

# Steve Brown & Guillermo Bazzola: a little great joy, by Sergio Cabanillas

The meeting in Ithaca, NY, of veteran US guitarist Steve Brown and Argentinian Guillermo Bazzola has favored one of the finest releases of 2014. *Una pequeña alegría* sounds like a kind and placid conversation between two friends next to a coffee -or a good *mate*- that brings together a common taste for swing or tango with encyclopedic knowledge of jazz language provided by the duo. A little great joy for every listener.



*Madrid, 2010*

© *Barbara Brown, 2010*

Sergio Cabanillas: Steve, what are the results of Ithaca College jazz program in the last years, according to the interest of the students and the number of them? Can you recommend our readers a few names of up and coming jazz

musicians to discover from Ithaca program?

Steve Brown: After having taught at Ithaca College for 40 years, as the Director of the Jazz Studies Program, I retired 6 years ago as Professor of Music. I have followed the progress of the program for the past six years and I have noticed a growth, not only in numbers of students, but also in the faculty of the Jazz Studies Department. There are now four big bands rather than two. I have also noticed curricular changes. Therefore I can only attest to the students who studied with me during their time in school, but the ones who attended Ithaca College and are prominent today include: Marty Ashby, Darmon Meader, Kim Nazarian, Chiel Minucci, Jay Ashby, Andy LaVerne, Tony DeSare, Chris Persad, Brian Czach, Chris Gordan, Tim Collins, Larry Corban and many others.

Sergio Cabanillas: Is Atlantic Bridge with Alberto Conde moving forward? Have you got any short term future plans for this band?

Steve Brown: Yes, we just finished a reunion concert at Xancarajazz in Vigo and we intend to continue to look for other playing opportunities. We were very well received again this time.

Enrique Farelo: Why have you become interested in Spanish jazz being so unknown in the US?

Steve Brown: During the 1980's I traveled to Spain to perform and run jazz seminars in many places in Spain starting in Banyoles under the leadership of Chuck Israels. Over the many years I visited Spain playing and teaching jazz, I developed an interest in Spanish players and the Spanish approach to American jazz improvisation. I was especially impressed by the music of Galicia through my relationship with pianist and composer Alberto Conde, who attended two of my earliest seminars.



*Carriage House, Ithaca, 2013*  
© Barbara Brown, 2013

Enrique Farelo: Is the interest in jazz in the US decreasing lately or is it the same it was before?

Steve Brown: The interest in jazz continues to be strong within the academic communities of higher education in the United States. Most US public schools also have a jazz program in their high schools, depending on the state. This serves as a “feeder” system for higher education. The general public of listeners and audiences are small but supportive. Radio stations across the US need to be playing more jazz.

Enrique Farelo: Does the US government promote culture with grants or does it rise taxes on culture as Spain does?

Steve Brown: They do give grants but they are difficult to obtain, especially within the last 10 years. Many jazz musicians are teaching in academic institutions today to

supplement their income from playing. Others play shows, commercial gigs, or have additional jobs. Donations from the private sector and corporate businesses fund concerts and venues in our country.

Enrique Farelo: What musicians are you interested in nowadays, Guillermo?

Guillermo Bazzola: I am no longer a “record hunter” in terms of checking every new release but I try to listen to new music all the time. I listen to new records by my all-time favorite musicians, by my friends, by young guys who contact me, old albums that I didn’t listen before, folk musicians from everywhere, etc.

Carlos Lara: And what do you think of The Bad Plus’ *The Rite Of Spring*?

Guillermo Bazzola: I know them, they’re very good, but didn’t listen to this album.



*Guillermo Bazzola*

© *Sole González*

Carlos Lara: Many jazz musicians make versions of classical music composers. Why -in a contemporary perspective- jazz

picks more from classical music than classical does from jazz? Does that leave jazz in a bad position?

Guillermo Bazzola: No. I guess that the concert music's own evolution, in which tonality was abandoned and there was a process of rhythm fragmentation, determined that jazz were no longer a matter of interest for classical composers. This interest in African-American music existed in the past and influenced the work of composers like Dvorak, Debussy or Stravinsky. Ligeti or Steve Reich (I think on "Electric Counterpoint", written for Pat Metheny, but it isn't a good example) did things related to African music but not directly to jazz. A British composer, Mark Anthony Turnage wrote orchestral pieces that included John Scofield and Peter Erskine, but not much more.

