

A Tribute to the Memory of Our AGS Friend and Colleague, Lillian Silverstone

The American Guitar Society has always been a destination. We are known as a gathering place for classical guitarists, musicians, and artists of all types to find inspiration, knowledge, and friendships that are unique and often priceless. So it was meant to be that Lillian Silverstone, a multi-talented artist, and her husband John Cahman, a published author and a delightful gentleman, found AGS and joined. They graced many of our Saturday evening meetings with their wit, their lively conversation, and their genuine appreciation for the classical guitar music that our members performed. I first remember meeting Lillian at an AGS meeting shortly after AGS moved to the Los Angeles Valley College, probably 12+ years ago. Lillian was a delightful and fascinating friend to so many of us at the American Guitar Society.

This tribute to Lillian Silverstone is to thank her for being an artist who inspired us to be our best. She was greatly appreciated by her friends and colleagues at AGS. The AGS thanks her husband John Cahman who wrote and shared her remarkable life story with us.

Lillian's Story as told by John Cahman

Lillian Anne Silverstone was born on June 27, 1948, in London, England. Her father was a professional violinist who played with the Joe Loss Orchestra, had his own band, and made several recordings. Her mother was a seamstress and homemaker.

Lillian left school and began working as an office assistant when she was about 18. She wanted something better, something more glamorous, and tried out to be a Blue Bell girl. She was accepted and began working as a showgirl at the Stardust Hotel in Las Vegas. She continued there for about six months, then worked as a showgirl for another month or so in Puerto Rico.

Lillian left Puerto Rico for New York where she began working as a fashion model. At the time, newspapers were not able to reproduce pictures well enough for clothing advertisement, so models were drawn wearing the clothing that department stores were selling, and the drawings were used in the newspaper advertisements. Fashion modeling then became her major source of income for the next few years.

While living in New York, Lillian began acting and learning the guitar. She acted in, and produced, off-Broadway plays, including her production of 'Three By Dorothy Parker.' During this time she met and married her first husband, whom she soon lost to a friend because (according to Lillian) 'she had bigger boobs.'

Lillian had a small part in the 1981 Peter Bogdanovich movie 'They All Laughed.' In 1982 she played Irene Gibson in the British Broadcasting Company production 'Nancy Astor.' (Irene Gibson was Nancy Astor's sister; she became famous at the time as 'the Gibson Girl.')

The Nancy Astor production by BBC became a PBS presentation on Masterpiece Theater in the United States. Lillian thought that her role in that production might open

some doors for her in Hollywood, and moved to Los Angeles in 1984. She was disappointed to learn that very few people in Los Angeles watched PBS, or even knew what it was for that matter. She still made a valiant effort to enter the film industry, but alas, was not successful.

In December 1984 Lillian met John Cahman at a Christmas party. The two were attracted but initially did not get along at all; nevertheless, they married the following September. Lillian began working as a legal secretary. She also became more serious about the guitar and began taking lessons.

In the early 1990's an artist friend saw some of Lillian's artwork and suggested that she seriously study art. Lillian took the advice and began studying art at Los Angeles Valley College. While at Valley College she participated in the Guitar Ensemble, where she met Miguel Mireles, another guitarist. The two began playing duets and continued to do so up until the pandemic.

After finishing the required basic courses at Valley College, Lillian completed her coursework at California State University at Long Beach. She graduated summa cum laude, with a Bachelor's in Fine Arts degree in 2002. Notably Steven Spielberg received his bachelor's degree in the same graduation ceremony.

Lillian then spent the next years painting and playing guitar. Active in the "Songmakers" organization for many years, (see www.Songmakers.org) Lillian gave much of her time and talent to Songmakers. Fellow Songmaker Dvora Gittelson, remembers Lillian performing at the Roundup and the Fireside and other venues, as well as leading the East Valley Hoot sessions. Dvora states "she was a huge talent, vocally, instrumentally, and artistically. Lillian was a treasured friend and recorded WHILE WE'RE HERE, WE SHOULD SING on my album of the same name."

