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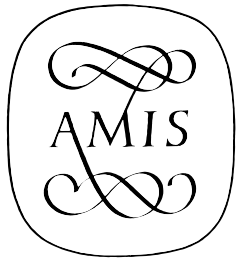

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The English Gentleman Luthier, David Rubio: An Identity Born in the USA

James Westbrook

David José Rubio (1934–2000) was arguably Britain's most illustrious post-war musical instrument maker. He was uniquely versatile and worked such long hours that he produced over 1,000 instruments in his eventful and varied career. Beginning with fretted instruments, such as the guitar and lute, he became an influential figure in the early music movement and in due course re-established a British tradition of guitar making that had lain dormant for over 100 years. Later he diversified to supervise the manufacture of harpsichords. Lastly, he excelled in crafting fine and scientifically exact copies of the Cremonese masters, becoming one of only a handful of non-apprenticed luthiers to be accepted into the violin-makers' guild.[1]

Rubio grew up in the Jewish community of London and turned his back on both his religion and education to become a professional flamenco guitarist. He began playing in the coffee houses of Camden Town, learned the true art of a gypsy tocaor while living in Spain, and toured America, where he began his career as a musical instrument maker. As a luthier, he was soon discovered, in his attic workshop in Greenwich Village, by the English guitarist and lutenist Julian Bream, who encouraged him and eventually brought him back to England. Before Rubio left America, however, he had made instruments for many notable people, and his time there is the subject of this article.[2]

1. A certificate pertaining to Rubio's membership to the European Association of Violin and Bow Makers, dated 6 October 1996, of which Rubio was very proud, is in the possession of the author.

2. The author plans to publish a more comprehensive account of the life and work of Rubio. Except where noted, the present narrative is based on a consensus of reminiscences by over 100 associates of Rubio. The large majority of published articles concerning Rubio were written post New York. However, the following contains a nice snap-shot of his time there: Ivor Mairants, "Autumn in New York," *Banjo Mandolin Guitar* 62/720 (April 1965): 235–6. There are over twenty other published articles about Rubio and his work, the most significant of which include: John Slim, "John Slim Visits Instrument-maker David Rubio: The Man Who Makes Sure that the Music of the Past Lives on Today," *The Birmingham Post, Saturday Magazine*, 25 April 1970; Denis Hart, "The Sound of Success", *The Daily Telegraph Magazine*, 331 (25 February 1971); George Clinton, "David Rubio, Master Craftsman," *Guitar* 1/3 (October 1972): 18; George Clinton, "David Rubio Talks to George Clinton about Wood, Technique, Reproductions, and Design,"

Early Years

He was born as David Joseph Spink on 17 December 1934, in Edgware, North London. Those were not easy times for the Jewish community. His grandfather, Solomon Spink, was a tailor born in the Russian Partition, who had married a German and come to London, presumably to escape the troubles. As an adolescent, Rubio was restless, especially with respect to his vocation. In part, he wanted to please his mother and better himself, perhaps to distance himself from the occupation of his step-father, a grocer. Finally, perhaps in defiance, he indulged his passion for playing the flamenco guitar and began to play in London clubs.

José Rubio the Flamencist

No one quite knows at what stage in life Rubio took up playing the guitar, but the earliest known photo of him with one dates from ca.1956 (fig. 1).

In the center of the photo is Bill Glover, an established professional guitarist. Although Glover specialized in flamenco, he could claim to have shared one concert in 1955 with a young John Williams. In the picture, Glover has a guitar by Conde Hermanos and Rubio a very modest-looking instrument. Glover said this of Rubio:

> David Spink turned up every night with a guitar and a notebook. He took free guitar lessons and was trying to steal the job which I very badly needed. If I put down my instrument, he would immediately play the next piece of my limited repertory. One day he begged money from me, and I gave him £1 to go away. In spite of this, he followed me to the Casa Pepe Restaurant.[3]

This illustrates an important point about Rubio. He was determined to succeed in whatever he put his mind to, perhaps at some cost to others.

Soon, he moved to Spain to study flamenco guitar with José "Pepe"

Guitar 5/9 (April 1977): 15–21; Anonymous, "Interview: David Rubio," *Guitar & Lute,* 8 (January 1979), 6–8; R. E. Bruné, "Guitars with Guts: 1965 José Rubio," *Vintage Guitar* (December 2013): 80–85. Also of note is one anonymous and inactive website: <www.rubioviolins.com> and a web-page by one of Rubio's clients, Jena Pang: <www.jenapang.com/pages/page%208.html>.

3. Bill Glover to Paul Fischer, 14 February 2006; a copy of this letter is in the author's possession.

FIGURE 1. Some of the cast of Paco de Ronda's ballet, The Acapulco Club, England, ca.1956. Bill Glover with guitar, "center stage," with David Spink very much "in the wings" (back row with a modest-looking guitar). Author's collection.

