



**Siegried Behrend**

Germany

Interview

'Be prepared for the unexpected.'

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**SIEGFRIED  
BEHREND**

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# Siegfried Behrend

*"Be prepared for the unexpected"*

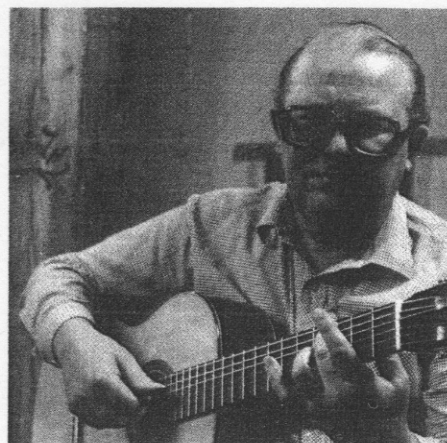
Interviewed by LANCE BOSMAN

Act first and attend to details later. This precept holds as true today for Siegfried Behrend as when it was first instilled into him. During the formative years of the early-post war, what few performance opportunities did arise had to be seized and played on spec, without concern for their finer details. These impressionable experiences were to equip Siegfried with an attitude and technique tuned to meet immediate demands. They have since paid dividends throughout an extensive performing career marked by over 1000 publications and 100 recordings.

A prolific arranger of classical guitar music, Professor Behrend has also contributed a sizeable quantity of original compositions. Many of these allude to indigenous music heard and absorbed in distant lands during the course of concert tours. Without striving for authenticity, these pieces could be described as crystallised impressions of local idioms and dance patterns. European folk songs from all quarters are set for solo guitar or for vocal accompaniments, which Siegfried frequently performs. Contemporary music is also given due exposure, both the moderate and radically new. Regarding the latter, he is something of a forerunner, striking out, literally, into the avant-garde with improvisations from graphic scores.

Combination and ensemble performance is another prominent activity, with guitar and percussion interpretations of Medieval and Renaissance dances. In the contemporary field the guitar is placed in the combustible mix of noise-effects, percussion and the 'voce humana' of Siegfried's actress wife Claudia Brodzinska. Claudia's dramatic vocal presentation matches the extremes of the accompaniment with her maniacal chatter, squeals and wails! On a larger and generally more accessible scale, Siegfried directs 'Daz Deutsche Zupforchester' The Federal German Orchestra of Guitarists and Plucked Instruments. Depending on the work being played, the ensemble enlists mandolin, harpsichord, lutes, lyres and woodwind or percussion. Undertaking projects from all periods and styles, performances range from Jacopi Peri's prototype opera *Euridice* (1600), through the music of successive eras to today's graphical-eleatoric improvisations.

On the current agenda are 30 solo concerts over home ground in Bavaria, a master class there too, and a summer school at Assisi, Rome. Such schedules, including world tours, recording and so forth, he nonetheless regards unspectacularly as just part of the job. Belying his inner momentum and dynamism, is Siegfried's outer composure, humour and affability. With the years he has cultivated a calm acceptance, taking in his stride upsets along the way, the rigours of long tours, and a breakdown in health, countered by the cessation of cigarettes and drink (the latter discipline, though, was relaxed on the evening of our chat, over which a glass of wine progressed into four bottles, witnessing my commendable attempts to stay upright.) Indulgence aside, Siegfried's conviction, sustained from the outset of his career, has never wavered: professional guitarists must work hard, especially at



first; they have to circulate, develop, and overcome their fastidiousness. With so much happening in music, progress will be made from the love syndrome of guitarists wrapped up in solitary affairs with the

"We should not develop guitarists, but musicians who play the guitar. We must educate guitarists who play their guitar in their room, and are happy if they play it every year. We must stimulate musicians to do every radio station call and says please come, we have come now and we'll record it, you go there ready after half an hour rehearsal to perform. It is necessary to study every style, improvisation more important to learn this in a conservatoire, tape music and recording techniques. An average person goes to a radio station and doesn't know what they are doing. When I go to record I know exact frequency I don't like; I tell him which one I like, and he changes, with the dials, the mike. I have learned with recording equipment, and this is not the case otherwise guitarists are helpless, they get nervous, they don't know what's going on behind the window. That's their profession and make a living with it.

