



Lorimer's Leningrad concert poster.

Some news at last for those who have wondered about the fortunes of the guitar in Russia. It is doing fine, and if Michael Lorimer reads it correctly, it should be doing better.

As the first American classical guitarist to concertize in the Soviet Union, he crisscrossed that great country from Leningrad, on the Gulf of Finland, to the city of Tbilisi in the Soviet republic of Georgia (far south on the Black Sea across from Turkey and Iran). Lorimer was pleasantly impressed by what he saw, for even though he is a classical guitarist, he had the opportunity to meet players of all types and talents. Moreover, he is conversant with all phases of the instrument, and now concludes that there is a great awakening of interest in guitar in Russia.

The idea of his historic trip was initiated by his agent, the late Sol Hurok, a legendary figure among classical promoters of cultural exchanges between the East and the West. On several occasions Hurok discussed plans to send Michael on such a trip. After his death, Hurok's agency followed up the idea by taking news of Lorimer and his music to the Gosconcert, the Russian agency that books artists and performers. "It was they who actually invited me," Michael explains. "We started out prepared to do nine concerts, but by the time we arrived, two more had been scheduled, because the original series was sold out well in advance of our arrival. It was great to be invited for such an extended tour."

Lorimer left San Francisco on February 18, 1975 and flew straight to Moscow via New York and London.

Michael Lorimer

First American Classical Guitarist To Tour The U.S.S.R.

By Alice C. Gilbert

"Except for the first two days I spent getting down from jet lag," he recalls, "I played or traveled the rest of the time, almost a month. I'd travel one day and play the next. On a few occasions I played the day I arrived."

The eleven appearances included two concerts in Leningrad, two in Moscow, two in Kiev (capital of the Ukrainian Republic), one in the Black Sea city of Tbilisi (both the people and environment there reminded him of Italy or some other Mediterranean country), one in Tiga (capital city of the Latvian Republic), two in Lithuania, and he made his final bow in Kharkov.

Lorimer felt that the local managers were as pleased with the sellout crowds as he. In several places, the same request (that sounded like an idiom due to its unvaried repetition) was made by these promoters: "Come back five times!"

Because of the time devoted to per-

forming and traveling, the visiting guitarist had little time for sight-seeing. Neither did he have an opportunity to visit the music stores he saw in all the cities he visited. Nevertheless, he did meet and talk with a great many guitarists and aficionados of the instrument. "In Russia," Michael states, "the hero of the guitar seems to be a man named Ivanov Kramskoy, a guitarist who also writes music."

Michael knows nothing about the availability of Soviet recordings in the United States and, in fact, is conscious of only one LP. This contains music by Kramskoy and is entitled *Concerto For Guitar and Strings* [Monitor, MC 2024]. He knows of no one, other than himself, who even owns the record, and doubts that this album will be easy to obtain, since Kramskoy recently died.

Before audiences, Lorimer wanted to present the guitar as a classical instrument. With this in mind, he arranged two programs. The first was structured for those who might never have heard the guitar in a classical context. In Michael's own words, "A program where they'd say, 'Wow — the guitar can really do a lot of things — has a lot of variety to it.'" The second program was composed of longer pieces: A Bach suite, four Sor studies, all of the Villa-Lobos preludes. It was a closer look at the classical aspect, with less variety but more depth. "It was a program one might hear," he explains, "in some big city in the United States, where not only guitarists but the average person in the audience would recognize the music, enjoy it, and would be likely to say, 'I know that. Is there a guitar recording of it?'"

In contrast to American concertgoers, one thing that particularly struck

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Lorimer's Leningrad concert poster, listing works by Albeniz, Segovia, Dowling, and others. "Guitarist Michael Lorimer (United States of America)."

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MICHAEL LORIMER

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Lorimer about Russian audiences was how quiet they were during a performance. "Anyone who's been to a guitar concert knows there's coughing — maybe not a lot, but always a little," he begins. "If you've been to Segovia's performances, you know he has a habit of glaring people down for it. Well, in Russia there was none. I couldn't believe it. The first time I played I noticed this. The second I was amazed: Still no coughing. And the third time, it was the same thing. I'm not sure what the reason for it was. All I know is, it was quiet.

