in an authentic context, but with a sound quality that would have broad appeal. The project came together last winter when I got a grant from my university (I am a Professor of Music at Roger Williams University in Bristol, RI) to put on a concert for mandolin w/ string quartet and piano in the university's performing arts series. I called up some friends and my producer, and we gave the concert and recorded the basic tracks all in the same week. I think we mandolinists are really lucky to have 4 pieces written for us by Beethoven, and they should be played. !

Yes, he was a young man at the time and wrote the pieces for friends and patrons, but there's no hiding genius. The works are in the easy-going galante style of social music in the late 18th century and are easy to like.

The Hummel sonata for piano and mandolin is a more virtuosic work-- Hummel was the hot pianist of his day-- and the piece really shows the debt he owes to his teacher, Mozart. What I particularly like in these works is that both composers analyze solutions to the inequalities of sound volume between the two instruments, and write the music so the mandolin "sounds through" the piano parts. Pianists particularly love the Hummel it's so flashy for them-- and I think it's really great for mandolin as well! My pianist, Nancy Nicholson, is incredible to work with and we really agreed on how to approach the issues of tempo, rubato and balance. The pieces are incredible demanding precision-wise for both players-- lots of ornaments, sequences and other repeating patterns of fast notes-- so we groaned a lot to each other about the unforgiving nature of the music, coming from Brazilian music (my last recording) and French Impressionist music (her forte).

And for all the work, the nature of the music has to be respected, so it all has to sound like a lot of sweet fun. Ultimately, we liked the pieces and the challenges were cool, so we did the work and are really happy with the results.

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**Q8**

Q - I'm also curious as to how much material is available for the mandolin from this general time period? Is there a catalog of such works? Does your CD showcase most of the canon, or does it only scratch the surface? I'm particularly interested in pieces of this period written for mandocello. Do you know of any such? Also, do you know of any English composers of the 18th or 19th centuries who wrote for our instrument?

A - There are tons of pieces, but most were not published and they are found in manuscript form in libraries in Europe. Many of them are social music written by virtuoso mandolinists. I have stacks of them-- most classical players do. Lots of the pieces from the 17th century are written for mandolin and "basso continuo." B.C. is a music shorthand system where the bass line is written out w/ some numbers attached to let the player know what chord belongs w/ the bass.

There is a duo in Italy that plays a lot of these pieces on mandolin and mandoello. The lines are contrapuntal so it works well. To find these pieces is somewhat difficult. Paul Sparks and James Tyler wrote a book about early mandolin. I'm at work now, so I don't have the exact title. I'm pretty sure you can find it in the Plucked String catalogue online. Norman also carries some of these pieces that are discovered and arranged by performers/scholars and published in Europe.

**Q9**

Q - Any thoughts on playing works written for the mandolin versus adapting works written for other instruments? Do Bach's sonatas and partitas translate easily for mandolin, for example, or are there "issues"? Are there important compromises or decisions that have to be made?

A - I always transcribe. That way I can find a repertoire that suits me exactly. I've gotten pretty good at it through the years. The unaccompanied Bach are great, although some of the more chordal movements rely heavily on the bow. I use specific movements as teaching pieces. I've never performed them, because I don't want to play a piece unless I'm convinced that my view into a piece gives a new perspective. I don't want to be a 2nd-rate violin. It's fun to play the Brandenburg concertos on mandolins, as I've done w/ my octet Enigmatica but for a recording I want a piece that I can play so folks will say "ah hahah or "ahahhhh..." or in some other way appreciate what I have done. The music has to come first. I usually start w/ a piece I can "hear" on mandolin.

**Q10**

Q - Metro is also an incredible CD, and I love Swimming in Light! I have ZU playing now! (Your thoughts on Grisman and Statman Mandolin> Abstractions?) I like them all. Make more music!

A - Thanks-- "Metro" is really fun-- I write tunes and play accordion and play w/ my kids-- how's that for confounding my classical fan-base? "Swimming in Light" ("Nadandom Luz") is a CD that still rocks my world.

The Brazilian music and the cool musicians saved me at a very difficult point in my life. Grisman and Statman are incredibly interesting musicians-- I like everything they do! I have lots more CDs on my mind-- the next one to come out is a CD w/ Enigmatica that should be out by summer. Then there's the new-American CD w/ guitar, and the follow-up Brazilian CD (maybe w/ book) and the Romantic-era bittersweet CD... Planning and recording a new CD is one of my favorite highs, but it takes tremendous work and a certain amount of financial backing. But there will be more-- you can bank on it!

**Q11**

Q - During your last visit as CGOW, you spoke a lot about your technique. You mentioned the way you hold the pick, as if you were holding an eggshell with your forefinger curled and parallel to your thumb. My questions are: Do you REALLY keep your index finger parallel; or

do you let it slip a little for support as well as flexibility?

A - I suppose some slippage does occur-- the hand relaxes and may open slightly. Certainly don't be so precise as to tense up your right hand.

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**Q12**

Q - How do you keep the pick from slipping sideways? This happens to me a lot and I find that letting my index finger drop helps.

A - Your sweat gets good. My pick will stick to my index finger even upside down, except in the coldest (driest) weather. So wait, or try climbers chalk.

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**Q13**

Q - In regard to your strokes, do you play up-down-up-down? Or, when crossing strings, do you play down on the first note of a new string?

