

# EDOARDO CATEMARIO

By GUY TRAVISS



*Edoardo Catemario.*

ITALIAN GUITARIST Edoardo Catemario began his music studies at the age of five. He has studied guitar with Salvatore Canino, Antimo Pedata, Jose Tomas and Maria Luisa Anido in addition to further studies with Titina De Fazio, Leo Brouwer and Oscar Roberto Casares. Catemario gave his first solo recital at the age of eleven. Since then he has won several national and international competitions including the Andres Segovia and Alessandria competitions in 1991 and 1992 respectively.

One of the defining features of Catemario as a guitarist is his association with chamber music repertoire and 42 concertos for guitar and orchestra. A major part of his performance career has been his work as a soloist with orchestras, and he continues to perform with orchestras led by some of today's most revered conductors. Catemario has recorded discs with DECCA, ARTS Music, Koch Schwann and EMI. Since 2007 he is regularly invited as guest professor at the Royal Academy of Music (London - UK).

*You mention that you are involved in a variety of musical styles and genres, including performances*

*on period instruments. Are these all equally important to you?*

I am a classical performer. I play classical music. What we commonly call 'classical music' embraces a wide range of different periods and styles - five centuries of music, from all the continents. From Scarlatti to Evans, from Bach to Ginastera, from Dowland to Sor, Giuliani and to folk songs, Piazzolla and Bolling... I love them all.

Period instruments offer the occasion to take advantage of different sounds. Romantic guitars have a more refined, round, powerful sound, and a palette of colours quite different from the modern instrument. They are elegant. The practice of performing on period instruments opened my mind in many ways. I started playing on romantic guitars at the end of the 90s. From time to time I still play on some Lacote or Pons guitars. I tend to distance myself from those who are obsessed by being 'philologically correct'. Perhaps they are right, but I must say that I wouldn't play anything in a way that I dislike just because some other guitarist says that it is philologically correct.



At the end of the day I must admit I prefer to play the modern guitar. I have played my Enrique Garcia (made in 1918) and Francisco Simplicio (1931) since 1987. Sometimes I use a wonderful Antonio Emilio Pascual (1925). As you can see they are vintage instruments. I find that these guitars made by great masters of the past have more palette, better sound quality and greater possibilities of expressivity when compared to more recently built guitars. I have been very lucky to have had the opportunity to play a huge number of vintage guitars (Torres, Santos Hernandez, Garcia, Simplicio, Estes, Ramirez I and Manuel Ramirez among others).

The concert I am going to play at the Wigmore Hall this year will be performed on different instruments: a Lacote (very close to the one used by Fernando Sor); a Torres (same as Tarrega's), generously given to me by James Westbrook, and my Enrique Garcia. The programme includes several works written or published in London.

A special word has to be said about the strings that I use. For almost twenty years now I have been using the same brand of strings on all different types of guitar (modern, vintage and romantic): *Royal Classics - Sonata light*.

*Do you feel more at home with a particular musical style?*

I am curious about all the repertoire of my instrument, whether it is ancient, classical, romantic, modern, folk or avant-garde music. I have spent hours reading all the scores I can find, and at my home I have a collection of printed scores (I still love to read and practise using printed scores). I find it extremely rewarding to discover how, on the one hand, the 'deep meaning of feelings' has not changed much during the centuries, while on the other, how differently it has been expressed: the composer using different poetics and idioms according to his period, his country of origin and his life. Then, when you have the opportunity to collaborate with a living composer the experience is even better. The composition and the performance walk side by side, often giving both the composer and performer the best results of their musical careers. When I learn a piece of music my goal is to become the piece; I try to get in touch with the composer's feelings and try to share a piece of his life. Culture, tradition, and the heritage of my teachers' words are the tools that I use during this operation. The music that I choose to play involves me at many levels (emotionally, aesthetically, culturally). I would not play music that I consider ugly. Obviously, not all the music that I play for myself finds a place in a

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concert programme. In order to perform a piece in concert I must be persuaded that it will be well received by the audience. Of course not all pieces are equally good for all audiences. Sometimes you get help from artistic directors, for example, when choosing a programme. Usually they know their audience and have a different perspective.

A crucial issue in a professional performer's life is the temptation to perform only commercial music. During the past twenty years we have experienced a kind of schizophrenic attitude to this: on one side you have a lot of crossover music (a bit of classical, jazz and folk all shaken together and served cold). On the other there is the need for original music. Occasionally some really bad pieces find a place in a repertoire simply because they are in a sense original. Sometimes pieces by some unknown nineteenth century composers appear again after 100 years from what I call a 'well deserved oblivion'. I have the same feelings towards some avant grade pieces whose meaning is completely unknown to me. Again, it's a matter of culture and good

taste. Good taste and culture should be the principal issue of any performer. For many years I have listened to acidic commentaries about the 'evergreens' by the same guitarists who were playing music that sounded to my ears like advert jingles. What should an honest performer do in these situations? I think that the ethics of a performer are strictly bonded to his aesthetics. It's important to play good, deep, moving music. In my experience the audience tends to recognise good music well done when they hear it.

