

Spanish Classic Magic

ANDRÉS SEGOVIA'S WORK AS A
COMPOSER HAS NEVER BEEN
CELEBRATED—UNTIL NOW.

**SCOTT
TENNANT**

REVEALS THE CHARMED CIRCUMSTANCES
THAT BROUGHT HIM TOGETHER WITH
A SEGOVIA GUITAR AND THE
MASTER'S UNHEARD SONGS.

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BY **MAC RANDALL**
PHOTOS BY **KEVIN SCANLON**

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In 1974 when Scott Tennant was 12 years old, his mother took him to see the Spanish classical guitarist Andrés Segovia at Detroit's Masonic Auditorium. Tennant, who'd already been playing guitar for six years, was well aware of Segovia's superstar reputation as the man who'd done more than anyone in the 20th century to legitimize the guitar as a classical instrument, and he was thrilled to witness the master in concert. The thrill increased after the show, when he received a brief audience with Segovia.

"My mom was very good at getting us backstage," Tennant recalls. "She'd say, 'Oh, this is my son!' and the stage hand would look at her and go, 'Okay, let her by. She's got a kid.' It was a little embarrassing at times. But I did get Segovia's autograph."

It's difficult to verify precisely what guitar Segovia was playing that night in Detroit, but circumstantial evidence suggests that it was his principal concert instrument for more than a decade: a 1969 José Ramírez 1A with cedar top and Brazilian rosewood back and sides bearing the internal stamp *AM* for Antonio Martínez, one of the Madrid shop's most venerated luthiers. More than four decades later, through a confluence of events that scarcely seems believable, that same Ramírez has ended up in the hands of Tennant—now one of the world's top classical guitarists—to be played on the recording sessions for an album paying tribute to Segovia. And the nature of that tribute makes the instrument's use all the more fitting, for Tennant isn't celebrating the virtuoso interpreter of others' material that most know Segovia to be. Instead, he's presenting a side of the maestro that the world hardly knows: Segovia the composer.

The roots of this ambitious project go back to the third and final time that Tennant was in Segovia's presence. It was the latter's 1986 master class at the University of Southern California, during which Tennant played the only Segovia composition he was aware of at the time, "Estudio Sin Luz" (Study Without Light). "Segovia gave me some advice after I played it for him," Tennant remembers, "and then he said, 'Now, please, suppress this.' Meaning put it away because it's not very good. That was the last thing I expected him, of all people, to say. Segovia was a person who...well, let's say he didn't have many self-worth issues. But one thing that he was humble about was composing."

As the years went by, Tennant learned of more Segovia compositions. Some were only played a handful of times in concert; most had never been recorded or published. "For a long time, my perception of Segovia the composer was limited to 'Estudio Sin Luz,'" Tennant says, "but the more pieces I heard, the more my admiration increased. He was very skilled. I'm surprised that he didn't promote his own music more, but I suppose it was more a personal thing for him, a way of getting things off his chest. Several years ago, the thought came to me of recording an album of his work on one of his old guitars that had come through town, a Hermann Hauser. But it buzzed a lot, and I couldn't settle on a place to record, so I scrapped that idea."

This is where David Collett enters our story. He's the president of Guitar Salon International (GSI) in Santa Monica, California, one of the world's premier dealers of classical and flamenco guitars. Last year, his shop acquired a group of 63 historically significant guitars from collector Russell Cleveland that were featured in the limited-edition coffee-table book, *The Classical Guitar Book: A Complete History*. One of them was Segovia's 1969 Ramírez. "We're not sure whether he ever used that guitar in the studio," Collett says, "but we do have documentation of it being used a lot in concert. He sent it back to Ramírez in 1980. They had to refinish the neck because he'd played it so much." Although the refinishing was done expertly, Segovia never reclaimed the guitar. Instead, it was sold off, eventually entering Cleveland's possession.

"It took three weeks for us just to change all the strings on the Cleveland guitars," Collett reports. "We were still evaluating them when Scott Tennant called us up. He'd heard about the sale and wanted to check out the collection. Just before Thanksgiving, he paid us a visit. I hadn't even thought of showing him the Ramírez,





Tennant recording at USC's Joyce J. Camilleri Hall

and I had to leave before he tried it out, but he sent me an email the next day. I'm quoting from it right now: 'I've played so many Ramírezes, but in that '69 I found a guitar I could play for the rest of my life.'