PS: by accident, I just discovered Nikolai Kapustin's piano music. It's interesting but I don't think it will have a big incidence into the academic music world.

Sergio Cabanillas: What are your short term future plans for Gnu Trio and your other projects?

Guillermo Bazzola: The Gnu Trio stopped playing mostly because a few years ago Andrés Litwin moved to the US. He came back a while ago, we met and talked about a comeback. I'm sure we'll be back very soon, album included. I have a new solo album, *Hora Libre*, recorded in Buenos Aires in 2005. It's an organ quartet with Ernesto Jodos, Rodrigo Domínguez and Juanma Barroso. It was just released by Argentine label BlueArt. Also an improvised music album recorded in NY with drummer Joe Hertenstein and multi-reedist Daniel Carter. I'm also working on a project with two musicians who are quite new in Madrid: pianist/saxophonist Miguel López and bassist Daniel Batán. They're very good composers as well. We are working on a collective project based on original compositions.

Enrique Farelo: Guillermo, I'm pretty sure that Kenny

Wheeler's "The Jig Saw" is one of your choices. Am I right?

Guillermo Bazzola: Yes. Kenny is one of my favorite musicians. I try to listen to all of his albums and I usually transcribe a couple of tunes at least. "The Jig Saw" is a relatively simple but very effective composition. I showed it to Steve, he liked it and we decided to record it.



*Ithaca, 2013*

© *Barbara Brown, 2013*

Sergio Cabanillas: How did you meet each other?

Steve Brown: Although he is a native of Buenos Aires, Argentina, we met many years ago in Madrid, where he now lives, during one of my trips to Spain to play and teach. He was always very gracious to me and helped secure performances and teaching engagements during my European tours.

Guillermo Bazzola: In 2007, our mutual friend John Stowell emailed me telling that his friend Steve Brown was visiting Madrid and asking if I were interested in getting in touch with him. I said "of course". Steve wrote to me, so I learned that he had already been in Madrid many years ago, doing seminars for the Taller de Músicos, where I work. We became friends immediately.

Enrique Farelo: Being so different musically and in your sound, how could you deliver such a fluent and harmonious result in your duo recording?

Steve Brown: We both have similar background even though we grew up thousands of miles from each other. We listened to many of the same artists during our formative years such as Wes Montgomery, John Abercrombie, Keith Jarrett, Chick Corea, Miles Davis and many others. We decided to pick material that would not only have great variety, but would represent the different backgrounds that we both have. For example, there are two tangos on the CD, three of Guillermo's originals, a couple of my originals, and some standards.

Guillermo Bazzola: I don't think we're so different. We both love music, jazz, guitar, composition, etc. Obviously, we have individual approaches to these subjects but they're entirely compatible.

Enrique Farelo: When did you decide to make a duo recording, what were your initial goals?

Steve Brown: We had started to record a duo CD in Madrid a few years ago, but never had enough contact time to complete the project. Therefore, when he decided to come to Ithaca, New York, to visit I scheduled three concerts and this recording session during the week Guillermo was here. My initial goals were to present the duo and feature original compositions.

Guillermo Bazzola: In 2010 we recorded some tracks at my home studio, but due to some technical issues we couldn't finish

it. So, when I travelled to Ithaca to visit Barbara & Steve, he had the idea of doing some gigs and a recording session.



*REP Studios, 2013*

© *Barbara Brown, 2013*

Enrique Farelo: How long did it take to record the album?

Steve Brown: The CD was recorded on April 8, 2013 in one six hour session at REP Studio in Ithaca, New York with recording engineer Nate Silas Richardson.

Guillermo Bazzola: We recorded it in one session, plus some mixing and mastering work.

Enrique Farelo: What format is more comfortable for you to play in, small group or bigger band?

Steve Brown: I enjoy playing in any format from a duo to a large ensemble. I am comfortable in them all but I realize that the larger the group, the less you get to play!