"But after you've played," he continues, "then what a difference! They are really demonstrative. They applaud warmly for as long a time as a western audience might, but then they go into a rhythmic clapping that I'd never heard before from any audience. It was exciting and really a great response to receive for your efforts and the music."

Michael says that the Russian audience gave him no less than four or five encores at all performances, nearly double the two to three expected by a concert guitarist in the United States and Europe (Segovia, of course, receives more).

"I have a good repertoire so I wasn't floored by this," Lorimer states, "although I hadn't expected so much enthusiasm. In fact, in Leningrad I played several encores and retired to the dressing room since I felt that was what was expected to me. I sat down to wait to meet the people who usually come backstage after a performance, when the manager of the hall rushed in to say that I'd better go back on the stage as they were still clapping. I had to play several more selections before I could leave.

Another difference he noticed was the way in which Russian audiences express approval by showering gifts upon a musician. Michael elaborates: "You know how at the opera the leading soprano is presented with a bouquet of flowers, usually supplied by the house? Well, in Russia people like to bring flowers to the concert and give them themselves. It could be just a couple, but it was very nice. They also like to give other kinds of gifts." Lorimer produces a cache of such items to illustrate: A group of reproductions of the works by the giver's favorite artist, postcards of the scenery or architecture of the city in which he'd played, even a small statuette of a guitarist carved by a guitar lover in one audience. Lorimer brought back many such offerings and cherishes them all.

The crowds he encountered in Russia were also great autograph hounds. They

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MICHAEL LORIMER

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swarmed into the dressing room after a performance, seeking a signature on their programs. Michael managed to save one lone copy of his program. All the rest were taken by the audience after he'd signed them.

In Lorimer's judgment, the Russian music halls he played in are all acoustically very good for the guitar. They are not large (the larger facilities are reserved for cultural events that require them), but they are excellent recital halls. For example, all are smaller in size than Tully hall in New York's Lincoln Center. Many of them are old, built in the 18th Century for chamber music, though even the new structures are copies of old ones. This classical architecture, with pillars supporting a square balcony, contributes to an atmosphere of intimacy. Lorimer confesses that his favorite was the concert hall in Leningrad. Called the Bolshoi Hall, it is considered by many to be the finest recital hall in Russia. Michael's opinion was that this reputation is well deserved. "In the first place, it is extremely beautiful," he states, "and the acoustics are excellent for presenting the tonal variety of the guitar."

Although this virtuoso plays without aid of amplification, Lorimer is familiar with technical gadgetry for the guitar

through experiences with recording. Michael remarks that — at least at the present time — there are fewer technical aids in the U.S.S.R. than in the West, but he feels that there will be many more in the future, since the Soviet government recently raised the priority of consumer-type goods in the country.

The most frequent request from guitarists he met on his tour was for good strings or for music written or arranged for the guitar. Sympathizing with this need, he did part with several sets of his own strings, since Russians are not permitted to buy these items outside their own country yet.

In several instances Lorimer had the chance to play the guitars of some musicians he met, and he tried to emphasize that good equipment — though helpful — is not the sole factor in achieving a good sound. "So many times," Michael begins, "you hear a young guitarist say, 'If I had a guitar like B. B. King's, I could really play.' In fact, I remember when I was studying with Segovia, I was impressed with the quality of his sound. I handed him my guitar to find out what mine would sound like if he played it. He lifted it to his knee and played it as superbly as his own. It was one of the most important learning experiences of my life."

Lorimer states that there are many *Continued on page 40*



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guitars in the U.S.S.R., since people play styles ranging from folk to classical (even some flamenco). Virtually all of these instruments are Russian-made. Indeed, a good number are homemade. In most instances, they are not of poor quality, but Michael saw none that were



5

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PROGRAMA

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any match for a good Spanish or western-made concert guitar. His own, a Ramirez, was a big hit with the Rus-

sians, most of whom had never seen a 'foreign' guitar.

He himself saw only one made outside Russia. It was a Japanese Kohno owned by a man in Moscow. "It was a very good instrument," Michael recalls, "perhaps the best I heard there. It was also the best Kohno I've ever heard, and I'm very familiar with that brand. The man received it some years ago as a promotional gift from the Kohno people, I believe."