"That's true," Tennant says. "It felt like we fit together somehow, like I'd found a lost friend. There's some kind of DNA connection there. This may sound like I'm explaining a cologne, but you can hear the character of the wood in the sound of the guitar, which is really the way it should be. There's a lot of depth and dimension. As opposed to just any old Ramírez guitar, this one has a personal stamp on it."

Within a few minutes, it was clear to Tennant that he'd found the guitar with which he could record that album of Segovia pieces he'd started thinking about years before. But who would put the album out? Tennant got in touch with Marcelo Kayath, one of the principals of a Brazilian-based website/record label called GuitarCoop. The two men first met in 1984 at a guitar competition (Kayath came in first, Tennant second), and they've been friends ever since.

Kayath's back story is worth an article in itself. A vaunted classical guitarist in his youth, he gave up the profession at 24, got his MBA at Stanford, and in time became a high-ranking executive at Credit Suisse in Brazil. Between 2005 and 2012 alone, he oversaw more

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than 60 IPOs that raised a combined \$17 billion. Less than a year ago, at 52, he retired from banking and is now once again devoting his life to musical endeavors. "Finance," he says, "is incredibly easy compared to playing the guitar."

Kayath loved the Segovia album concept and suggested that Tennant come to Brazil for the recording. But fate intervened: The Ramírez at GSI got sold. "This one guy hammered us relentlessly to buy it," Collett says, "and just wouldn't take no for an

answer. But we knew we had to hang on to the guitar so Scott could complete his project. Segovia's been gone now nearly 30 years [*he died in 1987*]; he's becoming a shadow today, and we need to retell his story. So we made a deal. The guitar was purchased, but the buyer agreed to wait until we were ready to hand it over to him."

Now that the guitar was someone else's property, Tennant no longer thought it advisable to take it out of the country. "If something were to happen to it, I'd be that guy who had it when it disappeared," he says. The album, therefore, would have to be recorded in California. However, that would be a more expensive proposition for GuitarCoop. And so Kayath reached out to the most appropriate potential sponsor he could think of: Augustine Strings, a company that had, in close consultation with Segovia, developed the first marketable nylon guitar string in the Forties. (Luthier and company founder Albert



Augustine had begun experimenting with nylon during World War II, when traditional gut strings became hard to acquire. Seeing promise in this new material, Segovia helped Augustine connect with nylon manufacturers at DuPont and became one of his main product testers.)

Kayath's instincts were correct. Augustine agreed to sponsor the project—provided, of course, that the Ramírez would be strung with Augustine Classic/Blacks and Regal/Reds, Segovia's preferred types. The next consideration was material. With help from fellow Segovia disciple Michael Lorimer, Tennant compiled a master list of all of Segovia's known compositions. Several proved impossible to find, so Collett contacted Angelo Gilardino, Segovia's archivist in Italy, in hope of tracking them down. "Within days," Collett says, "Angelo had sent Scott all the pieces we'd asked about, and six new ones besides."

Gilardino also alerted them to the existence of another "new one," which had long seemed more a rumor than an actual composition. "Fandango de la Madrugada" (Fandango of the Dawn) was written in 1945 while Segovia was living in Montevideo, Uruguay, with the pianist Paquita Madriguera. He'd apparently played it once or twice in concert, then gave the piece to

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his companion. Two years later, their relationship fell apart and Segovia departed abruptly for New York, leaving behind many possessions, including three guitars and the "Fandango" manuscript. For decades, that manuscript had remained in the Madriguera family's possession, gathering mold in a suitcase. But through connections in Uruguay and elsewhere, Gilardino was able to locate a readable copy, as well as another, slightly different version

written by Segovia from memory at a later date.

"For reasons of privacy," Gilardino says, "I cannot give a detailed account of how I received the work. Of course, when receiving the music, I promptly informed Mrs. Emilia Segovia [*the maestro's widow*] of the existence of the 'new' piece. She decided to delay its publication until all the works written for and dedicated to Segovia by many composers all over the world, whose manuscripts I had discovered in the archive of the Segovia Foundation in Spain, would have been published." That took 12 years, yielding 33 volumes of music. By happy coincidence, it was right at the end of this process that Collett and Tennant approached Gilardino, leaving the way clear for Segovia's widow to approve publication and recording.

