Concert Review

People’s search for hearing pleasure has started a very long time ago. Guitar, as one of the most essential instruments to human civilization, has brought entertainment and enjoyment to a very high level. And thus brought about the appearance of concerts and ensembles, where a large crowd of people can get together and enjoy the pleasure of guitar sound. During this semester, I had the honor to join four guitar concerts myself on campus of the University of Indiana Bloomington. This experience has put a lot of positive effect on me, and I truly felt I learned to listen quietly to a piece of music without feeling tedious. As follows, I would like to share my review of these four concerts with you, just to show my learning and appreciation of guitar concerts in general.

I went to the first concert on October 1st. The guitarist who performed that day is called Thomas Jackson. He seems like a very talented musician and absolutely did a good job on that stage. As he was playing the guitar, he put his left foot on the foot stand and the other foot on the ground, which allows him to look at the guitar neck at a very convenient angle while keep his body balanced and stretched straight. During his
performance, he’d close his eyes while playing, which indicates that he was fully focused on the rhythm between the guitar and his fingers. He also leaned his body to the left and right to the accordance of the rhythm as if he was trying to be more attached to the rhythm and the emotions it’s revealing.

The piece which stood out to me the most is Variations on a theme by Handel. The reason for me to choose this one is probably that it’s the first piece of the first concert I’ve ever attended, so I had a lot of feelings about it and noted a lot of things on my mind. This piece has different tempos alternating between different sections. At first it starts with an adagio tempo, which gives audience a sense of peace and quietness. Later it speeds up to andante, giving a sense of awakening. Then it changes to an allegro tempo where the guitarist’s right-hand fingers moves very fast between the strings, as if something is about to happen. Finally it goes back to a largo tempo again. There was a few times where Thomas constantly ends a section with only one left-hand finger vibrating on one string. I found this act very interesting because before exposed to various guitar performances, I had never seen this, until then and after I learned that this technique is called “tremolo”, and it’s very common among all guitarists when they are trying to make a note last longer (reiterate) without strumming the string the second time. The most memorable part of this concert is the awesomeness of the guitarist as well as the fresh experience of participating such a wonderful and meaningful occasion.

I went to the second concert on October 22nd, and the guitarist who performed was Isaac Bustos. He looked like a very experienced guitarist, and listening to him playing the guitar was an absolute pleasure. He used a foot stand in order to lift the guitar neck high enough for him to see it without moving his body too much. While he was
performing, I noticed that he often lift his left elbow and shake his head with his eyes closed, and sometimes his body would lean back and forth as well. This made me feel like he was very devoted on the rhythm and overall image he was creating as a performer. My favorite piece is Guajira a mi madre by Ñico Rojas, because it has a rather joyful rhythm which satisfies my taste. This piece first starts with a rather slow prelude with only a few notes and then followed by a faster and lighter rhythm. I found it very interesting that Isaac often tapped the body (or strings) of the guitar with his fingers in order to create a sound of percussion. It sort of gives the rhythm a little edge and made it less tedious and plain. It’s very enlightening to see how practical the guitar can be as an instrument, for it can produce so many sounds with only a pair of human hands.

On the third concert, I watched six performers playing the guitar in different styles. Undeniably, some of them seemed more experienced than others, and some seemed a bit nervous and stiff. However, I can’t say that I didn’t enjoy that concert, because obviously every performer was trying their best to deliver a well-played performance, and as a matter of fact, each of them did a very good job. The most memorable piece to me was Verano porteno performed by Michael Reardon. This piece has a very impressive prelude, which repeats a few times before it goes to the next section. It also reappear several times in the middle. The rhythm itself is andante and quite catchy. Percussion and tremolo techniques are involved in this piece of music according to my observation. However, after a series of research, I learned that a strumming technique called “rasgueado” is also used in this piece, where guitarist strums the strings finger by finger in a rapid speed with their thumb hold still on the upper string. It’s very interesting to watch several performers play one by one because audience get to
be exposed to different style of guitar playing and somehow start to compare with one another.

The last concert, also my favorite and most unforgettable one I’ve ever attended, was a guitar ensemble. There were twelve guitarists, one soloist, and a director in total. The reason why this concert stood out to me the most is because visually there was a big group of performers on stage creating a sense of pressure and excitement. And moreover, some of them were holding different kinds of guitars, which exposed audience to a new experience of guitar appreciation.

A piece called “Ginastera's Dream” was very memorable to me, because as some of the guitars were making a very high and thin sound, it reminded me of a Chinese traditional instrument, which is also a string instrument, and when playing it, performer would lay it flat in front of him and strum the strings with both hands. That specific part of rhythm was also very similar to a classical Chinese musical style. I was very impressed by how a guitar ensemble could produce such magical mix of western instruments and eastern music. This was definitely one of my greatest findings on that concert. Another thing that impressed me was the interaction between each guitarist on stage as well as the percussive effect. There was a piece where two adjacent guitarists clapped hands with each other to create a beating sound. Some others also tapped feet very hard on the ground, and some tapped on the side of the guitar with their fist’s joints to produce a crisp beating sound. I regarded it a very interesting and innovative technique of percussion. During “Ginastera's Dream”, there was another new thing to me, where performers held one string with two fingers and slide from the bottom to the top creating a low-to-sharp
sound. Before then I thought guitar playing is all very serious, but then I learned that guitar playing can be weird and playful as well.

On the last concert, the director, Daniel Duarte, took some time illustrating several uncommon guitars with the audience. He also invited John, a guitarist, to play a few pieces to us. And with the last type of guitar, John played a very catchy piece and leaned over to professor Duarte to let him play the rest. This act was so adorable that it made the audience laugh very hard. When the concert ended, I could feel the enthusiasm from the audience that they enjoyed themselves as much as I did.

Overall, these four guitar concerts are all very meaningful to me, and I could feel that I had learned something new after each one. Guitars are truly the gift to human beings for they convey joy to us and make such great company when we feel lonely and down. They are also practical in the sense of musical appreciation as they could imitate so many sounds from other instruments such as bass, trombone and so on. I would definitely attend more concerts in the rest of my life and never stop searching for the pleasure created by guitar sound.