



The New York Flute Club

NEWSLETTER

March 2023

Marco Granados: Venezuelan Flute Virtuoso

Interview by Stephanie Jutt

I have known the astonishing Marco Granados for most of my professional life and I am a consummate fan. His enterprising spirit led him on a lightning-fast trajectory from a childhood in small-town Venezuela and young teenage years as a professional flutist in Caracas to the US for a summer program with the Cleveland Orchestra and musical studies in NY, where he lives today. Marco's wildly virtuosic interpretations of Venezuelan popular music have been an inspiration to flutists everywhere, and his irrepressible energy is evident in his varied and creative teaching career, instrument design, recordings, and compositions. We started this interview in December 2022; material omitted for space reasons—touching on Marco's early career activities in the US and his thoughts on entrepreneurship—can be found with the online copy of this newsletter at nyfluteclub.org.

STEPHANIE JUTT: Please tell us about your early years in Venezuela and how you came to play the flute.

MARCO GRANADOS: My dad was not a musician by trade—he was an accountant and an economist—but he loved, loved, loved music. For health reasons, we were forced to move from Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, back to his hometown, where his family had a pharmacy business. Growing up, my dad wanted us kids to learn music, but at the time, the nearest music school was in the capital of our state, an hour away. My dad started taking me there, but it was it was a real hassle.

And then he got it into his head that he was going to start a music school! He raised funds—donations from the Venezuelan Symphony Orchestra, from the government, and from some private institutions—and he was able to open this music school that was free to all of the children in our town, with the instruments donated by the Venezuelan Symphony. At first, when he asked my brother and me what we wanted to play, all we knew was that we did not want to play the violin. That was the instrument my dad played, and we did not want him totally supervising us.

Around this time, when I was eight, a US Peace Corps band from Purdue University came to our town to give a free concert. My younger brother and I sat in the front row, with me in front of the flutes and him in front of the clarinets.

(Cont'd on next page)



I Just Wanna Play!
March 23, 2023
Thursday • 7:00 pm
Melody and improvisation from the "other" side
Irwin Hall, jazz flutist
See p. 6 for details.

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In Concert **Marco Granados, flute** **Ahmed Alom, piano**

Saturday, **March 18, 2023**, 7:00 pm

West 83 Ministry Center Sanctuary, 150 West 83rd Street, NYC

Program

Allegro Tangabile	Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992)
from the opera <i>Maria de Buenos Aires</i>	(arr. Marco Granados)
Hamburger Sonata in G major, H. 564	C.P.E. Bach (1714-1788)
Tres Canciones Amatorias	Enrique Granados (1867-1916)
	(arr. Stephanie Jutt)
Las Presencias (Rosita Iglesias)	Carlos Guastavino (1912-2000)
	(transc. Stephanie Jutt)
Revirao; La Muerte del Ángel	Astor Piazzolla
	(arr. Exequiel Mantega and Marco Granados)
Fugata; Adiós Nonino	Astor Piazzolla
	(arr. Marco Granados)
Two songs: Esta Iglesia no tiene...; Siesta	Carlos Guastavino
	(arr. Stephanie Jutt)
Sonatine	Walter Gieseking (1895-1956)
Libertango	Astor Piazzolla
	(arr. Pablo Zinger and Marco Granados)

Program subject to change

(Granados, cont'd from p. 1)

This band—dressed in shiny, military-style uniforms—was amazing, and we just fell in love with the sounds that we were hearing. That's what decided us—I told my father, "Flute!" and Danny said, "Clarinet!" So that's how we started music lessons in our town.

SJ: Who were your teachers?

MG: My dad hired some of the musicians from the state concert band from the state capital. They would come to our town once a week to give lessons. The clarinet teacher was also my flute teacher, so he taught us both. But the thing I remember most about him was his kindness—he was really generous with his knowledge and not judgmental. After about a year he said, "I have taught you all I have to teach you, you need to go to the capital to study." Then I started traveling to San Cristobal to take lessons at the Conservatory.

SJ: But you were so little! How did you get there?

MG: By bus—sometimes my dad would go with me and sometimes I would go by myself. I took lessons from the principal flutist of the state concert band for about a year. Then, when I was 11, the teacher told me, "Oh, we have an opening for second flute in our concert band. And it's a professional gig. You get paid a salary."

When I was 11, the teacher told me about an opening in the state concert band.

