

A photograph of Pepe Romero, an elderly man with glasses, playing a classical guitar. He is wearing a dark suit and a blue shirt. The background is a red brick wall. In the upper center, there is a painting of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a red shawl over a light-colored dress, looking towards the viewer. The painting is set within a rectangular frame.

Pepe Romero

A living legend of classical guitar, Spaniard Pepe Romero has been honoured by kings and heads of state. This month he performs for the first time with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

VIVE L'ESPAGNE...

MAESTRO PEPE ROMERO PLAYS SYDNEY!

Sydneysiders should prepare to fasten their seat belts and get ready to receive one of the most enjoyable musical rides of the year when Pepe Romero, king of the classical guitar, visits the Sydney Opera House on 1 and 2 August to make his debut with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Under the baton of Maestro Tito Muñoz, Romero will perform two of the most esteemed and magical guitar concertos available in the classical guitar repertoire today. The first is the *Concierto de Aranjuez* composed by Joaquín Rodrigo and the second is the charming work by Antonio Vivaldi, *Concerto in D*.

“love at first sight..”

In our recent interview with Romero, Fine Music 102.5 asked whether he had chosen these for a particular reason. He replied simply... “Of course, and I can say that both of them were ‘love at first sight’. And with both of them I have enjoyed a relationship in which every time I play them, I fall deeper and deeper in love with them.”

These concerts are part of a year-long world-wide tour celebrating Romero’s seventieth birthday in March next year, as well as his fifty illustrious years of music making around the globe.

Since recording his first album at the age of fifteen, Romero has added more than fifty solo albums to his catalogue, and a further thirty with the famous *Los Romeros* - a guitar quartet founded and created by his father Celedonio Romero. The original quartet was made up of Celedonio, Pepe, and his two brothers, Celín and Ángel. In 1990, Celín’s son Celino replaced Ángel and after Celedonio’s death in 1996, Ángel’s son Lito joined the group.

Pepe Romero has performed for US presidents, Carter and Nixon, the Queen of the Netherlands, Queen Beatrix, King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofía of Spain, HRH Prince Charles, and Pope John Paul II. He has won numerous international recording awards and is the holder of an Honorary Doctorate in Music from the University of Victoria. In 2000 he was knighted by King Juan Carlos I, gaining induction into the Order of *Isabel La Católica*.

“It all began in Málaga...”

Born in Málaga Spain in 1944, Pepe was Celedonio’s second son. He appeared in his first concert with his father when he was just seven and grew to love and admire Celedonio’s approach and philosophy towards the music

of the guitar. His father’s influence was far-reaching says Romero - “My father was my ONLY guitar teacher and it was indeed his magical guitar-playing and his profound love for life and his family as expressed with music and poetry that inspired me from the beginning of my own life to become a musician, a guitarist and to be taken over by the mystical power of music and the guitar.

“He was a masterful teacher who taught in a mysterious way that made me believe all along that I already was a guitarist. He showed us with his example that the rewards that the guitar offers can only be gained through full commitment and serious hard work. At the same time he showed us that working hard on the guitar is a fantastic pleasure in itself”.

That relationship says Romero, remains a huge influence in his music “...my father was the most elegant and charismatic guitarist with magnificent phrasing and conscientious attention to tonal production. I never play without feeling his presence.

“One of the principle aspects of my father’s teaching was to light the flame of passion for music and the guitar inside each one of us. He nurtured and praised my own achievements, giving me the power to develop my own creativity and style”.

Romero honours his father’s contribution to his musical development in “*Songs My Father*

Taught Me” - an album of classical guitar music recorded after Celedonio’s death.

Mother, Angelita, too was a guiding light in Romero’s life. “My mother had a profound influence as she revered literature and art and she imparted that love by making sure I was well-educated and well-versed in both. I was home-schooled by my mother until I was thirteen years old and when I was seven (we finished when I was twelve), she dictated the entire novel “*Don Quixote de la Mancha*” by Miguel de Cervantes and I hand wrote the entire book with time spent on philosophical and literary analysis. Along with playing the guitar I have always enjoyed painting and she took me regularly to museums like El Prado to study and enjoy the great works of the masters. I feel that this had a strong influence on me as a musician and artist.”

During the years of *Los Romeros*, his mother rarely missed a performance and was always there to support her husband and sons, globally dubbed “the Royal family of the guitar”.

“The Romeros are like a strong tree with many branches each producing their own fruits.”

Through their shared experiences as *Los Romeros* the foursome had impact on each other’s individual styles of guitar playing and interpretation says Romero. “There is no doubt that we influenced one another and that we



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continue to until this day. The Romeros are like a strong tree with many branches each producing their own fruits."

There is no one genre, no single period and no one concerto that Romero will hold up above others rather, he says, "I give myself fully to whatever piece I am playing and I love all periods of music...I have performed and recorded many concertos and loved every single one."

However, performing new works is an experience that comes with its own unique set of emotions. It is he says a "...feeling of excitement and anticipation and the incredible feeling of doing a world premiere, especially the first time that a great work becomes sound through me and the guitar. I feel incredibly blessed to have had so many opportunities to have had this amazing feeling."

“...the inner voice guides me through the music..”

But, when asked whether there is one piece of guitar music that he really enjoys playing or listening to that touches his heart that he would like to share with people, he says, "Throughout my long career I have been passionate and completely in love with many pieces. I can say there is one piece that as a child I wanted to play and it inspired me to become a guitarist and that is *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*."

Even after 50 years of playing virtually every corner of the globe, probably every piece of the guitar repertoire and having worked with so many of the world's leading guitar composers and conductors, there is no lessening of the maestro's appetite for new experiences, "I

hope to continue exploring and enjoying the magic of the guitar herself".

Asked whether the two concertos that he will perform with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra - Joaquin Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* and Antonio Vivaldi *Concerto in D* - come with individual challenges of note, Romero responds in the negative and, with the wisdom of a true maestro, says he treats them, "the same as with any other composition, which is to not let anything take me away from the connection to the inner voice that guides me through the music".

One of his keen recollections of performing the Rodrigo piece occurred on an unforgettably auspicious occasion. "I was playing the 50th anniversary performance of *Concierto de Aranjuez* in the Gardens of the Palace of Aranjuez. Joaquin Rodrigo was sitting with me on the stage. When the concerto was finished the audience gave a tremendous ovation that lasted for more than 20 minutes. I turned to maestro Rodrigo and asked him - "should I repeat the second movement again?" He answered, "No, Pepin, you were perfect, the only thing that can happen now is to mess up it."

“I enjoy a great Cuban cigar, a fine glass of red and a great espresso”

Even with global demands for his music and his time, the simple pleasures are never forgotten, says Romero, "I love time with my family, with my wife, children, grandchildren, brothers. I love long walks on the beach and I love watching in amazement the beauty of nature. And of

course, I enjoy a great Cuban cigar, a fine glass of red wine and a great espresso".

And, he could add Australia to that list, "I would like to say that since my first visit to Australia I became enchanted by the natural beauty of your country and the warm and welcoming personality of its people. I always enjoy and have great anticipation when I know I am coming to perform and visit Australia".

- Ron Dolan

Pepe Romero - Guitar from the Heart Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Friday 1 August 8pm and

Saturday 2 August 8pm

Sydney Opera House

Conductor - Tito Muñoz

Program

Rossini - The Barber of Seville: Overture

Rodrigo - *Concierto de Aranjuez*

Vivaldi - *Concerto in D, RV 93*

Beethoven - *Symphony No.8*

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