

Sasha Levtov 1950 - 2025



It was with huge sadness and shock that we all heard the news that Sasha Levtov had passed away suddenly on Sunday 19th October 2025. Messages of sympathy came flooding in to the Levtov family. There was a last very moving opportunity for quiet reflection with Sasha at the Recital Hall on 24th November and then a joyous Celebration of his life through words and music at the Avisford Park Hotel. This was attended by 250 people including life-long friends, new friends and many famous faces from the world of classical guitar. It was here that we learnt, to quote his son Joe, of 'this extraordinary man and his extraordinary life'.

Alexander Mikhailovich Levtov was born on 13th August 1950 in the rural town of Voronezh, where his father, Michael, a young engineer, was sent to 'raise the standard of agriculture' during the darkest era of Stalin's Terror. With Stalin's demise, the family was able to return to Leningrad. His mother, Olga, had great hopes for his violin lessons, which began at the age of seven, but which proved unsuccessful. Sasha's school years were miserable on account of his rebellious nature and, completely disenchanted with the Soviet education system after his first

year at university, Sasha embarked on a Trans-Siberian train journey becoming a labourer and meeting wonderful people along the way – many of them outcasts from society. Friendships and a love of the guitar were formed as a result of many nights of songs and stories by the campfire.

On Sasha's return to Leningrad, his cousin managed to secure him a job as a handyman at the Leningrad Music School within the Conservatoire, where faulty light bulbs changed his life – it was where Sasha met Nina, who was studying the piano there. In one of their first flats together, Sasha created 'creature comforts' from discards, such as a fully functioning hot shower made from an old shop kiosk and a car radiator placed over the gas cooker. As he and Nina started raising their young family, Sasha came to the realisation that there was no future for the family in Russia.

At this point, a chance meeting with a student of Russian from Oxford University, Della Thompson, was a miracle and created a path to the West. Shedding their Soviet passports, Sasha and Nina, Joe and Ilya, then 6 and 1, with just two suitcases and a guitar set off on a journey through Vienna and Rome, eventually arriving in England, where they were met by Della and driven to their new home in Bognor Regis in the early hours of 3rd January 1980. Without any knowledge of English, Sasha started a job as a nurse-attendant at Ashley House in Bognor, entertaining

New Members

We extend a very warm welcome to:
Garry Boatman & Linda Wyatt *Selsey*
Michael Kalli & family *Chichester*
Paul Nowlan *Littlehampton*
George Vears *Waterlooville*
Ian Denman & family *Lancing*

*We hope you enjoy many happy evenings
at the Club!*



the residents with his guitar and delighting them with his carpentry and handyman skills. His first concert there in aid of Amnesty International secured his musical prospects. Pupils followed and among the very first was Amanda Cook. That same year saw the birth of their daughter, Inna, followed by Yuli in 1989.

Sasha started teaching at the Adult Education Centre, Bognor Regis, and later at the Rikkyo School in Rudgwick. The end of term student concerts for Sasha and Nina's pupils soon outgrew the living room of their home in Lyon Street and a bigger space for concerts became necessary. The Old School in Bersted was renovated in 1993 after a summer of knocking through walls, installing plumbing, painting, wallpapering and many late nights. This building soon saw the birth of The West Sussex Guitar Club and for the next three years, The Old School drew inspiring musicians from around the world to its stage and our town. Then, in 1996, Sasha and

Nina's musical dreams transferred to The Regis School of Music at 46 Sudley Road. There, Sasha insisted the interior of the Recital Hall match the colours of the Great Hall of the St. Petersburg Conservatory - burgundy upholstery, white chairs and crystal chandeliers!

To say that the impact that Sasha has had on the musical community both close to home and further afield is immeasurable would be an understatement. From Sasha's youngest pupils experiencing their first strums of the guitar, to adults discovering – or rediscovering – a love of music, he has been a bedrock of our musical scene. He has inspired classical guitarists just starting out in their careers as much as he has welcomed established artists from across the globe. Sasha leaves behind an immense and undeniable legacy.

Sasha is survived by Nina, their children Joe, Ilya, Inna, Yuli, and grandchildren Michael, George, Eva, Lily, Jule and Leo.



Club evening and AGM

The AGM and first meeting of the season was held on Saturday 13th September with five committee members and fifteen others attending. The meeting started at 7pm on the dot and Club chairman Julian Bobak opened with a summary of the year's activity. Artistic director Sasha Levtoev said that it had been a successful year with six concerts given by highly acclaimed performers. However, more people need to attend so that the club at least breaks even and he encouraged members to use their complimentary tickets to increase the audience size. Membership secretary Baz Boxall gave a review of Membermojo and apologised that those who pay by cash may still receive reminders. However, it is proposed that members will be able to access the site through a password and alter their own details. David Alexander was thanked by Sasha and Julian for his continuing financial support through Equilibrium. All committee members agreed to retain their roles and there were no objections from the audience! The meeting was closed as swiftly as it opened as everyone headed towards the common room for refreshments and a glass of wine to steady their nerves before performing.

The evening began with the West Sussex Guitar Orchestra, directed by Linda Kelsall-Barnett and with a record attendance of nine, including new club member George Vears who lowered the average age by a number of years! They performed Catalan folksong *Farewell Lad* arranged by Bridget Mermikides followed by *Couleur Milonga* by Thierry Tisserand. They ended with *Tico Tico no Fuba* by Zequinha Abreu, a Brazilian choro song meaning 'Rufus collared Sparrow' and should not be confused with the Mozambique footballer Manuel Jose Luis Bucuane who is also known as 'Tico Tico'.

The solos began with David Alexander, appropriately dressed in a guitar-patterned shirt, and his furry friend Tyrone the rat. David informed us that he writes his own music so that no one else knows when things go off piste. He played his own arrangement of *Romanze*, which everyone recognised and appreciated that he had learned by ear, followed by *Lost and Found*. George Vears gave his debut performance of Bach's *Prelude in C minor* transposed to D minor, with the confidence of someone comfortable being on stage, ending with a bow that matched his playing.