I think this was the changing point for me, technically. I remember trying to prepare for that audition during my summer vacation months. I said to myself that I'm just going practice all that I can for this audition. And I remember I was practicing, like, about eight hours a day.

SJ: You must have had a very good curriculum to know what to do!

MG: We had the Taffanel & Gaubert book, and we had Altès, but I didn't really have etudes. I started focusing on the fourth section of the T&G book because that's all I had. I divided my practicing into segments—I would do three hours in the morning, take a break, then two or three hours in the afternoon, and then maybe an hour at night. I was able to make a game

out of playing the scales and arpeggios with a metronome at ever faster speeds, though I was more focused on the mechanics of it—at that age, you're not so distracted by the perceptions of what you're hearing.

SJ: It sounds like you were more engaged with the process than with the outcome.

MG: Yeah. And, thankfully, my teacher also emphasized that. He kept saying, "If you learn solfeggio really well, and if you learn your 10 major scales and your technique really well, the music is going to be easier to play." And it was—after I did all the scales, it became really easy to prepare the music.

SJ: Did you win that audition?

MG: Yes, I did. It was my first professional gig, and I was 12. And my dad said, "You can't have a job at 12!" But we came to an agreement: if I would use the money from my job for my education, then he would let me do it.

So every other Friday I would fly to Caracas, take a lesson from the Symphony player there on Saturday, and come back to San Cristobal (on a 13-hour overnight bus ride) in time for the Sunday night band concert. Between going to high school, doing my homework, and afternoon band rehearsals, I had a really busy schedule.

SJ: Where would you stay in Caracas?

MG: With my grandma. During one of those trips, I think when I was 13, I went to a concert of the Cleveland Orchestra. I had already been learning English, and at intermission, I went to speak to the musicians. I asked a violinist, "Would you please send me some information about summer programs?" Because in those days, we didn't have the internet. And to my surprise, three months later, I got a huge package from this man. He had collected brochures of summer programs. I chose one program to apply to, which was a high school program connected with the Cleveland Orchestra. I locked myself into a practice room and recorded everything I knew into a cassette tape. Then I sent it, and then again, a few months later, they called our house and said that they wanted to give me a scholarship. So that's how I came to the States.

SJ: Who was your first flute teacher in the US?

MG: Barbara Peterson, one of the subs in the Cleveland Orchestra. And at the end of the summer program, I won the concerto competition. And then she recommended that I play for Maurice Sharp, who was principal flutist of the Cleveland Orchestra. And I was



Robert Langevin and a teen-aged Marco Granados (L) enjoying a moment of levity at the Nice Summer Academy in France, c. 1978.

told that Mr. Sharp wasn't taking any students, except for graduate students at the conservatory. But he decided to hear me anyway and after my audition, he said he would teach me. Then I remember calling home and saying, "Well, I'm staying."

SJ: So, you didn't go back!

MG: Right—the guy who ran the summer program got me into this private [residential] school. And on Saturdays, I would go study with Mr. Sharp.

SJ: Was that the last time you lived in Venezuela?

MG: No. After my first year at Juilliard, I realized I was too young to be studying there, so I decided to spend a year studying in Germany. During Christmas break there, I flew to Venezuela to audition for the symphony to play a concerto. It went well and they gave me a date to play the concerto. But while I was there, I got a call from the general manager of the (Caracas) orchestra. And he said, "We have a vacancy that just opened up. Would you be interested in playing assistant principal flute?" And I said, "Sure!" I hadn't even finished my college training! And so I went back to Caracas, Venezuela, and I played in the symphony for a year.

SJ: Gosh! And after that you came back to NY?

MG: Yes, I continued my studies at Mannes, graduating in 1986. My first teacher there was Fritz Kraber, but he left for the University of Texas in Austin during my first year. I told the dean, "I want to study with Thomas Nyfenger or with no one!" The dean talked to Tom and convinced him to take one more student. After my first year with Tom, he joined Mannes as a part-time faculty member.

SJ: And right after your bachelor's you went on to the Manhattan School of Music?

MG: Yes. I was originally planning to study with Carol Wincenc, but she had just accepted an invitation to teach at Indiana University. I was still attached

to NY, and Michael Parloff agreed to take me as a master's student.

SJ: Wow, you have had some wonderful teachers! And from your earliest years, you were also playing Venezuelan popular music in your hometown, going out serenading with your dad....

