Andrés Segovia—The Teacher

Michael Lorimer

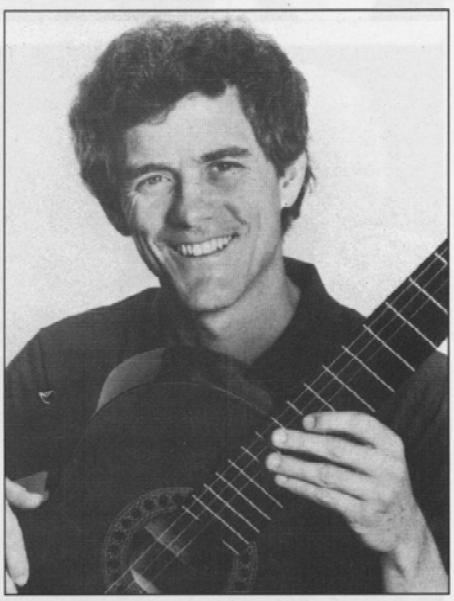
Michael Lorimer's article was commissioned in the early 1970s by Sol Hurok at Segovia's suggestion to be part of a souvenir booklet sold at Segovia's concerts. Unfortunately, Hurok's death derailed the project, but the essay, which Segovia liked very much, remained. It is published here in its entirety.

Of his first pupil, Maestro Segovia says, "From the beginning, master and pupil have remained in such close comradeship that the worst of times have served only to strengthen their bond."

Segovia's first pupil is his most famous one—himself. Since that first pupil, many of the best-known guitarists performing today have studied with him, including Alirio Diaz, Oscar Ghiglia, Christopher Parkening, Jose Tomas, John Williams, and me. Among musicians of Segovia's generation, only Pablo Casals has had as much impact as Segovia on the performance of a musical instrument. To say that every serious classical guitarist today has been profoundly influenced by Segovia is no exaggeration.

Segovia's teaching has been manifested in a remarkably wide variety of forms: numerous editions of music, of which some have an expressed instructive purpose, notably the Segovia scales and the 'Bible' for many classical guitarists, the *Twenty Studies* of Fernando Sor; an extensive list of recordings, including the didactic series *The Guitar and I* (MCA 2535 and 2536); television programs, of which the most important from a teaching standpoint is the 13-program series made by Nathan Kroll, *The Segovia Master Class* (Editor's note: this series is now available from Homevideo Exclusives); books such as *Segovia Technique* by Vladimir Bobri, *My Book of the Guitar*, the method Segovia co-wrote with George Mendoza for the young beginner, and two published volumes of his autobiography; movies; concert appearances; and pupils who are teachers in conservatories around the world. Finally, there is the teaching, which I will describe in this article, based on Segovia's personal instruction at periodic master classes held in cities such as Siena, Italy, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, and Berkeley, California.

A typical class begins with students arriving early and tuning their guitars, talking, and exchanging music. Two chairs are in a place visible to all, one for the student and one for Segovia. When Maestro Segovia arrives, the students rise in respect as he enters the room. He motions for people to sit down and calls



Michael Lorimer was a favorite protegé of Andrés Segovia of whom Segovia once said, "Michael Lorimer is one of the most talented young guitarists of these times and is the one I appreciate the most." Lorimer came to the attention of American audiences in the early 1970s with tours arranged by the great impresario Sol Hurok. Since then, he has performed in all major North American cities and throughout Europe, Israel, and Cuba and was the first American guitarist invited to perform in the former USSR. He has also performed with many major orchestras.

Twenty years ago, long before the current vogue in original instruments, Lorimer started featuring the baroque guitar in his concerts. By the mid-1970s one London critic wrote, "If Lorimer is not the best baroque guitarist in the world at present, the competition has still to present itself." Recently he brought to light a milestone of the guitar repertoire with his discovery of perhaps the best surviving collection for any instrument of early eighteenth-century Spanish dance music. This collection, the Saldivar Codex no. 4, *was identified by Lorimer as the companion volume to the British Museum Library manuscript* Passacalles y Obras (1732), *a legacy from the last great Spanish guitarist of the the Baroque period, Santiago de Murcia. Lorimer has undertaken the task of publishing a detailed study and facsimile of this hitherto anonymous manuscript from Mexico.*

Lorimer is much in demand as a teacher. He has given master classes at universities and conservatories from coast to coast, written for Guitar Review, *and, for six years, contributed a widely-praised monthly column to* Guitar Player. The Michael Lorimer Edition *(distributed by Mel Bay Publications) now numbers more than 20 volumes and features his transcriptions and a special series dedicated to new music. He was featured in a PBS television special, "*The Artistry of Michael Lorimer," *and his CD in tribute to Segovia,* Remembranza, *was released on the Windham Hill/Dancing Cat label.*

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The Segovia master class in Berkeley, California, 1964: (l–r) George Sakelariou, Corrado Mezzina, Lisa Hurlong, Christopher Parkening, Aldo Minella, Guillermo Fierens (playing), Andrés Segovia, Oscar Ghiglia (behind music stand), Michael Lorimer, Mrs. Segovia, Leticia Alba, Ako Ito.

