



# Renaissance Man

## Antonio Joaquin Arizaga

There's enough for a book or, better still, a documentary accompanied by his music. As La Quinta-based guitar master Antony Arizaga says at age 53, "If I die tomorrow, I'd feel like I'd already lived twice."

The story starts at a waterfront restaurant in San Pedro belonging to a grandmother where a 9-year-old boy first hears guitar. He's listening to the lush melodies and picking up the rhythms of the *tríos románticos* performances—a style that came up through Latin America in the 1950s.

By age 11, he's avidly studying the recordings by masters Sabicas and Segovia he hears at his aunt's, and composing at 15. His senior year's composition for a two-hour play became his scholarship ticket into the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia.

Today, he journeys each summer to Spain to not only study

with José María Gallardo del Rey, a Deutsche Grammophon recording artist and one of the world's great maestros, but also to perform in the land of his ancestors where the music came from flamenco songs, but was originally brought by the gypsies.

In between, however, it took two decades of 80-hour weeks teaching, performing, repairing musical instruments and skill-hewing practice, supporting a family of four ultimately as a single father, to burnish the guitarist's soul.

Today, the maestro plays in two musical traditions, which he describes as stereoscopic: "When I play South American pieces, the Spanish really enjoy my rhythm." But when he's there studying with his master, he says, "they don't pull any punches. The fact that this maestro who plays all the greatest halls, with the greatest orchestras—although he's not well known in the U.S.—

PHOTOS/WADEFYERS, THE DESERT SUN



who has no other students, would accept me, a California boy, it's a great honor. Just to keep up with what I've gotten from him in the months I've been with him, I have to practice four hours a day for a year before I go back to him., to be worthy of him, of respect."

In return, he helps his master transcribe. The late 19th-century music Arizaga discovers each year still quotes the ethnic folk music of Andalusia and the Moors. Other paths to discovery have been his studies with sitar master Rahul Sariputra, in class with Ravi Shankar. As he explains, "The original gypsies who came to Spain came from India. It gives the idea of the phrasing, the melodic sounds."

And then, he also is a master builder of the handcrafted classical guitar. "I'm in love with learning and with life," Arizaga says. And when you listen to him play—as have audiences in Thailand, Amsterdam and Vienna, as well as in Madrid, Salamanca, Grenada, and our troops in Bagdad—you'll hear his passion for both.

—CARLA BREER HOWARD

#### DETAILS

Go to [anthonyarizaga.com](http://anthonyarizaga.com) to find local performances, to sample his 15 CDs, to inquire for a private event, for private guitar instruction or private instruction on building a classical guitar. Arizaga also offers group classes at College of the Desert. Check the COD website for registration information: [collegeofthedesert.edu](http://collegeofthedesert.edu).

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