MG:...in the very beautiful, picturesque town in the mountains of Venezuela where he grew up. It was traditional for musicians to serenade around the town during Christmas, Easter, other special holidays, and for people's birthdays. My dad, because he played the violin, was one of the leaders of the gang who would go out serenading. As soon as I started learning the flute, I realized that if I could learn some tunes by ear, I could go with my dad, and just hang out with all these musicians, so I started learning a couple of tunes. During the serenades, I started hearing all the musicians playing by ear, and I would just join in and try to follow the music and harmonize. That's how I started developing a little bit of an aptitude for playing by ear and also by learning more tunes.

SJ: I think that's so key to your playing by ear, and your ability to hear and harmonize. Did you learn any Venezuelan folk instruments as well?

MG: Not really, though I can play some basic chords on the cuatro (the national string instrument of Venezuela and Colombia) and a couple of basic joropo (dance) patterns on the maracas.

SJ: It sounds like you've really stayed in touch with musicians in Venezuela over all these years.

MG: I have. I mean, less so today, just because the practical situation is so difficult there. But there are now a lot of Venezuelan musicians who have come to the US!

SJ: Tell me about your roles at the Longy School in Cambridge, MA.

MG: As soon as Longy saw my CV and my experience as a working musician and teaching artist in NYC, they got me involved as one of the first teachers in their teaching artists program, which focuses on how you can engage audiences in authentic ways and get them to appreciate and be a part of the artistic process.

I also had a flute studio there and I was also teaching chamber music and the teaching artistry course. During that time, Longy was starting to implement El Sistema and they also knew that I had been a part of that in Venezuela. El Sistema also coincides with and complements the philosophy of teaching artistry, that music should be for

all and that it's a right of every human being to be creative and to participate in the musical experience. So I wasn't teaching classes in El Sistema at Longy, but I did some coaching, teaching, and I even went to Los Angeles to do some teaching artist workshops that were part of Longy's master's program in LA.

SJ: And does that program still exist?

MG: Yes, and they've also implemented it in Cambridge.

SG: When were you were a part of El Sistema in Venezuela?

MG: At its very beginnings. I auditioned for [its founder] Maestro [José Antonio] Abreu, and he wanted me to be a part of the orchestra. I had already been learning from some of the teachers who were starting El Sistema, but it also coincided with the time when I got my scholarship to go study in Cleveland. Of course, I've stayed in touch with my Venezuelan teachers and colleagues. When I went to play with the Venezuelan symphony, I did a couple of master classes with El Sistema. And later, when I was living in the US, I went back to teach a master-class tour for them.

SJ: Tell us about musicians who have been really inspiring to you in your life.

MJ: Growing up, I became obsessed with Pablo Casals, not only because of his stature as a great musician and great cellist, but also because of the humanitarian aspects of his life, which I've tried to emulate. I was also really inspired by Mauricio Pollini, the amazing Italian pianist, who was able to combine incredible technical perfection with incredible musical mastery. And, in the flute world, my two heroes were of course James Galway and William Bennett. With William Bennett, I had the great fortune to be able to study with him and to actually share the stage with him and have a little bit of a closer relationship.

SJ: I've noticed that you tend to downplay your abilities as a composer. But somehow you wrote that NFA piece that is so popular, La Bella y El Terco [commissioned for the 2007 High School Soloist Competition]. How did this come about? And will you please write more flute pieces?

MG: Yes, yes. It's funny, but it's been kind of a struggle for me to acknowledge that I'm a composer. And I think writing for me started coming out of my own sense of trying to express myself freely through the flute. What could be construed as improvisations can then help me sit down and start trying to pull it all together. I'm really blessed and grateful that I've been able



Marco Granados and his brother Leo with Jamie Bernstein (daughter of Leonard) and Gustavo Dudamel (R) at the reception after Dudamel's November 2007 conducting debut at the NY Philharmonic. Jamie Bernstein had lent Dudamel her father's baton for the performance and had invited the brothers to perform for their fellow Venezuelans.



Sir James Galway and Marco Granados (R) in Boston c. 2014.



Marco Granados with Maxence Larrieu shortly after Larrieu was presented with the NFA's 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award. Upon becoming a Haynes artist that year, Marco received the gold Haynes originally made for Larrieu.



Marco Granados with (L to R) Barbara Siesel, Valerie Coleman (and daughter Lisa Page), and Zara Lawler at the 2018 NFA convention.



