Williams met highest expectations

By Dr. John P. Cannon (Dr. Cannon is the head of the Houston Classic Guitar Society).

"Guitar par excellence!" The challenge of this herald was met and fulfilled at last Friday's recital of John Williams in Hamman Hall.

The twenty-five year old guitar virtuoso gave a brilliant performance of music ranging from ancient to contemporary, revealing genuine artistry as well as complete technical control of his instrument.

The beautiful quality of sound he evoked, together with a wide variety of tonal color, provided a constant source of musical satisfaction.

The program began with two dances from Terpsichore by Michael Praetorius, tastefully by transcribed by Mr. Williams. The first has a stately but singing theme with contrapuntal embroidery. The second centers the well-known theme "La Volta." Both were spirited renditions.

Equally splendid was the reading given the Overture by Sylvius Weiss, a lutenist and contemporary of J. S. Bach. Three sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti revealed how well this harpsichord music transfers to the guitar, perhaps enhanced by the guitar's softer and sweeter sound.

Paganini on Guitar

Bach's Third Lute Suite concluded the first half of the program. Mr. Williams gave the piece a sensitive and sympathetic interpretation. The very slight increase in audience noise after progression from quiet to robust passages gave ample evidence of the close attention the artist had won from the audience.

Following intermission came the third movement of the Grand Sonata in A Major for solo guitar and violin accompaniment, here transcribed by Mr. Williams for guitar alone.

This is Paganini's most satisfying work for guitar, reminding us that Paganini himself was an accomplished guitarist. Similar to his Violin Caprices, the piece's intriguing melody and variations explore the technical capabilities of the guitar.

Ancient and Modern

In sharp contrast was the Partita for Guitar of the young English composer Stephen Dodgson, who successfully adapts the contemporary idiom to an ancient musical form. Since Dodgson is not a guitarist, the work is free of many of the cliches of the guitarist-composer, and therefore comes as a refreshing adventure.

The formal program concluded with two perennial concert favorites, Asturias and Sevilla of I. Albeniz. Written for the piano to capture the sound of Spain, which is itself moulded by the sound of the guitar, the pieces are enhanced by their return to this instrument. The brilliant execution brought the concert to an exciting climax.

As an encore Mr. Williams played the Recuerdos de la Alhambra of Tarrega, founder of the modern school of guitar technique at the end of the nineteenth century. Conceived as at tremolo study, the work has an incomparable haunting beauty.

At the concert, Mr. Williams revealed himself as a musician in the fullest sense, capturing his audience and winning a standing ovation from the capacity plus house. The Student Center Board is to be congratulated for sponsoring the first Houston appearance of an artist who is carrying forward the tradition of this unusual but increasingly popular concert instrument.