So after all that, what does the "Fandango" sound


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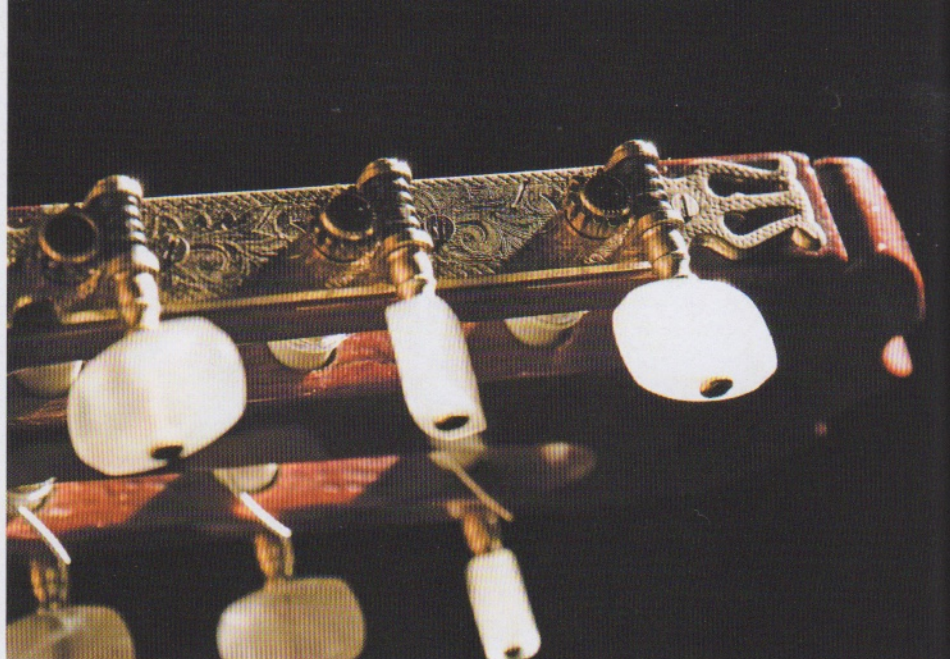


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like? “Within the borders of Segovia’s compositional style and capacity, it is one of his most significant works, both in size and in quality,” Gilardino says. “Beyond the customary features of Segovia’s writing, it shows affinities with the taste of Manuel Ponce and, more distantly, of Manuel de Falla.”

“Angelo told me this could be the sleeping masterpiece,” Tennant says. “I wouldn’t call it Segovia’s best work, but it is beautiful, probably as far as he’d go to doing something flamenco. The old, moldy version turned out to be the best, but I had to go through the PDF with a magnifying glass for two weeks. There was a lot of ‘Well, this *must* be a B flat.’ One thing’s for sure: It’s never been recorded before. This is a first.”

With repertoire in hand, arrangements were made to record the album in the Joyce J. Camilleri Hall at USC (coincidentally, one of only three American universities that Segovia ever visited). John Dearman, Tennant’s longtime partner in the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, was tapped to produce. “There are these moments in music history where composers get ‘rediscovered,’” Dearman says, “like Mendelssohn with Bach or, in classical guitar, John Williams with Barrios. This isn’t going to be on that level, but I think at least one set of pieces—the 11 Preludes—has a chance to work its way into the general repertory. Segovia’s music really reflects his personality, and so for Scott, who has such an identifiable personality himself as a player, it’s an interesting challenge: to acknowledge what Segovia might have done with this music, but still look at it as Scott Tennant.”

Dearman admits that since the sessions began, he’s been tempted to pick up the Segovia Ramírez and give it a go, but hasn’t done so. “I’m a little superstitious about that,” he says. “Let the strings handle one person at a time.”

At press time, two days of recording sessions had been completed, with more scheduled for the fall. The finished tracks will be sent to Brazil for editing, mixing, and mastering. Once the album’s done, GSI plans to host a release party/concert at which Tennant will play the Ramírez one last time before it goes back to its rightful owner. “I almost wish we’d done all this work before we sold it,” says Collett, ever the businessman. “Maybe it would have gone for a higher price!” But as it is, the latest buyer of the Segovia Ramírez has already done his part to make a special instrument’s history even richer. 