

**Hector Quine**  
England

Interview.

'The conservatoire guitar.'

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Lance Bosman



## Guitar in Education

# Hector Quine

## The Conservatoire Guitar

*Lance Bosman*

Since the first grade and diploma pieces for guitar entered conservatory examination schedules, a variety of others have emerged as successive colleges issued their own individual programmes. In all, guitarists now have a fair selection of music to mark their progress through the repertoire. Yet all this has taken place comparatively recently, within the last twenty-five years or so.

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To institute a grading curriculum for the guitar with the Associated Board, along with that existing at the Guildhall School of Music, was one of Hector Quine's priorities soon after he took up a teaching post for the instrument at Trinity College of Music in 1957. This was followed by a second appointment, the Royal Academy in 1959. Another of his imperatives at that time was to foster a professional attitude and ability among guitar students then. This in turn would elevate the guitar from its lowly status, regarded as such by the more stuffy and sceptical members of the musical establishment.

Recently retired after thirty years of college teaching, Professor Hector Quine reflected on the progress of the guitar in conservatoire education. Thinking back, its tentative unqualified entry into the academic portals in those days of the fifties is indeed a far throw from its assured position now. Between times, a diversity of grades and diplomas has sprung up, and now taken for granted as formal monitors of advancement; but someone had to set

them up with the Associated Board, with a syllabus representative of the current repertoire, while fulfilling the standards prevailing in existing grading systems.

That done, and with the guitar gaining recognition at Trinity and the Royal Academy, Hector Quine's services were extended to the Royal Manchester College (RNCM) in 1965 and the Guildhall School in London, 1967. Further appointments followed in a peripatetic and consultative capacity in London and regional colleges and polytechnics. Among these were examiner and advisory positions for the Associated Board, 1965; Oxford Board, Scottish Certificate, 1966; Royal College of Music and numerous colleges, universities and panels throughout the country from 1965 to 1985.

Not unexpectedly, eventual rumblings of concern mounted over what was regarded as a single teacher's dominance in so many influential niches of the teaching profession. Aware of this criticism, Hector Quine considered his position justified by the success of his methods and students. Over the years, many now accomplished guitarists and specialists received his guidance in the development of their talent. From a list of familiar names are Anthony Rooley during 1967, David Russell in 1974, Tom Dupré and Richard Hand from 1982-84.

For Hector Quine, teaching guitar is not solely a matter of conveying tricks of technique and probing the repertoire. Other factors are integral, the cultivation of musicianship and a professional outlook, the development and projection

of the player's personality. These components of his teaching philosophy were forged over three decades, during which time the guitar has secured its deserved place in college curriculums.

"Looking back to the beginning, when I started teaching at Trinity College, London, in 1957, I remember feeling strongly that the guitar had to be brought in from the fringe, and incorporated into the general field of music. At that time guitarists had no professional standards; they were amateur in attitude as well as in technique and musicianship. Amateurs were taught by amateurs and I still tend to think of guitarists who claim to be self-taught as being rather like the defendant in a legal action some years ago who was told by a judge that 'he who conducts his own defence has a fool for a client'. Professional guidance is essential, and that was and still is to a more limited extent, the problem with guitar playing—it's still largely an amateur endeavour. There's nothing wrong with amateurs, as such, but there must be standards, and professionals are needed to set them. Whether you earn money from playing or not, isn't really the issue; but to have the outlook of an amateur is inhibiting to these standards since it encourages playing only for one's own pleasure, for self-indulgence. The professional musician must, if he's to be successful, please his customers, the listeners."

But in those days, the late fifties, the classical guitar was emerging after a long dormancy. Compared to its appearances on the concert platform now, it was rare then. And it was the amateurs who sustained and revived interest in the guitar generally.

"Oh yes, I'm not being critical of its status then. I'm merely saying that it was the situation as I found it. I felt there was a lot of room for improvement in the guitar's performance image. I regard a satisfying performance as being an integrated event comprising three distinct elements. First there is an essential means to an end. Second, a thorough training in musicianship, aural, theoretical, related to the instrument and embracing history of music and harmony. The third element is the individual's innate musical personality. Whether this can be trained or not is an open question, but I have the feeling that careful training in the first and second elements will do much to encourage its growth. Most people, even with minimal musical sensitivity, can develop their potential to a surprising degree given the right training and environment. Teachers of the guitar more often than not have had no inclination or understanding of how to guide students in this way."

Whatever the teaching, is there a tendency for guitarists themselves to impede their progress by shutting themselves off? That the self-containment of the solo guitar breeds insularity in the player. Or perhaps the instrument attracts people who are that way inclined anyway.