A - I usually alternate, starting with a down stroke. I alternate across strings too-- I don't automatically use a down stroke when moving to a new string. Sometimes I'll reverse my picking if it's more logical for cross-string picking. For instance, if I was playing down A-G-F-E on the E-string, with an open A string between each note, I'd probably play an up-stroke on the E-string notes, because that would move my pick in the direction of the A-string for the next open-A note. A down-stroke on the open-A would get me over to the E string for my next up-stroke note (the G, etc.).

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**Q14**

Q - Coming from a background of playing other kinds of music, I've tried to learn some Bach sonatas on the mandolin--to help my reading, for the challenge, and to explore the genre. I'm not well-schooled in listening to classical music, esp. the sonata form, and I wanted to learn it from the page in order to concentrate on developing my reading rather than my ear.

A friend of mine, who plays old-time and Celtic fiddle but had spent some time playing in a community orchestra, had once told me that there was a very interpretive way one could play a sonata, speeding up and slowing down the tempo as one would vary dynamics. The only times I've heard these sonatas played have been by non-classical players on non-violin instruments: Bela Fleck on his SOLO BANJO WORKS CD and Chris Thile backstage at the Wings & Strings Festival. In both cases, their playing of the sonatas was both fast [big surprise ] and with metronomically steady tempo throughout. My question is: Is there truly a range of liberties that a player can take with tempo within a piece and still be stylistically valid?

A - Absolutely! Any violinist or cellist playing the unaccompanied Bach works for their instruments is going to play w/ rubato. Most classical guitarists worth their salt will too. Rubato is the art of allowing a particular beat to be pulled back or pushed ahead slightly, while maintaining the integrity of the "big beat". Rubato gives a piece room to breathe, and personalizes a performance. There is a danger in rubato, however, because it can be misused. It doesn't give free license to a performer to dispense w/ tempo, and, to be convincing, it need to convey an indisputable artistic vision. It can't be copied; it can't be faked; it belongs uniquely to a performer, and, actually, to a performance. I've heard students play the biggest mess of out-of-time notes as Bach on their mandolin or guitar and insist that they are correct in their interpretation because that's the way their favorite famous recording artist played it.

Of course they're wrong. The famous artist never lost track of the big beat no mater how they bent it.

The student just hasn't groked the nuance of the performance. Rubato is part of a mature and historically-informed approach to Baroque music. But, of course, you can't do it until you're ready, and even then, it's possible take it too far for some folks' taste. Start your Bach without rubato. If you can't play it metronomically then you have no business introducing

rubato anyway. Bach wrote 85% of what he had to say into his notes. Concentrate on getting that first.

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**Q15**

Q - I downloaded the sheet music you put on your website. Thanks for making that available. I am learning Iara which is a gorgeous piece and accessible for a beginner such as me. I noticed, however, that when you play the piece, you incorporate a kind of swing. Could you say something about that? How does it differ from swing in other forms of music?

A - You're welcome-- isn't it a beautiful piece! I play the piece using some rubato (I described that in the last post) and also some rhythmic variation. I hold some of the slow notes a tad longer, to give a light floaty nostalgic feel, and then rush the quick note runs a little to give a giddy excited quality. Yes, I do think the piece is all about love . The piece was written in the Romantic era and choro then, as it was beginning, was influenced by Chopin as well as native Brazilian dance forms. So that kind of interpretation is stylistically fine, and it resonates well with my personality. Choro, although it is a written music, also has an acceptable vocabulary of rhythmic variation. Dotted-8th/16th figures can be interpreted as triplets to soften the rhythm, or anticipated-- played slightly before the beat-- to accentuate the syncopation. It's part of the performance practice of a style and, like the use of rubato, it can't be faked or copied. So how do you figure it out? Listen to lots of choro recordings by the great master interpreters and get a feel for what works for them. When you get a big enough vocabulary of alterations in your head you'll be able to approach the written melody in a stylistically-appropriate way that won't be copied, and will work artistically for you.

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**Q16**

Q - How do you "hold the pick more lightly" when playing choro?

A - Easy to feel, difficult to describe, but I'll try. I'm assuming, for the purpose of this explanation, that you're playing your mandolin with a small, heavy pick-- one that is stiff enough to push your strings with enough force to cause the body of your instrument to sound, but still slightly flexible so it can bend a little on string contact. The more firmly you hold a pick like that, the more focused a sound you can produce on your instrument. A full, focused sound is precisely what's needed for classical music. With a sound like that you can build the big crescendos, strike the dramatic chords, control the long variable-speed trills. Note: if you are playing with a very thin flexible pick on a traditional American carved-back A or F model instrument, all bets are off, because you've essentially given over control of your volume and attack to a piece of plastic, or maybe to your microphone.

Choro is played on a bandolim-- a lighter, brighter Brazilian version of a mandolin, strung w/ light strings and played w/ a flexible pick. To play choro on my mandolin-- a heavier-built, higher-tension instrument-- without altering my technique would result in an overplayed sound for the nature of the repertoire. I am a stickler for observing stylistic characteristics of a music-- classical or not-- so it was natural for me to fool around with my pick technique until I could achieve a sound that, to my ears, made choro sing. Well, why didn't I just play a bandolim-- you may ask. Indeed, why didn't I just play an 18th-century round-back instrument on my recording of Vivaldi and Beethoven, maybe one w/ 6 single strings? I like the sound of my instrument.