As the student plays, the Maestro might interrupt with comments.

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a student to perform. As the student plays, Segovia might interrupt with comments such as:

> Cleaner here. Would you please play that passage again? Crescendo here. Keep the tempo—don't pause at the end of each phrase. Be careful of your tone. Quieter here, but in the other voice. Finger this like so—that's it. Much better! Don't cut that—play more legato here. This is of no importance in the composition, but it is to fill an empty space; however, it is necessary to fill it with grace. Very rhythmically here. Well, you must work on that some more.

During one afternoon, the class has many moods. Humorously, in mock sadness, after hearing a slow portamento, Maestro says in a high falsetto voice, "Oh no! So sad!" And later, with much warmth and enthusiasm, he exclaims, "That's absolutely beautiful, isn't it? Anything by Dowland is charming." Occasionally you might hear something like, "Que barbaridad! You have absolutely no concept of tempo. Suddenly you start to run like the devil, and then you stop to catch your breath. I am not here to count one-two-three, like in the conservatory!"

Maestro becomes angry when people do not listen or when they show a complete disregard for sensitivity. Students who have uncritically chosen poor editions of music or blindly accepted bad teaching also provoke his ire. In this regard, Segovia has more patience with young people. Students feel the warmth of his satisfaction when he listens to a pupil who has improved.

One reason his classes feel vital is because Segovia's teaching springs organically from the particular piece of music being performed, rather than from a method imposed from without. He has a wonderful recall of music, even music he has not played for years. For the most part, he leaves technical matters to one side, never approaching technique as an issue in itself but always relating it deeply to music. Maestro's comments are concise and practical, and his attitude recalls the saying, "For him who has perception, a mere sign is enough. For him who does not heed, a thousand explanations are not enough."

Segovia does not become involved in lengthy rhetorical discussions and at times he teaches completely by example, illustrating with the guitar, without speaking one word. His playing speaks volumes.

The Maestro's Message to His Students

Segovia's efforts on behalf of his students does not end in the classroom. Knowing that much learning comes from the

real experience of performing, he has enthusiastically and generously furthered the careers of his students through introductions, endorsements, and arranging concerts. His influence has assisted his pupils to gain recognition. Nevertheless, when a student giving a concert once tried to publicly thank Segovia for his guidance, the Maestro turned the acknowledgement aside and said that he, Segovia, had always been his own true teacher and that in one way all artists, like this boy, are their own true teachers. This philosophy is behind Segovia's respect for the individual difference in fingering, editing, interpretation, and other matters as long as he feels these variations still project the music's beauty.

The thrust of Segovia's teaching summons in the student all that gives vigor, life, feeling, energy, and grace to the music. He is concerned with practical details that give the most definition, space, and contour to a musical picture—fingering, articulation, phrasing, use of color and dynamics, and respect for rhythm and nuance. Segovia's profound appreciation for balance, something that always moves me in his playing, is also strongly reflected in his teaching. He calls attention to these issues in diverse ways.