Marco Granados with composer Julia Wolfe at the 2022 NFA convention. Wolfe's piece *Oxygen* (for massed flutes) was commissioned by the NFA and performed at the convention.

(Granados, cont'd from previous page)

to go through different types of cycles of intense learning in my life.

During this last cycle, during the pandemic, I became super-obsessed with doing the research and development for my own headjoint design so that I could have an instrument that properly expressed my voice. I was frustrated that I could never find that in a headjoint that I could buy. After a long learning process, I now feel like I have a flute that better represents what I like to say with my voice. So now I think that I'm going to be able to have the ability and the freedom to get back to composing. I'm very excited about that!

SJ: Please tell us about your new connection with Altus flutes.

MG: I recently became an Altus artist, sparked by an auspicious encounter with one of the vendors at the Altus booth at the 2022 NFA convention that I was assigned to visit as an NFA board member. Unbeknownst to me, the man who is the top repair person for Altus in Tennessee, Joe Butkevicius, had told the Altus rep people that they should look out for me, that I was one of the best flute players around.

So when I showed up, they wanted

to talk with me. I told them that I had come up with a new design for a headjoint, and they wanted to see the prototype that I had just finished. I tried it on one of the Altus flutes, and I was in shock, because I was finally able to realize, wow, the Altus flutes are amazing! When you try one with a regular headjoint, you might not be able to tell. But when I tried it with my prototype, I was like, "Whoa, this is a really great flute."

SJ: Lucky it fit, right?

MG: Yeah. And then on the other hand, they were saying, "Oh my God, that headjoint sounds amazing." Then, they just quickly said, "Oh, you know, at one point we produced Robert Dick's headjoint, we can produce your headjoint." So, they gave me a flute to try that evening. I went back to my room, and it's an amazing flute. And I said, "Yeah, we should talk. I'm interested. Let's see what we can come up with." Shortly thereafter, I became an Altus artist. Now we're in the middle of discussions about how we're going to produce the headjoint.

SJ: Will you be playing that flute and that headjoint in your NYFC recital?

MG: I'm going to play one of my prototype head joints that I just finished.



Marco Granados in New York with interviewer Stephanie Jutt in 2022.

It's an Altus 14k head on the flute that they lent me because my flute is being built. My new flute is going to arrive sometime in February. We'll have to wait and see.

SJ: We'll be waiting! It's been such a pleasure talking to you, Marco. Thanks!

*NY-based flutist **Stephanie Jutt** is professor emerita of flute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and principal flute of the Madison Symphony. Recent recordings on Albany and Centaur feature Latin American and Spanish repertoire and three Brahms sonatas. stephaniejutt.com*

More interview material below and on the following page. —Ed.

Marco Granados: Interview extras

by Stephanie Jutt

STEPHANIE JUTT: You and I go back a long way. The first time I heard you play was in the mid-1970s, with the Quintet of the Americas at a National Flute Association convention.

MARCO GRANADOS: Quintet of the Americas was my first gig right out of school. Just after graduating with my master's from Manhattan School of Music [in 1988], we were all trying to figure out what to do with our lives and our careers. I had just won the Artists International Competition that came with the opportunity to do a solo recital at Carnegie Recital Hall (now called Weill Hall.) I was preparing for this recital, getting the program together, when I got a phone call from one of my friends from school, and he said, "Hey, Marco, would you be interested in playing in a woodwind quintet?" I said, "Sure!" And he told me about the group, Quintet of the Americas. They did a lot of modern music and were holding auditions. "Tomorrow's the last day. And if you want, you can just show up and audition!" I got all the details and then I showed up. I read a couple of things with them, and then they asked me, "Do you want to play anything else?" I played one of my Venezuelan solo tunes. They liked it and the next day I learned that they had selected me as one of their three finalists.

In those days, the quintet was being represented by Columbia Artists and they were doing the Community Concert Association tours, so it was a lot of concerts per year. As the final audition, each one of us was going to do a tour. And then at the end of the tour, they would let us know who got the job. Part of the quintet's thing was audience

engagement, with a lot of talking to the audience. In those days, that was kind of a new thing. And, as I remember it, I had the last tour. They gave me a script of what I was going to say in the concert that I had to memorize. At our first concert, in LA, and we went on stage and then, halfway through the concert, I went off script. And it went really well. But one of the players got really mad at me afterwards and said, "Don't you ever go off script!" I said, "Okay, okay." We kept going on the tour. By the end of the tour, I had become the emcee of the whole thing. We went from me just going off script in the first concert to them letting me take on that role in all the concerts.