The enthusiasm Lorimer found for guitar, in addition to the increased production of guitars and technical equipment, leads him to believe that a guitar renaissance is taking place there. This spirit was apparent everywhere he went. "There's no doubt about it," Lorimer asserts. "I met many guitarists there — even an Eskimo guitarist named Peter Panin. I was invited to the homes of other musicians and visited with many. People are really into the guitar. They love its music in any form. It is obvious they will be pursuing all its possibilities. For one thing, they love American music, especially jazz, and are quite familiar with it." Michael adds that Duke Ellington's visit helped turn many on to this music, but American musical idioms were known in the Soviet Union before any Russian-

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American arts exchanges were arranged.

"I met a musician in one city and was invited to his home," Lorimer continues. "On the walls of his rooms he had pictures of all the band members of Chicago. Another — a young musician with long hair — had a folk-rock band and played the music of Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young."

Lorimer feels certain that the policy of detente was most popular. The people he met were eager to talk to Americans, hoped to meet more American musicians, and have more American music made available to them. Moreover, some — aware of Watergate and Nixon's resignation — expressed the fear that Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford, might view detente differently and damage the chance for the reciprocal exchange of artists.

Lorimer has been invited by Gosconcert to give another series of concerts in Russia, and he expects to do so, possibly next year. The people he met and their warm reception of his music made his first tour memorable, and he finds the possibility of a second visit intriguing for the unexpected moments it will probably bring. The first was full of them. "What could have been more surprising," he concludes, "than to be leaving a group of musicians and have one call after me, 'When you get back to the States kiss Carole King for me.'" ■

PICKUPS

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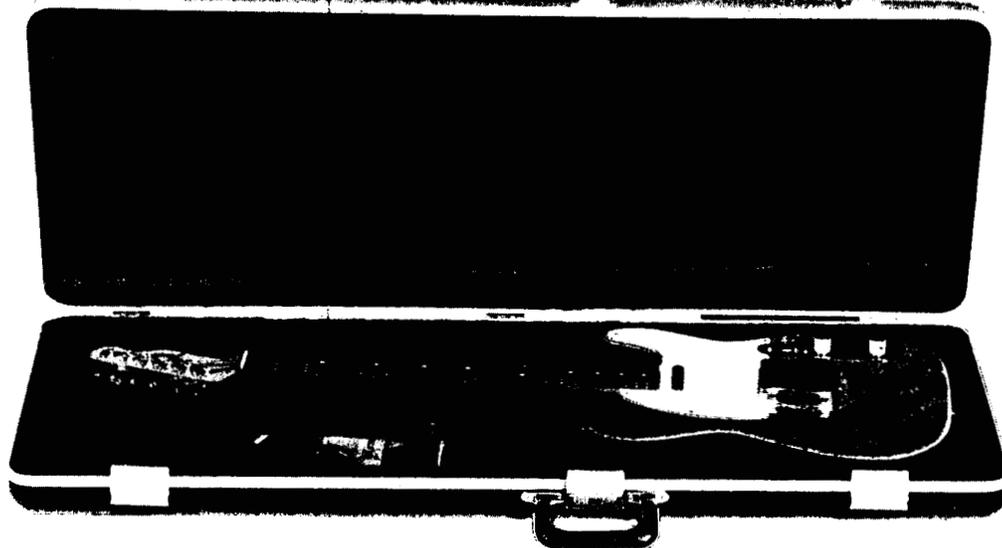
charged magnetically opposite (by turning the magnets around in one pickup), so they are electrically in-phase.

On the old Les Pauls, the pickups were powerful but not humbucking. To make such a unit was not so important at that time. Players were using low volume and usually were some distance from the amps, so there was no trouble with extraneous hum being picked up and amplified. However, as rock and roll became popular volume increased, amps became larger, and the performers began standing right in front of them. The chances of extraneous signals being amplified also increased, so humbuckers were introduced (and are still produced the same way as they were in 1956).

Everything I have said about single-coil pickups also applies to the humbucker. The most commonly used model has two active coils. When you adjust your pole pieces so they are even with the cover, you pick up the string at two different spots. When the string vibrates up and down above the pickup, you double the fundamental and the lower frequencies (this gives the pickup its beautiful mellowness), but cancel the harmonics when the string moves down on one coil and up on the other. This changes, depending on where you position your pick over the strings and the angle of attack. With a distinguished

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