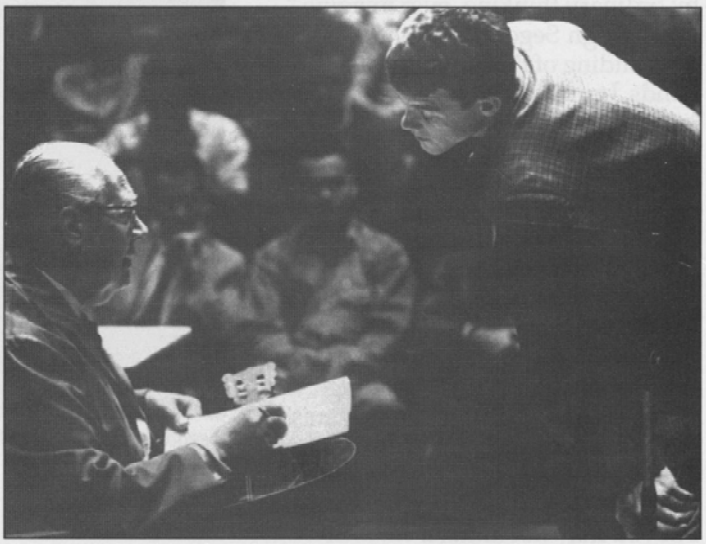
According to Segovia, "Nuance in the rhythm is a result of a delicate lack of respect for the rhythm, and by this 'lack of respect' we may define the good artist and the bad artist." Pointing to an imbalance between the melody and accompaniment in one student's performance, Segovia says, "The way you play this, it sounds like the servant who enters the room and says [Segovia shouts loudly], 'Master, I am at your service!'" Reminding another pupil of the existence of numerous levels in music, Segovia remarks, "You play this as if you were on railroad tracks," and indicates, "I am sitting here, you are sitting there, and the students are sitting over there. You cannot be in all three places at the same time. In the same way, you must observe the various levels in the music."

The proper use and execution of the portamento (the sound produced when a finger slides on the string linking one note with the next) is an issue to which he is particularly sensitive and is one that comes up over and over again since it is poorly understood by many players. Segovia's concern about and awareness of the power of this 'innocent' effect is touching. In general, he directs guitarists to eliminate portamenti because they are so often vulgarly played, but at times Segovia indicates that the portamento is a most beautiful, expressive resource of the guitar.

"Why suppress that?" he asks. "I am not a friend of portamenti, but there are some that are absolutely essential for the guitar and should be played because they sound better on the guitar than on any other instrument."

Segovia approaches some aesthetic questions as if they were matters of decorum: Sit in a way that is pleasant to look at; do not draw attention away from the music by grimacing; tune the guitar quietly so as not to attract attention; and eliminate all that is crude or distracting in playing, such as harsh tone. He often makes analogies between the use of spoken language and music and he points out that the best orator is not the one who speaks most quickly.

Segovia's own speech mirrors his music—he speaks slowly and articulately, with humor and feeling. Punctuated with far fewer pauses, 'ahs' and 'ums,' than you hear in most people's talk, Segovia's speech is remarkable for its fluency.



Maestro Segovia and student Lorimer interact.

What I Found Most Important In Segovia's Teaching

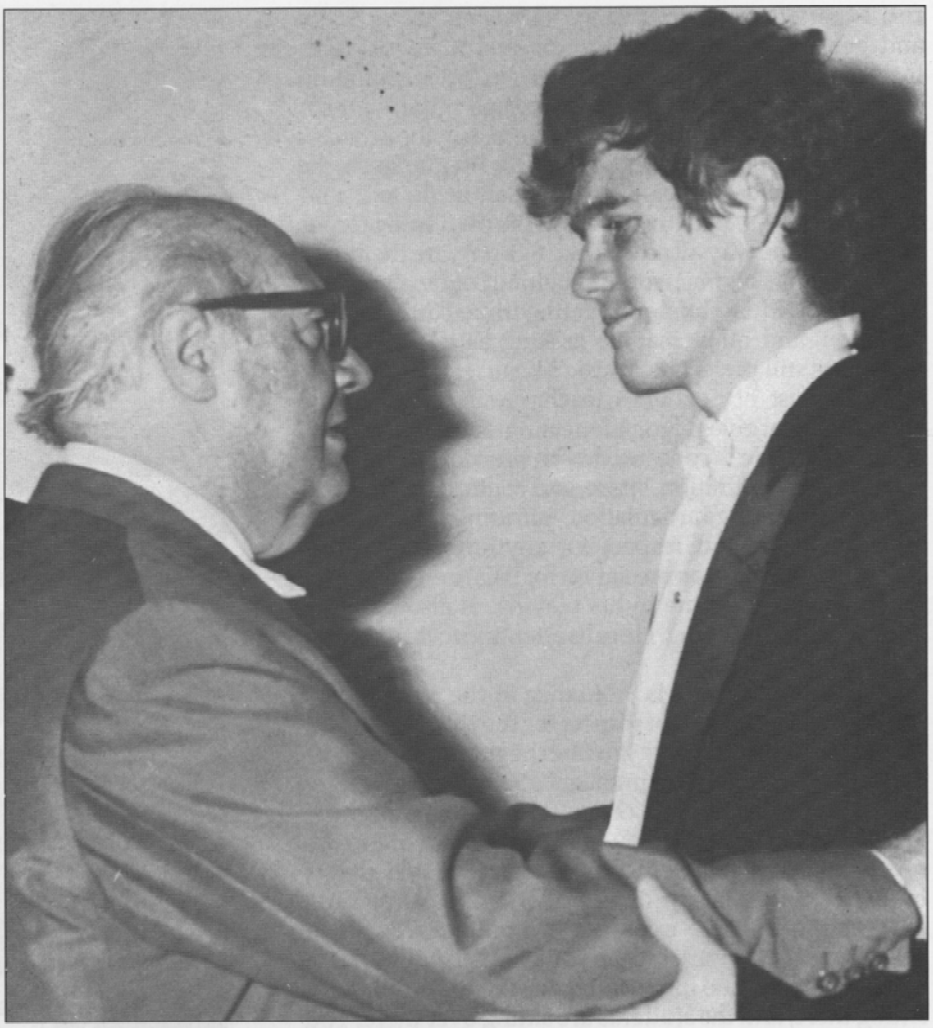
Each student finds within himself the personal meaning and importance of Segovia's message. For example, by watching Segovia, I learned how to sit with the guitar. I immediately sensed the excellence of his position and the freedom with which his hands move on the instrument. The upper part of Segovia's body is free. The guitar is held so that its vibrations are not damped and the sound is projected.