"Now, more in Germany, in these years we are integrating pop music and electric guitar into the curriculum of music schools. It's most important to know modern technical material. It doesn't mean that I love the electric guitar, but you have to know how to learn counterpoint, the teaching should include it, even if you don't like it, but you should go on around. Because we're living in the 21st century, this is quite different to the 18th. Today you have to know many things in order to exist; and besides you have better impressions of older works, it broadens your horizons, electric combinations, works for guitar and guitar and synthesiser. I had a piece by Klaus Stahmer, *Espace de la Solitude*, synthesiser and ballet. It's a piece of about 45 minutes, I perform it often. So I have to work with these changes, with the composer on the synthesiser changes. Guitar is normal, sometimes it moves into electronics, the electric guitar. These are all 21st century; and I can't understand how a guitarist can live without knowing his musical surroundings.

As good as his word, Siegfried promotes in his repertoire both the avant-garde and the established repertoire. From known concert pieces, one is John McCabe's *Canto* (1968) which he has performed many times. New ground is pioneered in graphic score composition. Among composers who have written this line for the volatile combinations of guitar and percussion are: the Italian Haubstock Ram Anestis Logothetis who has written several volumes, *Zonen für Gitarre*; John McCabe's *Daz Letzte*



the Korean composer Isun Yun and his *Gakok* (1972) from which Siegfried has arranged a version for voice and guitar; Behrend's own *Xenographie* (1969); and *Ultima Rara pop song* (1969) by the Italian Sylvano Bussotti, a composer who has already raised some eyebrows, if not the roof, before now.

A sampling of this music can be heard on Deutsche Grammophon 2530 034, along with Renaissance dances pepped up with percussion. Whatever the idiom, when Siegfried — 'Pluck Siggie' — Behrend and percussionist Siegfried — 'Bonk Siggie' — Fink get together, it seems that nothing will stop this pair. Siggies 'Plunk' and 'Bonk' know just how to give it stick. And to add to the exuberance is Claudia 'almond eyes' Brodzinska's vocal lines.

"My wife was originally an actress, she made many films, and when we got married she accompanied me on tour. It was then I got the idea to commission composers to write for guitar and voice. Bussotti wrote the *Ultima Rara*, for which he devised the 'voce humana' which isn't actually the right word, because it calls for guttural exclamations from the back of the throat. Some words are articulated, other not, in a mixture of using the voice as a musical instrument. It's not *sprechstimme*, Bussotti's way is all his own. John McCabe also wrote a piece for us also using a talking voice with guitar and percussion. The talking element is right for Claudia because she isn't a singer. She has four pitches as notes and the words she has to express are within the range of these four notes, exact pitches and quarter tones.

"Yes, there is a strong oriental influence in this, because with our system we cannot notate, nor do we use these nuances, nor the special glissandi derived from Japanese and Eastern music. This is why we started to write with graphical notation. From one note you draw a line to the next note; then you can touch on any or all of the inflexions between. This also applies to the instrument, to which the singer relates. There are some pieces where the singer opens first, but with most the instrument begins. For instance, the piece by Yun starts with bass F on the guitar, and I strike that note applying a weird, long vibrato, so that the pitch fluctuates as well as the quality of sound. And so, the singer does the same, but always returning to the normal note. You could say that Yun's piece is a mixture of Eastern and Western music.

"The Bussotti piece is completely different. He writes words, with varying tones; so sometimes, for instance, if a word ends with N, then that syllable is subjected to inflected variation. For this kind of music, graphic notation is very helpful. In this way he can convey glissando notes, but even these can't be played on the guitar; therefore I have developed a performing glass. If you take a straight glass and touch it at the note point on the fretboard, then pluck the string, you can produce quarter-tones, eighth-tones — anything. You must not press on the string but lightly touch and vary it, the note will vary too; it wavers just like the string on an unfretted instrument. And you can use different glasses; I have made special ones, tiny and bigger, and all have their own acoustic, so that the quality of sound can be varied at will.

"When Bussotti composed this piece for Claudia and me, the first performance was with him in order to arrive at an interpretation. Then together we made a record for Deutsche Grammophon; at the same time I made a second recording with Claudia. Since then we have performed it at conservatoires around the world, and at the Purcell Room in London. I think for the first time, anyone would have to work with the composer; alternatively I have some of my students perform it, and I work with them and explain. Without this guidance it can't be performed or even read. The guitar part is written with three lines, three systems (staves) like a score. The middle system is the main voice, the 'prima voce'; the above system, the 'voce vicina' is a nearer voice to the main voice, and the lower system, the 'voce lontana' is the faraway voice. Inside these three systems are bigger and smaller notes, the bigger being the more intensive. So you might say that it's

complicated to read.