Martínez. It has often been said that he learned the craft of lutherie while there and it has even been claimed that he trained with the Condes, a dynasty of makers in Madrid. This, as we will see, is unfounded, and in any case he seems to have lived mainly in Seville. While in Spain, he became so behind with his rent that his landlady would not allow him into the house until it was bed-time, and he was required to leave the moment he rose. As a result, he spent most of his time playing the guitar in luthiers' workshops.[4] Rubio had a photographic memory and may have acquired some knowledge of guitar making without even realizing it.

In order for people to take him seriously as a flamenco guitarist, Rubio needed a Spanish name. It remains unknown whether the locals first called him José Rubio or whether he adopted the name himself, not wishing to be known as "David Spink, the flamenco guitarist from London." He probably assumed or was given the name soon after he arrived in Spain, for it first appears in the 1961 contract for his aforementioned American tour. His formal name on the contract, which he also used as his signature, was David José Cohen: José being the Spanish for Joseph, his real middle name, with Cohen the Jewish surname he derived from his step-father. The contract states, however, that his artistic name was "José Rubio."

4. Interview with Nest Rubio, Cambridge, 4 February 2011.

Rubio means "blonde" in Spanish although as a nickname rubio denotes someone with red hair or a red beard. This is not how Rubio came to be called so. His step-son Reid Galbraith, his long term New York and Cambridge friend Carl Shavitz (also a client) and Paul Fischer, his workshop manager for six years, were all told by Rubio that "Rubio" referred to his light (i.e., "blonde") complexion. However, when some fair-skinned people go abroad to hot countries their complexions may briefly turn ruddy, so either meaning of rubio may be involved. What is certain is that Rubio did not have a red beard, despite what has often been claimed. There is no evidence that he grew a beard of any color before settling in America and when he wore one as a young man it was black, as photos and his friends attest. Beards are not associated with flamenco artistes, and as a flamenco guitarist, whether in London, Spain, or America, Rubio was always clean shaven. He eventually grew a beard when he became a luthier, for it suited the image of a craftsman that he wished to cultivate.

Now that Rubio had a Spanish stage name, how did he explain his English accent in Spanish? The obvious ruse was to claim his parents were Spaniards living in London during his childhood. Rubio's ingenious solution, however, was to pretend he hailed from Gibraltar, which is under British rule and English speaking, yet close enough to the mainland to share aspects of Spanish culture such as flamenco.

Rubio arrived in America in October 1961 on tour with the Rafael de Cordova ballet company. His contract required him to perform as a guitarist for twelve weeks beginning in New York on 10 October 1961 with one television appearance a week. So far, no archive footage of his work has surfaced—if it ever occurred. There is, however, a photograph of him in 1962, possibly on this tour (fig. 2).

At some stage during this visit, Rubio decided to remain in America. In San Francisco, he became part of the North Beach flamenco scene and played in clubs such as the Old Spaghetti Factory and The Trident, across the Golden Gate Bridge in Sausalito, owned by The Kingston Trio. It is believed that Rubio was obliged to return to New York to guide the composer Mitch Leigh (along with David Serva) in the use of flamenco rhythms for the Broadway musical *Man of La Mancha*.[5] In 1967 this musical toured, supporting many of the American flamenco fraternity in the

5. I am grateful to Jeffery Chinn (1947–2017), to whom I dedicate this article, for his recollections concerning the flamenco scene in Northern California. And to Jonathan Talbot who offered an invaluable insight into other aspects of Rubio's flamenco years.

FIGURE 2. David Rubio, New York, 1962 (dancer unknown). Author's collection.

process. Rubio finally settled in New York City, where he earned a living by playing flamenco guitar in coffee houses and offering a little guitar teaching in Greenwich Village. Here is one account of Rubio from those days, by Douglas Nicholas:

> He played in a tiny cafe, El Gitano, on Bleecker Street. We would go and hang out there all night, and I took some lessons from David. He would sit in a chair on a small dais, usually in a white shirt and chino pants, and cross his legs,

> showing off his Andalusian horseman's boots, with their Moorish embroidery and leather tassels. Then he would play great flamenco all night. After a while the owner, Jacques Sandulescu, hired a lovely young woman with a wealth of hair and huge hoop earrings as a waitress. One night David told us that they were engaged, and that her name was "Nest." [6]

Marilyn Neste Harris (1932–2012), who was from Illinois, eventually became his second wife when she needed marital status to settle with Rubio in England; they did not officially marry until December 1966, just months before they left America.[7] Rubio was a regular at Dante's Restaurant in Florida; this is what Nest said, in an interview, about his working there as a flamenco guitarist:

> It was a very posh restaurant in Fort Lauderdale called Dante's Restaurant. All the celebrities would come down from New York; they kept the air conditioning so cold, so that the ladies could wear their furs.[8]

Rubio principally played guitars by the Conde brothers of Madrid, but he was slowly introduced to the lutherie community of New York City, just as happened in Florida and Northern California during his short spells as a flamenco guitarist. The local guitar makers, just prior to his arrival, included Manuel Velazquez, Titi Amadeo, Guillermo Del Pilar and Manouk Papazian. Around 1962 the Rubios rented a two-room flat at 16 Christopher Street, near sixth Avenue. According to his wife Nest, about this time Rubio stopped playing and sought a new direction for his life.