Segovia indicates all this in a very simple way: He sits and he plays. Only once, after being questioned, did he discuss the technical merits of his sitting position. Many times, however, Segovia stresses the importance of posture that is pleasant to look at. At first I was not attracted to cultivating a position based purely on aesthetics. Then I began to see that the sight of Segovia with his guitar enhanced and complemented what I heard in his music, and I was increasingly drawn to the composure I felt in the image of him with his guitar. Later I saw that the sitting position both induces and reflects harmony and composure. Segovia does not try to control the guitar—he lets go and interacts with it.

The knowledge Segovia has given me through suggestions and criticisms accounts for only part of the impact he has had

upon me. Just as important as everything he says, perhaps more important, is his presence. This is difficult to explain since the model of learning in our culture consists mainly in the transmission of facts and concepts: Students go to school to learn a body of information or techniques; courses are described in university catalogs only in terms of content. The power of Segovia's teaching, though, affirms the validity of a model of learning respected in earlier periods and in many other cultures. This is the relationship of apprentice and master, based on the idea that it is important to be in the presence of one who knows, a master. As the Sufi Murza Asim said, "Even if you have only been present, in silence, at the assembly of a Wise One, you have gained more potentiality than you could, by ordinary thinking, ever imagine."

Through Segovia's playing, my understanding of the guitar's potential expands. I am inspired when I hear that so much sound can come from the guitar, that such quality of sound can be produced, and that a piece of music can be played so expressively. Yet, when Segovia's playing has shown me paths for transcending my limits and for reaching more feeling in my playing, it has never been the result of slavishly following techniques, phrasings, fingerings, articulations, tonal shadings, and so on, because that sort of study misses the point completely. In studying the art works of others, it is not permitted to copy, only to steal—that is, you may take the essential whole, but you may not imitate.



Segovia and Lorimer following Lorimer's 1968 concert in Santiago de Compostela.

Every time Segovia plays something, it is different and complete; yet there is always a feeling, an essence. Just as aspects of the sky may change—some days are cloudy, some days are clear—yet there is always the sky. Segovia has found the life force in the music and always keeps it in the center of his playing. He makes clear what is essential. He once said, "The most important thing in life is first, life itself, and then to apply the life we receive from heaven to our family and work—to love what we are doing. The artist loves his art so much that he obliges his audience to love it also."

Segovia's model helps me most obviously when I have explicit goals, but in many cases, I know about goals only after passing them. Then his presence and inspiration are possibly even more important. I have gone to Segovia when I sensed that my playing could be better, and his suggestions showed me more about not only the piece I was playing, but also about my whole approach to the instrument and to music. I am always growing and changing, and this movement is still heightened when I am around Segovia or hear him play.

Being around Segovia, I embrace more feeling in myself. Possibly you have attended one of Segovia's concerts. You may have enjoyed hearing him when he performed. If so, you went to the concert to hear him play in person, though quite possibly you could have heard him better and more comfortably if you had bought a recording and listened to it in your own home. But there was something special about the concert—only there could you fully experience Segovia's presence.

After one of Segovia's concerts you may take his love out into your life in some way. You may feel your life has been enriched and your perceptions made clearer. In the same way each of us may be touched by Segovia when we listen to him play, I have been touched by Segovia the teacher.