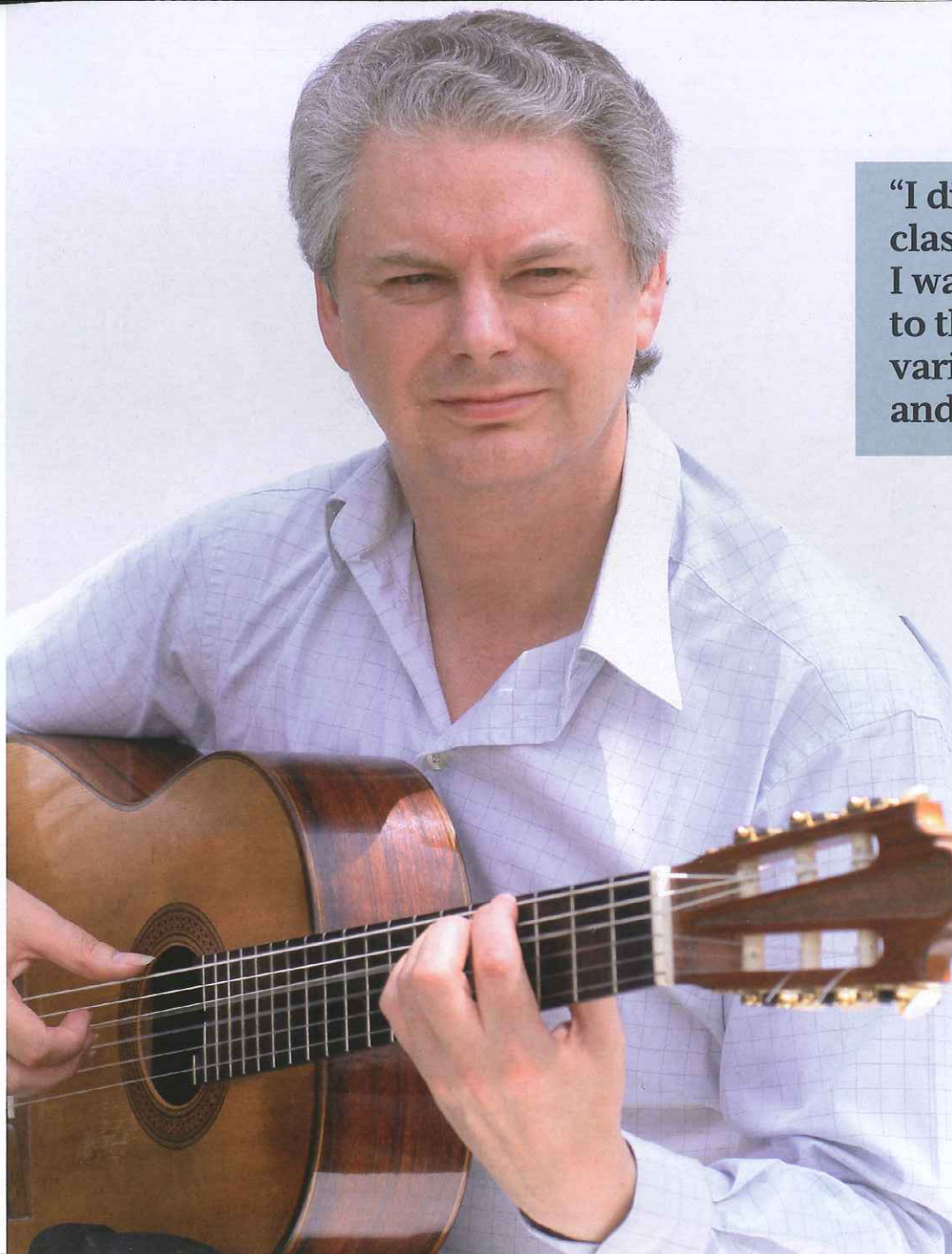


“I didn’t start playing classical guitar until I was about 22; prior to that I’d played in various rock bands and jazz trios”



instrumentation is usually four standard nylon-strung guitars, but occasionally requintos, acoustic octave bass and *terz* guitars are included, and in the case of the Niibori ensembles in Japan an orchestra is recreated using soprano, alto, tenor and bass guitars, but of course, the key element here is that they are all in the same genre.

Since the inception of Four Parts Guitar, this critically acclaimed ensemble has been giving sell-out gigs around the UK, ranging from playing with Rick Wakeman at Birmingham Town Hall to the Colston Hall in Bristol. It started with a chance meeting between Ray Burley and Gordon Giltrap around ten years ago which resulted in the formation of guitar duo Double Vision. This in turn led to the formation of Three Parts Guitar with John Etheridge. Founder member Ray Burley talks to Steve Gordon about the origins and what happened next.

