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Main Stage :: Six-Strings in St. Joe

Six-Strings in St. Joe

Anthony Glise puts guitar in the spotlight with his annual festival

May 08, 2007



St. Joseph International Guitar Festival & Competition director, Anthony Glise has a very different handle on the guitar world - and life. He lives part-time in the US and part-time in France and along with 9 music diplomas from 7 countries, he also studied medicine, historical dance, is a fencing coach and has also studied business management and administration at Harvard University. As an active performer, author and composer, with these additional business skills from Harvard, he's a bit of an eccentric rarity in the music industry. Urban Guitar recently spoke with Anthony about his annual festival.

Urban Guitar: *Why did you originally put together the guitar festival?*

Anthony Glise: I think people launch a festival for very different, but very specific reasons: First, it's a great way to recruit students into a university guitar program, second, it's a way to further develop a higher national and international profile for your school and community and thirdly, it's a way to further build your own circle of like-minded colleagues.

In addition to all these aspects, even though I've lived and worked in a half dozen countries in the last 25

years, I have a bit of an obsession with my hometown, St. Joseph, where I decided to found the festival. It's a tremendous mid-sized city with an underground arts and music scene that is rare in cities twice the size.

I wanted to use the festival to develop the international profile of St. Joseph as a cultural and artistic center.

Urban Guitar: *Is founding a festival a worthwhile venture?*

Anthony Glise: I'd encourage anyone with the energy to found a festival, but you have to have a *lot* of patience (it usually takes 2-3 years for a festival to become internationally recognized) and be prepared for a terrifying time commitment and unless you have some financial support, you'll probably never see any financial gain.

For example, I have absolutely no staff, and put in between 600 and 800 hours a year on the St. Joseph festival. Last year was the first time that there was any budget for my festival directorship and that only came to around \$3500. Do the math: over the past 5 years that comes to \$1.14 per hour.

You have to *really* want a festival, and be a little crazy at the same time!

What a festival shouldn't be is a mercenary tool to manipulate others. There are a few festivals that run: "You do this for me and I'll hire you into my festival!" That causes a festival to simply become almost a type of "professional blackmail." There's no honor in that, and honor in the business - and in life - is everything! The music, school and community has to always come first.

Urban Guitar: *How has The St. Joseph Festival grown or changed over the years?*

Anthony Glise: One of the greatest boosts was when I added the competition. Through my endorsement contracts, we've ended up with commercial support from Audio Technica Mics, Marshall Amps, LaBella Strings, Mel Bay Publications and a host of other supporters.

This year we've added additional prizes to include paid concerts in Boston and Houston.

1 | [2](#) | [3](#) **NEXT**

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Main Stage :: Six-Strings in St. Joe (pg 2)

Six-Strings in St. Joe (pg 2)

May 08, 2007



Urban Guitar: *What artists will be in St. Joseph this year?*

Anthony Glise: This year our headliners are Aleksandr Tsiboulski, the Ukrainian-born guitarist who won 1st Prize in St. Joseph in 2006 and who just won 1st Prize in Tokyo, Val and Lucia, a brilliant flamenco music and dance company and Hungry Monks, who do a fantastic mixture of historical and Celtic music.

We also have post-concert jam sessions which have live remote radio and television feeds to the regional media, so we not only target serious classical players and audiences, but we involve the general public - which is the key to any festival's success!

Urban Guitar: *What level of players have you attracted to the St. Joseph competition?*

Anthony Glise: The level of competitors has been extremely high and they have come to St. Joseph from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Cyprus, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Poland, Serbia, Ukraine, Uruguay and throughout the US.

One of the fun aspects of the final round of the competition is that the audience members can vote and their

cumulative ballots are tallied as one vote and calculated with the professional jury. This has given the general public a very real sense of involvement and ironically the “untrained general audience” consistently votes the same as the jury. A little uncanny, but even a non-musician pick up on the different levels of the finalists!

Urban Guitar: *What other events will be held during the festival?*

Anthony Glise: Besides the concerts, masterclasses and free, open jam sessions, we also focus on career development lectures. This year we have David Burke, an advisor to Yahoo, presenting a lecture on how to develop your website. We've had lectures by Getz Color Graphics about how to get your promotional materials ready for print, Thomas Ransom [Owner of Ransomed Studios] lecturing on recording techniques for guitar, and a representative from Volunteer Lawyers and Accounts for the Arts discussing legal and contract issues that face performers.

[PREVIOUS](#) | [1](#) | [2](#) | [3](#) | [NEXT](#)

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[Six String Station](#)

Main Stage :: Six-Strings in St. Joe (pg 3)

Six-Strings in St. Joe (pg 3)

May 08, 2007



Urban Guitar: *What have been some highlights from past years that you'd like to share?*

Anthony Glise: Actually, the festival itself is the highlight! There's a tremendous "buzz" around this part of the country every year when the festival starts.

Urban Guitar: *What are your ideas for future festivals?*

Anthony Glise: I'm already developing a marketing plan to expand the festival to different cities in order to build a series of back-to-back guitar festivals. I also direct "Six Strings and the Spirit" guitar festival in Chartres, France, just south of where I live in Europe. I'm very interested in developing this type of festival series between the US and key European cities.

Urban Guitar: *Do you have any suggestions for anyone interesting in starting a festival?*

Anthony Glise: The list is pretty long but I'll give you a few of the main things you should consider at the beginning.

1) Look at your long-range goals for founding a festival:

- Is it to build the guitar program at your university? If so, make damned sure that they WANT a bigger guitar program! Otherwise, you can spend years building the festival as a recruitment tool only to find out that the institution doesn't actually want the higher enrollment. You could have your classes “capped” and then you've done years of unpaid work for nothing.
- Is it to build a higher regional or national profile? Make sure that you or someone on your staff has the marketing skills to design a marketing plan that will insure that success.
- Is it to build a local publicity image for your community? Get the local government, city council and visitor's bureau 100% behind you since they'll have many of the resources to help at the beginning.

2) Get a serious - *written* - financial commitment from your local arts society, school, university and/or music stores - a 5-year commitment is realistic. Even an annual \$10,000 commitment is enough (which is nothing in the grand scheme of how they will be able to use the publicity, if they're competent). Without that financial support you're going to have major problems, probably never get paid and lose thousands of hours of your time that you could have used to develop your own career.

3) Get a staff. Since I don't have access to any staff support, I do everything myself and it's a killer! I wouldn't recommend this kind of “solo act.”

4) Don't do *anything* without a contract and discuss that contract with a lawyer.

5) Finally, if it's not working out the way you want, don't be afraid do cut your losses. If the festival doesn't fly or have the support you need to keep from killing yourself, just let it go. It's unfortunate, but some cities can support a festival and some simply can't. There's no shame in simply saying, “this isn't working!” On the other hand, I think you'd be surprised at how many people will step up to the plate to help you out.

[PREVIOUS](#) | [1](#) | [2](#) | [3](#)

Renaissance man:

For more info about Anthony Glise, visit:

<http://www.anthonyglise.com/>

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