I'm a modern North American playing a modern North American instrument in the 21st century. I'm not about to pretend otherwise. But I'm also a professor of music history and a scholar of Brazilian music. I'm not about to take the performance practice out of a musical style. So my right hand is the variable that lets me vary my interpretation, much as a violinist or classical guitarist does. I may have got off on a tangent here, but I really can't answer the question technically because it's all about the art of sound production, and the artistic intelligenc eof knowing what sound you're aiming for, and why. Not just a "good" sound or a "pretty" sound, but an appropriate one. I know when I've found it.

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**Q17**

Q - Do you happen to know where I can get sheet music for Portuguese guitarradas? Or just

a book on Portuguese traditional folk music? I've googled my fingers blue but have been unable to find anything.

A - No, sorry. Try Luso-Brazilian books maybe?

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**Q18**

Q - What is your favorite color?

A - Purple, except in cars, where it's English racing green.

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**Q19**

Q - I re-read some of your comments from your last go-around, especially about your feelings as to why you don't feel comfortable playing bluegrass because it is too rigid or formulaic a mandolin style. I would be interested in your analysis of what you consider to be the traits/trademarks of the 'bluegrass style' mandolin.

A - Well, the reason I don't feel comfortable attempting to play bluegrass is that I don't know the trademark licks. So I'm probably a pretty bad choice to define them. I'm a player who is really sensitive to genre, however, so I do know when I don't even have my foot in the door. If it was easy to play bluegrass, I would. Because it's cool and it would be fun to fool around with. But, you know, to really get into a style you need to feel more than sorta-would-like-to. Now with classical mandolin (remember, I did start w/ fiddle tunes) I was obsessed w/ knowing everything about it. I took lessons from a teacher who didn't even cut me slack when the method book had me playing Jingle Bells in July! Likewise w/ Brazilian music, I couldn't let it stay on the page. I needed to make the music live, and I knew that I'd figure out how to do that. Bluegrass doesn't call me, so I haven't figured what makes it it. But here's my big secret: I really want to be as cool as Sam Bush.

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**Q20**

Q - Evan Marshall recommended light strings and a thin pick for classical music. Would you second that recommendation? Any idea what kind of pick the first players of Beethoven's pieces for mandolin would have used?

A - I adore Evan, and we have, years ago, agreed to disagree on this He plays a very lightly-strung instrument with low action and a light pick and he often uses amplification. I play a heavily-built instrument w/ medium gage strings, a high action, and a small heavy pick and rarely use amplification. Vive la difference! We have different agendas w/ classical music too. But so who cares, as long as we can avoid being hauled in by the mando-cops!

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**Q21**

Q - I was really interested in what you said last time about standard notation. I was intrigued by the notion that standard notation gives the player more freedom. I assume you mean that, where as TAB says, put your finger here to get the required sound, standard notation says, play around with all the possibilities and do what is right given your instrument, your hands, and your taste. I wonder whether you could elaborate on some of the ways this freedom has enhanced your art. Are there pieces you finger differently from other players, for example, and if so, what is the effect on your expression?

A - Yes, there are lots of pieces I play uniquely. Some of them have been convincing enough to alter standard interpretation of a particular piece. All artists have to be innovative, to think outside the accepted parameters. Not to be different, but to be authentically themselves. I can truly say that I've never been satisfied playing a piece like anybody else. That would be derivative and, by definition, second rate. I finger a piece to take advantage of the tone color of my instrument-- playing a melody entirely on one string, or in a particular position on the neck. Sometimes I finger a piece to allow for consistent phrasing in a series of sequences, or a series of trills. Sometimes I phrase it to cover for a weakness in my instrument or my technique. I like to see the TAB for arrangements by a player like Simon Mayor, who works



out unique arrangements, particularly solo pieces, that sit well on the instrument and allow a series of hammer-ons or pull-offs to happen easily. That's an interesting lesson for me, but I'd never want to copy him and do it the same way. Playing from TAB, to me, is like playing w/ an extremely flexible pick-- you give the control of your sound and your expressive range away.

I couldn't do that.

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**Q22**

Q - I can really relate to this, personally. I play the Beethoven Sonatina in C a lot, and being rather dumb about things, I tried playing the whole basic melody in first position. After about a year of lifting my hand up and hammering my pinkie down like a club to hit that high C, I decided to try it another way, and so now I shift up to I guess what would be third position (first finger on third fret). This way, 1) I can hit the high C easily (though Grisman can do it in first position, so I suppose it's possible), and 2) I kind of like the SOUND of shifting back down to first--it falls in just the right place, punctuating the melody's syntax nicely. TAB doesn't preclude adjustments like that, of course, and is a good way of notating them once you figure them out and want to share them, but I feel pretty good about having figured this out just based on the notes. Anyway--I'd like to hear more about this.

A - Or, on the C major, you could shift to 2nd position. Or start in 2nd position and stay there. You listen to the notes on your instrument and how they support their role in the piece and decide where to play them based on your assessment of that. Sounds like you've done that-- good work! But here's the funny thing: sometimes I painstakingly work out the "best" fingering and then abruptly change it, because it doesn't "feel" right at tempo. Or somebody looks at what I'm doing and asks me why I'm doing that and not this-- and it opens a door to a new easier way. Or not. In any case, with notation, rather than TAB, the decisions remain where they should be-- w/ the player.

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**Q23**

Q - I was fascinated by your comments last time about gender. So let me ask: do you play like a girl? Silly question, I suppose, but whatever. You commented on gender and the social aspects of being a professional musician, and you characterized (I thought) bluegrass as a male aesthetic or something. Can you recognize the gender behind a person's playing? Do questions like this enter into your thinking at all?