Nest carried on working, bringing home the tips, because there was not much else.

Rubio turned the top of a dresser into a work bench and made his first guitar (fig. 3).

6. Douglas Nicholas to Jena Pang, 19 March 2012.

7. Nest claimed to have been married three times before, commenting: "Things were different back then." Her son, Reid Galbraith, briefly worked with Rubio, and later became an established luthier in England.

8. The author recorded a series of two-hour interviews, four in total, with Nest in Rubio's old Cambridge workshop, from 18 November 2010 to 25 February 2011.

FIGURE 3. Luthier Jose Rubio, ca.1963. Caption to back reads: "This is where it all began / 16 Christopher St. A tiny apartment / The whole workshop is in the picture." Author's collection.

Guitar Maker

It is clear that Rubio did not have the necessary skills and information to make a guitar until he was in America. Some people cite Titi Amadeo of New York as his master, others Miguel Company of Miami, but the evidence for these is sketchy.[9] Eugene Clark is certain that Rubio was a novice while making his first guitars in New York, calling him to ask elementary questions at various stages and secretly trying to photograph his fretting factors.[10] However, the guitars that influenced Rubio can be ascertained by means of his own extant instruments and archival templates: they include a Faustino & Mariano Conde guitar, a Robert Bouchet guitar owned by Bream, a 1934 Francisco Simplicio (from the Winkler Collection), Santos Hernandez (also probably from the Winkler Collection), and instruments by Antonio de Torres, specifically FE09 and FE17

9. Prominent guitar makers in Northern California included Warren White, Eugene Clark, and Gabriel Souza.

10. Telephone interview with Eugene Clark, 25 January 2012.

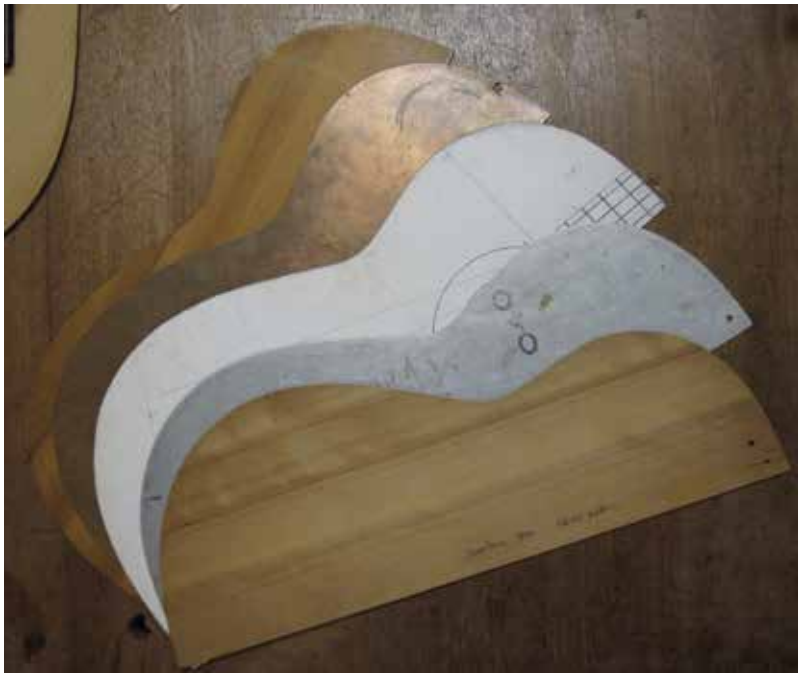


FIGURE 4. Some of Rubio's guitar templates (gifted to the guitar maker Martin Woodhouse, Cambridge, UK).

(fig. 4).[11]

Around 1964, the Rubios moved to 66 Carmine Street, an eight by forty-four foot room that was essentially their living area and Rubio's first proper workshop combined. Since space was limited, the only place to sit was on the trash can by the door and Rubio constructed a platform, hanging from the ceiling, to be their "bedroom." The landlord was an elderly Italian who spoke no English after sixty years in America; he admired Rubio and his tools, so the Mafia did not touch them, Nest claimed, for he considered them to be family. Again according to Nest, one of their wedding presents was the offer of a free contract killing by a Hungarian

11. Torres's two main periods of activity are today referred to by all contemporary guitar historians as: F.E. (first epoch) & S.E. (second epoch) respectively. Torres's biographer José Romanillos coined the first epoch (F.E.) serial numbers, while Torres himself numbered his second period of activity beginning each number with "Segunda Epoca" or "2.ª época." on each label. See José L. Romanillos, *Antonio de Torres, Guitar Maker: His Life and Work* (Westport, CT, 1997).

FIGURES 5a, 5b, and 5c. The earliest-known "Jose Rubio" labeled guitar, #9, 1964. Courtesy of Beverly Maher, The Guitar Salon, New York.

hit man.[12]

Rubio's surviving day-book begins in 1964, probably upon his arrival at Carmine Street.[13] His initial entries are largely for repairing guitars, including a 1955 José Ramírez II, an 1836 Schmidt & Maul, two 1960s Viuda y Sobrinos de Domingo Estesos, a 1934 Esteso, and a "New York" C. F. Martin.