Baz and Teresa, who still remain nameless but propose to bear a title by the next club evening, then performed the simple but very beautiful piece *Duet in G Major Complete op.27* by Carulli. They followed with *Sogno Nostalgico* by Armando Sciascia and arranged by club secretary Debbie Burford. The piece was also the opening theme for the 1970's detective series 'Callan' for those old enough to remember.

Elaine Foakes announced that she was going to play two pieces by two different composers with four hundred years between them but both masters of their trade. She began with John Dowland's *Galliard Melancholy* explaining that sad songs were highly fashionable in the Elizabethan era. This was followed by the sharply contrasting *Sugarloaf Mountain* composed by Gary Ryan, a fiendishly difficult piece that takes the player up and down the fretboard at the rate of knots.

Jay Huff played us two choros from Villa Lobos's *Suite Populaire Bresilienne*; the *Mazurka* and the *Schottische*. All pieces in this suite have a sentimental tone and the word choro comes from the Portuguese term chorar which means 'to cry'. The spirit of melancholy was captured by Jay but he ended by saying that it was 'Work in progress'.

The performances ended with Linda playing *Rossignol*, or 'Nightingale' a traditional folksong and one of her own compositions *The Cuckoo and the Chiff Chaff*. This is based on a Sussex folksong whereby the cuckoo attempts to lay an egg in the chiff chaff's nest. Sasha congratulated her in her new capacity and said that the best place to be in Sussex was Bognor Regis and the best place to be in Bognor Regis was at the guitar club, which everyone wholeheartedly agreed upon.

The meeting was a lovely start to the season and newcomers George Vears and Paul Nowlan were welcomed. As ever, a big thank you to Sasha for setting everything up and providing food and drink at the start of the evening and to Diana Green and Barbara Westmore for clearing everything away at the end. Rather like an aeroplane flight, the take-off and landing are the crucial parts, the bit in between is where the passengers can just sit back and enjoy themselves.

Teresa Henley

South Coast Guitar Societies Playing Day 2025

A fabulous day of music-making resulted when three guitar societies got together – West Sussex Guitar Club, Dorset Guitar Society and Southampton Classical Guitar Society - on Sunday 21st September at a village hall not far from Ringwood. Our hosts were Dorset GS and they made us very welcome indeed, from the coffee and biscuits that greeted us on arrival, the delicious sit-down lunch of savouries, salads, home-made puddings and the all important glass of wine, to the afternoon tea and cakes. This annual 'Guitar Friendly' was started by Sasha Levrov and Paul Thomas, the secretary of DGS, in May 2014 when 10 of their members travelled to one of our club evenings. Following its success, each society then took it in turns to host a day-time event, but this was the first time that Southampton CGS had joined us.

The orchestra formed today was a whopping 46 players, made up of 11 from WSGC, 16 from SCGS and 19 from DGS. I did have a wry smile as the orchestra took their seats – David Clarke had chosen a place right at the back, as far from the conductor as possible, but his plan for hiding was foiled when the empty seat next to him was taken by none other than Mark Eden, with whom he ended up sharing a music stand! We had been sent the music in advance – *Misionera*, composed by Fernando Bustamante and arranged by Steve Marsh in 7 parts. Amanda Cook had been invited to conduct the rehearsal and we went through the piece in considerable detail. Sasha was a little late and it turned out that his confusion had not arisen from the fact that the village hall was called 'St Ives and St Leonards' even though it was in Hampshire, but that he had accidentally put the wrong postcode into his satnav - BN24 instead of BH24 - so had initially headed towards



Photo courtesy of Paul Thomas, Dorset Guitar Society

Brighton! At least he was in time for the delicious lunch, after which the orchestra resumed their seats for the final performance and recording of *Misonera* which was very successful and the sound filled the entire hall.

The presence of the Mosaic Octet, conducted by Amanda Cook, was a lovely bonus to the schedule. The group includes our own Jay Huff and Andrew Richardson. Mark Eden and James O'Neill gamely stood in for the missing members of Mosaic today. Their pieces were Torroba's *Estampas No. 8*, *The Space Between Us* by Chris Stell (who originally set up the group and wrote this during Covid) and the wonderfully-titled *Eight Little Corinthians in a Tub* by Akis Filios. Amanda then had to leave but not before Sasha had presented her with a thank you bouquet.

Each society had been allocated half an hour. The seven members of the WSGC orchestra (Jay, Andrew, Baz Boxall, Yvonne Scott, Julian Bobak, George Vears and Debbie Burford), conducted by Linda Kelsall-Barnett, performed Purcell's *Prelude* (from 'The Fairy Queen'), *Farewell Lad* (a Catalan Folk Song), *Morenita* (a Spanish Folk Song), *Coleur Milonga* by Thierry Tisserand and to finish, a lively *Tico Tico* (by Zequinha Abreu). Three soloists followed – David Clarke with *Circle's End*, composed by Steve Marsh, George Vears with Bach's *Prelude in D minor* and Linda with her own arrangement of *A Brisk Young Sailor Courted Me*.

Southampton CGS, a larger orchestra of 16 members, played three pieces – *Déjà Vu* by Richard Charlton, Bizet's *Habanera* and Pachelbel's *Canon*. These last two pieces had been arranged for the group by their leader Tim Rushworth. There followed a solo from Jane Nash (Villa-Lobos's *Prelude No. 1*) and a delightful duo of flute and guitar (Gilly Slot and Tim) with Pernambuco's *Sound of Bells*.

After a short tea break it was finally our hosts turn to play. Dorset GS's orchestra numbered an impressive 19. They began with a duet from John Edwards and Chris Gillson, Mompou's *Cancion y Danza No. 5*, a solo from John, *Petenera* by Sainz de la Maza and then as time was running short only one piece from their orchestra, but it was such impressive playing of Karl Jenkins' *Palladio*, also arranged by Steve Marsh, that it certainly left us all wanting more. These events do not happen without a great deal of work and planning. Paul Thomas began in May sending all three societies the music for the orchestra and asking for numbers to be confirmed. West Sussex Guitar Club would like to thank Dorset Guitar Society for being such wonderful hosts for us today.