"Well, it is an introspective instrument. I wouldn't be dogmatic about this, but would say that prospective players who are somewhat introverted tend to be attracted to an instrument which promises a large degree of self-indulgence. This is not to blame them for their personalities, though the inflated ego which often seems to go with it is a rather unpleasant characteristic. On the other hand, playing the guitar can be quite good therapy; playing to other people can help the personality to expand. There's no point in sitting in a corner playing to yourself. So there is satisfaction in communicating, whatever the music you play."

Returning to the guitar's introduction to Trinity during 1957, it sidled in initially as a 'second-study' instrument. In this it functioned in a subsidiary role to a principal study of

violin, flute or other established instrument. Then in 1959 Hector Quine joined the staff of the Royal Academy of Music in London where, in the 150-year history of that institution, the guitar had never been taught. Remembering the general musical climate as being traditional, conventional and somewhat bigoted, Quine regarded the guitar's acceptance there as being to the Academy's credit, and said much for the courage and foresight of its Principal, then Sir Thomas Armstrong.

"There was a fairly rapid build-up of second-study students at the Academy, followed by two first-study guitarists. During the next few years the applications increased, allowing us to select students in entrance examinations. These were youngsters who had reached a reasonable standard. During the sixties and seventies only one in ten who applied was accepted, but this was enough for me to establish a respected department.

"Most of these students, having completed the three-year course, applied for a fourth, or 'post-graduate' year. Several of them said to me that, after three years' tuition, they felt that they were just ready to *begin* the course, as they now understood what it was all about. It had taken three years to come round to this mature viewpoint—to appreciate what gaps there had been in their technique and musical education.

"As professionalism grew in the system, each new annual intake was able to imbibe something of the expected standard by watching and listening to the senior students who were in the third or fourth years of their studentship, as well as from the individual lessons and various classes. Higher education is about learning, building and developing on a secure foundation, but this essential basis was very rare in those days, as competent teachers of the guitar at

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primary and secondary school level were very thin on the ground. All too often I found it necessary to take students right back to the fundamentals in order to get the basic technique straightened out before going on to more advanced work. This may help to explain why, for some years, guitarists at the music colleges often lagged behind their contemporaries in other departments."

With the guitar then placed in the colleges, an examination syllabus became the next objective. Was this the first for the guitar and personally set up?

"Yes, I devised the whole system. Guitarists didn't know much, and the musical world didn't know the guitar. An important part of my work was to liaise between the two. It was in 1965 that I approached the Associated Board and said that we ought to have a system of grade exams for guitar. The instrument's standards were rising, and many guitarists outside the colleges, as well as young players who were intending to apply to enter them, wanted a set of standards against which to measure their playing and for working towards. The Board showed some reluctance as I had expected, but a cautious beginning was made, with just three grades, namely 4, 5 and 8. The reasoning behind this was that Grade 4 was considered as equivalent to O-Level, Grade 5 to A-Level, and Grade 8 as a preparation to the Diploma exam. I had set the syllabus for the Performers' Diploma a few years earlier, and the Teachers' Diploma followed soon after the grades. As the years went by I was able to fill in Grades 6, 7, and then 3 and 2. This year Grade 1 is due to appear, and will thus complete the range of examinations which was instituted more than twenty years ago. I notice still how often it's referred to today as a measure of difficulty for newly published pieces; so it's now an established yardstick."

Assuming that the original choice of exam pieces was in keeping with their time, later advances in the repertoire may well have dated them. In the years since has the upsurge of revived early music and contemporary literature been represented in re-adjusted programmes?

"The syllabus was constantly under review, and modified lists were published every three years, though my guiding principle remained the same: to encompass as wide a spectrum of good guitar music as the repertoire allowed, and gradually to raise the level of difficulty until it matched that of other instruments—this being part of the brief of the Associated Board. Teaching was still a big problem throughout the country; music colleges needed to train guitar teachers who would in turn teach to a professional standard. You obviously come in for some criticism when you set both Grade and Diploma syllabuses for not just one but three institutions as I did, especially when starting from scratch as in the case of the guitar. In choosing the pieces, setting scales, sight-reading tests, etc, you have to make inspired guesses at what you think is the right level. People write in, particularly teachers, complaining that a piece set for Grade 3, for example, is too hard, or the one in Grade 6 is too easy. The Board gets endless letters of this kind, and not by any means only about the guitar syllabus: the problems are common to all music examinations. Such complaints and suggestions are always carefully considered, but it must be remembered that there is always a subjective element. I am convinced, on the whole, from the pilot scheme back in 1966, the system of grade exams for the guitar has been a good thing."