RB: Gordon and I happened to meet at the annual conference of the Registry of Guitar Tutors, where we had both been asked to give seminars. We sat opposite each other at the meal table and we both knew a little bit about each other. I think it was Gordon’s idea to put a few things together, although he was a little dubious at first if steel and nylon would work, but as I’d been working with a harpsichordist for a long time I knew there would not be a problem as it’s basically the same. We met up at my place one day and busked through a few bits and pieces which sounded really good. So on the strength of that we put a programme together and put a gig on.

SG: As a classical player, do you find that working with

Raymond Burley

Put Raymond Burley on stage with Gordon Giltrap, John Etheridge and Clive Carroll and watch the magic unfold. **With Steve Gordon.**

The fusion of genres, styles and crossovers has long fascinated instrumentalists and composers. Many have attempted, some have succeeded. One of the most notable 20th-century composers – Leonard Bernstein – apart from composing just about the most famous and popular musical ever, was also a critically acclaimed conductor: his Mahler cycle with the New York Philharmonic has

achieved legendary status. The most unlikely fusion of Gregorian chant with saxophone, in the form of Jan Garbarek and the Hilliard Ensemble, is another resounding success.

What is remarkable about Four Parts Guitar is that it successfully blends not just two but four very individual styles from three genres, with Ray, John and Gordon respectively playing classical guitar, jazz and steel-

string acoustic, combined with the multifaceted and percussive approach of Clive Carroll. Guitar quartets and guitar ensembles have been around for a while and can be traced back to the early 20th century (perhaps even earlier) when the Munich Guitar Quartet was probably the first quartet to perform regularly. Now quartets such as the LAGQ, Tetra and Vida regularly record and tour. In these cases,



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a guitarist on steel strings presents challenges in the form of articulation? I’m thinking particularly if you give a single-line passage to a jazz guitarist and the same passage to a classical guitarist, the articulation and placement of notes will be very different.

RB: Absolutely – but I wouldn’t say I was a trained classical player! I didn’t start playing classical guitar until I was about 22; prior to that I’d played in various rock bands and jazz trios, so I know the style.

SG: You had three very diverse playing styles in the trio with Gordon and John, and with the addition of Clive Carroll this must just about cover a huge spectrum of techniques and timbre. As the ‘nylon’ guy, do you find that you fit in with them, they fit in with you, or does it just work?

RB: It just seems to work; if I am adapting I don’t do it consciously, and probably Gordon and John would be the same.

SG: How does it work out with the arrangements? Is it a

democracy in what you play?

RB: The way the arrangements work in the duo with Gordon is that the repertoire consists of his solo pieces and quite simply I literally write a second part. It’s pretty much the same in the quartet – a lot of the pieces we play are Gordon’s.

SG: And with programming, is it different combinations of solos and duos first half, with the quartet in the second?

RB: No, not quite. For this tour, the first half – a long half – is all solos. Gordon tends to go on first, then me, then John followed by Clive. The second half is various combinations of duos, trios and obviously the quartet. We often start the second half with one of Gordon’s pieces titled ‘The Dodo’s Dream’. It’s a piece he composed for a loop station – he plays a line, records it, plays it back, overdubs it with another part and so on. I arranged this for the four of us so Gordon keeps playing the riff all the way through the piece, I drop a part on top of that, followed by Clive and then John. After this, John and I play a duo, ‘Places Between’, which is one

of the pieces he plays with John Williams. Then a renaissance suite I do with Clive, and so on.

It all started when we first sat round a table at our agent’s place in Worcester, played through a few things, and it was a case of ‘You do this, I’ll do that’ etc; and on the strength of this we put a programme together, with me left to do the arrangements, which is fine because I enjoy doing that sort of thing.

SG: One of the great things about this is that you can live in a different world from the solo classical guitar. For me, sitting in an orchestral pit with a *theorbo* or baroque guitar, working with other musicians, is a huge pleasure.

RB: Absolutely, but I still do a lot of solo concerts and I enjoy playing a lot of the solo repertoire. But you’re right: it’s such good fun and you can’t beat working with good musicians, and especially ones who have a story to tell. In the quartet we all have vocal microphones, so there is a lot of banter going on between us and to the audience – every night is different.

SG: Is it entirely an acoustic set?

RB: John tends to plug in but the rest of us go through the house system. I usually take my own mic around – I use an AKG 414, which is brilliant for what we do. I play on a Philip Woodfield and signature JHS; Gordon Giltrap uses a Fylde, Rob Armstrong and signature JHS*; Clive plays on his Ralph Bown; and John uses a Dave Hodson.

SG: Any plans to expand into a quintet – add a bass?

RB: Not really. It wasn’t even going to be Four Parts Guitar. What happened was that we were offered some gigs for Three Parts Guitar which John couldn’t do because he had some dates lined up with John Williams. We asked Clive to make up the trio for those gigs, and then John’s tour was cancelled, so rather than sit around twiddling his thumbs he joined us and the trio became a quartet.

Rather providential!
Steve Gordon