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A TRIBUTE TO FREDERICK M. NOAD

August 8 1929 - September 13, 2001

by Edward Flower

Frederick Noad passed away on September 13, 2001. The world of music has lost a great champion and friend. An extraordinarily gifted man, Fred Noad was a master teacher, an accomplished performer on both classical and flamenco guitar, a scholar, composer, arranger, transcriber, software developer, publisher, and, of course, author. Meeting him for the first time, one might not immediately guess that this gentle, modest man had a fierce passion for music and an ardent and implacable desire to pursue and realize his dreams. The concentration of all this productive and intense energy was focused on the guitar. He had an encyclopedic knowledge about its history, repertoire and techniques, and leaves us an enduring legacy of scholarly editions, anthologies, recording, and instructional books and videos.

Frederick McNeill Noad was born on August 8th, 1929, in Blankenburg, Belgium. His father was Colin Kenneth Noad of London-a doctor and Captain attached to the 9th Gurkha Rifles in India. His mother was Eileen Maude McNeill of Ellary Estate, Argyllshire, Scotland. The couple was on holiday in Belgium when their new son made a surprise entry into the world. In 1931, at the age of 39, soon after returning to active duty in India, Colin Noad succumbed to cholera. Frederick was only two years old, and his brother, Duncan, only seven. Their mother, finding herself alone with two young sons, had to forge a career for herself. Being a determined and talented woman, fluent in German and a number of other languages, she found work with the British Foreign Service and the BBC, eventually receiving the award of an M.B.E. (Member of the British Empire) for her efforts.

Frederick Noad grew up in Eversley, a small rural village in Berkshire, England. He attended Eagle House Preparatory School, and was later accepted a Wellington College, where he received his diploma in Latin, Greek, Ancient History and Literature. Having a quick ear, he excelled in modern language studies, eventually becoming fluent in French and Spanish. It was during that time he began his musical studies on the violin, meanwhile developing a fascination for the guitar, which inspired him to make a number of trips to Spain in search of flamenco instruction. This was the beginning of a great love and enthusiasm for flamenco, that lasted and grew throughout his lifetime.

In 1948, at the age of nineteen, he enlisted in the Royal Corps of Signals. A year later, he was commissioned as a Lieutenant and was stationed in Vienna, Austria, where he specialized in intelligence gathering and radio communications. He also taught skiing to the troops. Fred remained an avid HAM radio enthusiast throughout his life. He was always a committed "gadgeteer" or "techie" and, being a man of infinite curiosity, these skills were eventually channeled into the world of computers. He was released from duty in 1950 and subsequently attended Brasenose College, Oxford University, where he received his M.A. in Jurisprudence on May 2nd 1957.

All the while, Fred had been actively performing as a guitarist. The flamenco team Rosandro and Margarita hired him as their principal accompanist at the Fiesta Club in London. Upon graduating from Oxford, he was employed by J. Arthur Rank Films, and in 1958 was sent to the United States to join the newly organized story department in Hollywood. However, shortly after his arrival in California, the Rank Organization underwent what is now called "downsizing," so Fred found himself in Los Angeles without a job. Always intrepid and optimistic, this momentary adversity did not dismay him in the least, and proved to be an opportunity to use his musical

abilities. He was engaged to play at the Chef's Inn in Corona Del Mar. This seemingly inauspicious engagement was to be the beginning of a most illustrious career in the world of music and the guitar.

It was at this time that Frederick met Marilyn Clay Stuart, in whom he found his lifelong partner. They were married on June 2, 1960. While honeymooning in Spain, Fred had the opportunity to study with Andres Segovia at "Musica en Compostela," in Santiago de Compostela. He continued his study of guitar with Celedonio Romero and Julian Bream, also composition with Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco. Although the couple traveled extensively and lived in England for a few years, California became their home, and Fred chose to become an American citizen. In early 1960s he and his wife founded the Spanish Guitar Center in Hollywood, where he taught and imported fine guitars by such luthiers as Miguel Rodriguez of Cordoba, and Manuel de la Chica of Granada. As his reputation grew, he was more in demand as a teacher and player throughout the Los Angeles area.

In 1963, he was asked to write a method book for guitar by the publisher Collier Books, which at the time was marketing the "Quick and Easy Guide" brand name series. The book was an introduction to classical, flamenco and folk guitar playing, and proved to be a best seller. Shortly thereafter, in 1964, Fred approached KCET, the Public Television affiliate in Los Angeles, with the idea of televising a series of guitar lessons. Coincidentally, the station manager was a guitar aficionado, and showed Fred a book he had just purchased on guitar instruction. He was looking at the book to tell Fred who the author was, when he realized that he was actually speaking to him! Thus began a relationship between Frederick Noad and educational television which continues to this day. This series, shot in black and white, ran from 1964 to 1968. Fred developed a format of simple, clear progressive lessons, concluding with his performing a short piece. These programs captured the imagination of millions of viewers. In 1981, he televised a new series in color, which is still in syndication in most major cities in the United States, as well as being broadcast overseas from Samoa to Israel.

Throughout this time, Fred Noad remained busy with teaching and performing. In 1964 he established a guitar instruction program at the University of Redlands. Later, in 1973, he founded another at the University of California at Irvine. He initiated a concert series at Plummer Park in Los Angeles and taught summer courses at Idlewild. As a player, he became best known for the performances which concluded his T.V. lessons. He also gave soloconcerts, and duet concerts with the guitarist Howard Heitmeyer. He frequently performed with the tenor Hayden Blanchard, with whom he recorded the LP for Orion Records: John Dowland, Songs and Dances, upon which Fred played the lute, accompanied by Ruth Adams on the viola da gamba. He also played lute and theorbo with Musica Pacifica, recording with them the music to La Daphne on ABC records.