That the guitar lends itself to musical doodling, pastimes, a busker's instrument, is needless to say to its credit, a measure of its versatility. Though with these associations we can well imagine it being initially received by some with scholastic disdain.

"Indeed yes, diplomacy and tact were essential qualities for what I was trying to do; firm but gentle persuasion with acute awareness of areas of susceptibility. Now the guitar is generally accepted, though the Board's examiners are still critical of technically poor or unmusical playing. In the early days they tended to blame the instrument rather than the performer, but over the years we've managed to convince the musical establishment that the guitar is an instrument of substance worthy of being taken seriously."

In setting the guitar up in three major colleges, Trinity, the Academy and Guildhall, Hector Quine attained a singular position of influence. That is, one teacher holding sway over the formation of college guitar tuition and examination setting. Whatever its pioneering merits, it left open an opportunity to exercise personal doctrine and monopoly. And not just from the founder himself, but perpetuated through his immediate pupils too.

"Of course, there was that danger. I was well aware of it and was often reminded of it by others. As you can imagine, there were many along the way who criticised me; they didn't like to see someone in a position of unique power! I wasn't teaching only in the London colleges; I received a call from the Principal of the Royal Manchester College, before it became the Royal Northern, asking me to do some teaching there, which I did for a couple of years. When later he asked me to undertake their entrance exams, I felt I was being hemmed in by college teaching. It was also at the back of my mind, this 'Quine empire', this problem of controlling everything, with just one way of doing things."

"Such an apparent concentration of power could be, and was misunderstood by a few people in the guitar world. I knew about the accusation but I was also aware that, underlying some of the criticism, there was more than a touch of envy and malice. I did not take too much notice of



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this as I felt that, given the success of my approach, it would have been absurd to discard a 'winning formula' for one of more doubtful worth. The Associated Board and all the colleges in which I had taught, examined or set examination syllabuses, found that standards had risen considerably, and said so! It was simply a question of having a proven method which produced the results, and of wishing to disseminate this as widely as possible. Personal aggrandisement was not one of my objectives; neither was I strict, in the sense of being a martinet—dictating. But I did try to make clear what standard of playing, technical and musical, were expected and to give instruction which showed the way to achieving this. I never deliberately set about building a cult, nor did I pursue prestigious positions; I accepted them when invited, for whilst having no personal ambition, neither did I feel any need for self-effacement. I first heard about the accusation of 'megalomania' from one of my students of those days, who told me, with a wry smile, that I had been called a 'benevolent dictator'. Paraphrasing this a few years later, an old friend who was very distinguished in the musical world, jokingly said that I was the 'Feuhrer of the Guitar'. All this was of course nonsense, and the comment which I most cherish came from another former student. When talking about my method, he said simply: 'Well, it works!' And so it does, as the success of my students from many countries, in winning international competitions or becoming distinguished performers, shows. I was not afraid, when the time came, to delegate some of the responsibility which I had carried for many years to former students who I could trust, to propagate the principles of sound technique and real musicianship on which my system was founded.

"In addition to all this activity, I was also playing frequently at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and working on several new publications for Oxford University Press, of which my tutor was the most important. Through this book I wanted to let people know what I taught instead of keeping it a private thing. I also had new music to work on, including the studies and pieces in collaboration with Stephen Dodgson, since 1965."

On more general ground, and with the wisdom of many years involvement, how can we stimulate the guitar's repertoire?

"I always return to the same thought—that the repertoire is still the guitar's major handicap. The trouble is that it's vast but of poor quality. If you look at the legacy from the 19th century, it just does not stand comparison with the literature for other instruments written during the same period. Similarly today, there is a lot of other music being written for the guitar, but much of it is of poor quality; unlike that of Stephen Dodgson, who has made a real 'in-depth' study of the guitar, its technique and spirit, over many years, although he does not play it. Some composers ask simply 'How many strings has it, and how are they tuned?' and then go on to write superficially for it without considering idiomatic possibilities. The composer who does not know the guitar also tends to write clichés, as indeed do some who do know it! We can't fill the gaps in the past. We have the Bach suites and a rich repertoire of Elizabethan lute music; these are not so much transcriptions as realisations through the medium of the guitar. I don't think much of transcribing the Beethoven violin concerto or Moussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. To play these works on a solo guitar may be a 'feat', but it is also a travesty—not to be taken seriously. It's interesting to note that, in this century, almost all the significant guitar works have been written by full-time composers, whereas in earlier times, writing for the guitar was exclusively the work



of guitarists themselves. The present situation is healthier—again it's a matter of professionalism. The repertoire of the instrument needs improving in both quantity and quality, essentially with music from this century. Renaissance and early Baroque music are a valid part of its repertoire and should be given a regular airing, but we have to be very selective with guitar music from the intervening periods."