Guillermo Bazzola: I prefer small groups (maybe trio is closest to perfection in terms of balance) but I like to play in different situations, from solos to big orchestras. Each format has its own characteristics, with pros & cons. To



explore different settings is an important and truly rewarding work for any musician.

Enrique Farelo: How many pieces have each of you selected for the record?

Steve Brown: I selected seven and Guillermo contributed six.

Guillermo Bazzola: Well, actually we both agreed the repertoire. Each of us provided some originals, Steve suggested playing some tangos, so I picked a couple of them. We tried different songs, kept some and discarded others. I would say it was a joint decision.

Sergio Cabanillas: How did you feel in your last tour in Galicia?

Steve Brown: I had an extremely enjoyable visit to Galicia. I played some well-received concerts and conducted a seminar for seventeen students with Guillermo at the Conservatorio Superior in La Coruna. I met many future jazz musicians and had appreciative audiences.

Guillermo Bazzola: It was great! Galicia is one of my favorite places in Spain, so I try to go there as often as possible. I have many friends there that really like and support jazz music by going to concerts and buying records. We also had a masterclass at the Conservatorio Superior in Coruña, and the students showed a great interest in our music. Their musicianship was very good as well.



*Madrid, 2010*

© *Barbara Brown, 2010*

Enrique Farelo: In terms of work, what do you both expect from the future for each of you, one in Spain and another in the US?

Steve Brown: I expect to continue performing, writing, teaching and traveling. I hope we can continue to perform as a duo with Guillermo both in the US, Spain, and elsewhere, but we are also working on individual projects of our own.

Guillermo Bazzola: I expect to keep on working with different projects, the duo with Steve and also some other things. *Hora Libre*, An organ-quartet album I recorded in Buenos Aires in 2005 will be released very soon. I have one more record I did in NY, all improvised music. It's still unreleased. I also have some teaching and writing projects.

Enrique Farelo: What are your influences according to guitar playing?

Steve Brown: My major guitar playing influences are Barney Kessel, Joe Pass, Wes Montgomery, and Pat Martino.

Guillermo Bazzola: I like to listen to all kinds of instruments, so my influences are diverse. Speaking about guitar, specifically, I would mention mainly Jim Hall and John Abercrombie. But of course, I enjoyed and try to learn from other great players like Wes Montgomery, Ed Bickert, John Scofield, Bill Frisell, Ralph Towner and John McLaughlin, among others. And also Carlos Sanana, my first guitar hero.

Enrique Farelo: The album is dedicated to George J. Katz. Who was he, and why do you dedicate the album to him?

Steve Brown: George Katz was my wife, Barbara D. Katz-Brown's father. Guillermo and he became good friends while George was living with us after Superstorm Sandy in New Jersey.

Guillermo Bazzola: George was Steve's father-in-law. I met him in Ithaca in April 2013. We got along very well. A WWII veteran, he was such a nice man, full of stories and a very skilled wood craftsman. And he was 90 years old! Unfortunately, shortly after, he got ill and died. It was very sad for all of us. I feel blessed for having had the chance of meeting him.



*Una Pequeña Alegría*  
*Brown Cats Records,*  
*2014*

Enrique Farelo: One of the most attracting and interesting

aspects for physical record lovers is the artwork. In this case it was made by Barbara Katz-Brown (again Katz and Brown). Could you introduce her to our readers?

Steve Brown: Barbara Katz-Brown is my lovely and talented wife who painted the acrylic painting of “Extremadura in the Autumn” while traveling from Madrid to western Spain. She is a retired public school district administrator and the author of the recently published book, *Climbing the Rock Wall – Surviving a Career in Public School Education*, available on Amazon and at Barnes and Noble. For more information [www.climbingtherockwall.com](http://www.climbingtherockwall.com).

Guillermo Bazzola: She has a great sense of humor and is a wonderful and multifaceted person. She’s an educator, a writer and an exquisite painter.

Text : © Sergio Cabanillas, 2014

Translation: © Sergio Cabanillas and Guillermo Bazzola, 2014.