SJ: There was a dance section in that concert at the NFA convention—I think that's how I first met you. I volunteered to go up and learn the dance steps that corresponded to the rhythms in the piece you were playing. It was so much fun! I'd never seen anybody do anything like that in a concert. I was just enchanted by the whole thing; it was so original—and you were a great dancer! When did your [clarinetist] brother Danny become a part of the quintet?

MG: That was much later. So anyway, after that tour, they asked me to join the quintet. And then I was in it for roughly six years. At the time, my brother was playing clarinet professionally in Spain, but something happened with the orchestra in Spain, and he came back to NY to freelance. It happened to coincide with the clarinet in the quintet leaving, so we invited him to read with us. And Danny was an amazing clarinetist. He was a member of the group for



Marco Granados and compatriots serenading in Venezuela at age 14-15

about a year or so, and it was super fun to have Danny sitting right across from me. We have *completely* different musical personalities. My brother is the type of musician who likes to over-prepare and everything has to be super planned. And I'm the opposite. I like to be spontaneous. I like to change the phrasing in the middle. Like, if I did something one day, I want to do it differently the next day, to bring an improvisational element to classical music. So, it was really fun working with my brother because I would try to throw him off and phrase differently. But we had a really good time!

SJ: Of all the people I know, I love the natural way that you play, and your musicality is so fluid, in every register and in every circumstance. And you were like that as a very young person! And, of course, you're even more like that now.... Are there any other questions that you'd like to answer that I didn't ask you?

MG: I feel like I want to address the issue of entrepreneurship. And you know just how essential and important that is.

SJ: Of course, that word "entrepreneurship" is perfect because you have been the creator of your own destiny on so many levels. You've had to reinvent yourself so many times over your lifetime—as a performer, educator, and administrator. And now you're creating a new headjoint that you're committed to. You're like a cat with nine lives, right? And maybe you're at number six, or something like that. But they all really flow together, and that defines your overall attitude towards life and work.

MJ: Yes, that's a beautiful way of putting it. I think that nowadays, in the flute world, we talk a lot about entrepreneurship. We talk a lot about entrepreneurship from the perspective of career options. To me, that's almost like putting "the cart before the horse." I want to focus on the horse—the creative part, the driving force. So, any kind of reinvention that we can seek within ourselves has to grow out of (i) the love of playing the flute and (ii) the love of self-expression, as you find the best ways of channeling that creative energy to show the love you have for the instrument. You, Stephanie, have been a perfect example of that because you've had an incredible music career. And you've always channeled it in all the concerts that you've put together.

SJ: Yeah, I think it has to come from the love of doing, doesn't it? That's really our source material—without that, you can talk about entrepreneurship all the day long, and it's not going to do a thing for you. Right? Because entrepreneurship is not a business. It's life. And that's really, really key.



TOP: Marco's Venezuelan music group Un Mundo in 2000 at the British flute convention. ABOVE: Un Mundo a few years later: (L to R) Aquiles Baez, guitar/cuatro; Marco Granados, flute; Leonardo Granados, percussion/vocals; and Pedro Giroudo, bass.

MJ: Yeah. For example, I got involved during the pandemic with probably the most difficult project of my career. I have to say that the last couple of years have been incredibly difficult, but they're also yielding a lot of rewards. Getting into the nitty-gritty of designing a new headjoint, having it make sense, having it be in tune and all those things, the many lonely hours, trying to figure stuff out, it all comes from that. It comes from the really strong desire to play beautiful music.

SJ: Can you tell me more about your flute headjoint work?

MG: My headjoint design grew out of a curiosity to figure out the science behind the complex issue of how a headjoint works and/or should work. The flow-based design of my headjoint is actually a finishing process that can be applied to an existing headjoint to convert it into a flow-based design.

I will be covering the topic of a flow-based approach to flute playing during my warmup and masterclass at the Flute Fair.

SJ: Any repertoire or practice suggestions for readers who liked playing your NFA piece, La Bella y El Terco?

MG: My recommendation is for flutists to familiarize themselves as much as possible with Latin American music in order to develop more of an affinity for "rhythmic phrasing." Rhythmic phrasing can help a flutist be super solid and flexible at the same time, improving both interpretation skills and musical artistry.

SJ: Thanks so much, Marco! So glad we had the chance to do this.