

# Idols

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According to the good old *Concise Oxford* the word *idol* means *image or deity used as an object of worship, or false god*. The dual meaning of the word implies a warning, an idol can easily change from a great example into a false god.

Well, I never went that far for myself. I can admire some people, but I will not bend my knees for them in worship.

There are lots of idols in popular music. And if there aren't they try to drag them from the street, just like in the popular TV show *Idols*. Just watch the reactions of the audience during pop concerts, or the things that happen if a popular band arrives at the airport: people go crazy and even faint!

I'm not a man for overenthusiasm, I will not go crazy when observing a superstar. Nevertheless, I can feel lots of admiration, or experience a sense of elation which makes me want to pick up a guitar right away! But... no further show for me!

I have had many great examples of guitar players right from the start of my classical guitar playing enterprise.

In that sense, John Williams was my first idol. The local record shop had Bach's *The Four Suites for Lute* in the bargain bin, the well-known CBS recording from the seventies, featuring a pretty young John Williams. I bought the record, my first classical guitar LP and became an enthusiast for William's style and the music by Bach for lute. Many years later I have to admit, that John Williams' play in that period was almost meagre in comparison to his current activities. His age, his musical wisdom and a great instrument -the well-known Smallman- provide a maturity to his play, which I did not hear to that extent in his first Bach recordings. Just listen to his latest recordings of Barrios Mangore to notice the difference!

I have had the pleasure to attend a live-recital by Williams once. Unfortunately, it became a bit of a let-down. The Great Hall in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam required amplification of the guitar and I must say that the way it was done did not benefit the sound and expression of his recital. It was a bit of a tin can sound. Such a shame!

I was a fan of the guitar duo John Williams/Julian Bream as well. I like to listen to the *Together* albums and the *Live* CD, both fine examples of duo play in those days.

I was not quite fascinated by Julian Bream's solo guitar playing, but I did like his Renaissance lute recordings. I remember the record *The Woods so Wild*, with beautiful fantasias by Francesco da Milano and all those well-known English lute tunes like *Go from my Window* and *A Loth to Depart*.

There are more guitarists that I appreciate and admire. Appreciation comes first with me, admiration, however, only has a chance to take hold after a live recital.

I like to listen to David Russell. His CDs with the Tarrega repertoire are top class and he has a very convincing style on stage. I almost fell from my chair in sheer admiration, seeing the apparent ease he shows when darting through diabolically difficult Tarrega material, while striking *each* ornament perfectly. Well, there were many of them!

Likewise, in his recordings and on stage, Manuel Barrueco shows accurate and well-wrought play. Everything is so finished, that it is sometimes almost scary. Just fascinating!

The recital by Sharon Isbin was a humorous one. She entered the stage like a dark-haired queen in a beautiful long red dress, even though this garment appeared completely impractical during guitar playing in the classical pose. When she announced an encore afterwards, I was completely surprised, because her voice was so different from what I expected. She had a genuine and original Texan intonation, usually known from John Wayne movies.

But speaking is not important when you for example listen to her album *Dreams of a World* with those beautiful folk song arrangements. Goosebumps of pleasure! Plus, a little insight in the famous Jewish expression of yearning wishing each other *Next year in Jerusalem!* while listening to her interpretation of *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*, Jerusalem of Gold...

The Assad brothers gave me the most intense experience of near-idolatry. When they played, there was chemistry, a clearly discernible joyful contact between audience and players on the wings of the incredible Brazilian music. I had never experienced it like that. That divine swing! Even in 19th century guitar duets by Fernando Sor!

Many will miss Andres Segovia in the ranks of my idols, I guess. Well, fair enough, he was a great guitarist, I know his significance for the guitar and the guitar repertoire, but his style just has no appeal for me. I do not mean offence, it's just the way it is. The freedom of the beholder! So alas, I do not own any recording by Segovia.

Idols are nice as an aiming point for your own play, but it should not be overdone. My guitar teacher warned numerous times against over-enthusiastic imitation.

"You will not add anything to the world with an almost perfect John Williams imitation", he said, "your *own* interpretation, however, surely will!"

In brief: play your own game and don't let your idol become a false god!