A - I've been laughing about this question since I first read it. "Do I play like a girl?" It actually was a female CoMando who told me to stop stepping around the issue and just say it-- that bluegrass is all about testosterone. I think I do pretty well agree. It's like lead guitar in rock-- anyone should be able to do it, in the abstract, but 99% of lead guitarists are guys. I think of the mandolin as a very feminine instrument, and I realize that I am in the minority here. I play like me, and I'm a girl; therefore I play like a girl. But what does that mean? Traditionally it seems to mean more emotion and less power and speed. But traditionally symphony orchestras were full of men until they started having auditions behind a screen. Now the ranks frequently have more women than men. I always think of myself as a woman when I play. And I think this is an advantage from a performance standpoint. I can generally tell the difference between men and women performers on recordings, and I don't think this is bad, or that one is inherently superior. I like what I do; I like who I am. There's big chemistry in music, and a mix of genders is a good thing.

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**Q24**

Q - A hypothetical question. Assuming you could turn back the clock and had to start your classical mandolin career and music career over again from day one, what if anything would you do differently, regarding your training, studies, technique, etc. the second time around? (And of course you have already done a fantastic job the first time around!)

A - Good save there at the end Sure. If I had to start over again I'd start younger. I'd have discovered the mandolin as a child and had immediate access to a great small instrument and a good teacher. I'd have won the heart of a devoted patron quite early in my career so I

wouldn't have to have a dayjob and could just play mandolin all day. I'd still study w/ Hibbard Perry and Vincenz Hladky, and Takashi Ochi, and Hugo D'Alton, but I would have also flown to Brasil, as a child prodigy, to hang out w/ Jacob do Bandolim. I'd have been represented by a devoted agent who would have made me and mandolin famous in the world of chamber music. Sigh... actually I probably wouldn't have changed much, because I've been fierce and lucky, and have found opportunities on the fingernail of a suggestion. I might have been bored otherwise; I'm pretty independent. If I could change anything now I'd be back on a record label, would have a good agent, and some company would call and hire me to make a teaching video and take care of all the pesky details.

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**Q25**

Q - Does your "core foundation" of technique change when you go from genre to genre - classical to choro, for example ? (By the way, your World Cafe Quartet Metro CD is amazing - I love your version of 'My Funny Valentine')

A - No, my technique does not change. It bends a little, but is basically the same. It's a flexible, versatile style; I've developed it to work for me and it does. Thanks for the good words for "Metro"-- I had such pleasure recording "Funny Valentine". It's a simple and overplayed song, but I love it and I think that shows. If I'd put music on my webpages, that was my pick for my bio page.

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**Q26**

Q - If you would, please share with a four year tab reader the most efficient way to begin to learn to read notation. Any simple exercises, and your incredible insight would be greatly appreciated !

A - I've never played from TAB, so I'm just guessing here, but I'd say, play scales and arpeggios. They are the heart of all tonal music. Learn your key signatures. When you're going to play a piece in the key of D, play your D scales and arpeggios first to get you into the proper sound space-- you'll be more likely to hit the right notes. It might help to have a recording of a piece you are reading, so you can play along w/ it and let your ear help you read. Any CoMandos who have done this-- feel free to jump in here!

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**Q27**

Q - We're still hoping you'll visit the West Coast !

A - I'm still hoping to be out on the West Coast soon, with a great guitarist/mandolinist I have been playing w/ of late. There are plans afoot, but nothing concrete. When I know something I'll send it into the list.

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**Q28**

Q - Any thoughts about the aesthetic value of pick click? Is it to be avoided? Is it an essential dimension of our sound?

A - It's always there. An audience won't hear it too much, but close miking will capture it in a recording.

I actually don't hear it much and it doesn't bother me when I do. It's real, and the noise of tone production is part of any instrument. When we were recording "18th Century" the engineer had to mike the piano really carefully to avoid incredibly loud pedal noise. Who ever thinks of that, except a pianist or a recording engineer? You can definitely hear my pick on some of the intense sections in my recordings, but,hey-- they're intense! Erasing pick noise from a recording is kind of like the Barbie-&-Ken approach to human anatomy.

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**Q29**

Q - Please tell us about your exquisite Woodley mandolin. Your Lyon&Healy asymmetrical Style-A sounds gorgeous on recordings and in person, but that Woodley is something else. How does it differ from the L&H? Do you find that one works better in some contexts than the other?

A - Ah, my two fabulous instruments, sigh... Would that my love life were so good! But maybe it's time for a better-than-original replacement to manifest itself there too! I played my original beloved L&H for years, accepting no substitute-- not even another of the same sort! Then-- the fateful summer I met you, Peter, and your charming wife and daughter at AMGuSS-- my mandolin world changed forever! Well, that may be a little dramatic, but it's getting late here. Anyway, my L&H case latch failed and my instrument tumbled out onto the concrete floor and was beheaded! In the middle of AMGuSS and miles from home! I had no other instrument there, and borrowed a remarkably good one made by Doug Woodley, a longtime AMGuSS student. I think it was yours, Peter... Anyway I played my Gibson F-4 that fall until the L&H was repaired and breathed a sigh of relief to get back to its gorgeous rich sound.

The next summer I remember another Woodley being passed across the orchestra at AMGuSS for me to play, and that time I decided that I was going to get Doug to make me an instrument, with the same measurements and scale-length as my L&H. I think it took a about a year-&-a-half. It was gorgeous from the get-go. But I was definitely a one-mando woman to that point. So I decided, to give it a chance, that I would play my Woodley exclusively for 3 months, to break it in. It sounded so good after that there was no reason to stop playing it. Doug made the D string stronger and kept the great balance of sound across the strings that characterizes the L&H and makes it great for classical music. He made the instrument look like his, but he built it to measurements from my L&H, so it felt comfortable from the start. He also made it easier to play.