Fig. 5 shows Rubio's earliest extant guitar (number 9), also from the year the day-book starts. One guitar can be dated earlier, made for the folk guitarist John Winn and probably number 8. Rubio must therefore have made just a handful of instruments between ca.1962 and 1964 at Christopher Street on the converted dresser (fig. 6).

By now, however, he had gone into full production and in April 1965, in a letter to his step-sister Melinda Cohen, Rubio wrote that "I am now on the verge of becoming a successful guitar-maker" (fig. 7).

In October of 1965, Rubio moved to his last New York address, a loft in a house at 43 Bond Street.[14] Rubio got to know all the local suppliers of seasoned wood. H. L. Wilde had been a family supplier of timber for musical instruments in New York for 100 years. A contemporary of Rubio's called Thomas Knatt sold him cypress wood for his flamenco guitars which he purchased in Italy (Florence) in 1965. Rubio and Nest used the "driveaway" method for their road trips, not just delivering the car to its buyer, but selling strings and accessories from the boot. There are many accounts of Rubio even dealing in wood, although many of his close friends deny this. By 1966 Irving Sloane acknowledged Rubio's expertise in his book Classic Guitar Construction:

> More recently, I have benefited from the valuable experience of José Rubio, a luthier with an impressive and well-deserved reputation. Both he and his wife, Nest, gave generously of their time and interest.[15]

12. Interview with Nest Rubio, Thursday 18 November 2010.

13. Rubio's day-book, in the possession of the author, is a beautifully preserved account of his New York work. For those orders listed therein, it gives the name and address of the client, as well as some details about the instrument, especially if there were to be any special requirements. At the date of this article, it is surprising how many of these people, continuing to live at the same addresses, still have their cherished Rubio instruments.

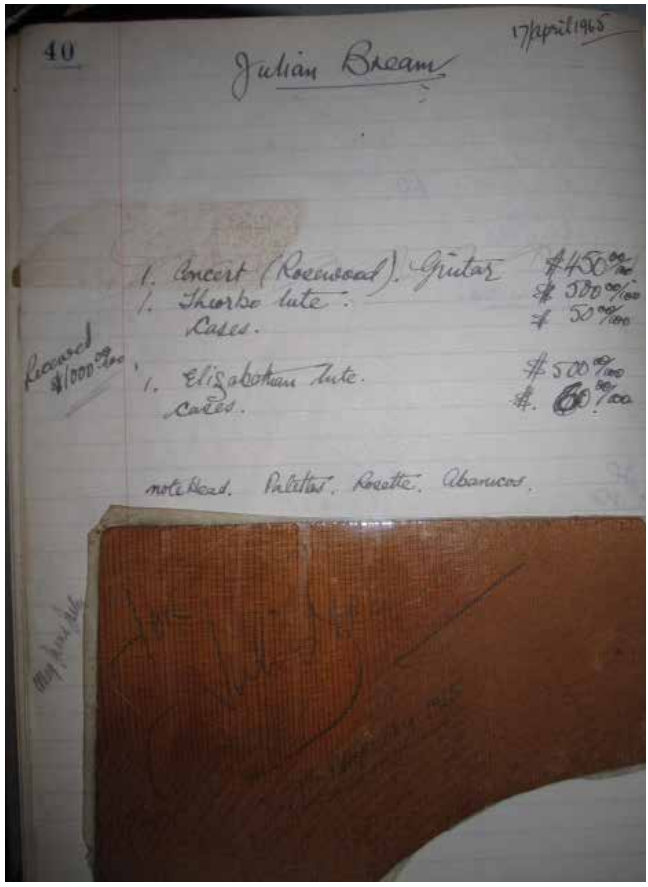
14. Lucien Barnes IV, who was the apprentice of José Rubio, took over the occupancy of 66 Carmine Street, and eventually Michael Gurian was his successor.

15. Irving Sloane, *Classic Guitar Construction* (New York: Dutton, 1966) 5. This book also features the Winkler Collection of rare guitars (New York), which Rubio would have been exposed to.

FIGURE 6. 66 Carmine Street, New York, Rubio's second workshop. Author's collection.

FIGURE 7. The Rubios at their third and final New York workshop, 43 Bond Street, ca.1966. Author's collection.

(a)



(b)

FIGURES 8a and 8b. (a) An entry in Rubio's day-book for an order from Julian Bream, 17 April 1965, with (b) a soundboard cut-out signed and dated "For Julian Bream 7th February 1965." Author's collection.

In July 1966, Rubio wrote to his step-sister saying that it "takes about 100 hours to complete one instrument [guitar] which has to be spread over a month to allow the necessary processes to dry etc." The day-book suggests that Rubio worked very hard, adhering to his promised delivery dates.

