

ETap Seminar 2019

The European Tap Guitar Seminar (ETap) is held every summer in the beautiful Ardennes Forest area of Wallonia in South East Belgium. It is a 1 week long music study and performance summer school dedicated to teaching and evolving the tapping guitar methodology.

Organised and led by Daniel Schell, the expert teaching team this year featured Kai Kurosawa (USA/Japan), Kuno Wagner ('the real Wagner') (Germany) and Wolfgang Daiss (Germany).

Ian Rogerson (UK), Rob Thorpe (UK), Kai Kurosawa and myself (UK) travelled by Eurostar from London, a comfortable 2 hour journey to Brussels. In Belgium we were joined by Tim Van Everbroeck (Belgium) and Jean-Christophe Beumier (Belgium).

On arrival in Brussels Kai and I took a leisurely sight-seeing walk with our instruments, stopping for 'refreshments' at the Lambic bar in Place Fontaine. We were en-route to the venue for our evening concert near the famous Bourse building, a popular area for bars, jazz clubs and eating. We had a lot of fun that evening meeting our other tap-guitarist friends and performing a concert with them at the 'Time Out' bar, a regular gig for Daniel Schell.

Next morning we took an easy 2 hour train ride south, as the seminar this year was to be held in the forest village of Suxy, near Neufchateau. Accommodation was in 2 large houses. Wonderful meals were cooked by Christabel, catering for all our various food preferences, leaving us free to concentrate all week on our music work.

The village school building was hired for our group music work and lessons. Each day classes were scheduled with the teachers while Wolfgang Daiss gave private lessons in one of the houses.

Daniel Schell taught a number of exercises from his 'My Space' methodology books using compositions from his extensive 'The Path to My Space and Time', a major body of work detailing the tapping guitar method. His piece in 5/4 'Remi face au lacs dore' provided an excellent vehicle to explore maintaining a tight bass groove in odd time signatures where the note lengths are in different subdivisions (in this case 2 and 3, then reversing) while playing melodic motifs and chords simultaneously where the harmony is also based on 2nds and 3rds. Another of his compositions, Vas-Y-Voir, provided a study in 3/4 time with bass ostinato with evolving melody hand work, melodic and harmonic minors. The importance of daily warm ups with simultaneous varying scale work in both hands, focus on repeating notes where the second note should arrive 'in position', changing each day one note in the scale and exploring different modes. Indian style slides in scales, starting with sliding to the second note, then the 3rd, 4th etc, a great work out to ensure accuracy on one string. Work on varying sounds (avoiding too much staccato tapping!), holding certain legato notes in a phrase, pull offs, trills etc. We also continued the work Randy Strom initiated with us on his use of '\$6' chords, four note chords never built on a key root but various other intervals, observing where possible a sense of parsimony. We found a number of nice voicing choices applied to the Spring Comes (Autumn Leaves) progression. This also gave an opportunity to apply Daniels Interval vector model to the chord names.

Kai Kurosawa has evolved a highly expanded method for playing the tap guitar, giving a wider range of timbres and sonority than standard tapping. He brought his violin body Bear Tracks instrument, playing fretless on the lower bass strings, using la Bella nylon bass strings. Bass in 4^{ths} is played by his right hand, melody left hand, uncrossed. He taught us how to begin learning his method of fretting with one finger while plucking with another finger, which he does with both hands. A focus is on the quality of sound, feeling the fret and tapping as close as possible. We began with fretting with 1st

finger and plucking with 3rd, and fretting with 2nd finger and plucking with 4th. For the warmest single note bass sound, the variation of fretting 1st and plucking with the 4th. Then work on adding ghost notes between in a bossa bass part. A mute barre on melody strings then tap and pull offs to the note below, moving this chromatically. Creating a palm mute sound tapping on the frets. Holding chords while strumming with the 4th finger of the same hand. Using the first finger as a mute while tapping with the other fingers. He demonstrated approaches to improvisation, mixing arpeggios and scales, moving melodic patterns up and down the fretboard.

The multi-talented Kuno Wagner used his drums, tapping guitar and mandolin to teach us and help with rhythmic aspects of playing. We had a lot of fun learning a Greek folk tune, Hasapikos Politikos, something I definitely want to keep exploring on the tap guitar and adapting the duet score which was written for guitar and mandolin. At ETap we always aim to learn some ensemble pieces to then perform at our concert later in the week, this year Kuno taught us a great arrangement of Palladio, composed by Karl Jenkins (of Soft Machine & Nucleus) arranged for the 4 guitars of the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet.

Private lessons with Wolfgang are always a massive help, his musical knowledge and understanding being immense. He helped me resolve issues with phrasing and trills such as in the Aria of Bach's Goldberg variations by finding special fingerings to get the best sound, and suggesting possibly transposing down a 4th some pieces to suit the Chapman Stick sound better. His advice at last years ETap to change my way of playing had helped me overcome hand problems since some tendon damage.

Le Cube bar is in the centre of Neufchateau, where they have an outdoor stage and tables surrounded by sand like a beach, and where they held a summer 'Beach Festival'. We performed a concert there on Tuesday night, all the tap-guitarists playing in various configurations of solo, duo and trios. Kuno lifted the level as always with his great drumming, so much fun to perform with. A few of my surf tunes seemed appropriate in the 'beach' like surroundings. Daniel was joined by Florence on vocals playing some lovely versions of standards.

Friday night we performed our main concert together in 'Bar a Gouts', a wonderful bar with very kind and friendly staff serving artisan beers and wines and food in the town of Jamoigne. It was intended to be an open air concert, but the days thunderstorm meant we played inside in front of the bar. The audience were fantastic, very attentive and appreciative to our music, and the room had a good sound. Again we all performed in various solo and group configurations, enjoying Florence's singing again with Daniel and Kuno, and we performed in ensemble the Karl Jenkins composition Palladio. The count in was perfect but for some reason we dived in at breakneck speed, which was hilarious and yet it sounded great. It was so good relaxing afterwards with the excellent beers and food provided by the owners. Such a great evening.

The course concluded on Sunday lunchtime, Suxy had proved to be a perfect location for our work together, hopefully we can all return there next year. As well as the music, we had shared a number of fun outings during the week, sampling the wonderful and unique 'green' (meaning fresh) Orval trappist beer only available on tap at the Orval Abbey, and fun meals together in Italian & Greek local restaurants, usually after wild swimming in the refreshingly cold nearby lake. This was my 20th year at ETap, each year providing further knowledge and material to take away and continue developing. Some of us then returned to Brussels to perform a final concert together that evening, which again we enjoyed in the friendly 'Time Out' bar in the city centre.

Dave Bowmer July 2019.