Peter Nuttall thanked everyone for coming and said the day had been 'a feast for the stomach, ears and soul' and we couldn't agree more. He said of Southampton GS, 'Why on earth did we not get together

before?' to which Hazel Inskip, their secretary, responded that it had been a great pleasure for them. Judging by the success of today and the warm words from everyone it is likely that the meeting of the three guitar societies will become a regular event. Finally, we all clambered onto the stage, some sitting, some standing, some kneeling with difficulty, for a group photo to be taken - Sasha, as ever, encouraging us to hold our guitars aloft!

Debbie Burford

Zoe Barnett Recital at St George's Church, Chichester



On 26th September, as part of the 'Last Friday Concert Series', Zoe Barnett treated her audience to a programme of 'Aires de España' from composers Tárrega, Mompou, Albéniz and Pablo Casals. Zoe played with such beautiful delicacy and tone throughout that it created a really magical atmosphere in the church. Zoe's encore of *Railroad* by Gary Ryan was a fun way to end the evening and a great tribute to Gary who was Zoe's teacher at the Royal College of Music. Zoe mentioned how touched she was to see in the audience a group of loyal fans from WSGC. She was presented with a bouquet from Sue Howell-Evans, Musical Director at St George's, who also taught music to a young Zoe at Lavant House School for Girls. Sue mentioned "to never underestimate a Lavant House Girl" and indeed the very next afternoon Jess Breach (at school at the same time as Zoe but slightly sturdier in build!) was a top scorer for England as the women won the 2025 Rugby World Cup! Well done Jess and Zoe!

Debbie Burford

Natalia Lipnitskaya and Judicaël Perroy Recital



On the 27th September our club welcomed back to our stage two internationally acclaimed guitarists, Natalia Lipnitskaya and Judicaël Perroy. They gave us a magical evening of guitar music from the 17th to the 20th Century.

The first half of the recital comprised of solo performances by Natalia and Judicaël. Natalia began with *Ground in C minor* by Henry Purcell (1659-1695). A repeating bassline serves as a foundation for a haunting melody and variations, the minor key creating a feeling of melancholy. This was followed by the enigmatically titled *Les Barricades Mystérieuses* by another 17th century composer, François Couperin, with its repetitive motif and its increasing and decreasing momentum. The *Tango de la Casada Infiel*, based on a poem by Federico Garcia Lorca about a gypsy who discovers his newly-found lover is actually a married woman, was played by Natalia with passion and feeling. Then came *Cancion del fuego fatuo* (Song of the Firefly) from *Love, the Sorcerer* by Manuel de Falla, and Natalia ended with *Rondena* by Regino Sainz de la Maza (1896-1981), a form of Spanish music pre-dating flamenco and originating in Ronda, Malaga.

Judicaël then took the stage, surprisingly wearing a thick, striped woolly jumper. He apologised for his unusual concert attire, explaining that he seemed to have lost his shirt. Not that it mattered in the least as when he started playing, his mastery of the guitar was immediately spellbinding. *Fantaisie hongroise* by Johan Kaspar Merz (1806-1856) is a virtuosic and technically demanding piece from the romantic era and was played seemingly effortlessly. This was followed by the *Prelude and Fugue from Suite BWV 997* by J.S.Bach.

taking us on a more measured and contemplative journey after the fireworks of the previous piece. The concert favourite *Capricho Arabe* was performed with technical precision and great expressiveness. Judicaël then ended the first half of the concert with *Sevilla* by Isaac Albeniz.

After the interval, Judicaël (now happily reunited with his shirt) and Natalia performed together as the Duo Antipodes. I wondered if the name reflected the fact that they originated from opposite sides of Europe – Judicaël from France and Natalia from Belarus - or possibly reflected their opposite natures. Judicaël gave me the impression that he was there to do what he does best, play the guitar, and was happy to leave the communication with the audience to Natalia.



Sasha with Natalia and Judicaël



They began with *Prelude, Fugue and Variation Op.18* by organist and composer César Franck (1822-1890). Originally composed for the organ it has a beautifully gentle and lyrical Prelude, a brief Lento, a Fugue and ends with a Variation on the melody of the Prelude. The final piece in the programme was *Duo Concertant Op.31 no.1* by Antoine de Lhoyer, a substantial piece in three movements, in the Classical style reminiscent of the music of Mozart. The duo then played an additional two pieces, *Zita* and *Lo Que Vendrá* by Astor Piazzolla (arr. Assad).

Following the enthusiastic applause, the pair returned to the stage to give us an encore – *Agua e Vinho* by Egberto Gismonti, ending a very enjoyable evening.

The committee would like to thank David Nicolson for his generosity in sponsoring this recital.

David Clarke

Club Evening 18th October 2025



This was one of our best-attended club evenings – it had a light-hearted atmosphere and was very much enjoyed by all. How fitting then that it would also turn out to be the very last guitar club event run by our much-loved and much-missed Sasha Levto.

The fun began with the 17-strong All-Join-In orchestra playing three pieces selected by Sasha to depict modes of transport – firstly 'walking' to Schumann's *Humming Song* then a 'camel ride' in the *Orient* and finally a 'waggon ride' with the *Arkansas Traveller*. Sasha could not resist a quip about America today, "Who'd have thought they'd now have an idiot in charge?" It was lovely to see eight members of Andrew Richardson's group Guitar Harmony attend a club

evening for the very first time. They played *Sailing*, *Psalm 23* (Howard Goodall) and Saint-Saëns's *Organ Symphony* ("not the whole thing", Andrew reassured). All three pieces were specially arranged for the group by

Andrew. Thanks must also go to Jay Huff for stepping in to play guitar 2. Linda Kelsall-Barnett's orchestra followed with their three contrasting pieces. The WSGO was only seven-strong tonight but played *Tico Tico*, *Farewell Lad* and *Misionera* to enthusiastic applause.