*Period instruments offer certain advantages when performing the music intended for them, especially with regard to idiom. Why is it important for us to hear this music performed on original instrumentation?*

Recently I have heard many fine disquisitions about the subtlest differences regarding idiom on period and modern instruments. The difference between romantic guitar and modern guitar is notable, but sometimes I get the impression that those who specialise in historical performance (those who tend to have these discussions) make an abyss of a small hole. Perhaps that's in the nature of all those who inhabit these small worlds. When I was younger there were never-ending discussions on the supremacy of cedar over the spruce top and vice versa. Another common subject at that time was baroque ornamentation. Today many guitarists spend a lot of words on the importance of originality when performing (this is a neurotic approach to the score,





**Edoardo Catemario and Max.**

perhaps narcissistic?) and, from time to time, the legitimacy of the adaptation of music to the modern guitar. In my opinion, arrangements, any arrangements, tell a lot about the person who makes them. A good performer, with good culture, great knowledge and relevant practice on period instruments will probably make different choices from a bad performer who knows very little.

That said, I think it is important for every guitarist to play on period instruments. They should know the great historic luthiers and seek to try as many different historic instruments as they can (from collections, museums etc.). I know very few violinists who don't know the sound of a Stradivarius. But many guitarists have never played a Panormo, Lacote, Torres, Garcia or Santos Hernandez. It's important to know the roots of your instrument in order to understand how the music possibly sounded when it was composed. This is an aspect of what I have been calling culture.

*What has historical performance practice taught you about adapting this music for the modern instrument?*

Music is music. I began to play the guitar when I was five years old, the classical guitar. I was seduced by the sound of the great masters who quickly become my heroes. Their names were Andres Segovia, Maria Luisa Anido, Mario Parodi, Ernesto Bitetti and later Julian Bream.

My professor of music, Titina De Fazio, was an organist and composer. She didn't know anything about the guitar. She taught me to use an instrument, whatever instrument, like an instrument. She used to say, 'a smith uses a hammer, and you use your instrument to do your job, feel the difference and be a musician'. I also had to learn to play a little bit of organ. Sometimes we would play together, four hands on the organ or piano, or she on the keyboard and me on the guitar. It didn't make any difference. As I have said, historical performance practice has been very interesting and intriguing and gave me occasion to investigate sound on a different guitar.

*What is your view on musical improvisation? To what extent do you add to the score, especially with regard to historical practices?*

This is an interesting question. When I was a child, around Christmas time, my family used to get together in big reunions. There were many good singers able to improvise the most wonderful tunes of our folklore: Neapolitan songs. I can clearly recall them. Later on, during my studies, I discovered that those techniques that my uncles, aunts and grandparents were using (diminutions, ornamentation, cadenzas, counterpoint in thirds, sixths and so on) were the same used in baroque and classical music. I think that by listening to the music, all the music, you can learn and improve a lot. Playing the organ got me



thinking about the guitar polyphonically. I try to recognise all the singing lines and give to each its own dynamics, its own meaning.

Regarding the score, I try to be careful with all that is written in. I rarely change any written sign. I write my own cadenzas and sometimes I arrange my own version of the pieces that I play (like the Paganini *Gran Sonata* or the Giuliani *Sonata Eroica* or Bach's *Chaconne*). There are books that I consider to have made a fundamental contribution to my musical development: *The Art of the Violin* by Leopold Mozart, Quantz's book about baroque dances and ornamentation, *The Art of Fugue* by Bach, *Elements of Composition* by Shoenberg, *A Practical Method of Harmony* by Rimsky Korsakov. I tend to choose to learn from books written by those who I consider great musicians. All the information that I have been able to put together is the key that I use to understand the score in front of me. A score can be read on many levels: the more you know the structures (all of them, micro and macro structures) the better you can recognise and use them to make musical meaning evident. The more you are aware of the style the more you can bring the piece to its original affection and so on. The basics of the musical meaning are relatively simple; the use of them takes an entire life to be mastered. I have written a humble booklet (downloadable for free from my website: [www.catemario.com](http://www.catemario.com)) in which I try to explain in

a few, comprehensible words the *Basics of Interpretation*.

*As a performing artist attached to some major record labels, how have negotiations with record companies affected the music you record?*

I had the chance to work with a wonderful artistic director who unfortunately passed away at a very young age (Gian Andrea Lodovici). He supervised and produced my first ten recordings. What he taught me was that a recording is made to be sold. This doesn't necessarily mean that you have to play commercial or easy listening music, but that there must be a project behind whatever it is you are making. If today you wish to record the greatest hits of the guitar you must be prepared to offer some freshness, something new that has not been said before. That's hard. The most famous pieces in the repertoire have been recorded extensively by many of the greatest performers. It's much easier to perform and record something unknown. The artistic director of the label of my recent recordings (Universal Italia) has been very flexible and leaves to me a considerable freedom on the choice of what I want to record. The last three recordings have been: *Bach for Guitar* (Decca) and five centuries of spanish music in two CDs, *Recuerdos* and *Espana* (Decca).

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