

Cristina and I got to Chambery by train; then a van collected us at the train station and took us to the house.

I do remember the trip in the van as it went through the most spectacular views of the French pre-Alps; the road was scary at moments, narrow and with a very deep cliff on the side. The house is on a plateau, surrounded by beautiful meadows. The facility is owned by a couple and mostly used family holidays and climbing singles and groups. It's all in wood, very nice, with about 20 people capacity.

Very small team as well, especially if compared with the previous two courses. Among them a French trio (The French Connection) who I remember being quite stunning players; Cathy Stevens as AT instructor, Jurgen Baake as Kitchen Coordinator, then Stephan, Richard, Oivind & Eivind, Antonio, Simon Potton, Aiko, Bernard, Martin...

An intimate course indeed; Robert telling stories at meals, like the one of the American couple driving through the Mexican border with grandma's corpse in the trunk...

Classes and personal meetings were focused, as for a L2 in a real sense, on deepening the technical aspects of playing the guitar: fretboard knowledge, repertoire, ear training and so on.

One of the first mornings, after breakfast I'm enthusiastically explaining few things about GC to Cristina in our room, when suddenly I look at the watch finding out I'm just late for a meeting: terror, with my heart in my throat I grabbed my guitar and run to the ballroom. As I open the door I see a Circle working; an empty chair next to Robert, he turns toward the door and say something like: "Ah! Here you are, we were just waiting for you, would you like to play a solo for us? We'll accompany you, which key would you like? Which tempo?". As I sat down next to Robert my only wish is for a black hole to open under my feet and me disappearing in it. I say "A minor" with a trembling voice, he brings in a very simple bass line and I play few pathetic notes on top.

Later on during the same meeting we were circulating in a given key, Robert was just before me and for quite few times it happened that I played exactly the same note he just played, I was a bit embarrassed, I didn't want him to think that I was trying to imitate him, I smiled at him as if I was saying "hey, I'm doing it on purpose", then when we stopped he said "no worries, you just felt the need at that point of that particular note, but I was quicker..."

Robert's room was somewhere upstairs, where the ceiling was lower, and the door to the room was itself pretty low; there must be some text from him talking about attention and presence, and how we could use "accidents" as reminding factors, so he gives the examples of him bumping his head onto the doorpost; well, that's the post, and I bumped my head on it as well when I went for my personal meeting. After a fine re-arrangement of my right hand (again!) he asked me if there was something specific I'd like to learn; Asturias was getting really popular in those days and, as it was more playable compare to Moving Force, I thought I could aspire to it. He taught me the piece, then we played it together: unforgettable.

During the classes we had in those days we worked mostly on scales, intervals, chords and arpeggios; also, to introduce us to ear training, he would stand behind us and, while playing a note he'd give us a hint saying something like: "this note is either an E, a B or a C", then we were asked to guess the note and play it ourselves. References were also made by Robert about The Relative Pitch & Perfect Pitch Ear-Training Courses by David L. Burge (big and quite expensive courses on cassette to develop ear capacity), and also the Frank Gambale Technique Book I & II to develop fretboard knowledge and music vocabulary.

One day, it was mid morning, I was practicing some repertoire with a small group down in the ballroom, after a while we took a break and I went outside to smoke a cigarette; in the quiet of the surroundings I could only hear the sound of few guitars from a distance. Then suddenly the guitars stopped, and that sudden void was filled by Silence, in a form I can only describe as a dense and nourishing substance which was filling the whole space around me, in which I found myself diving in. My first personal and direct experience of Silence.

After dinner we had a meeting without guitars where Robert introduced us to some ideas about States and Stations to define different qualities of being; he did that using the metaphor of the house with a basement, a ground floor, a first floor and a top floor (the attic). People's life is centred in one of those levels, as whether you live or spend most of your time: you might be based in the basement (no light/windows, not even the suspect that there might be other/better levels above), or at ground floor (air and light to a certain extent and the awareness of "higher floors"), then first floor and so on; those are the Stations. Then you might live at ground floor and go downstairs into the basement to get a bottle of wine from time to time; or the first floor lodger invites you upstairs for a coffee; those are the States: a temporary condition which can give you a glimpse of a different state but it's not your centre of gravity. Well, that is what I got and what I remember of what he said, anyway.

Then we were asked for comments/observations/points of seeing, so I told my story of my encounter with Silence in the morning, describing it "as dense as milk". Robert commented it saying that it was a clear example of a First Floor Experience.

Another night, after dinner, in what we called in later times "House of Guitars", Robert went around the Circle to distribute parts of a groovy polyrhythmic pattern which later on I learn to be something like "BoogaLoogaChoogle" or something like that. It might sound stupid but I was facing all these information for the first time, they were all brand new for me, and I felt all the way through the course like Alice in Wonderland.

I don't remember much of the performance and its preparation, but I do remember an Alexander class just before the performance, it was a lie-down to relax and become more present; Cathy suggested to take deep breaths and to allow a singing note on the exhale; every breathe the choir would become louder and louder, particularly Antonio's voice was very deep and loud. This triggered Oivind into a wild lough, he couldn't stop, other people in the room got infected, even Cathy in the end, after a timid attempt to keep it together, blasted into laughter. It took a while to get it back together, we were all exhausted but it worked: all the exceeding tension was released and our state was then more suitable for our performance.

In the final meeting a new course in Berlin was announced for next December; afterwards I approached Martin to get more information, and he told me that I could and should go, and that I would have been welcome also as part of the Kitchen Team as he thought it was about the right time for me to do that. It would have been the fourth course in one year, and with a progression (L1, L1.5, L2, and then KT): no doubt that I felt like being on a rocket launched into the future.