Paul Nowlan makes his debut

Paul Nowlan made his debut on our stage with Carcassi's *Andantino*. Paul only joined the club in September and Sasha said it usually takes years before people are brave enough to play guitar in front of an audience, adding that Paul had a beautiful heartfelt sound. David Alexander entertained us next with his own composition called *23.59* (or One Minute to Midnight) which is a tribute to the bridges of Prague and a Gothic lady who disappears at midnight. His other piece was *Deolinda* by Kristiaan Wolfe. Harri Goldsmith followed to bring us memories of summer with *Country Étude* by Tatiana Stachak.

Sasha helped Peter Watkins onto the stage and he announced he was going to "sing a piece to do with last Wednesday". All became clear as Peter began "Happy birthday to me..." and we all joined in. *Catch a Falling Star* followed, then Sasha helped Peter down the steps of the stage, somehow managing to hold Peter's guitar, Peter's arm and his own glass of red wine with hardly a drop spilt! George Vears, one of our younger new members, played Villa Lobos' *Prelude No. 4* and we wish him all the best in his auditions for music college. Robin Burgess, with a daunting 6 pages of music spread out, gave us *The Eye of the Witch* by Leo Brouwer and *Danza Brasileira* (Jorge Morel). David Clarke followed with two pieces from Torroba's *Suite Castellana*. Sasha's comment was that although David has to deal with the club's finances he still manages to make very poetic music!

Elaine Foakes had had a very busy day - in the morning there was the stress of taking her Grade 8 flute exam, so this evening she needed to "chill" with a couple of folk songs. We were treated to Gary Ryan's arrangements of *Shenandoah* and *The Ash Grove*. The last soloist was Linda Kelsall-Barnett playing her two lovely compositions - one based on a Sussex folk tune and called *A Brisk Young Sailor Courted Me*, the second, *Fall*, incorporating a Northumberland folk tune and a tribute to the sycamore gap tree and the renewed hope as the tree begins to sprout new shoots. Sasha couldn't resist asking about Linda's special arm rest made of soft fur, "Is that your rabbit?" to which Linda replied in mock horror that the rabbit was now 10½ years old "but he's up and down". There then followed the best quip of the evening from Elaine, "Most rabbits are!"

Sasha finally introduced "two very capable guitarists" (take that how you will everyone who played earlier!) to round off the evening - Jay Huff and Andrew Richardson played three of Andrew's beautiful compositions - *And in the End* (No.7 from Life's Directions) was followed two movements from Chalton Down, *Hello Robbie* and *Ancient Hedgerows*.

Sasha thanked everyone for playing tonight and for contributing to the food table. Special thanks must go to Nicky Maccarrone and Alison Stonestreet for helping Nina prepare the food, David Alexander for putting away chairs and adding sherry to the drinks table and finally Elaine Foakes who did all the washing up at the end of her very busy day. As we all went merrily off into the night, little did we know that our lives and the guitar club itself would never be quite the same again...

Debbie Burford



Memories of Sasha



There is so much to say about Sasha it is difficult to know where to begin. He was of course an inspirational guitar teacher, bringing out the best in his pupils from the very youngest children to the newly-retired adult. He and Nina were also instrumental in putting Bognor Regis on the map as a concert venue for world-class musicians and he gave many young professionals their first booking to start their careers. Sasha was not only generous with his time but he would always help less-well-off pupils and their families and even let a homeless street musician (a fellow guitarist of course) sleep in his old van in the car park until he'd found a place to live.

Sasha also had a great sense of humour and he loved to learn new English expressions. Language was a joy to him as well as music. Who can forget him in helpless laughter over the pronunciation of the word "sheet" or the time he realised that he'd sent out an invitation to all club members to attend a "rectal" when he'd meant to type "recital".

I was still in my twenties when I first met Sasha in 1987, joining his guitar evening class at Bognor Community College. At that stage I

knew almost nothing about playing the guitar and certainly had no idea that it could be used as an orchestral instrument. I learnt so much from Sasha - I began playing duets and soon joined a guitar quartet, always with Sasha's encouragement. The lifelong friends I made in those evening classes also became the first members of the guitar club when Sasha set it up in 1993. I've no idea what I would have done with my life for the last 40 years had I not met Sasha, because playing in the quartet led to my arranging music for the guitar too. I'm glad that I was able to tell him recently how much I appreciated the start he gave me in the world of classical guitar, but as always he would modestly play down his involvement.

Sasha's title of "artistic director" could not have been more fitting. He was a great entertainer and had a terrific eye for what worked on stage and his ingenuity was second to none. I think he loved the guitar club parties and he could conjure an inspiring stage set out of a few old bits and pieces and some unpromising-looking cloth. Who else but Sasha could have thought of turning the grand piano on the stage into a gypsy caravan, or a sailing ship complete with mast and ship's wheel. From the very first summer party of the club in 1994 he decided it would have the theme of a medieval court and he even constructed a portcullis out of cardboard with a working drawbridge. The following year the Italian party saw him build an almost full-sized gondola, also out of cardboard. Nothing was ever wasted and props were kept from one year to another. Even Christmas parties often had a different take each year. One memorable one was Dickensian and another based on fairy tales. Who else but Sasha would have thought of turning the doorway at the back of the stage into a virtual fireplace with the lintel as the mantle-piece complete with greenery and stockings and the image of a log fire flickering in the hearth below.



Invisible fishing line was his favourite method to suspend things above the stage or from the ceiling for that extra magic. For a circus party he strung a brightly-coloured parachute from chandeliers to create our very own big top. Those same chandeliers supported various brown cloths to create a moody casbah for our Arabian Nights party.

But Sasha also enjoyed dressing up and loved to host each

party as a mischievous character, pouring glasses of his warming punch in winter or fruit cocktail in summer. Who can forget Sasha dancing around the stage in knee breeches and striped socks as a mischievous Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or riding into the hall on a bicycle as an Italian ice cream seller and handing out cornettos to everyone. At the wild west party he built working saloon doors for the hall, made the piano into a cowboy waggon and bought pop guns for the children, declaring himself "mayor of this town". Last year's Christmas party was also rather special as it featured for the first time a mini panto to the music of a Persian Market. Sasha's comical timing as the irrepressible snake-charmer brought the house down.



