

**George Clinton (1931-1991)**  
England

Obituary. 'Keeping apace with the new.'  
Published in *Guitar International* magazine.  
(Formerly *Guitar*). December, 1991.

Lance Bosman

## KEEPING APACE WITH THE NEW

*George Clinton, founder and editor of 'Guitar International' died peacefully at his home in Dorset, on the 28th October, 1991, aged 60.*

*A guitarist and journalist, he will be remembered for his outstanding contributions to the advancement of the guitar in all its forms.*



*Drawing by Nick Flynn*

**T**O EXPERIENCE STIMULATION, EXASPERATION, enthusiasm, exhaustion and elevating wit all in the space of one minute, and you were in the company of George Clinton. This mix of contrasting impulses provided the motive power for a journal that now verges on twenty years of running. Crossing many fields in that time, it above all reflected George's support for the traditions of the guitar, its innovations and his sponsorship of established players and talented newcomers.

For some while before the magazine's inception in 1972, George envisaged such a journal, with the breadth and spirit to embrace a cross-section of present guitar activities, while giving broader exposure to the classical repertory. With the crossover of the Spanish guitar into jazz and rock in those days, the stirrings of fusion styles, burgeoning solo concerts, there was more than enough ground to prospect. So the magazine was launched. Its proposed image and vision was stamped from the first issue in an interview featuring John Williams exchanging views with rock guitarist Andy Powell of Wishbone Ash. The continued success of these initiatives took a twenty-hour working day, on shoe-string finances; though in not being answerable to market forces, the

magazine was free to venture too, giving time and space to lesser-known players, minority interests and experimental ideas. A glance back over past volumes will show it was always open to these.

An old campaigner, George began the guitar in the mid '50s playing flamenco with his brother Tony. This followed a stint in the RAF where, away from the parade ground, he won table tennis championships. The jazz clarinet was another pastime, fitting in with his occupation as a photographer and a part-time union steward. Settling for the classical repertory of the guitar, his particular attraction to the vihuela led him to probe the museums, hand-sketching original tablatures.

Never still, guitar teaching took up the evenings, with an active hand in guitar society meetings. To stir the dust, his arousing letters enlivened the pages of the late banjo-mandolin-guitar magazine, *BMG*. Even then George was challenging the self-proclaimed guardians of the guitar—and did so to the last.

But to know George you would also be aware of his shortcomings. He could be bloody demanding, bulldozing, with a fiery temper. More than once his breezy impulsiveness





George Clinton with Segovia at the launch of Segovia's autobiography in 1977 (photo by John Dalton)

drove him, chin out, into minefields of controversy and personality clashes. Enquiring and provocative by nature, he was susceptible to childish provocation too.

That same headstrong nature, though, carried the magazine through God knows how many lean times and dramas. For sure there was little material gain. And apart from the odd indulgence, George didn't treat the magazine as a soundboard for his ego. Difficult to explain, but it evolved as an entity, somehow outside himself, from which point he enlisted hands and stoked the fires.

Moments away from the magazine were spent in tending his small-holding, cultivating succulent vegetables for the Spanish speciality dishes he had picked up from visits to luthiers. Another necessary release was wood carving which took the shape of immaculate horse heads. The live models for these chewed contentedly in the paddock, co-existing with the family cat, Gypsy the collie, erstwhile goats and a toad awaiting pickings. George liked the buzz of life around him.

Promoting many facets of the guitar, he championed new music in publication and on the concert platform. To broaden knowledge of the instrument's traditions he prised specialists from their corners to write on the early guitar, the lute, the vihuela. At heart the guitar for him was its classical repertory—though he dismissed the label 'classical' guitar as a divisive term, giving rise to elitism: it's not the guitar that is classical, but a musical tradition played on it. In this area his

coverage and enterprises speak for themselves across past pages. Particularly memorable though were George's observations on the filming of Segovia at the Alhambra, October 1976. These writings fully capture and convey the atmosphere of the settings and actions in vivid journalism and sensitive photography. Equally graphic are his accounts in the Commemorative Tribute to the master, April 1986; and a 90th Birthday Souvenir issue of *GI*, January, 1983. In addition, mention should be made to his book *Andrés Segovia*, a compilation of anecdotes by different authors.

