

## HIGH SOCIETY



Society Gathering in Baltimore.  
Organizer Asgerdur Sigurdardottir is in the red dress.

# GUITAR SOCIETY SUMMIT EDUCATES AND INSPIRES

by Blair Jackson

There's nothing easy about running a classical guitar society. Funding is always the main issue, of course. Will concerts keep a society afloat? What level of performer is needed to attract guitar fans who will pay for concerts? What other activities should the society be engaged in? Providing a network of guitar teachers? Philanthropic activities, such as promoting the guitar in underserved and economically disadvantaged communities? How does the rent on meeting or performing spaces get paid? Can a society attract people who will work for free or very little, if only sporadically? Will foundations help out? What are other potential funding sources?

So many things to consider, and working in isolation only makes matters more difficult. Every community is different, and every guitar society that serves that community is different. But there are also common problems shared by most of them, and a strong desire to help one another navigate both stormy and calm seas. That was the idea behind the Fifth Guitar Society Summit, held March 5 and 6 at the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. The event, which was organized by the Baltimore Classical

Guitar Society, spearheaded by president Asgerdur Sigurdardottir, attracted representatives from 15 other classical guitar societies spread around the US and two from Canada. "We're in a good location, about halfway between Miami and Ottawa," Sigurdardottir told me by phone a few days after the Summit. "We also had an inquiry from Mexico, and there were a few societies that couldn't come because they were putting on their own concerts that weekend. But there's a lot of interest in this; it's bigger every time." The first Summit, in 2008, took place in New York City and attracted six regional societies.

On the first day of the Summit, the society reps introduced themselves and discussed their respective operations, but the day was dominated by a lively talk and extensive Q&A with guest speaker Matthew Hinsley of Austin Classical Guitar, one of the largest and most successful guitar societies in the US. (Hinsley was interviewed in the Spring 2015 issue of *Classical Guitar*). "He gave a workshop about board development, budgets, staffing, all sorts of valuable things," Sigurdardottir says. "He talked to us about how he grew their society. It's all about grassroots. People ask, 'How do you book artists? What kind of contracts



## SUMMIT PARTICIPANTS

**Austin Classical Guitar**

**Boston Classical Guitar Society**

**Greater Cincinnati Guitar Society**

**Cleveland Classical Guitar Society**

**Florida Guitar Foundation (Miami)**

**Lancaster Guitar Club**

**Marlow Guitar Series (Washington, DC)**

**Minnesota Guitar Society**

**New York Classical Guitar Society**

**Ottawa Guitar Society**

**Philadelphia Classical Guitar Society**

**Pittsburgh Classical Guitar Society**

**Tampa Bay Area Guitar Society**

**Guitar Society of Toronto**

**Wilmington Classical Guitar Society**

*Major Guitar Summit funding came from the Augustine Foundation and the Peabody Conservatory.*

do you use?’ Basic stuff, and also more complicated things. He had a list of do’s and don’ts—we all took meticulous notes on that, and went away with long lists of things we need to implement, or at least discuss with our organizations.

“The more we can learn from each other” she adds, “the better we can serve the performers who are out there, because in the end, they are the ones who are going to benefit because we put on better concerts and are more successful in bringing audiences in.”

After that all-day session, the action shifted to the Baltimore Museum of Art, where Summit participants enjoyed a wine and cheese reception, followed by an on-stage interview of internationally known composer Marc Neikrug, whose *Three Pieces for Guitar* had its world premiere that night at a concert at the museum by Polish guitarist Lukasz Kuropaczewski, a skilled Peabody Conservatory graduate who studied there with the great Manuel Barrueco. Kuropaczewski’s program also included pieces by Mauro Giuliani, Kristof Penderecki, Alexandre Tansman, Sofia Gubaidulina, and Krzysztof Meyer.

On the second day of the Summit, the attendees heard a lecture by attorney Michael

D. Oliver, who spoke about dealing with international intellectual property law, social media laws, contracts, audio/video recordings, conflicts of interest, and other issues. “He gave a crash course on everything from the ‘terms of service’ we have to have on our websites to why certain clauses are in contracts,” Sigurdardottir says. “If we record concerts, what are the legal ramifications of that?”

The formal part of the conference concluded with a post-lunch discussion of possible topic areas for the next Summit—to be held in 2017, again in Baltimore—and then Kuropaczewski taught an optional master class.

“It was inspiring, it was humbling,” Sigurdardottir says of the Summit. “It benefits all of us. Of course there are things that are different in Baltimore than New York or in Canada, but basically we’re dealing with the same issues. We want more people to come to the concerts, we want to talk about audience development. We want our organizations to run smoothly. Having a place we can share our experiences is fantastic.”

*Contact Asgerdur Sigurdardottir about next year’s summit: [president@bcgs.org](mailto:president@bcgs.org)*



**Lukasz Kuropaczewski**