In July at our most recent Latin-American party, we thought he was joking when he said he wanted to recreate the Andes mountain range on the stage. But he was serious, and sure enough some old brown cloths covering two tall step ladders with a cotton wool topping of snow against a blue cloth "sky" transformed our stage into something magical.

Sasha also had an inexplicable fondness for watermelons and would want to find new ways of using them at events. Somehow a watermelon was chosen as the showstopper for the Outer Space party with the idea that it would become a "rocket" with two lit fireworks in its rear. It would be pushed into a darkened hall, for maximum effect, on a tea trolley. Unfortunately just beforehand the watermelon rolled off the trolley not once but twice and smashed. Not to be deterred we could all hear the sound of giggling and reams of sellotape being employed to repair the melon as best he could so that the "rocket" could finally make an entrance!



Over all these years, Sasha's drive to make every event special never faded. He still worried about every club evening and every concert because he cared so much. Would people turn up? Would they enjoy it? But he always did his utmost to ensure that they did, and above all he cared very much for every member of the club and they were like a second family to him. He loved being the host, making everyone feel welcome and his warmth and humour shone through in everything that he did. But he could not have achieved this success without Nina's help and support to make his visions a reality. Nina was also very much the voice of reason, reining in some of his more crazy ideas! I don't think talent like Sasha's can ever be replaced and the ability he had for creating something from nothing was just extraordinary. I shall

miss Sasha for the rest of my life and I don't think the guitar club or the parties can ever be quite the same again without him! Most of all, I just want to say "Thank you Sasha!"

Debbie Burford

Club evening 8th November

The third club evening of the season was the first held without Sasha. His absence was palpable, and an air of sadness and disbelief hovered. However, in his own words, 'The show must go on' and Linda Kelsall-Barnett kindly and with great conviction stepped into Sasha's shoes and led the All-join-in Orchestra.

The turn out was excellent with the welcomed addition of members from Guitar Harmony, a young player Torin Ayling and her dad, old timers Ian Moorey and Robin Burgess and junior Vakaris Silaikis who is now close to being a senior. We began with *Lands End* which was played in a round format. The orchestra then moved on to *Autumn Leaves*, appropriately selected given the time of year. Originally a French song, it has become one of the most recorded songs by jazz musicians and the E minor 7 flattened 5 chords, C7 etc written above gave members the opportunity to veer away from the normal notation used. The orchestra remained in position whilst Torrin Ayling and her dad gave a lovely performance of two jazz/blues duets which they had played at the Festival. Some members left before the night drew in but most remained for the traditional culinary delights and a glass of '19 Crimes' (a favourite of Sasha's) as an interlude to the music making.

The evening gave all participants the opportunity to put into practice the advice offered by adjudicator Emmanuel Sowicz. Morgan Andrews began with Sor's *Study in C major*. Played from memory, he became stuck at one point in the well-known proverbial loop experienced by all players but it was a valiant effort. David Alexander, with slightly unruly hair following a ride on his Harley Davidson, played his own composition *Night Passage* which portrayed the magic of travelling through the Suez Canal on his honeymoon with his wife Anne, drinking brandy Alexanders which he thought were named after him. Continuing with the creativity, Andrew Richardson performed one of his own compositions designed for his students and comprised of twelve variations using the same shape in the left hand but at different positions on the fretboard. The second one was quirky and angular, not dissimilar to Brouwer's compositions and in sharp contrast to no.7 which was far more lyrical.

Teresa Henley, Jay Huff and David Clarke gave a re-run of their festival solos (*Lagrima* and *Adelita, Aria and Variations* by Girolamo Frescobaldi and two pieces from *Castles of Spain* by Torroba, respectively) and with improvements evident in their performances. Baz and Teresa, who still remain nameless, performed *Drifting* and *Incantations* by Richard Charlton. Elaine Foakes played *Birds flew over the Spire* and *A Chill Wind* both by Gary Ryan and studied during lockdown when spare time was more abundant and a reminder to slow down the frenetic pace of life. Linda Kelsall-Barnett started by saying that it didn't seem long since she was last up on the stage and performed *Study no.6* by Leo Brouwer and her own composition based on *The Fair Flower of Northumberland*.

Whatever the time of year there always seems to be a fly buzzing around the recital hall and this reminded Robin Burgess of an amusing anecdote while teaching guitar to boys from China, who tended to adopt English first names to join with their Chinese surnames. So when Stevie Wong, Andy Wang and Jimmy Tang were asked how they were feeling, they replied, 'We all feel sick, sir, we think there is a fly going around!' Following that, he performed *Manhã de Carnaval* by Luiz Bonfá ending his performance with, 'You've got to get the beginning and the ending right'.

Elaine Foakes swapped guitar for flute and remarked on how she was even more out of her comfort zone on stage, feeling so much taller than when seated. She and Jay Huff, also tall but thankfully seated, performed *Sicilienne* from Fauré's *Pelleas et Melisande* proving the natural combination of a wind instrument with a stringed one.

The evening ended with Club chairman Julian Bobak saying how Sasha normally did everything for club evenings, festivals and concerts. He congratulated everyone on how they had pulled together to work as a team to keep things running as smoothly as possible. He thanked Linda Kelsall-Barnett for so valiantly taking the baton and competently running a most enjoyable and interesting evening and that Andrew Richardson would be taking his turn on December 6th. His final words of 'Onwards we must go', were a rallying call.



Jay Huff and Elaine Foakes

Things will never be the same without Sasha but for certain the club will continue. We must thank Nina who supplied and organised much of the food, assisted by Nicola Maccarone and Alison Stonestreet. The hall and kitchen were cleared in record time by Debbie, Linda, Julian and Teresa and the door was locked not long after 10pm.

Teresa Henley

Irina Kulikova Recital

Our last concert of the autumn, given by internationally acclaimed Russian-born guitarist Irina Kulikova, was special and poignant for a number of reasons. The concert was held on Saturday 22nd November, a day marked with concerts and music festivals to celebrate the feast of St Cecilia, patron of music and musicians, who renounced marrying a pagan so that she could sing to God. Irina, known for her magical touch and engaging stage presence, certainly made her guitar sing to the heavens that evening.