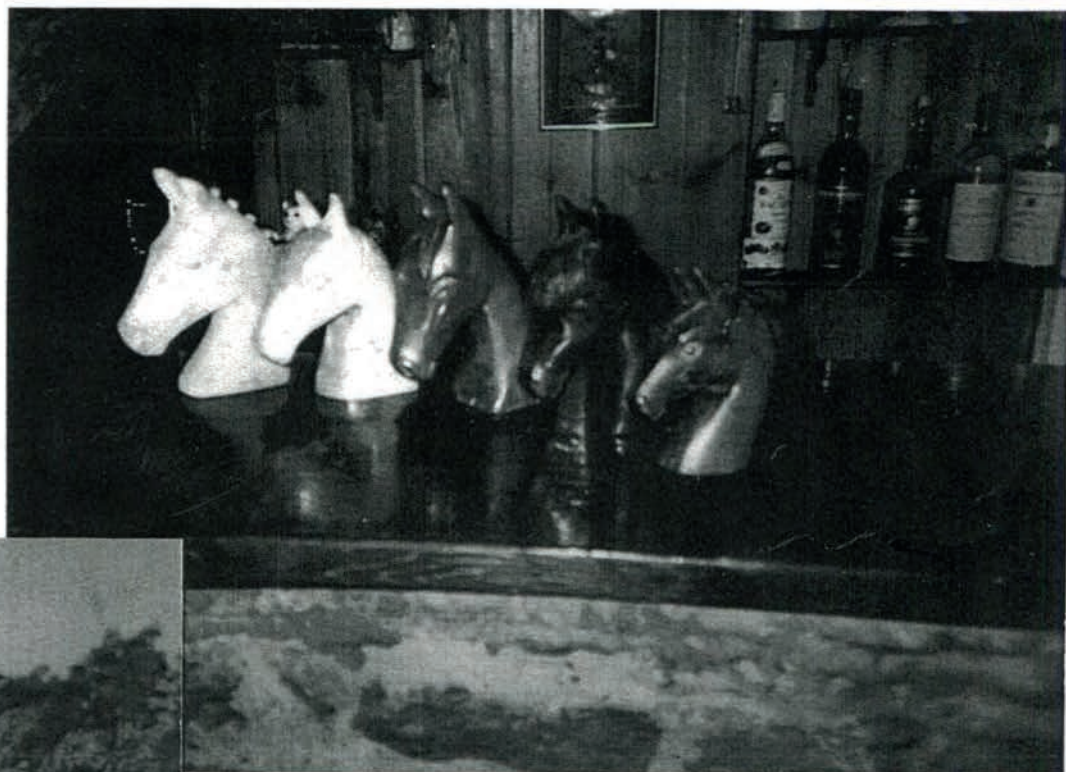
On first reaction it seemed a bitter twist of fate that George should be struck by a tumour, attacking his mind, the source of his driving power. On second thoughts the onset of this can, in a way, be reconciled as almost a natural course of things: for he used his mind to its utmost; is it so ironic then, that a dynamo so long in overdrive should eventually burn out? Such was his imagination and mental energy, it was all-consuming.

Better than anyone I know, George could inspire others with his irrepressible enthusiasm. He could spur a feeling of confidence that urged you to grasp at objectives you thought were beyond reach. All this, together with his humour, the colourful language, made him a privilege to know. With lasting memories and in gratitude, I'll miss him.

*George Clinton is survived by his wife Valerie, son Geoff (who takes over as Editor), and two daughters Deborah and Anne Lisa.*

**Lance Bosman**





*George's wood carvings*



*George with his  
table tennis cups  
(photo courtesy  
Clinton Family).*



*George Clinton playing clarinet in a jazz band (photo courtesy Clinton Family)*