

Guitar Maintenance & Preservation in Dry Climates

Caring for classical guitars in Colorado's dry climate presents special challenges. Summers have very low humidity while winter heating can push relative humidity close to 0% in some homes. When you consider that most classical (and flamenco) guitars are built in locales with medium to high humidity --- 40% to 90% in some cases --- it becomes clear that certain extra precautions should be taken to protect your favorite instrument.

With these thoughts in mind, I asked some DCGS members to comment on protecting wooden instruments, based on their experience as players and builders of classical guitars.

On the general effects changes in humidity can have on an instrument, one builder commented,

"A classical guitar has about 80 wooden parts, made from 4 or 5 different kinds of wood. The different properties of those woods will cause significant stress on a guitar. These stresses are exaggerated by changes of temperature and especially humidity,"

For example, the Taylor Guitar Company (regarding steel-string guitars) notes that a guitar can gain or lose 2 to 3 ounces of weight depending on humidity. That weight translates into significant swelling or shrinking of wood fibers in the guitar. And that, in turn, puts significant stress on the joints and materials in the guitar.

What are some early symptoms of a guitar reacting to a loss of moisture? (Probably the most common problem for guitars in the Denver area.)

---Frets may become loose. This is caused by the fingerboard wood shrinking lengthwise, enlarging the fret slots.

---The ends of frets may start protruding beyond the edges of the fingerboard. Again, from the fingerboard shrinking (in width) as it dries out.

---The fingerboard may show a high spot visible at the 12th fret. This is again caused by shrinkage of wood fibers in the fingerboard. However, the heavy construction where the neck joins the body of the guitar keeps this area relatively stable, thus the rest of the fingerboard recedes from the 12th fret, causing a high spot or hump in the plane of the fingerboard.

More serious symptoms include:

---Separations along glued seams and binding around the body of the guitar, as the wood shrinks and the more stable binding and marquetry materials do not.

---Cracks in the top, sides and back wood of the instrument. These indicate that the wood has shrunk so much that it cannot span the distance between the edges of the guitar, and splits open as a result.

So, how to minimize the risk of these types of damage?

First, all those I spoke to regarding this subject were in clear agreement on one topic:

Minimize change. Stability of the guitar's environment reduces the risk of damage.

One builder noted,

"I have been to Paracho (Mexico) where they build a lot of guitars that end up in the US. But that place is literally in the jungle. It's going to be difficult for a guitar to make the transition from humidity of 80% or 90% to Denver's climate."

If a guitar is coming from any environment outside of Colorado's "high and dry" climate, using a guitar humidifier may ease the transition. Depending on which type of in-the-case humidifier you use, the guitar can be kept at around 50 to 60% relative humidity.

This brings up an issue that may apply to Colorado's climate throughout the year and also to more humid climates during the winter. If you remove your carefully humidified guitar from its case in January, you may be introducing it to a heated room with

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COMING ATTRACTIONS

- Tuesday, July 21, DCGS Monthly Meeting
- Tuesday, August 18, DCGS Monthly Meeting

We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Your donations are tax-deductible. All donations are appreciated and can be sent to: Rochelle Chartier, 7881 Oak Street, Arvada, CO 80005

Editor's Note: Advertising and items for the calendar are accepted on a first-come, space available basis. Members are given small complimentary ad space. If you have any questions, please contact Clara Tomsula at ClaraCT@aol.com or 303-467-0957. **Deadline for the next newsletter is August 15.**



Board Notes

It is July and time for all of us to renew our membership. Membership dues remain \$20.00 for families and a special \$10.00 membership for full time college students (please note which college you attend on your membership form.) Attached to this newsletter is a membership form for you to fill out. **We do want all the information filled in so that we can double check our records and make sure we have your correct address, phone number and email.** If you prefer you may join through our website, www.denverclassicalguitarsociety.org. If you join through our website, you will make your payment through **Paypal** and please note that there is a small fee for this service.

In addition to paying dues we hope you will consider making a donation to the Society. With the help of donations and grants from SCFD and 1ST Bank we have been able to bring some very fine

performers to Denver. We hope to be able to continue to do that but we need your help. Please consider a donation and remember that we are a tax exempt organization and your donations are tax deductible.