It was around this time that Rubio reconnected with Julian Bream; they had known each other when Rubio was playing at the Troubadour in London. Bream needed some adjustments made to an instrument and Rubio had been recommended to carry out the work by a client in New York. While in Rubio's workshop, going through some soundboards for Bream's guitar, Rubio's client and Bream could not decide between two pieces of spruce. Bream took one piece of spruce, signed it with a pencil, and said "I'll take this, and you take that" (fig. 8).

Rubio realized that Bream had just ordered a guitar from him. This was on 7 February 1965, and on 1 April Bream wrote to Rubio from Santa Barbara asking him how the guitar was coming along.[16]

In much of their correspondence, Bream is very articulate in describing his instruments, and also very definite about the way Rubio should proceed in improving them. In an interview in 1972 Rubio said:

> Julian Bream was passing through New York and he rang me to ask if I have any boxes to show him [in Bream's terminology, guitars were "boxes" and lutes were "boats"]. I brought one down to the hotel...after about ten minutes he said "you've done something different here, you've put some bar of wood right under the bridge." I asked how he knew, and he said "I can feel it with my fingers."[17]

Bream was correct, even though he had not put this hand inside the guitar.

Bream also added a theorbo and an Elizabethan lute to his order. Up until this point there is no evidence that Rubio had acquired any knowledge of making lutes, although his day-book notes some prior repair work, including the re-fret (inserted rosewood) and a bridge replacement on Ephraim Segerman's theorbo. This did prompt him to carry out some research, and other notable names associated with early music found in Rubio's New York day-book include Karl Herreshoff,

16. April Bream to David Rubio, 1 April, a letter in the possession of the author.

17. George Clinton, "David Rubio, Master Craftsman," *Guitar* 1:3 (October 1972): 18.

Edmund Brelsford, Frederic Hand, Bunyan Webb, Michael Jaffee, and Joseph Bacon.[18] With time, Rubio was capable of making lutes that were fairly historically correct by then-current standards. Bream, however, required his lutes to have an ebony fretboard with fixed metal frets and a bone saddle too, no doubt in order to preserve his guitar technique.

In March of 1965 Rubio visited Hugh Gough, a founder member of the Galpin Society, who had immigrated to New York. Rubio used to take his rosewood to run through Gough's thickness planer, and although Gough was not making lutes, he had considerable knowledge of historic instruments.

In July 1966, Rubio wrote to his step-sister:

> It [the lute] is now going through a tremendous revival due to people like Julian Bream, who is perhaps No. 1 in the world today. I now have almost as many orders to build lutes as I do for guitars and of course they are a good deal more expensive––also more beautiful. To learn how to make them, I had to spend a lot of time in museums, etc. studying old ones that were ready to fall apart, and restoring them.[19]

Bream's 1965 guitar was one of three that Rubio completed based on guitars by Robert Bouchet—presumably influenced by Bream's own guitar. Rubio told the story that after Bream had used guitar to record *Twentieth Century Guitar*, one of the most influential records of the period; he went to Rubio's workshop and exchanged it for one of the others Rubio had made. Rubio subsequently sold Bream's initial choice to a client in New York without telling him it was second-hand, evidently fearing he would ask for a discount. Rubio received numerous calls from the new owner regarding the process of breaking in the new guitar. "The first string is just starting to come to life, the bass is progressing nicely," etc. Finally, after

18. Rubio did much research, contacting museums all over the world. For example, in 1981 he wrote to the Curator of the Musikhistorisk Museum, Copenhagen, to ask if he could inspect their Hass harpsichord. He was given a warm response with the inclusion: "Your name is well known in this house"(a letter dated 5 July 1980). Rubio asked, among other things, for a drawing the 1681 Giusti cembalo from the Germanisches Museum, Nuremberg (a letter dated 27 August 1975 to Dr. Van der Meer). He wrote to Grant O'Brien in 1977, at the Russell Collection, St. Celia Hall, asking for plans and photographs of a Dulcken single-manual (a letter dated 11 August 1977). O'Brien replied that they had just finished the plans of a 1638 double by Ruckers, on loan from the Brussels Musical Instrument Museum (a letter dated 22 August 1977). (All the above letters are in the possession of the author).

19. A letter in the possession of the author.

three months of numerous calls of this nature, and upon hearing Bream's new recording, Rubio received a call from the guitarist saying that while the guitar was quite good: "I just wish you could have made me one that sounded more like Bream's."

On 18 April 1966, Bream wrote from Japan to thank Rubio for making and sending him a new guitar. Bream said that he played on it in concert in San Francisco just hours after receiving it. He added:

> All the guitar cronies were very impressed—they thought I was playing my Bouchet! They were rather shocked: you simply don't play a guitar in public apparently unless it's a year or more old—I didn't know that![20]

Rubio's order book does not include the "off the shelf" instruments he made and for which no formal order was placed. When someone ordered a guitar he would probably make three together but only the one actually ordered was listed in the book. There is only one entry for Bream, for example, but Rubio made at least the two aforementioned guitars for him while he was in New York, and possibly others that Bream selected. Bream made two recordings with his 1966 guitar, both of them in 1968: *Julian Bream and Friends* and *Classic Guitar*.

