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# Orvieto, Italy:

## Orvieto Guitar Festival and Exhibition, 2001

Review by Lawrence Del Casale

I am convinced that any serious musician should make the pilgrimage to Italy and study his instrument at a respected festival. And if you are a classical guitarist there is one festival that manages to give you all the culture, romance, artistic splendors, and of course the great food of Italy, the *Orvieto Guitar Festival and Guitar Exhibition*. This year virtuoso guitarists and co-directors Rocco Peruggini and Richard Jacobowski have done it again. The Orvieto Guitar Festival and Guitar Exhibition 2001 was just as wonderful as last year and is highly recommended for the student guitarist.

Nestled in the region of Umbria on the border of Tuscany, Orvieto is conveniently located one hour north of Rome. The city of Orvieto reached its pinnacle in the late middle ages and today it remains a beautifully preserved and pristine city whose majority of buildings date from this period. The cathedral, whose cornerstone was laid in 1290, is the centerpiece of Orvieto and can now boast of its recently restored frescos by Signorelli. Orvieto is also famous for its cuisine. This year the festival directors were able to arrange the daily lunch and dinner for its students at the "Zeppelin" Ristorante just around the corner from the beautiful Istituto San Lodovico. My wife and I dined a couple of evenings with the students and were amazed at the constant variety of Umbrian and Tuscan dishes that flowed from the *Zeppelin's* kitchen. The Istituto San Lodovico is a magnificent building that accommodates the students and teachers. Upon entering the huge wrought iron gates of the Istituto San Lodovico one is welcomed by a courtyard overflowing with flowers, gardens and columns that invite all who enter to practice, read, or just relax and contemplate.

The festival's daily classes are held at the Chiostro San Giovenale, the medieval cloister of an ex-convent that has marvelous teaching facilities and incredible acoustics. Evenings are also spent at the "Chiostro," performing in and/or listening to a concert. At night, as we strolled through Orvieto's cobble-stoned streets, I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the city and its inhabitants as they made their way to the cafés or to a guitar concert by one of the festival's students. The conclusion of the festival was a guitarist's dream. All the students as

well as other guitarists from around Italy shared an afternoon sampling instruments crafted by some of Italy's most important luthiers including Gioachino Giussani, Fabio Ragghianti, Lucio Antonio Carbone and Giuseppe Guagliardo.

I had the pleasure of speaking with one of the festival co-directors, Mr. Jacobowski, about the *Orvieto Guitar Festival and Guitar Exhibition 2001* over wine and antipasti one evening. I was impressed with the hard work and dedication Mr. Jacobowski put into the festival. And it was clear by listening and talking to many of the students that they had learned a great deal about technique, phrasing, performing, and even the construction of our beloved guitar. I wished that all dedicated guitar students could have this opportunity.

**Lawrence Del Casale:** *I loved the whole feeling of the Orvieto Guitar Festival and Guitar Exhibition 2000 so much so that I returned again this year with my wife. It just seems to be getting bigger and better. What's your secret?*

**Mr. Richard Jacobowski:** Thank you. Rocco and I are just trying to communicate our love and personal experiences with music to all of the students involved in the festival. Although the standard for student performances is quite high (most students who attend the festival are from various music conservatories around Italy) there is a supportive and enthusiastic interest in one another's playing. Each student performs four times in a Master class setting and selected students perform in the Chiostro for the public. This feeling combined with the guitar exhibition makes for a great experience.

**LDC:** *Last year there was a competition connected to the festival but not this year. Why did you drop the competition?*

**RJ:** We felt that the competition detracted from the quality of the education we were able to give. We want to make this a time for reflection, introspection and perhaps a rediscovery of the sheer pleasure of hard work and discourse amongst musicians. The ancient beauty of Orvieto often leaves the students with a renewed energy for playing and a deepened joy in living. The competition just did not seem to work with those ideas.