In August 2019 Lillian began a long battle with cancer. She was initially diagnosed as having ovarian cancer. During treatment she was also found to have lung cancer. Both cancers were treated with chemotherapy and surgeries, and both were in good remission after about two years.

However Lillian's battle with cancer was not over. In March 2023 she developed what appeared to be symptoms of Bell's palsy. A scan revealed a tumor and she underwent surgery on April 5. Although the tumor was removed, it was found to be glioblastoma, an aggressive cancer with a very poor prognosis. Her guitar playing skills deteriorated progressively over the next few months; this was most painful for her. She had been a Sudoku ace but by September she couldn't balance her checkbook. The tumor returned and she had a second surgery in October; following that surgery she was unable to even hold her guitar properly. Her decline continued rapidly afterwards. She walked around the block at Christmas but was unable to walk to the bathroom by New Years' day. She had a short hospital stay and came home, where she spent her last two months. She died at home on March 6, 2024, almost exactly eleven months after the initial diagnosis.

Lillian really, really wanted to live. She wanted more chemotherapy even when it was clear that the treatment was not helping. At the same time, she realized that she had tremendous losses, both due to the treatments (surgery and radiation treatment) and due to the tumor; she felt she was 'wrecked' by both. Her entire last year was a great tragedy in which she tried so hard to keep living despite impossible odds and increasing losses.

Lillian was charming, pleasant, witty, and generous. She was a person you wanted to be around, to have company. She would tell you her opinion and maybe argue with you about your opinion, but she would still accept you for who you are. She enjoyed achieving in art and music and would work for hours to perfect a piece of music. She was a very decent human being and is greatly missed by all who knew her.

John Cahman, March, 2024

Lillian and Her Guitar

Lillian met Miguel Mirales at the LA Valley College Guitar Ensemble class during the 1990's. At the suggestion of Miguel's teacher, Howard Heitmeyer, Lillian and Miguel Mirales began playing classical guitar duets. They performed at AGS meetings, and they performed at the 90th Birthday celebration for Howard at the Café Cahuenga.



Their repertoire as a duet included the following:

- 1) Invention in Dm, J.S. Bach
- 2) Praeludium, J.S. Bach
- 3) Plegaria, arr. by H. Heitmeyer
- 4) El Noi de la Mare, Catalan folk song arr. by H. Heitmeyer
- 5) Duet in G by Ferdinando Carulli

Lillian and Miguel performing at the HH 90th celebration.

The AGS, the LA Valley College Guitar Ensemble, and Lillian's father, (Phil Silverstone, a professional violinist and well-known band leader in London – see <http://www.r2ok.co.uk/silverstone.htm> ,) gave Lillian a strong appreciation of classical music and the classical guitar. Here Lillian shares a pensive and melancholy moment as she plays "Claire de Lune" by Debussy. www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJ5_GDqjHVQ

Lillian with Paints, Pastels, and Watercolors

Lillian earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Drawing and Painting from California State University at Long Beach in 2002. Her work has been in several shows in the Los Angeles area, including the New Beginnings show at NoHo Gallery LA, the Carter Sexton Portrait show, and La Galeria Gitana Splendors from the Garden and Music shows.



Lillian said this about her creations:

“I have recently discovered the joys of plein air painting. Painting outdoors, especially with other artists, is exhilarating and fun. It's great to get a pleasing drawing or painting but the now-ness of doing art seems to be the real reward. I've realized that art has a zone, like sports - It's a spiritual activity, a meditation.”

Dos Guitarras

I think you will enjoy browsing her web site - www.Lilliansilverstone.com A fascinating display of her paintings awaits your discovery. These are my favorite paintings of her's... I like the idea of Lilli painting lillies.