"In the piece by Yun the guitar part has norm but the voice has four lines: low, middle-low, me and in between are graphic signs. These indicate 1 of the voice, inflections for either side of the note.' notation is essential because we can't write these n our system. Normally a singer would have performing such music because they are acc definite pitches and enunciating notes. But an wife, finds them easy to perform because she has nc about clean pronunciation of notes."

Chance or aleatoric improvisation, the combinations of sounds within given paramete phenomenon of the experimental decades of the sixties. Taken to the limit, an aleatoric score cons of pictorial symbols, devoid of strict notation. graphic abstractions are interpreted as the spirit performer also assumes the role of composer. Th proponents of the movement, especially John Cage their work in musical philosophies, there was room a bandwagon of freeloaders. In one piece by Earl memory serves, the graphic resembled a kinc silhouette, from which Cubist imagery the perfo begin from any angle, tracing an infinity of rando and translate these into musical terms. What's Denied that 'score', would the performer be de stimulus for free improvisation?

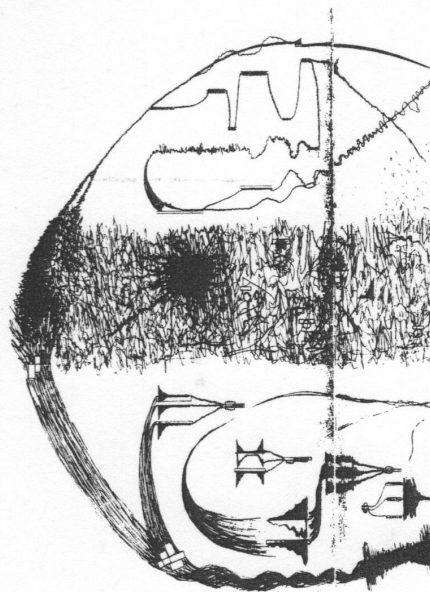
But then, such uncompromising disregard for and reason was perhaps necessary at the time to new musical consciousness by completely severing break new ground. Actually what has happened sin been the decline of aleatorism, but its consolidation considerable enrichment of 20th century music. It forms it can be heard, for example, in the aleatorism' as Witold Lutoslawski describes it improvised sections are enmeshed into strict frameworks; and in the case of a solo instrument, tl Brouwer's *La Espiral Eterna* (1971). While the rar compositions differ, the scintillating effects they the same: within defined outlines are shimmering passages brought about in no other way than t spontaneous interpretation of indeterminate wri practitioner and composer of indeterminate and tot music, how does Siegfried view its relevance?

"So far as excess is concerned, let's look back a the classical periods. At the time of Bach, Mozart, an epoch was about 25 to 30 years, then it change generation. But today we have so many generation: thrust on us. From London you hear a first perform New York, from Tokyo; so many things, and composers get involved in these things. Until a com his own style he passes through all these impressio listener is bound up in them too.

"Yes, I understand reservations for this improvisation. In one way I think that total impro now lost, its time is over; but I will try and say necessary. Until recently we weren't able to impro in jazz and that. Going back to Jacopo Peri's ope (1600), there was only a bass and a melody given piece orchestra was playing it; so they all improvise figured bass. This opera, written for the marriage c Medici to the King of France, I performed for th this century, with almost only original instrument the original melody and bass score. Now we jump to and fifties of this century, and musician's were improvise, they were too used to playing from th nothing else possible. So along came these radical and they shocked, and said you must learn to trar you feel, transmit yourself. This is made clear with I painting which you can immediately make music o a very strong creative element, he says so much

painting; and everybody who hears music in it will hear it differently. So these composers, despite their shocks and excesses, drew attention to improvisation; and finally it's done, and finally the result is Lutoslawski and others. Besides them, other composers have gone beyond notated music and said more with quarter tones and so forth through graphical notation. This is good because it expands your compositional world. Strictly graphic, that's not so good; but it was necessary to give improvisation full exposure. And still, many musicians never perform free music because they don't like to learn it; but many soloists and chamber musicians really do, and they profit from it, even for the classical repertoire because it gives them a wider perceptual range of musical vision."