The next year at AMGuSS, I played half a concert on each instrument, and there was intense discussion, over beer, as to which was better. The crew was definitely divided. But I've played the Woodley ever since I got it, with a brief break to play & record the "Mandolin in the 18th Century" project (because I thought the rich heavy sound of the L&H would be good for that period.) On the whole the Woodley is a better, more versatile instrument for me. It allows me to create a lighter sound for Brazilian music, but still spin a rich tender tremolo. It has amazing power for those intensely violent Piazzolla chords, but balances beautifully for classical pieces. And it just keeps getting better.

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**Q30**

Q - Is there a number for telephone order of your CDs?

A - No, sorry, I don't do credit cards myself, I do it through PayPal on my site. If you don't want to use a credit card online, then email your order to me @ [mairmusic@yahoo.com](mailto:mairmusic@yahoo.com). I'll email back an address to send a check and will send your CDs out when I get the check. That's the way I did it before my new spiffy online CD catalogue was designed. The free-SoundingJoy-w/-order-of-3 offer is still good for all CoMando-ers, even those who order this way, through 12/24. Thanks lots to those of you who have already ordered!

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**Q31**

Q - Will that West Coast tour include Arizona (we'll be on the Coast once the San Andreas fault sheds it's left half--or maybe sooner, if Global warming keeps up)?

A - Arizona IS the West Coast to those of us in frigid New England! If you can schedule a concert, or a mando week-end workshop, we will come! Are you kidding-- Arizona anytime between now and March is heaven to a New Englander! Email me off-list if you want to get serious about this! That goes for anyone in a sunny or otherwise amusing spot of the country!

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**Q32**

Q - I can't begin to tell you how much I have enjoyed your tour(s) as GCOW. Much (most) if it is way over my head but I am totally fascinated by the facility with which you are able to describe the indescribable. Somehow it makes me feel as though I even know what you are talking about!

A - Well, of course you understand everything I'm talking about-- it's all mandolin. You should see me sitting in front of the computer w/ my eyes closed trying to figure out how to write something that will translate into a specific physical movement.

It's nice to hear from you because you are a hero of mine from the old-old days of CoMando when I was clueless about how to send an email and someone in a workshop suggested that I sign onto a listserv to get practice. CoMando was it. It's fun to be back!

There's no more questions in my mailbox-- y'all have 4 more days-- don't stop now!

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### Q33

Q - I have two questions for you:

First, does your "core foundation" of technique change when you go from genre to genre - classical to choro, for example ? (By the way, your World Cafe Quartet Metro CD is amazing - I love your version of 'My Funny Valentine')

And second, If you would, please share with a four year tab reader the most efficient way to begin to learn to read notation. Any simple exercises, and your incredible insight would be greatly appreciated !

We're still hoping you'll visit the West Coast !

A - No, my technique does not change. It bends a little, but is basically the same. It's a flexible, versatile style; I've developed it to work for me and it does. Thanks for the good words for "Metro"-- I had such pleasure recording "Funny Valentine". It's a simple and overplayed song, but I love it and I think that shows. If I'd put music on my webpages, that was my pick for my bio page. I've never played from TAB, so I'm just guessing here, but I'd say, play scales and arpeggios. They are the heart of all tonal music. Learn your key signatures. When you're going to play a piece in the key of D, play your D scales and arpeggios first to get you into the proper sound space-- you'll be more likely to hit the right notes. It might help to have a recording of a piece you are reading, so you can play along w/ it and let your ear help you read. Any CoMandos who have done this-- feel free to jump in here!

I'm still hoping to be out on the West Coast soon, with a great guitarist/mandolinist I have been playing w/ of late. There are plans afoot, but nothing concrete. When I know something I'll send it into the list.

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### Q34

Q - As a long-time admirer of your work (along with Hibbard, Herman, and Walter, but still hangin' in there) I wish to congratulate you on your two fabulous tours of duty on the COMANDO CGOW program. Your contributions simply sparkle! They are knowledgeable, accurate, interesting, and humorous from time to time. Are you sure that "Marilynn" is spelled correctly? Maybe it's people like Condoleezza, Russell, and all the Finns with their double letters who have influenced you?

A - Thanks, glad you like the chatter! Those double letters are absolutely important. But, on the advice of a friend, you can also get to my website by typing in a 1 "n" version of my name.

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### Q35

Q - I want to express my appreciation for your recommending that each mandolinist develop a recognizable style of his/her own. Several years back I returned from a CMSA convention

with your Christmas CD and played it for a three-year-old grandson, who was astonished at how nicely the mandolin switched from "pretty music to not-pretty music and back again." This was a Spanish or Italian carol in the key of D minor (and D major,) and the young lad insisted that it was the mandolin leading up to the major chords that was so pretty, not the major chords on the guitar. I am a great fan of all your recordings (except maybe the one with the non-mando instruments.) I wish you luck with your new E-mail news letter.

A - I remember you telling me about your grandson's comment. The tune was "A la Nanita Nana" from "Sounding Joy". What a cool kid! And which non-mando instrumental recording are you objecting to? the accordion, or the string quaretet and piano? I know, you're probably holding out for banjo...