In 1967, Rubio made a fine 8-course maple lute, with an ebony veneered neck and floral marquetry inlay for Bream (serial number 118). Bream, however, asked Rubio to retrospectively fit the bridge with a bone saddle. Instead of altering his lute, Rubio made him another (serial number 127) and sold the initial one to Michael Jaffee, of the Waverly Consort.[21] Bream subsequently used his 1967 Rubio lute for many recordings, including: *Elizabethan Lute Songs* (1970), *The Woods So Wild* (1972) and The *Lute Music of John Dowland* (1976). Fig. 9 shows the drawing used to make the 1967 lutes.

Once Bream began playing Rubio guitars, people would call to place orders, and when Rubio replied that his finest guitars cost $450, they would often say that they wanted something a little more expensive. Ru-

20. A letter in the possession of the author.

21. Number 118 is now in a private collection, while number 127 was sold at Sotheby's, London, in December 1991. Although, the serial numbers indicate eight other instruments were made in-between, these were probably guitars, and 118 and 127 were in fact consecutive lutes. This assumption is partially reinforced by the fact that the spruce soundboards used for these two lutes have markings indication they were consecutive slices from the same tree.

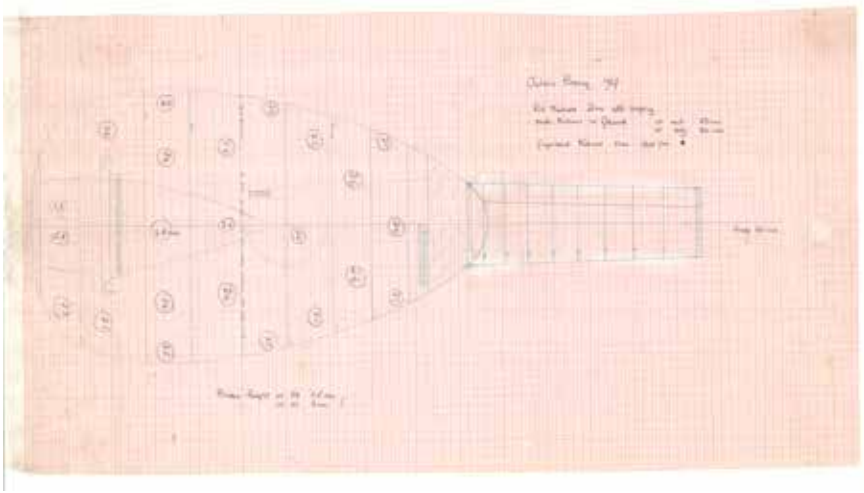


FIGURE 9. A drawing with soundboard thicknesses for Julian Bream's 1967 lute. Author's collection.

bio therefore increased his price to $500, and much to his amusement, this seemed to make his customers more pleased with their order.

It was not just the flamenco players and classical guitarists who ordered Rubio instruments, for the likes of Charlie Byrd and Bucky Pizzarelli all played jazz on the nylon-strung guitar. On one occasion in November 1966, Bream came back with Pizzarelli and Barry Galbraith (Nest's brother-in-law) to Rubio's studio after Bream had played a concert at Carnegie Hall. They jammed together playing in the style of Django Reinhardt, and Pizzarelli ordered a guitar with an additional seventh-string: a low A to assist in performing bass lines.

In July 1967, another order was placed for a seven-string guitar with a unique major third tuning, with one string stopped on the first fret. This guitar was for Ralph Oliver Patt, another American jazz-session guitarist who introduced major-thirds tuning. Patt said:

> As a studio player, when I came across a difficult passage, I would try to lay things between the G and the B strings, which is a major third, because by doing that you can play a chromatic scale without having to stretch with your little finger. That really simplifies things. I started wishing that the whole guitar was tuned in major thirds. That would give a player a complete chromatic

> scale within four frets in one position.[22]

Other unusual orders included a guitar with ten single strings for Narciso Yepes, useful for arrangements of music by Bach and others that cannot be accommodated to the six-string guitar. It also enabled composers to write for an extended instrument, and in some tunings it gave a unique sympathetic string resonance. Yepes, for example, performed standard guitar repertoire such as the Villa-Lobos studies and Tárrega's Recuerdos de la Alhambra to full effect.[23]

The last and perhaps the most unconventional guitars described here were for Michael Kasha, a chemist who radicalized the bracing of the Spanish guitar. His longstanding relationship with luthier Richard Schneider is well documented. One of Schneider's apprentices, Jeff Elliot, recalls that Rubio agreed to make him a guitar on the condition he did not have to put his label in it. During his New York days, at least, Rubio was a traditionalist, and on a personal level he may have not agreed with Kasha's radical designs. With this in mind, Rubio said that guitar makers "keep going round in circles … after a year or two we're back to Torres again!"[24]

Preparing to Leave America

One day Nest asked Rubio to make her a harpsichord, so he bought a Frank Hubbard kit. This was ca.1966. He never made an instrument from that kit, but he did eventually use the drawing, and the bentside became the mold for making his own. Although he did not begin making harpsichords until he left America, the seeds were sown while in New York, as the following quote from Victor Rangel reveals:

> In the late 1960s, however, I had begun dealing in Neupert harpsichords, and through contact with excellent harpsichordists who were my customers became aware that there was need for more responsive instruments to be built that would include traditional design but use contemporary knowhow. My wife and two children and I had dinner with David [Rubio] in his loft one

22. *American Lutherie,* number 72 (Winter 2002): 36–9.