Based on the success of his television programs and the Quick and Easy Guide to Playing the guitar, in 1968 Macmillan Books asked him to write a method book for classical guitar. This resulted in the book Solo Guitar Playing, which proved to be the cornerstone of his life's work. His wife, Marilyn, an artist, collaborated with him, drawing the illustrations for the book, and assisting with proofreading, as she did often for many of Fred's books. Solo Guitar Playing has come to be the book of choice for hundreds of thousands of professional teachers and amateur players throughout the world. When asked why he wrote a method book, he replied that, while teaching, it seemed pointless to repeat the same basic information to student after student, when, by writing a book, they could all refer to the same source. It was this combination of inspiration and practicality which underscored all of Fred's work.

It is not an easy task to write a good introductory method book. The author has to be an accomplished instrumentalist, a master teacher, has to know the repertoire intimately, has to be

able to empathize with those who have absolutely no musical background, has to set out each step in a logical, easily digestible sequence, all the while inspiring the student to reach for the next goal. Fred's gift was that he understood both the path of the total beginner and the aspiring professional. Those reading his books have the sensation that the author is not just laying out information but is their mentor and is with them all the way. He often said that he was a great believer in "music in the home," and, in his books and TV-shows, he was always steering the student toward playing something substantial-however simple-so that the would-be players might derive a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction with each step of their musical journey.

Soon after the publication of *Solo Guitar Playing*, the rights of Collier's *A Quick and Easy Guide to Playing the Guitar* reverted to him, and the book was republished under the title *Playing the Guitar* by MacMillan. In the meantime, he had begun to work on a series of anthologies which were to be published by the Ariel Company, a division of Music Sales. This series of four books-*The Renaissance Guitar*, *The Baroque Guitar*, *The Classical Guitar* and *The Romantic Guitar*-is another invaluable contribution to the guitarist's library. Any player looking for an overview of plucked instrumental music from 1500 to 1900 cannot wish for a better collection. Each of these books was meticulously researched. Fred scoured museums and libraries throughout Europe to ensure that each piece in the series was not only a gem, but also historically authentic and accurate.

It was while he was doing research for these anthologies in Spain in 1968 that I first met Fred and his wife, Marilyn. We stayed up until dawn at a flamenco club in the Castillo de Santa Barbara in Alicante. The night culminated with Fred teaching the club's guitarist how to play Sor's famous B minor etude. The young player had been hearing it played every day on Spanish Television but could not read music, so when he understood that Fred was a well known teacher, he begged him to show him how to play it. I remember being struck by the clarity and purity of Fred's guitar sound, echoing through the old Spanish castle. Years later, we did a number of duet recitals and recordings. Besides the fun we had, the memory which lingers the most is Fred's exquisite sense of phrasing, and the beauty of his tone.

When personal computers arrived on the scene, it was a dream come true for Fred. He was always the first in line for any new gadget, and the early Commodore 64 found an instant place in his heart. Within weeks, he had written his own music writing program-albeit very basic. This sowed the seed for what eventually came to be called "SpeedScore." From the Commodore, he graduated to the Atari and then, later, to the Mac. He humorously dubbed his efforts "Noad's Folly," because at times the amount of time spent developing the program seemed inconsistent with the potential rewards. What he wanted was a computer music-writing program which one could learn in minutes, which was intuitive and logical (much like Fred), without a host of unnecessary "bells and whistles," and was as close to writing by hand as possible. The process of developing "SpeedScore" typified Fred's approach to realizing his ideas. He was a creative visionary, but even more so a doer. He made the supposition that "SpeedScore," as an idea, might simplify his life, and if that turned out to be the case, then he could market it and simplify other people's lives too.

Other major works were published: *The First Book for the Guitar*, written for the younger student; *Solo Guitar Playing, Volume 2*; *The New Guitar Song Book*; *100 Classical Studies*; *Frederick Noad's Classical Guitar Treasury*; *Heitor Villa Lobos' Complete Works for Solo Guitar*; two TV booklets(12 lessons each) which accompany the Television instruction series; *The Virtual Guitarist*, and his final publication, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Playing the Guitar*.

It seems a curious coincidence that his first and last books would be general introductory methods for a "brand name" series. Both have proven to be bestsellers, and deservedly so. The complete *Idiot's Guide to Playing the Guitar* is, in its way, a masterpiece. The total beginner, starting from scratch, all of a sudden finds that he or she is playing music. I complemented Fred on this

seemingly effortless progression, and all he said was: "Yes, well I've spent quite a bit of time thinking about this." He was a master of understatement.

I was recently speaking about Fred with a friend who is a prominent teacher in the Chicago area. He commented that almost every student who walks through his door has at least one or two books by Frederick Noad. It is hard to quantify the effect he has had on the guitar industry, but my friend's observation must hold true throughout the English speaking world. Furthermore, Solo Guitar Playing has been translated in Dutch, Italian, French, Japanese, Korean and Spanish, and is also available in China. The TV series is still in syndication throughout the world, so it is safe to say that his efforts and example have introduced millions upon millions of people to the guitar, giving them solid technical and musical foundations, and inspiring their lives through the gift of being able to play music. His is an immeasurable contribution to our world. His life's work has made it a better place. If I were to imagine Fred living longer, you can be sure that he would have filled these years with an abundance of even more inspiring books and teachings. As it is, we are graced by an unparalleled legacy of musical offerings for the guitar, which will enrich generations long after you and I are gone.

Those who knew him will remember him as a warm, modest, wise, and witty man, a devoted husband, loyal friend, and a lover of animals, especially dogs and cats. He had impeccable "old world" manners, a terrific sense of humor and fun, an excellent grasp of business matters, and a giving, generous spirit. He was a first rate musician and a truly caring human being. Rest in peace, Fred.