Moving from the present to the past, and into a quite different line of activity, are Siegfried's compositions based on, and arrangements of, folk music. Much of this has an exotic slant, inspired from lingering impressions of indigenous music heard on foreign shores. Embracing a pretty extensive touring background, the list includes quasi-Arabic, Japanese, Greek, African and European folk songs and dances, set as compositions or arrangements for guitar, voice and ensemble. "I have three outlets for composing, and one is folk music. Over time, I've gathered masses of tapes from all over, where people play in private houses, bars, the lot. I listen for hours not only because I enjoy this music, but it also teaches me about different mentalities. You can't really do that if you don't know the language, but you can get somewhere with their music and by observing their behaviour. After two or three hours, maybe, I begin to appreciate their sensitivity, sometimes in brutal music, sometimes refined. In many instances I return to the hotel and write something down, not authentic of course, but that which filters through my mind. I don't try to copy, but simply recreate in my own way their resources.



Zonen  
for  
Siegfried  
Behrend

"Folk songs, particularly European, accompaniments simple and pure. I've performed settings, Britten for example, *Songs of the* (the title is cut off), but I see them as art-songs. I've accompanied records and always leave the voice to perform accompaniment, be it figures, chords or cut to intrude or disturb the line of the voice, becoming pure expression of the people. If you dis-

chitarra sola o chitarra a 3  
da 1 a 3  
strumenti  
esigendo da  
solo e possibile  
suonare le zone  
(indistintamente)  
da un solo  
strumento, con  
come di più  
senza di registri  
adatti, parallelamente  
(senza di registri)  
mentre di più  
diversi, di suono  
M.B. come per  
l'occasione di ogni  
particolare, possibile  
arrivando di possibilità  
stereofoniche.

ultima rara (?)  
(pop song)  
le pause fra (non 0  
subito ripresa)  
voce vicina  
prima voce  
voce lontana  
rall. ancora  
6  
scritto a  
Siegfried  
Behrend  
composizione  
dell'editore  
Goethe

surroundings then it is no more a folk song; and so I believe that Britten's folk settings — you can also take Falla, his Spanish songs — they were folk but are art-songs now. This is not for me, I don't compose art-songs. The lullaby for example is not an art-expression; it is a feeling from the mother to child. Yes, and another thing: not to change the keys; the melody and accompaniment are restricted to everyday harmonies.

"My second involvement is much in new music, avant-garde and the popular repertoire. Sometimes I work with totally graphical, other times it's notated with graphical combined. Lastly are the productions with my Zupforchester; I ask my colleagues and outside composers to write for that. If it happens that we have 15 minutes to fill in a programme, then I'll write something myself."

Fulfilling immediate challenges such as this, goes back to his first days in the field after a brief formal education in music. Born in Berlin in 1933, Siegfried entered the Berlin Conservatoire, aged 16, and within two years was touring locally. In 1958 he toured the USSR and followed this with experience in orchestral and chamber music. At this period, a time of post-war optimism, speed and readiness were of the essence, "for just after the war, Germany had a spate of films and I was composing for them. I must admit that this was one of my most productive impressionable times: you go into a studio and the orchestra is sitting there, and you have maybe a spot of 10 seconds, during which time those film frames are seen just once, and you must get the ideas then and write them down. While the copyist is setting that, you move on to the next spot. When this is finished, then it's a return to the first spot which is practised once with the picture and next time recorded — and that is that.

"So I think it's most important for a musician to be ready for anything. You can't say excuse me, I'll take this home and study it and possibly next week I'll be able to do it. No, you have to be there and ready to do it then; you have the music, so perform it. Of course you might have to work on some; there are some compositions that are so difficult they can't be read from scratch; you might have to work on them but not hours and months. There is what I call a guitar fetishism, where many guitarists, they work on say Giuliani for half a year caressing it; and when they think it's perfect they stand in front of an audience, and they forget half of it through nerves. It's too perfectionist, it lacks a professional approach; they have no routine to work to except practice. They have to learn soon that you don't practise if there's nothing to do. So it's most necessary that in the first years you have to work very hard."