Also attached to this issue of *The Rosette* is a copy of our 2009/2010 Concert Series Brochure. You may join the Society, make a donation and order your season tickets by downloading this form and returning it to me. The season ticket package is your best deal! You save 20% off the regular prices and you will help to support our concert series. We have a wonderful line up of guest artists for next year; on September 26, 2009 we have the 2008 winner of the GFA Competition, **Gabriel Bianco** (France), on November 7 **Carlos Perez** from Peru, on February 6, 2010 **Javier de los Santos**, the winner of the 2009 Denver Classical Guitar Society Debut Competition, will perform and lastly on

March 27 we will have the **Tres Amigos; Ricardo Iznaola, Jonathan Leathwood and Masakazu Ito**. This concert will be part of our 15th Anniversary celebration. We expect it will be sold out so get your tickets early!

If you are interested in helping with our various activities or if you have ideas for something you are interested in seeing us do, please contact me or one of the other officers.

I would like to thank all the members who have helped out with the concerts, meetings and the competition. We would not be able to do the things we do with out your help.

The Board is looking forward to our next year and we are hoping to see all of you at the meetings and the concerts.

—**Rochelle Chartier**
President



Guitar Maintenance & Preservation in Dry Climates (cont'd)

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humidity approaching 5%-- 0%. Consider how this change might affect your guitar if it goes from 50% humidity to 5% humidity, and back again, several times a week. If your house is too dry for you in the winter, it's probably too dry for your guitar. Of course, if you can keep your house at a constant humidity year round, you reduce the risk of drastic change and subsequent damage to your guitar.

Again referring to information the Taylor Guitar Company has published about humidity and new guitars, I found it interesting that they support using humidifiers for the first few years after a guitar is built, but accept a gradual reduction of guitar humidity after 3 or 4 years. They feel the wood in the guitar will have acclimated to it's environment by then, and will be far less prone to cracks and warping.

One guitar builder here in Denver supports the acclimation theory, but

applies it before the guitar is assembled.

"The guitars I build are all made from wood that has cured in Denver for many years. This wood has aged in Denver's climate before it is built into a guitar. The guitars built from these materials will be very stable in places like Denver and most of the Western US."

So, providing a stable climate for a guitar will help protect it. But what about other steps you can take?

A simple one:

---"Keep your guitar in its case!"

One builder was adamant about this basic idea.

The guitar's case will slow down any transition in temperature or humidity, as well as the obvious protection against falls and impacts. The protection against temperature changes becomes critical in the winter

months, when a guitar may go through 60 or more degrees of change in a few minutes. While this may not cause structural damage, it can be very hard on the finish of a guitar, particularly those with hard lacquer finishes. The rapid, extreme changes in temperature can cause "finish cracking" or "checking" which is costly to repair, and can allow moisture or perspiration to enter the wood.

Other simple precautions?

---"Keep the guitar clean!" states one builder. "I cannot believe the condition of some of the classical guitars I've handled. The finish will eventually be damaged by perspiration and grime if the guitar is not cleaned after every use, and occasionally treated with a polish designed for guitar finishes. Regular furniture polish is too heavy and has too much wax in it for guitar finishes."

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Meeting Notes

Sixteen people attended the meeting. There were ten performers. Our young player, **Ethan Lorentz**, performed and once again did a wonderful job. We encourage any young players to attend the meeting. If a young player attends we will move them to the front of the program and allow them to exit after their performance. That way they can return home at a decent hour for retiring to bed.



- **Kathryn Lewis:** Carcassi 20
- **Brint Luken:** Alegrias Rosas – Traditional; Andalucia (The Breeze and I) –Ernesto Lacuana
- **Ted Intersio:** Robinson's May – Thomas Robinson; The Autumn Leaves; Dance of the Washer Woman
- **Ken Thompson:** Julia Floriad – Agustin Barrios; Choro da Saudade – Agustin Barrios
- **Dan Gorklo:** Capricho Arabe -

Terraga; Registrio – Lauro Suite Venezolana; Cancion – Lauro Suite Venezolana; Sonata in e minor - Scarlatti