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**Q36**

Q - With your unquestioned cachet as a mandolinist, organizer (I've attended two AMGuSS sessions) and writer, why don't you write a book (or series of books) on how to play the mandolin? Having studied and taught with Odell, Bickford, Pettine curricula, I wish some one would bring GGDDAAEE up-to-date. And you're the one who has the tools. And don't wait until you're an "Old Gray Mair" to do it!

A - That's a pretty big request, sir. But I do know what you mean. Hibbard and Vincenz Hladky, who I studied with in Vienna, both left method books barely begun. so the legacy of their technique is left to their students to pass along. I think I'd have to have some big incentive to put the time and effort needed into that project. I usually feel that i can barely fit a few hours of playing into my work week as it is. thanks for the vote of confidence, though, and I promise I will think on it. And Merry Christmas to you and your grandson!

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**Q37**

Q - How about tempting all of us "would be" classical mandolinists with a little "commercial" for AMGuSS?

A - Well I haven't got the AMGuSS brochure out, or the webpage updated yet (I'm still waiting for room & board rates from RWU) so CoMando's will hear it first right here: the Guest Artist for 2004 will be (drum roll, please...) Evan Marshall! I'm really pleased to have Evan back-- he was our guest artist about a decade ago, and did a terrific job. He'll be giving some workshops, introducing his new method books for mandolin, and playing our friday night concert-- way cool!

We also have a new member of the staff this year-- Adam Larrabee. AMGuSS participants from last year are sure to be pleased! Adam is a jazz guitarist, the mando-cello player in my octet, Enigmatica, for the past year-and-a-half, and my new duo partner. He's an amazing musician and a great teacher-- although not yet into his 30's. He knocked everybody's socks off last year.

And returning faculty, we have Bob Sullivan-- our fabulous orchestra conductor, guitar instructor, and multi-instrumentalist (all the mando-fam instruments and then some). One of my favorite duo partners; renown for his wicked sense of humor, and part of the "Bob & Bob" stand-up team. Also Bob Asprinio (aka Dr. Bob) the other half of the team. but, in serious circles, a lutenist, and player of all the mando-fam instruments and guitar. Also plays mandocello in Enigmatica, and, with his lovely wife and soprano Ellen, is 2/3 of my favorite trio to perform with. And Ralph Costanza, mandolinist, AMGuSS registrar, guitarist and soul of the late-night jam sessions.

And, of course, there's me. There are technique classes and world/jazz/folk sessions, w/ guest artists like Peter Mix. Everyone plays chamber music (there's a beginner ensemble w/ the redoubtable Ralph for anyone w/ fear of one-to-a-part music) and a nightly concert series featuring, besides Evan, me, all the rest of the faculty, Enigmatica, and other guests. AND-- the centerpiece of the week- the American Mandolin & Guitar Orchestra-- made up of all the students and faculty (yes, there are probably some air-mando players among first-timers that plays the final concert. It's usually 50-60 player. Honestly, friends, this is the most fun you can have in a week with your mandolin and still be legal. there are CoMando's who can attest to this(or at least tell stories...)

To qualify you need to read music-- even a rudimentary level is OK, as there are classes at near-beginner, intermediate, and awesome/professional level for mandolin, as well as mandola, mando-cello, and guitar.

If you want to get a brochure, drop an email w/ your address to Ralph @ . Info will be on my website by the end of the month. if you want to get updates in my bi-monthly newsletter, send me your email address throught my website.

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**Q38**

Q - When I started playing mandolin, I was learning bluegrass, had a flatback, and always stood up as I could play with a strap. When I switched to bowlback, however, I had to sit. And now I get some lower back pain despite my sitting up straight and being athletic in general. Do you ever get lower back pain? If so, what do you do about it?

A - Hmm... not much. I sit and play w/out a strap. I usually sit well back in the chair so I get support from the chair back. With a roundback it usually helps to play w/ a suede or sticky cloth on the lap to keep the instrument from rolling, and w/ a footstool under your left foot to give the instrument a good lap. I play a flat-back so I don't use those. I lean forward a bit to shorten the torso. Be sure you keep your lumbar curve and don't drape over the instrument.

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**Q39**

Q - How do you keep your hands from getting stiff? Do you stretch? Do you soak your hands? Do you wear gloves like Glenn Gould? I live in the balmy Bay Area and still find that my hands get pretty stiff (especially before a lesson when I have no time to warm up!).

A - You can stretch your hands by slowly and gently bending each finger in toward the palm, and back-- but not too far-- with your other hand. Also separate each pair of fingers-- pinkie/ring, ring/middle, etc. w/ the fingers of the other hand. One funny exercise to warm up the whole hand is to make your hands into fists and then open them flat very quickly several times in a row. Putting your hands on warmer parts of your body (stomach, armpits) can also help. I wear leather gloves outside from September to May. My pianist swears by soaking her hands up over the wrists in warm water, but i've never done it.

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**Q40**

Q - You have described much of the mechanics of tremolo and it has been quite helpful. Most of the advice I have heard regarding speed in playing relates to being loose and relaxed.

I find, however, as I try to play faster my shoulder and arm become tighter. Do you know of any way to learn to loosen up and relax. It seems when I demand that my arm let go, it spites me and gets even tighter.

Any advice and direction will be greatly appreciated.

A - Hoowee!! Is it snowing here! I'll answer the last couple of questions I've got in my inbox between bouts of shoveling. Last call for any questions this week-- otherwise you'll have to wait until I get my "Ask Dr. Mando" call-in radio show, or the absent Commisar decides to invite me back next year!