As an adjudicator on panels for competitions, Siegfried has observed an increasing trend of performers towards dramatic physical gesture of emotional release, and myopia as though in spiritual association according to him, a facade to boost the insincere, if it's reckoned that larding a piece with its musical impact, then it's hardly fair established and beyond competition running it. "I know, but it seems that the act of winning. My point is that talent will show. The problem with competitions is that you win. In fact the teachers encourage them through winning, so that they, the teachers, ego. The teachers forget to teach, only to train as fast as possible. The student consequently without knowing it. The jury are mostly admire the quick and craftsmanlike performance at the expense of the inner content. The result is stronger and more showy the better; and talent is lost. Let your talent rule your head and not

Spare time, when there is, could well be spent on guitars in trim, of which Siegfried has 23. Of these he generally opts for one old favourite, a 19th-century guitar, which he plays every day, since they're like members of the family." Siegfried is digging around museums and things of interest, and obscure guitar literature. "I've lots of microfilm of guitar music, but never have time to research so much good music hidden away, like on Giuseppe Antonio Brescanello. He was an Italian and worked in Munich in the service of the King of Bavaria, and later for the Duke of Württemberg, chamber music, symphonies and a collection of partitas which I play. Nobody knows about his merit recovery. I've also found 12 sonatas by the German composer Lantzberg. To transcribe but it's so time-consuming; still I'll get round to it."

Living the itinerant life, arranging his schedule, frustrations of travel and so on, must all be borne of stress. He copes with this by making a habit of developing a calm acceptance of the overbooked hotel. "I've learned that there's no use flustered, it's no good moaning at the stewards, they can't help it. For some years now I've been keeping my mind of all thought for short periods. Of the problems of travelling, I take these



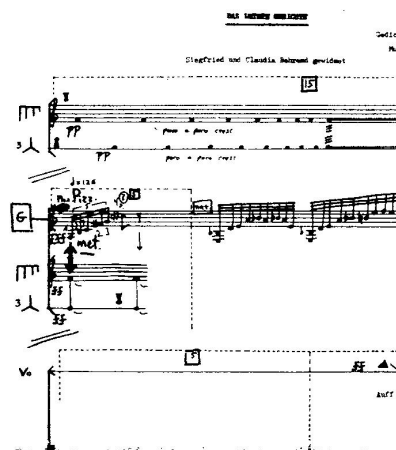


"Still I must say I'm a kind of gypsy type. I like this travelling, I eat all over the world and I've made good friends everywhere. Sometimes I think when I get back from a nine-month tour, I won't go next year, too much. Then say after two or three months I get itchy, I must go to Japan, I miss the food, the atmosphere of the exotic."

style of music reflects the lifestyle around: that it is a comment on the times in which it is composed. It can even initiate a social trend. Logically then, there is an interrelationship between music, non-musical matter and social circumstances. But herein lies a paradox: people today don't generally like the music of today — at least, the so-called formal kind.

"As I grow older I'm drawing very close to the big symphonic works by Wagner, Mahler, Bruckner. Living in Bavaria now, after coming from Berlin, the city, I'm in an old farm house which is totally isolated. You can see for miles just fields and mountains, no houses. Looking at that gives you an understanding for big formations. Those composers I mentioned, most of them lived here in Bavaria, Austria; and you can comprehend the grandeur, the huge impressions, the expanse of such things, and hence their vision. So I have since found a greater understanding of this kind of music. Before, it was too much for me.

"On a different parallel I sense the aggression of today reflected in 20th century music. Any art, whether it's music or painting, is a mirror of the times, the artist living them. So I see a connection between this monumental music and the countryside. In the cities, everything is nervously overfull, overworked, over-technical. So it means that composers today are reflecting these problems; therefore the music is so disturbing and turbulent. You listen to those composers of the early-twenties who lived in the countryside, Carl Orff, Delius; they never wrote disturbing, avant garde music, and they were living simultaneously with disturbance, but in a different environment. If you happen to live in Rome, Paris, New York, you're surrounded by so much noise, there is nowhere without it.



"But this shouldn't prevail for the active musician. He must absorb music from a comparative study of modern music and classical hand in hand. We have a lack of education. A musician today has to be able to solve a musical problem without long preparation, be prepared for the unexpected. To learn a profession is most important, the technical part. These, working hard on artistic interpretation, do handwork, but by brainwork of the head. By versatility the result is what I call a fetishism. All in all there are two activities: one who just like to play the guitar by themselves, these can do whatever they want. But those who have a profession, they have to study everything."

*For detailed account of aleatoric music, see R.S. Brindle, (1975 OUP).*