23. Yepes famously collaborated with José Ramírez III with the initial design, and Paulino Bernabé Senior made at least one ten-string guitar for him.

24. George Clinton, "David Rubio Talks to George Clinton about Wood, Technique, Reproductions, and Design," *Guitar* 5/9 (April 1977):15–21.

> night, and on mentioning this to him, he said he had been thinking of branching out into harpsichord building. We walked around the loft where he stored fine sheets of wood on shelves along the wall, and he rapped on various pieces to demonstrate the differences in sound. Since I already knew that he built very fine guitars, I encouraged him to go ahead with the harpsichord project.[25]

However, as we shall see, Rubio was contemplating another and more urgent business decision.

As early as April 1965, he wrote to his step-sister: ". . . when my back orders reach one full year (approximately thirty guitars) I will just hop on a boat and bring my little business right back to London."[26] He never did return to the capital, but he continued: ". . . all I look forward to is a flourishing little business and a small cottage in the country." Just over one year later he wrote again to his step-sister: "I think I have had enough of city life—coffee houses, etc., to last me six lifetimes." And in May 1967, Bream wrote a long and detailed letter to Rubio telling him that work was well under way to convert his stables in Semley (Dorset, England) into a workshop for him.

An entry in Rubio's day-book for February 1966 records an order for a flamenco guitar from the New York-based musical instrument maker Hugh Gough, although it is not certain if he ever made this guitar. (Nest Rubio already had a virginal by Hugh Gough.) According to John Koster, Hugh Gough's biographer, Rubio visited him on 22 March 1965, so they must have been friends for some time.[27] During 19 to 20 June 1967 Gough moved his tools and workshop to Rubio's workshop at 43 Bond Street. It is probable that Rubio discussed lute-making and that he was interested and influenced by Gough's keyboard making. Gough probably gave up his own workshop and moved into Rubio's with the intention of taking it over when Rubio left, as planned.

Although Gough and Rubio were sharing the workshop space, Rubio's day-book indicates that from June to September 1967 there were only two orders, and from August to September, "travelling" is penned in. (Perhaps Rubio and Nest were saying goodbye to their friends in America.) Gough therefore had the workshop more or less to himself after July. He noted in

25. Victor Rangel to James Westbrook, 7 November 2013.

26. The content of this paragraph is within three separate letters to Melinda Cohen, which are in the author's possession.

27. John Koster to James Westbrook, 1 September 2015.

his own calendar that on 30 August 1967, the Rubios left for England and that he commenced full occupation of 43 Bond Street.[28] By the time Rubio left New York City, other established makers included Lucien Barnes IV and Thomas Hom (both worked with Rubio at one time), Eugene Clark, Thomas Knatt, Thomas Humphrey, and Michael Gurian.

The cannibalized Hubbard kit was shipped over from New York, along with Rubios' other belongings, on the SS Rotterdam. In September 1967 Nest and Rubio moved to their new workshop on Julian Bream's Broad Oak estate at Semley in rural Dorset, England.

Back in England

Unlike America, which had a thriving population of guitar makers, Britain had not yet fully woken up to the developments of this instrument, since the retirement of the Panormos and their outdated London-made parlor guitars.[29] Musicians in Britain were on the whole still playing nineteenth-century guitars as late as the 1950s, either for classical music or (ill-equipped with steel strings) for the music of the bedroom skiffle guitarist. Bream used an 1880s American-made guitar for concerts until he was nineteen years of age. It was therefore a good moment for Rubio to come to England where Julian Bream and John Williams, among others, were helping to make the guitar a serious solo instrument once more.

Rubio, however, had greater ambitions than being just a guitar maker. Besides offering guitars, vihuelas, and lutes, he wanted to make viols, harpsichords, violins, violas, and 'cellos. So José Rubio, the Spanish-guitar maker, became David Joseph Rubio, the English gentleman luthier.[30] It was now in his interest for people to know that he was not Spanish. Per-

28. John Koster to James Westbrook, 1 September 2015.

29. This was because, during the late nineteenth century, the role of the guitar in Britain had changed. The banjo had become more popular and the guitar was used for light music within the ladies' bands that used mandolin and guitar. This left the guitar, considered as a serious solo instrument, in a semi-dormant state in Britain.