Lillies With Blue Ocean



Small Water Lilly



The Lilly Pond

Success at the age of 20 as a showgirl at the Stardust Hotel in Las Vegas



As stated by her fellow showgirl Rosemary Tall-DeHart who now administers the Archives of the Grant Philipo's Las Vegas Showgirl Museum: *"Incredible Showgirl Lillian Silverstone has agreed to add some of her shots to Grant Philipo's Las Vegas Showgirl Museum, Archives for all of you to enjoy! Pictured here is Lillian Silverstone, at The LIDO in Las Vegas at The Stardust Hotel & Casino! Isn't she stunning?"* (photo from 1968)

Although Lillian states she is not readily visible in any of these video clips, she was in this dressing room with her lifelong friend Ann E. Chatterton who is visible in these clips. They were a main part of the dance troupe and the dance routines captured here in this 1968 video. Lillian stated, "these video clips are from the Stardust Hotel show "Tout Paris!" from 1968. She also wrote to all viewers in her Youtube post – "ENJOY!"

<https://fb.watch/rw2AkvL7Ni/>

As a Playwright, Actor, and Director



This is a photo from 1975 from an off-Broadway play entitled "Three by Dorothy Parker." Lillian Silverstone and Victoria Berdy produced it, and it was performed to rave reviews in the New York Daily News. This led to standing room only and having to even take the chairs out of the dressing room. We took this photo at Elliott Randall's (who was one of our backers) apartment on Riverside Drive. Bottom left is Charles Mckenna and next to him is Lilli. Top row is Hugo Napier (Leo Napier), Victoria Berdy, and Elliott Randall. We made plays out of 3 Dorothy Parker short stories, the first play was with Hugo and Lilli in "Here We Are", then Lilli did a monologue 'The Telephone Call', and the last play with Charles Mckenna and Lilli, 'You Were Perfectly Fine'.

A Gifted Singer and Songwriter

As an artist in lyrics and melody, Lillian wrote and recorded many songs. Here is her poignant autobiographical song entitled “City Girl” (copyrighted 1990.) She posted it on Youtube with a wonderful slideshow that captures important moments in her life.

City Girl: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eq1JdXX1RtA>

In 1984 she went into a studio with an LA producer friend and made this recording of her composition written in spirit and era of a Joan Jett, or Pat Benetar. Check it out!

I Like Boys: <https://youtu.be/ZXsRZxOjVJE> - written and sung by Lillian in 1984.

Her song entitled “My Daddy” is a dedication to the memory of her father Phil Silverstone.

My Daddy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bc2-iJlvUpI>

My first recollection and awareness of Lillian as a gifted singer / guitarist occurred at an AGS meeting about 10 years ago. The performance part of the meeting had concluded, and most had moved on to the reception area. My wife Donna and I were still in the performance room when Lillian appeared with a guitar. She sat down and told us that she had a recent lesson with Howard Heitmeyer and he helped her learn a jazzy rich chord accompaniment to spice up one of her favorite songs – the beautiful ballad: “(What’s It All About) Alfie.” Donna and I still remember vividly the emotion and passion and feelings that poured out as she sang the touching lyrics and played the rich chords of the poignant song – Alfie. We were wowed by Lillian’s powerful interpretation of that song. Donna and I still comment on that experience today. Thankyou Lillian. You have touched many people with your gift of music and art. RIP dear friend.

An Epilogue from Miguel

“We take our friends for granted. We shouldn’t but human nature makes us feel entitled. I’ve heard it say that when we depart, we leave as much of a hole as when you pull something out of water. Not so with a good friend. There are always memories. A good friend leaves the best memories. I can still hear Lillian blurting out, “Bravo Miguel!” on my attempts to give a good performance at many AGS meetings. She was always there, cheering me on. She was one of my best friends, my best fan. I miss her. RIP Lillian.” Miguel



Dos Guitarras - Lillian and Miguel



Self Portrait In Red



The Artist's Husband