If your right shoulder and arm tighten up uncontrollably, I'm pretty sure you're hiking your shoulder-- compressing it up and inward toward your ear. This basically immobilizes your right arm and as you try to make it work harder and faster, the shoulder squeeze continues to build harder and tighter as well. Be very careful here, as you can permanently injure yourself. You are trying too hard, and moving too fast in your anxiousness to improve. The first thing you need to do is stop giving the project the "papa bear" effort, and de-escalate down to "baby bear". You can't "demand" anything from your arm, darlin'. In fact it's best to treat your arm, shoulder and hand-- at least during this technique-changing regime-- like they're sweet and non-offending kindergartners. They're not trying to do the wrong thing; they just don't know what the right thing is. OK-- now sit in a chair w/ both feet on the

ground and your shoulders relaxed (try to lower your shoulders down from around your ears . It might help to tuck your chin down slowly once and raise it back up-- to release and get some space in between your vertebrae. (Gosh-- I'm sounding like my yoga instructor!) Then begin to s-l-o-w-l-y pick a continuous down-up on an open string (chanting "ommmm" is optional Yeah, i am joshing myself a little about this, but the point is not to rush, to cut yourself lots of slack, and to be pleased at every little thing your hand-arm-shoulder triplets do right. It takes a long time to develop a decent tremolo and the process absolutely cannot be rushed or shortcut. It took me well over a year to develop even an OK tremolo and today I've got one of the best in the business. You won't have it by this Christmas, but by next Christmas your "White Christmas" could be smooth as silk! The directions I give my students on improving their tremolo is, keep your down-ups smooth and even, and keep your right arm loose. Slow down as much as you need to to make that happen, as it is the necessary first step. Speed is not your initial assignment-- your motor memory will take care of that for you later. But nothing will fix a rushed too-tight technique. Have patience, Vinny, it will come. Now I've got to go out to shovel-- I'll get to the last couple of questions this afternoon.

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**Q41**

Q - Could you talk a bit about the composers on your cd, Zu. The more I listen to it, the more beautiful I find it. (I'm particularly fond of Siegfried Behrend's, "Serenade". I'd like to know why you picked all of the pieces you did and your relationship to the composers, especially Ernst Krenek. The liner notes say that he wrote the piece for you to "expand the boundaries of the contemporary repertoire for mandolin-guitar duo." Could you explain how he expanded it?

A - There's always time for interesting questions, especially to those of us newly snowbound... "ZU," as a recording, was a work of love, a work dedicated to making a mark in the sand to preserve a certain kind of mandolin achievement, not the sort that sells a zillion CDs, but the sort that means there will have to be good mandolinists a hundred years from now, because there are these pieces that will continue to exist and demand to be played. This CD preserves them; I had to do it. It would have been so much easier if I'd been born to look good in jeans and play bluegrass, but some of us are born for this (big sigh). Luckily the job still involves a mandolin and cool wardrobe! This may be a long post because no one has ever asked me this before, and the telling involves alot of stories. I'll start at the top:

Norbert Sprongl: Duo

This piece was described by a funny kid who heard it as "the dance of the bad elves". It is, IMHO, one of the best pieces ever written for mandolin and guitar.

I met Sprongl over 25 years ago, when I was just starting out and studying mandolin in Vienna w/ Vincenz Hladky of the Vienna Conservatory. Sprongl was ~90. I was invited to his house, with my duo partner and a translator, at Hladky's request after my playing had been vetted, and we played the Duo for Sprongl and his wife. The piece was a little over my head at the time, but it had grabbed me and I was working it out passionately. When we finished playing, Sprongl mused for a minute, then asked me how long I'd been playing mandolin. When I said 4 years, he smiled, and began at the beginning, going over every nuance of the piece and even correcting a couple of publication errors. A few of years later, we returned to Vienna and played the piece in a concert at the Palffy Palace in memory of Hladky, who had died suddenly the previous winter. Sprongl was very pleased. When our Duo decided to do this recording of modern music, I knew it had to start w/ Sprongl. Much as the Kronos Quartet begins w/ Anton Webern, Sprongl, for me, is where modern mandolin style begins. And the piece kicks butt! Once when, as a young American player, I was asked, condescendingly, by an older pompous European musician to "play something" -- the 1st movement of the Sprongl is what I picked. I also remember playing it on magical night in Spain, by request, too full of wine to expect to do so, but, somehow, managing to pull it off and see it more clearly in the process.

Brian Israel: Sonatina

I had recorded this piece previously on the LP "Contemporaries," but wanted another crack at it. Israel was a funny and brilliant composer who wrote many symphonies, operas and chamber music in his very short life. He was dying as he wrote this piece. He wrote it for a mandolin composition contest, at the request of mandolinist Neil Gladd. I got to do the premier in London in 1984. It starts with a brilliantly fast Toccata that clocks in at under 2 minutes, then moves to an unbelievably sad and stark Elegia, that nearly always brings me to the brink of tears, and ends up w/ a funny drunken Menuetto, that lurches from 3/4 to

5/4, forgets where it's going, and mocks Wagnerian opera in one sly quote. Israel is the one composer on the CD who I didn't meet, but I got funny letters from him, and he was pleased to know we were performing and recording his piece, although he never got to hear even the first LP recording.

