

Wyoming Tribune Eagle of August 18, 2016. Editor's title: "Sexism is Everywhere"

The Cheyenne Guitar Society is a vibrant albeit male establishment. Three women are dues-paying members--Christine Cousins, Susan Jahnke, and yours truly--but each of us has out-of-town commitments; hence, several months may go by without a woman's contribution to CGS meetings. The men don't seem to mind or even notice. Once, when I objected to a group song in which a jilted Lothario inflicts emotional and economic damage on his target, the response was a blizzard of criticism. Another time, when I pointed out that the photos on CGS's website feature only the guys, I was met with indifference.

Truth be told, from their perspective we must seem mere dilettantes. Steve Gilmore has performed in the U.S., Canada, and Ireland. Keith Blaney is popular on the local circuit. Russell Williams presents Bach transcriptions alongside contemporary compositions of equal heft. In the vocals department he is no slouch either, selecting pieces with chords that are devilishly difficult, yet he executes them while doing justice to the lyrics.

I am mindful of the comments of a male writer about women "scribblers" whom he compared to three-legged dogs: "They don't do it well, but one is surprised they get around at all." Two hundred years later we continue to labor under stereotype threat.

You may think that's mere self-flagellation; unfortunately, there's more to it than that. In high-level positions women suffer professional and economic restrictions spared their male counterparts. Often we are penalized for inclusivity in decision-making, which goes against the authoritarian ways preferred by male leaders. Take a look at Theresa Huston's evidence in "How Women Decide"; it'll shed scales from your eyelids.

Interestingly, it was a woman guitarist who provided the impetus for CGS's *raison d'être*. In 1995 Lisa Hurlong, one of female classical guitarists that could be counted on the fingers of one hand, remembered a Cheyenne physician—now retired—and devoted classicist. She urged Russell Williams to involve himself with a young guitarist seeking asylum in the U.S.

"Ernesto Tamayo had won an international competition in Mexico City and a scholarship to study at Peabody Institute but had no funds for room and board," Mr. Williams emailed. "Lisa Hurlong contacted me about setting up a concert."

The young man arrived with but a shirt on his back. "It was snowing that day in Cheyenne," recalls Dr. Williams. "Ernesto became alarmed when he noticed he could observe his breath. I showed him that my breath was visible also."

Barbara and Russell Williams opened their home to the artist for the duration of his visit. Warm clothing was, of course, an immediate concern. "My father donated a jacket. Someone brought a pair of boots. Others found a parka, gloves, head coverings."

The concert, held at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, was a resounding success. "People who couldn't attend sent donations. Mr. Tamayo left Cheyenne with enough cash for a year's food and lodging. The story of his defection from Cuba and his rather incredible performance helped generate a nice boost for his career."

As for CGS's inception, "We decided to do this again and in doing so, started the guitar society," says Mr. Williams, who currently serves as its president.

I own a Tamayo CD from 2007, given to me by a son, in which the liner notes pay homage to Tamayo Senior: "I see my father with that Spanish Guitar . . . that beautiful morning my father and the guitar were producing sounds that came from heaven. I was a five-year-old boy, and . . . I knew then that I wanted to play the guitar forever."

Indeed, Mr. Tamayo began practicing at age five. Sadly, he passed away in October 2014, cut down by an inoperable brain tumor.

I imagine there are girls and women out there who wish they had a role model à la Tamayo. Perhaps world-renowned Lisa Hurlong, and sister guitarists who post on youtube, can address these needs in small ways. I'm lucky to have the sometime coaching of Mr. Williams; together, we offer the occasional duet. In collaboration with Bill Bailey, we've experimented as trio. It's painful to measure oneself against others' accomplishments, but it does fuel the desire to improve.

Russ Williams tells a story from his student days. Having been invited by his church to perform during Sunday services, he chose "It Ain't Necessarily So." The song, popularized by Sammy Davis, Jr. in "Porgy and Bess," pivots around the lines, "The things that you're li'ble / To read in the Bible / Ain't necessarily so." Afterwards, mortified by his audacity, he wondered if he should apologize.

I like to think it was his way of protesting induction into manhood, which Michel Leiris's principal oeuvre describes in terms of the journey "into the Fierce Order of Virility."

It's not easy being male.