Hector Quine's definition of successful students are those whose personalities have developed along with their playing ability. From introverted 16-17 year olds, to the completion of the course in their early 20s, he sees them gain in confidence, polishing their performance technically and also musically by radiating their personalities. "I've never thought of guitar tuition solely as having students coming to a lesson and setting them to work for the next one. Guidance must have wider aims, a way of looking at things. Music must also be an expression of the player's personality. If you don't they aren't communicating, so you have to straighten out their personality first. To help this, my courses have included workshops, tutorials, accompaniment, repertoire and chamber music classes. All of these are related, but may be individually tailored to the students too."

Students are also encouraged to work at extended compositions rather than miniatures. For it is through the performance of music with substance and duration that the guitar will stand equal to other solo instruments. "I mean, for example, a sonata for solo guitar of say 15-20 minutes' duration is more acceptable to the informed musician than the lollipops and other ephemera to which many guitarists seem addicted. These only serve to perpetuate the poor image of the guitar which has been its lot for centuries. By substantial works I don't mean groups of pieces. At the end

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of the 19th century, pianists tended to put together recital programmes which consisted of little more than a string of encores, a medley of Strauss waltzes or whatever. Many older musicians will be aware of these recitals even if they can't actually remember them. Yet it's something that guitarists *still* do—a practice that might have been acceptable eighty years ago, but which seems absurdly trivial today. I feel that we need to leap a few decades and catch up with what's going on in the larger world of music."

Assisting the guitar's participation in broader activities are Hector Quine's ensemble contributions. For the continued development of the guitar and its players, more integration into the wider field of music is essential. He also maintains that, in any case, there is only a limited demand for solo playing, and saturation point can't be far away. "With this in mind I began publishing a series called 'Guitar Plus' in which I've arranged various orchestral and chamber works to feature the guitar in ensemble with flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and so on. It's surprising what can be done with the guitar in these groups, given careful scoring with regard to balance and texture. The arrangements, though not necessarily simple, are mostly playable at school level. I see this as one of several ways in which the guitar can progress towards full integration. The practical value of such ensemble work is that it gives guitarists experience in such matters of basic musicianship as keeping time, following a conductor and, most importantly, listening to others. All of this plays a large part in a student's artistic development, and in preparing him for the world of professional music outside.

"During the last quarter of a century, the status of the guitar has undergone a remarkable transformation. I was lucky to have been in the right place at the right time to be able to make a contribution to this progress, though I seek neither credit nor kudos—no bouquets, but hopefully not too many brickbats either! As I have tried to explain in the interview, my objective was always the same from the beginning; to try and integrate the guitar into the wider field of music. This, I believe, has now been at least partially achieved; not only through educating young, aspiring professional guitarists in sound technical principles, and providing both tuition and practical experience in all aspects of musicianship, but most importantly, by giving them the opportunity to mix freely with, and to learn about professional musical standards from contemporary students of *all* instruments and disciplines. Now, I am pleased to say, they will accept *nothing less* than this kind of comprehensive training, which only a music college can provide.

"On a valedictory note: as I am no longer a part of this scene, whatever experience and expertise I may have accumulated over thirty years—unique though it undoubtedly is—is now redundant. Mere private teaching of guitar playing is not enough now to satisfy the demand which I have, to a large extent, created. My life's work, having thus come to an end, the torch now passes to other hands, which I hope will find the inspiration and determination to continue building on well-laid foundations."

#### Publications

<i>Introduction to the Guitar</i>	publ. 1971	OUP
<i>Bach—Prelude, Fugue &amp; Allegro</i> (ed.)		OUP
<i>Bach—Prelude &amp; Fugue in A minor</i> (ed.)		OUP
<i>Bach for the Guitar</i> (arr.)		OUP
<i>Handel for the Guitar</i> (arr.)		OUP
<i>Carols for the Guitar</i> (arr.)		OUP
<i>The Young Guitarist</i> (arr.)		OUP



<i>Various other solos &amp; duets</i> (arr.)	OUP
<i>Guitar Technique</i>	
(Book, uniform with OUP series)	due 1989
<i>Studies for Guitar</i> ,	
Books I and II (with Stephen Dodgson)	Ricordi
<i>12 Transitional Studies for Guitar</i>	
(with Stephen Dodgson)	Ricordi
<i>12 Introductory Studies for Guitar</i>	
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<i>At Sight</i> (supplement to above)	
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<i>The Contemporary Guitarist</i> (with Arthur Wills)	Ricordi
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<i>20th Century Guitar</i> (anthology)	Ricordi
<i>Bach—Three Fugues</i> (arranged for Guitar Duet)	Ricordi
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