Irina opened the concert with some tender words about the love and fun that Sasha had for life and people, his amazing and individual teaching method and how he would send audiobooks and jokes to make her laugh. Although no longer present with us, Irina said that Sasha was still in her heart and that this evening was a special occasion for her.



The concert repertoire was played on four different guitars, the first belonging to Irina and made by Italian Luthier Andrea Tacchi. The other three were beautifully crafted by luthier Stuart Christie who, at Irina's suggestion, gave an interesting and informative introduction to each guitar before she commenced playing.

The programme was fresh and enticing, a mixture of the seminal guitar classics from Spain and South America, transcriptions of north European piano or operatic repertoire and a much-welcomed abundance of works, many composed specially for Irina by contemporary composers of all nationalities. She started with *Milonga* by Jorge Cardoso, a piece that she played when nine but revisited relatively recently. The nostalgia and connection to her childhood of practising this music with her mother during the long Russian winter months was visceral.

The first half of the concert also included three bastions of the guitar performance repertoire which never tire to helplessly seduce the audience; *Capriche Arabe* by Francisco Tarrega, *Una Limosna por el Amor de Dios* and *La Catedral* by the Paraguayan composer Augustin Barrios Mangore. *Una Limosna por el Amor de Dios* was performed on Stuart Christie's spruce and cypress guitar based on a modified Jose Romanillos design and the excellently executed tremolos fluttered effortlessly up into the cupola above the stage as if ascending towards heaven. *La Catedral* requires no introduction. *Saudade* was composed during the difficult years Barrios spent in Havana and Irina played with the yearning and melancholy everyone experiences when casting an eye back to happier times and places. *Allegro Solemne*, played so fluently and almost in one phrase simply spun in perpetual motion.



Stuart Christie (guitar maker), Amanda Cook, Irina Kulikova, Peter Stewart (composer)

Variations sur un theme de Mozart op.9 'Das klinget so herrlich' from 'Die Zauberflote' by Fernando Sor was an interesting and contrasting excursion from the repertoire composed primarily for the guitar and with the Spanish influence into the realms of opera. The pieces dedicated to Irina by contemporary composers were another welcome detour down the maze of Irina's diverse repertoire. She performed a beautiful lullaby by Scottish guitarist Peter Stewart, named after and composed for her young daughter *Marielle*. We were

honoured to have Peter in the audience and Irina joked that he should compose something more rebellious and stubborn now that Marielle is a teenager.

Irina then performed two pieces by Mexican composer and guitarist Eduardo Diaz, both of which could so easily have words written to them such was their lyrical nature. *Una Tarde de Abril* was written for Irina's birthday and the mesmerising *Desde el Alma*, played on Stuart Christie's spruce and Santos rosewood guitar, needed no explanation as to why the title translates to *From the Soul*. The invitation by club chairman Julian Bobak to partake in refreshments temporarily broke the spell but the audience took no persuading to return.

The second half opened with the rather operatic *Andante y Rondo Brillante op.2, no.3* by Dionisio Aguado followed by three contemporaneous compositions which all had a charming story attached to them. *Portrait of a Rose*, dedicated to Irina by English composer Vincent Lindsey-Clark was a deeply personal reference to Irina's father who called her 'My flower'. The harmonies captured the unfurling of pastel-shaded rose petals in the early summer light and the blaze of colour when massed together. *Valsa Negra* was written by Italian composer Sergio Ercole and depicted the omnipresent blackness found everywhere following the eruption of mount Etna. This atmospheric piece was performed on Stuart Christie's spruce and Indian rosewood guitar based on a 1935 Santos Hernandez guitar.

Serbian guitarist composer Nemanja Bogunovic grew up with and was influenced by Soviet and Italian movies and his composition *Encounter* certainly had a cinematic feel to it. The final piece on the programme was *Valse no.7, op 62, no.2* by Frederic Chopin, and Irina executed the rapid scalic passages with much precision and grace. There was no question that the audience was going to demand an encore and the positioning of the beautiful bouquet of flowers on the grand piano was the cue for her return. Irina's final piece *Ballade to beautiful Elena* was composed by her teacher Victor Kozlov, and was selected in memory of his passing during Covid. As she began to play she spoke the words 'But let's stay with Love'.

Irina graciously thanked Stuart Christie and Peter Stewart for their presence in the audience and mentioned how lovely it was to see Amanda Cook, face to face as opposed to just on Facebook. At their last encounter in 1997 at West Dean, the teenage Irina's Russian minder would not allow her to converse with Amanda! Sasha met Irina at the same time and invited her to give her first concert at the club to a capacity audience. WSGC are saddened that Sasha never heard Irina's mesmerising recital; he was so looking forward to hearing her play again. We would all like to thank Irina for her magical performance and for lifting our spirits, particularly under such difficult circumstances. One thing was certain, Irina, like Saint Cecilia, certainly gave us the gift of music that night.

As is customary we would like to thank Mayor Councillor Gillian Yeates and Bognor Town Council for all that they do for us and Little Florist for the beautiful flowers. WSGC would personally like to thank Nina, Yuli and Inna Levtoy for all their help in organising the concert. Without their support the show would definitely not have gone on.

Teresa Henley

CHRIS JONES



It was with great sadness that the committee learned that club member Chris Jones passed away unexpectedly on Tuesday 18th November. Chris was being cared for by the Royal Sussex County Hospital and, as an organ donor, two successful matches were found, a wonderful gift from Chris.

Chris had been interested in the Arts his entire life and enjoyed playing the classical guitar. He joined the club in 2023 and specifically moved to Bognor to be near the West Sussex Guitar Club. He gave his commendable debut performance at the January club evening in 2024, joined Linda's guitar orchestra and continued to contribute at club evenings and parties, demonstrating a flair for all musical styles along with considerable improvisatory and compositional skills.

