

1996

NOVEMBER

CLASSICAL

GUITAR

UK £2.75 / USA \$4.50

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9 770950 429060

CLASSICAL GUITAR

VOLUME 15, No. 3

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

United Kingdom £38.50
Overseas: Surface Mail including
North and South America and
Eire £42.75 \$68.40
Airmail: USA, Canada, £56.65 \$90.65
South America and South Africa
Airmail: Australia, New Zealand, £60.50 \$96.80
Middle East and The Far East
Airmail: Europe £42.95

Remittances must be in GB Pounds payable in the United Kingdom or US Dollars payable in the USA. If not remitting in Sterling or USA Dollars, please add equivalent of £10.00 for Bank Handling charges.

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

All subscriptions to be addressed to:
Pat Summerfield, Ashley Mark Publishing
Company, Olsover House, 43 Sackville Road,
Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 5TA.

UK Distribution to News-stands
Newsagents and Wholesalers
by Seymour Press Ltd,
Windsor House, 1270 London Road,
Norbury SW16 4DH. ☎ (0181) 679 1899.

Typesetting - Artwork by *Pre-Print*

Printed by COLDEN OFFSET LIMITED

Published monthly by:
ASHLEY MARK PUBLISHING COMPANY
Olsover House, 43 Sackville Road,
Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 5TA.

THE KING AND THAI

HOW HUCKY EICHELMANN BROUGHT THE CLASSICAL GUITAR TO THAILAND
AS TOLD TO COLIN COOPER

'I WAS in Manila for an operation with a faith healer, and during that time I went to a guitar shop and saw a beautiful 8-string guitar made by a Filipino guitar maker. I sat down and played a few tunes. He said "Just stay there, don't move". He came back after 20 minutes with his brother, who was the president of the Philippines Music Society. They invited me for a concert tour. During my last semester in Stuttgart, where I was studying, I went there. One day after my examination, when I'd been drinking with Maria Sicca to celebrate my master's degree, I went to the Philippines. At one of the concerts was the Dean of the University of the Philippines. I was asked if I would be interested in teaching at the University for about two years. At the same time I had a position in Germany waiting for me; it wouldn't wait for two years, so I went back. I'd already given concerts in Korea, Japan, Thailand and so on. They told me they were going to open Thailand's first music academy. Also there was a position at the University in Bangkok, and they asked me if I would join them.

'You know, after Asia it's very difficult to live in the narrow German way. I couldn't stand the German climate and how people deal with each other. So I called them in Bangkok and said "Send me the ticket".

'In the beginning it was a very difficult thing. Ten to 15 years ago there was not much western music in Thailand. And if there was any, it was popular music. But with the help of some Thai friends we got this idea. The King of Thailand is a composer and a clarinet and saxophone player; he even holds an honorary master's degree from the University of Vienna. Everybody in Thailand knows his music; it's very light jazz music. With the King's permission we did an album; we arranged ten of his songs for classical guitar and orchestra, which was played by one of the first synthesizers in Thailand! The reason was that I went there and played classical music, and they looked at me as if I was from a different planet or something. But with the help of His Majesty's music — everybody knows the songs, they only had to promote the new sound of the guitar — the tape became an enormous hit. Like a pop tape, actually. Sales of between 300,000 and 400,000.'

(In Thailand, Hucky said, there are always three different books — one for the artist, one for the company, and one for the tax officials.)

'They have this problem of piracy. A population of 60,000,000 in a country three times the size of Germany.

'For me it helped a lot, because all of a sudden everybody knew the sound of the classical guitar.



PHOTO: COLIN COOPER

Hucky Eichelmann

I think it's a very unusual thing that, first of all, you have a king who writes music, and second, that this music really helped to introduce the classical guitar to the country.

'After that I was able to start my guitar festival, which I ran for about seven years. I invited people from all over the world. Among others were David Russell, the Amsterdam Guitar Trio, Siegfried Behrend. At the same time I was able to start doing what I really wanted to do: work with a lot of composers. I initiated a lot of new works for the guitar. Later I was able to do this album *Gumgah Gumgah* (ONPA CD OP36 — see CG, July 1995), which is quite difficult to listen to: really serious Asian music.'

Hucky Eichelmann came to the CGFGB at West Dean in 1993. He was a success, and will probably come again. His two records (details below) were reviewed in CG, July 1995, but are probably not yet available in Britain.

Discography

'With Love From Asia'. Sunflower Records C339422025. Accord Music Productions, Singapore, Malaysia.

'Gumgah Gumgah'. ONPA CD OP36. Onpa Marketing Co. Ltd., 20900/6 Charoenkrung 72, Bangkoklaem, Bangkok 101209, Thailand.