#### Sigfried Behrend: Serenade & ZU-MA-GI-TON

Behrend was an important and supportive mentor for me and my first duo partner. I played in the German National Mandolin Orchestra two summers under his baton; studied at his masterclass; played in his concert series in castles in Bavaria, and, the summer before he died, gave a workshop at his annual Guitar Masterclass, one of the inspirations for my own AMGUS. Behrend's "Serenade" is a sweet dreamy piece that he originally wrote for solo mandolin and mandolin orchestra, and he gave us his own transcription for mandolin and guitar. ZU-MA-GI-TON, the title is an abbreviation of the words zusammen (together), mandolin, guitar, tone, is a crazy piece that sounds like a free-jazz jam session from the late 1960's. The pieces is written pointillistically, with boxes of notes to be repeated and graphic notation. I mis-translated some of the directions given and was trying to "temolo like a whirlwind" rather than tremoloing behind the bridge, but Behrend liked it, when we played it for him at a masterclass, and told me to keep it in. The last summer I saw him he said that someday our duo would make a really avant-garde recording and put ZU-MA-GI-TON on it. So it had to be here.

#### Fritz Pils: Sonatine

The titles of the 3 movements are from ancient songs (the 2nd one, loosely translated as "Winter is going on way too long" strikes an ominous chord today) and is a delightfully diverse showpiece for its under-5-minute length. I spent an intense evening at a bar in deep philosophical discussion w/ Pils, who speaks no English, speaking German way over my head, thanks to some of Behrend's homemade schnaps. It's a pleasant memory that far surpasses that of the serious hangover the next morning. Ah, being young and foolish...

#### Ernst Krenek: Suite

Krenek is one of the very important composers of the 20th century, part of the "2nd Viennese School" of Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg. He became famous in his 20's, in the 1920's, writing an opera "Johnny Speilt Auf" (Johnny Plays Out) that radically combined 12-tone music with American Jazz. He immigrated to the USA and lived in southern California. This piece, that is dedicated to my Duo, and commissioned by us, is my contribution to mandolin longevity. But before he would even put pen to paper we had to fly out to California to audition for him-- merely agreeing to pay for a commission wasn't enough to convince him to write for mandolin and guitar. Because of Krenek's historical importance, because this was his last piece, there will always have to be mandolinists good enough to play it. Noone's played it except me, yet, and it's definitely the hardest thing I have ever wrapped my fingers and brain around.

It's finally about to be published, and there are many players eager to get a crack at it. It's lovely, to my ears, in an atonal way. The technique required sounds great on the instrument, but is completely non-idiomatic. Great fingerboard-spanning arpeggios laced w/ double sharps and flats, changing every measure; a solo mandolin "Soliloqui" for the 4th movement, a mini-opera for the 7th. It's 15 minutes of music that is completely part of Krenek's language, and the language of the post-WWII atonalists, but completely new for the mandolin. Neil Gladd has called it the most important work for mandolin composed in the 20th century. I just met Gladys Krenek, Ernst's widow, in NYC on her way to Vienna, and plans are foot for more performances of this piece. I'm proud to be part of the picture.

#### Q42

Q - I really agree with you about the flexibility one need to put in the "right picking direction" theory. For me, it mostly depends on finding the most comfortable position needed for the following note. Usually a downstroke on the strong beat is preferred, but, as you correctly pointed out, if my next note will be on a lower note, an upstroke will bring me closest to the correct string, thus minimizing my wrist movement. But... I was watching the Chris Thile techniques video last night, and he REALLY insists on the "up-down" everytime-at every cost. And he says that on a 6/8 tempo (jig tempo), we should always use a "down-up-down, down-up-down" movement. I feel this movement quite uncomfortable and it doesn't help me much in accenting notes (I have to say that I "flatpick" guitars since 1977, therefore my picking control is quite good, by now). How do you approach 6/8 tempos? Ok, I've written a very long mail for just a 6 words question, I hope I haven't bored you to death in the



meantime.

A - Picking is best determined by the way it feels to you AND, more important, the way it sounds. If you accent on your downstroke, as is natural, then a down-up pattern will give a nice da-dum-da-dum-da-dum iambic pentameter quite naturally. If you want that accent pattern that's fine, and it makes it easy for your hand to only have to do one thing. But you can also consciously make that accent pattern while using reverse picking. Lots of jazz player have and still do that. Many Europeans, particular German players, think all-down-strokes is the superior method of picking, as it gives a clean attack to each note, and no accent. I don't like to use that much, because it creates a sound that seems detached and dry to me. People tend to get quite dogmatic about pick direction-- second only to actual type/weight of pick. But I think if you're listening you'll adjust those to get the sound you want. If you're not listening, well it doesn't really matter how you pick or what pick you use.

6/8 picking is a special case. I divide it into 2 types that I call "jig picking" and "Bach picking". For an Irish jig, which is a strongly accented dance, you want a big accent on 1 and 4 (8th notes), and I agree w/ what you said Chris demonstrated, that a d-u-d / d-u-d easily creates that accent and gives it a nice physicalization in the right hand. for a 6/8 in Baroque music, say, a gigue from a Bach partita, however, we've moved out of dance territory. the long line is crucial in Bach and to break it up to accent every beat does a disservice to the music. a strict down-up works much better to tailor to the subtle rhythm and the occasional hemiola (a 3/4 beat pattern thrown into a 6/8 measure) found in baroque music, or classical music from any era.

Well, the sun has gone over the yardarm, and it's time for a martini by the fire as the blizzard continues to rage. it's been a fun week-- thanks for the opportunity to talk about my favorite instrument to an audience of believers. Max, if there are any more questions in the chute that haven't made their way to me I'll be happy to answer them tomorrow (Sunday) but I know y'all have another week beginning.

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