

Solo Again, Naturally



Rebuilding this website has the same effect as clearing the attic, a phase I actually went through last summer.

During an enterprise like that, you open up all curtains and sliding walls which used to hide a heritage of many years, you pull out all boxes and treasure chests and start digging. You pass things which have been resting there for ten or twenty years through your hands, continually asking yourself questions like "why am I keeping this?", "Do I actually want to keep this?" or "What use is this after all these years?"

I started to clear my attic briefly after the moment the Guitar Duo DOS Amigos had crashed. Examining one of the many boxes, I came across a modest file with concert programs of our recitals and even a few newspaper scraps. I discarded them, I went solo again, so why should I keep them? I even left my two copies of *The DOS Amigos Duo Book* -my self-made compilation of the sheet music of our repertoire- to another guitar duo. Just making a clean sweep.

I guess you think that this sounds as a clear expression of frustration. It looks like burning all letters from an ex-lover (which- as a matter of fact- I have done somewhere in the past). Nevertheless, it was quite necessary, because it provided some relief in a weird way. Well, it is not that weird. A clean sweep to remove all cobwebs definitely has a therapeutic purpose.

Of course, the duos are not really gone, they are still there as (sheet) music on this site and files on my computer and -safety first! - various back-up media.

The reconstruction of the DOS Amigos Homepage had the same effect as clearing the attic. I dug up all the music, played quite a bit of it, sighed that it was a good time with fine arrangements and beautiful music -this remains the constant factor- felt sick to death about the way it ended and concentrated on the future in the end. Exactly the purpose of the remake of this web site.

The tentative conclusion will be: *Solo again, naturally...*

The difference between solo playing and duo playing became quite clear to me on the last meeting of the Guitar Circle.

Being a soloist -*Nomen est Omen*- you are on your own. You will have to pull yourself up by your shoestrings. A computer scientist calls this not without a sense of humour bootstrap, the self-starting-up of a computer like the kick of a boot. There is only one you can praise for the success and blame for the failure, guess who it is... yourself (guitar playing does not involve arbiters who can be blamed for everything).

Playing alone in front of an audience is sometimes scary, being on stage on your own without back-up. I was not used to it any more after fifteen years of duo playing. You have to adapt your attitude to independence, you have to motivate and inspire yourself, it just feels weird. After all those years I had forgotten this.

To be honest, I was taking some risks at that time. Playing by heart for instance. If you have a black-out as a soloist, you are done for a moment. The only thing you can do is continue at the last known point (do not start all over again) without picking up the pieces, and keep smiling.

Apart from the social effect -it is just great to make a great musical performance as a team of musicians- ensemble play offers some security which a soloist is lacking.

One of these things is backing. The sense that you get help to play on, even if things go wrong at times. The other side of the coin, however, may be that you have the opportunity to be a bit careless in the wake of the play of the other(s).

The effect of the sense of backing became clear too on the same Guitar Circle meeting: I played some duo material with my teacher Robert and felt much more relaxed. Sufficiently relaxed to be able to improvise impromptu on the chord progressions of some popular Latin themes, even the gaps in the solos appeared natural.

Anyway, I am working again on my solo skills now. Making some recordings presents a perfect exercise. Which does not imply, however, that I will hesitate to establish a duo (or an ensemble) again if the opportunity arises.