30. While crafting his instruments, Rubio rather eccentrically dressed smart, or as Paul Fischer put it: "His style of dress was very English/formal." Paul Fischer to James Westbrook, 5 June 2019 (fig 10a, for example). All the instrument labels during his New York period state his name as "Jose Rubio", and are signed as such. The majority of these instruments also carry an ink-stamp to the inside of the body. These instruments are also numbered and dated using Hindu-Arabic numerals. On his move to England, however, His name appears as "david j Rubio", and was signed accordingly. At this time, he drops his serial numbers and dates his instruments using Roman numerals.

haps he even thought of giving himself an Italianate name to suit his new clientele, those accustomed to buying violins by the best Italian masters. But the point here is that he did not need an assumed name, for he was now an established and reputable instrument maker.

Rubio's arrangement with Bream, however, was to last only for about a year. In March 1968 Rubio moved to The Ridge House in Duns Tew (Oxfordshire). His new workshop was a converted barn, adjoining this seventeenth-century cottage. Rubio employed many workers there, creating his "Rubio workshop" models.[31] If someone ordered a guitar, for example, Rubio would encourage them to order a workshop model from one of his apprentices, such as Bryn Jones, which was cheaper and had a much shorter delivery time. But many owners of "Rubio" instruments are seemingly unaware that they have an instrument constructed by one of his workers and not Rubio himself. For those who understand the ethos and philosophy behind such workshops, this was nothing new. Did Tielke, in the seventeenth century, really make all those highly decorated lutes himself? Rubio was probably influenced by the José Ramírez guitar-making workshop while he was in Spain and the Dolmetsch and Goble ateliers in England.

Fig. 10b shows Rubio (standing, center), Edward Brewer, harpsichordist, seated at the keyboard, and Victor Rangel examining Rubio's first harpsichord just before it was used in an inaugural recital at the St. Mary Magdalene church in Duns Tew. Brewer and Rangel had flown in from New York the previous night to see how the instrument would perform. Many of Goble's work force eventually came to make harpsichords for Rubio.

In Duns Tew, Rubio would often work into the night on his own projects because he was too busy overseeing his workforce during the day. Then in 1976, he and his wife Nest delivered a harpsichord to the music faculty in the University of Cambridge. They were smitten with Cambridge and decided they wanted a quieter workshop, now that the one in Duns Tew had been expanded to support his small workforce. So in 1979 Rubio and Nest moved to Cambridge, his last workshop site, leaving behind his Oxford workforce to go their separate ways. Rubio worked there making violins and lutes, and voicing harpsichords, without ever

31. There were at various times and durations at least fourteen instrument makers working at the Ridge House between 1969 and 1979, some constructing complete instruments, others specializing in distinct facets of harpsichord making.

(a)

FIGURE 10a. Rubio in his customary "English gentleman's" attire, ca.1970, making a harpsichord. Courtesy of Gillian Borer.

(b)

FIGURE 10b. David Rubio (standing, center), Edward Brewer, harpsichordist, seated at the keyboard, and Victor Rangel-Ribeiro examine Rubio's first harpsichord, 1970. Author's collection.

forgetting his roots: in the last years of his life he produced many very fine concert and flamenco guitars. It was in Cambridge, and through his close association with the University—where in February 2000, an honorary master's degree was bestowed upon him—that he carried out most of his scientific experiments.[32]

Conclusion

In his youth, Rubio was a troubled, rebellious person: against his mother's wishes he dropped out of university and joined a Spanish flamenco troupe. He married non-Jews and renounced his religion. He did not find his life's calling until he began to make musical instruments in New York. There were stark differences between his American and English periods. In his Greenwich Village workshops, he needed to sell his instruments before he had even completed them. This left little time for him to experiment and expand his business. However, by the time of his last move, to Cambridge, he had a comfortable existence and his order books were full, leaving more time to conceptualize and experiment (fig. 11).

So here we have a man who, at first sight, and particularly as seen by some of his American contemporaries, was daring, perhaps even ruthless. But he had the confidence to carry through his ambitions. He was driven to be successful in what he did, and to a large extent the route to his success did not matter to him. Without the generosity of his American colleagues he might not have succeeded, yet through his determination he surpassed many of those recognized in his field. Some years after Rubio left New York, he and his Oxfordshire workforce were still making instruments for American clients, not only those orders placed in the Bond Street days and still to be completed, but also those ordered subsequently. Rubio was riding on his New York reputation.

Success in most businesses is measured by the accumulation of wealth. However, success in musical instrument making is usually measured by those who play the instruments, and with the likes of the guitarists Julian Bream and John Williams, the cellist Anthony Pleeth, and the harp-

32. The committee at Wolfson College, Cambridge, initially planned to confer on him an honorary doctorate. However, because of the lengthy process involved, and the fact that he was terminally ill, it was rushed through as a lesser degree. His scientific experiments ranged from replicating the varnishing techniques of the Cremonese masters, to acoustic testing for guitars and other instruments.

sichordist Gustav Leonhardt on his order-books, Rubio certainly became one of the most distinguished Anglo-American post-war musical instrument makers.

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FIGURE 11. Rubio using his "shaker table" and overhead camera to capture the vibration patterns on violin plates, Cambridge, 1990s. Author's collection.