- **Martin Ters:** Log of Stories; Jasmin Tea; A Hike to “Cervena Lhota”; Still Life
 - **Ethan Lorentz:** Allemande – J.S. Bach; Saraband – J.S. Bach
 - **Jeff Copeland:** Saudade No. 1 – Roland Dyens; Saudade No. 2 – Roland Dyens
 - **Bruce Thompson:** Three Sor Studies
 - **Michael Bevers:** Carcassi #3; Bourree – Bach; Sor #2
- T**wenty two people attended the meeting. There were twelve performers. We all played until close to closing time. Everyone did a great job.
- **Kathryn Lewis:** Carcassi 10
 - **Brint Luken:** Solea; Alegrias
 - **Ted Intersio:** Robinson's May –

Thomas Robinson; Minuet in G - Bach

- **Dan Gorklo:** Lauro Waltz #2; Lauro Waltz #4; Cancion – Lauro Suite Venezolana; Cathedral
- **Martin Ters:** Maximo Diego Pujol; Preludio - Triston; Jasmin Tea; Still Life
- **Rochelle Chartier:** Farewell – Sergo Assad
- **Ethan Lorentz:** Passa Caille; Patita in A minor - Bach
- **Jeff Copeland:** Zambra Granadina – Isaac Albeniz; Torre Belmeia – Isaac Albeniz
- **Bruce Thompson:** Three Sor Studies
- **Michael Bevers:** Carcassi #3
- Prelude – Bach; Etude 1 – Brower
- **Walt Beekman:** Jesus, Joy of Mans Desiring; Lagrima
- **Grant Steffen:** Autumn Day Suite – R. Pick

—Bruce Thompson
Meeting Chairman



Guitar Maintenance & Preservation in Dry Climates (cont'd)

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---I have had some success in preventing fingerboards from drying out by giving them a light treatment of lemon oil a few times a year. I rub the oil into the fingerboard; let it soak for a few minutes, then rub the neck smooth with a clean cloth. I noticed a reduction in the high spot at the 12th fret, a week or so after this oil was applied for the first time. My theory is the oil replaced some of the moisture lost, thus forcing the wood in the neck back toward its original geometry.

---I'm lucky in having a basement which stays relatively cool all year. The room where I keep my guitar has no direct forced air heat, so there are no sudden temperature changes, even

in winter. I don't use a humidifier in my guitar, so I think this cool environment must help in preventing structural cracks and damage to the finish.

The whole idea of protecting your guitar from extremes of humidity and temperature is to prevent serious problems and damage. If your guitar has cracks or other signs of severe stress already, a luthier should be able to repair major damage, and then regular maintenance and protections should give your guitar a long life.

Thanks to: **Manuel Rodriguez, Martin Ters and Vincent Chavez** for their help in preparing this article.

—Brint Luken

The Summer Guitar Workshop Presents

The New Mexico Classical Guitar Festival

July 10-12, 2009

Featuring Special Guest Concert Artist
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and clinicians and concert artists **John Truitt, Ben Silva, Brian Moore and Matt Rohde**

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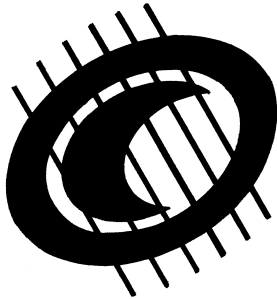
<http://santafeclassicalguitarfestival.com>





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July/August 2009



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*Send membership dues (\$20) and address changes to Rochelle at 7881 Oak Street, Arvada, CO 80005. Please include your email address.

**Send newsletter articles to Clara at ClaraCT@aol.com

Calendar

Saturday, July 18, 10:00 am—11th Annual Hike Concert, Quandary Falls Trail in McCullough Gulch. Contact Jim and Nancy Bosse: jimbosse@bresnan.net, or 719 275-3840 to RSVP and for directions.

Tuesday, July 21, 7:00 pm—DCGS Monthly Meeting, South Broadway Christian Church, 23 Lincoln Street (at Ellsworth), Denver.

Thursday, August 13, 7:30 p.m.—Patrick Sutton, guitar. Graduate Recital. Lamont Student Concert Series. Hamilton Recital Hall. Free admission. No tickets necessary.

Tuesday, August 18, 7:00 pm—DCGS Monthly Meeting, South Broadway Christian Church, 23 Lincoln Street (at Ellsworth), Denver.

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