His past experience as a librarian and archivist for the University of the Creative Arts in Farnham equipped him for the role of club archivist, which he

commenced soon after joining. Although his time as a member was short, he contributed significantly and with great enthusiasm to club life.

Teresa Henley

Club evening 6th December



The orchestra playing 'All Join In', composed by Andrew Richardson in memory of Sasha (photo by David Alexander)

The fourth club evening of the season fell on the feast of St Nicholas, a saint known for his generosity in bringing gifts. The evening was hosted by Andrew Richardson who, along with David Clarke, set out the hall, lay out the music and food and, most importantly, purchased the wine! There was a flurry of messages on the committee group WhatsApp asking where the wine glasses were kept, and then a further flurry stating that they had been found.

The All-join-in-Orchestra was indeed almost orchestra-sized with all of Guitar Harmony attending to support Andrew, who had composed a truly touching piece appropriately named *All Join*

In as homage to Sasha. The music was written in normal notation, tablature and chords so that every member present could participate. The piece was an uplifting melody full of sunshine and light and was followed by the equally jolly *Frosty the Snowman* until Frosty sadly met his fate when the sun came out in the last bar and melted him. Guitar Harmony finished the first half of the evening with *Here, There and Everywhere* which was almost another homage to Sasha whose presence can still be felt at the hall. The playing paused for a sausage or two, washed down by a glass of '19 Crimes' before WSGO, directed by Linda Kelsall-Barnett, performed the relatively newly-learned *Cateretê/Xote* by Machado, and a re-run of *Farewell Lad* and *Misionera*.

Andrew then carefully worked through the list of enthusiastic performers who were considerably more relaxed after a glass of wine and the solos and duos began. Paul Nowlan, whose performance career is in its infancy, played *Andante* by Carulli with a self-assuredness that belied his level of experience. Morgan Andrews introduced his piece, a fiendishly difficult *Waltz* by Chopin (transposed by Tarrega) as 'Something I have been nibbling away at for ages' and was echoed by Andrew saying 'Well, that piece is a bit of a marathon.'

Robin Burgess, before commencing with the tricky *Sonatina Meridional I Campo* by Manuel Ponce, confessed that he normally plays the repeat correctly and so started with this and ended with a defiant strum. The confessions continued with David Clarke saying he was not sure 'What had possessed him to tackle Napoleon Coste's *Scherzo* from op.25 *Les Soirées d'Auteuil*' which started with an almost impossible cascade of descending pull-offs. David Alexander plucked yet another two of his own colourful compositions out of the hat. He started with *Slow Time Boogie*, a piece about a dachshund with attitude out walking with its mistress, and *Dappled*, an Appalachian Blues, played in classic Earl Scruggs banjo style.



Andrew Richardson

Elaine Foakes and Joanna Wellwood-Froud gave their excellent debut duet performance of *El Noy de la Mare* by Llobet and *La Vals*, Joanna's very first piece played with Sasha. Baz Boxall and Teresa Henley tested the waters again with their duets *Incantation* and *Drifting* by Richard Charlton. Elaine then returned as a soloist espousing how much she admired Poulenc for being such a quirky individual and played the 'almost decadent' *Sarabande* which has five beats to the bar most of the time. She followed on with the achingly beautiful *Desde el Alma* by Eduardo Diaz, recently performed by Irina Kulikova at her recital.



Linda Kelsall-Barnett



Elaine Foakes and Joanna Wellwood-Froud



Baz Boxall and Teresa Henley

No club evening is complete without Villa-Lobos and Jay Huff continued with the *Suite populaire brésilienne* saying that if the *Valsa-Choro* went well he would play the *Gavotta-Choro* and he captured that melancholy tone associated with Brazilian folk music. Linda Kelsall-Barnett was not sure if her piece was ready to be aired but performed with poise *Platero y yo*, a prose poem about the wanderings of a poet and his silvery donkey, set to music by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco. A number of the evening's performances were prefaced with 'It's not quite ready to be played but ...' Club evenings are perfect for discovering just how well or otherwise you know a piece and to just give things a go.

It was yet another lovely evening and well done to Andrew Richardson for doing everything from composing *All Join In* to setting out the room and even performing one of his own exercises designed to improve the pull-off. Echoes of Sasha are found everywhere, in the music played, the glittering Christmas decorations, the deep velvet curtains but as a club we are finding our course of direction, much as a river does, now that he is no longer with us. Last of all, thanks must go to all who helped clear up which is a highly polished performance in itself; Judith Ratledge, Teresa Henley, Debbie Burford, David Alexander, Julian Bobak and Linda Kelsall-Barnett.

Teresa Henley

Christmas Party 2025

A first Christmas Party without Sasha as host was always going to be a rather poignant occasion and one full of memories of Christmases past. It was just something he was so good at - relishing the chance to provide humour and entertainment along with his special warming winter punch. So how would the party be without him?



Well, the hall was as wonderfully decorated as ever with a beautiful Christmas tree in the corner and the tables were looking festive. A buffet table was laden with delicious food and a warm winter punch was as normal brewing by the door and ready to serve. Our excellent hostess this evening was Linda Kelsall-Barnett who had done the most amazing job from designing the party invitations, collating the replies, organising a schedule of performers, providing one of the quizzes and helping to set out the hall in the afternoon.

Guitar Harmony started the party with a lovely programme - *Carol of the Bells*, *The Lord is My Shepherd*, *Nova Nova* (a 13th century carol) and *Frosty the Snowman*, all arranged by their leader Andrew Richardson. Jay Huff stood in to make their numbers nine. Linda then took on her more usual role to conduct eight members of the WSGO in Pachelbel's *Canon* and *White Christmas* (an arrangement by Debbie Burford).