**LDC:** *The students all seem to have a deep sense of musicality. How are you and Mr. Peruggini approaching that aspect of performing?*

**RJ:** We don't discuss technique in an abstract way. We are always searching for the musical result in a technical idea. Rocco and I stress sound, vibrato and style at every level of a player's progress. I personally try to discuss musical ideas apart from "guitaristic" ones wherever possible—we of course must apply these ideas to the guitar, this is how discussions on technique arise. We often find an intense striving for expression in the students. I would like to hope that some of this is due to our teaching.

**LDC:** *You are a respected guitar teacher at home in New York. Do you find a difference between the American students and the Italian and/or European students in their approach to the guitar?*

**RJ:** It is amazing to me when I hear students from New York, Lithuania, Italy or somewhere else for that matter. I find that people from all over the world seem to approach the guitar as individuals. Due in part to recordings, perhaps, students from many parts of the world are aware of performances by the greatest players. This seems to create a general sense of playing that manifests itself in individuals regardless of nationality, race or culture. I do not sense a national sort of style or a European versus American style. I do see, however, for the sake of simplicity, two camps the world over, Apollonian and Dionysian. I am sure this has always existed in art.

**LDC:** *As a touring concert artist you have been invited to give master classes at many festivals throughout the world. Each guitar festival certainly has similarities and each is a little different from one another. How is the Orvieto Guitar Festival and Guitar Exhibition 2001 similar to other prominent guitar festivals, and what makes it unique?*

**RJ:** I have had the experience of playing and teaching in many music festivals. Some of these festivals are for various instruments and others are for guitarists only. I feel the Orvieto Guitar Festival and Guitar Exhibition combines the best of both worlds.

The emphasis is on musicianship not competition. We discuss repertory and style and have the students perform a great deal of chamber music. However, like the better guitar festivals, we live the guitar. We spend a great deal of time on correct posture, technique, strings, and nails. Things like that.

**LDC:** *As a virtuoso of the instrument you are always searching for that perfect guitar. You purchased a new guitar at the exhibition by Giuseppe Guagliardo. Can you talk a little about the guitar exhibition component of the festival and some of the luthiers?*

**RJ:** The final day of the festival consists of a luthier show and some of Italy's finest luthiers bring their instruments for all to try. I found a spruce top guitar by a Sicilian maker by the name of Giuseppe Guagliardo. After only two hours of playing the instrument I performed with it in concert. I never would have dreamed of doing that with a new guitar. Also present was Gioachino Giussani from Tuscany whose instruments are noted for their beauty and power—the Romeros regularly play Chino's instruments. Fabio Raghianti, another Tuscan-based luthier, was in attendance. Raghianti is a luthier who builds a variety of guitars including steel string acoustic guitars as well as his bold classical guitars. Lucio Carbone, the Milan-based builder, was also present, selling his line of fine instruments. We see the highest level of the luthier's art. These builders are among the finest in the world, each unique, and yet comprising a "school" of Italian building which comes from a knowledge of ancient traditions and a meaningful use of new technologies.

**LDC:** *What adjustments will you make to next year's Orvieto Guitar Festival and Guitar Exhibition 2002 if any?*

**RJ:** I don't foresee any changes being made in the general structure or feeling of the festival. We are, as always, searching for fine luthiers to exhibit. And I am always interested in recruiting more American students to Orvieto. Both Rocco and I teach in Italian and English and there is always a wonderful rapport between all of the students. The Orvieto Guitar Festival and Guitar Exhibition, as it is, is a great joy in my life. It is all of the people involved which make it a success.

*Richard Jacobowski is a world class concert guitarist who resides in New York where he teaches regularly at the USDAN Center for the Creative and Performing Arts and also the Director of the Half-Hollow Hills School string orchestra. When not performing, Mr. Jacobowski gives master classes throughout the United States and Europe.*

For more information on how to attend the Orvieto Guitar Festival and Guitar Exhibition 2002 next summer, contact:

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