A first break to sample the delicious buffet was followed by solos from Morgan Andrews (*Sugar Plum Fairy*, *Auld Land Syne*) and Paul Nowlan (a *Study* by Sor and *Silent Night*) who would surely have won a prize (had there been one) for the brightest red waistcoat and Santa hat. Linda helped Peter Watkins onto the stage who gave us Shakin' Stevens's *Happy Christmas Everyone* but without all the hip gyrations! Elaine Foakes and Joanna Wellwood-Froud then treated us to their beautiful duet *El Noy de la Mare*. David Alexander had been told to be 'colourful' so he brought to the stage a multi-coloured music stand on which was a music score that he was about to read. "Only kidding everyone" he said "You know I can't read music" but he turned it round to reveal the message Merry Christmas. He played his own great arrangement of *Coventry Carol* in an early English style.



The Gala Trio followed - Debbie mentioned that Diana Green could not join us tonight due to having a hip replacement on Tuesday. "That's no excuse!" came back from the audience. John Mason began with a lovely solo of *In the Bleak Midwinter*. David Clarke and Debbie both had capos on their guitars for the next item - *Musical Box* (arranged by Debbie). David expressed concern at Debbie's ancient capo which had to be ratcheted up like a 16th century torture instrument. The piece brought laughter from the audience as the slightly out of tune sound really did emulate a very old music box. John followed with *A Sussex Carol* then the trio 'Wished everyone a Merry Christmas' in an arrangement by Derek Hasted. After a second break for food, Judith Ratledge kindly read out the answers of the Christmas Tunes anagram quiz and the winner was Elaine with 21/25.

Linda explained that her solo *Platero y yo* was about a donkey called 'Silvery' which prompted another heckle from the audience "But is it Little?" The hall was hushed to appreciate her very fine playing. George Vears wished to "continue on a theme of *non-Christmas*" with a Sor *Etude op.6 no.1* which was enjoyed by all. Jay said he was going to go against this trend and played a medley of three carols followed by a rather special piece, Gordon Giltrap's *A Christmas Carol*, which Jay had played at his first ever Christmas party at the club. Elaine's solo had a very tenuous connection to the Christmas theme but her *Song of Dawn* by Vincent Lindsey-Clark was a new piece to most of us and very beautifully played.

There was a pause for reflection as everyone stood with glasses in hand for a very special toast to Sasha – the drink accompanied by a slice of cake baked in his honour. There followed the raffle draw. Now this had been set up by our chairman Julian Bobak in the afternoon but he sadly could not join us in the evening as he was unwell. It was certainly an unconventional raffle as all the winning numbers were already picked and attached to the prizes. Since not all the tickets were sold there were left half a dozen unclaimed prizes! Linda came up with an ingenious way to solve this problem. If the winning number was say 36, she would ask "Anyone got 35? 34?...etc." until a winner was found! Linda then gave the answers to her dingbat quiz which ended in a tie break at 13/15 - the two winning tables were judged by Linda on the best singing of a chosen carol (harsh!)

Zoe Barnett was our final soloist and what a treat it was to hear her stunning arrangement of *White Christmas*. No Christmas party would be complete without some carol singing at the end. Debbie made her way to the piano and this year was joined by four guitarists playing chords provided by Linda - Andrew, Jay, John and Morgan. Linda led the singing and there was a new twist to the traditional *Twelve Days of Christmas*

– tables were picked to sing the various verses. Robin Burford was not so impressed to be landed with 'a partridge in a pear tree' but luckily Elaine was on his table and in fine voice!



As the evening drew to a close with *We Wish You a Merry Christmas* it was a time to be glad that everything is continuing at the guitar club with an exciting programme already arranged for 2026. It was wonderful that Nina felt able to stay with us for the whole evening which can't have been easy.

There are lots of people to thank for this evening – Inna and her family for decorating the tree and the hall; Nina, David C., Julian and Debbie for setting up the tables in the afternoon; Julian for organising the raffle and providing the punch ingredients; Julian's wife Shelly for the cake; Julian and Linda for printing the quizzes and giving prizes; Nina and David A. for looking after the punch and filling the glasses; Elaine for doing all the washing up assisted by Robin; and finally all those who contributed to the food table and the clearing up and packing away of tables and chairs at the end. I'm sure that somewhere out there was a very special man in an elf outfit who was beaming with pleasure that we'd all pulled together and made a great success of the 2025 Christmas Party.

Happy New Year to Everyone

Debbie Burford

Librarian's notes: Antonio Lauro (1917 - 1986)

This Venezuelan composer and performer was born on 3 August 1917 in Ciudad Bolívar in Venezuela. His father was an Italian immigrant, who taught his son to sing and play the guitar and the family moved to Caracas where Antonio pursued formal musical studies (piano and composition). In 1932, Lauro attended a concert performed by the Paraguayan guitarist and composer Agustín Barrios, and was so impressed that he gave up piano and violin in favour of the guitar. From 1933, Lauro studied with Raúl Borges and was introduced to the classical guitar repertoire. His colleagues studying with him, unveiled Lauro's works to an international audience.

Lauro was a fervent cultural nationalist and (like Barrios in Paraguay), was determined to celebrate his nation's musical heritage and toured nearby countries to introduce them to Venezuelan music. He was particularly attracted to Venezuelan waltzes from the previous century eg by Ramón Palacios. The music was always melodic and characterized by distinctive syncopation in which two measures of 3/4 become a single one of 3/2. Lauro set about composing a guitar repertoire and his first efforts included pieces later known as Tatiana, Andreina and Natalia composed around 1939. He composed dozens of works for orchestra, choir, piano and voice, many of which remain unpublished.

In 1948, when a military Junta was in charge, Lauro was imprisoned for his democratic beliefs, telling his colleagues that prison was a normal part of life for a Venezuelan man of his generation. He continued composing in prison, and on his release, returned to performing in the freshly-formed, professional 'Trio Raúl Borges'. He held numerous professorships including at the Juan José Landaeta Conservatory, and began a solo concert tour culminating in a triumphant performance at London's Wigmore Hall in 1980. Shortly before his death on 18 April 1986, he received Venezuela's highest cultural award, the Premio Nacional de Música.

Julian Bobak

The West Sussex Guitar Club is grateful for the continued support given by:



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A very special thank you must go to Sasha's son, Yuli Levtoy, for designing and publishing this newsletter for the guitar club.

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Finally, thank you to Debbie who has taken nearly all of the photos.