

**Review****Cleveland Classical Guitar Society & BlueWater Chamber Orchestra present Robert Gruca with the BlueWater String Quartet (January 20)**

by Daniel Hathaway



Our politicians could learn a lot about working together from three of Cleveland's musical groups. The Cleveland Classical Guitar Society is joining with BlueWater Chamber Orchestra and Les Délices to present joint concerts this month and next. On January 20, CCGS and BWCO presented guitarist Robert Gruca with the BlueWater String Quartet in Spanish, Italian and Latin music at First Unitarian in Shaker Heights. Next month, Les Délices will play two concerts with lutenist Nigel North and soprano Carrie Henneman Shaw on February 16 and 17 jointly sponsored by CCGS.

Collaborations like these can be beneficial in a number of ways: combining two distinct audiences, sharing expenses, developing unusual programs. The list goes on. Though the longterm effects of such joint projects are still to be measured, good vibes abounded at Sunday's well-attended concert.

The January 20 program featured two quintets for guitar and string quartet featuring Gruca with violinists Ken Johnston and Molly Fung-Dumm, violist Alexandra Vago and cellist Kent Collier, two solo works for violin and guitar played by Gruca and Johnston and a substantial guitar solo.

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Sonatina* for violin and guitar, op. 205 is one of a hundred works the Florentine-born composer wrote for guitar (he emigrated to Hollywood at the beginning of World War II and wrote twice that many movie scores). The three-movement piece remains sunny and cheerful even in the second movement (marked *malincolico*) and kept both Gruca and violinist Ken Johnston busy, the former with lots of figuration, the latter with an astonishing number of melodic sequences.

On the second half, Gruca and Johnston returned for Joaquín Nin y Castellanos's *Suite Espagnole*, a spirited travelogue of Old Castile, Murcia, Asturia and Andaluz full of double stops, syncopations and surprise endings. (Nin, a Cuban of Catalan origin who died in 1949, was the father of Anaïs Nin, which would be to simplify a very complicated rela-

tionship). Both the *Sonatina* and the *Suite* are sophisticated salon pieces, easy to listen to but perhaps not so easy to play.

Both halves of the concert ended with quintets, Mauro Giuliani's early Romantic period *Gran quintetto* and contemporary Cuban composer Leo Brouwer's *Quintetto*. The Giuliani began portentously with a dramatic *Introduction* capped by a long cello trill, then seemed to remember it was supposed to be a happy, uncomplicated piece and recovered that thought in a theme and variations movement and a brisk *Polonaise*.

The Brouwer began with an energetic and rhythmically complex *Allegro—piu mosso*, continued with an unnamed, unmarked middle movement based on a viola *ostinato* answered by muted strings, then a several-sectioned *Finale* that began with hints of the opening movement, led to a slow section and concluded with a bizarre waltz.

Gruca's solo piece, 20<sup>th</sup> century Paraguayan composer Agustín Barrios Mangoré's Bach-inspired *La Catedral* provided variety in the middle of the second half and allowed Gruca to show off his admirable technique, especially in the perpetual motion third section.

It was interesting to spend an afternoon listening to completely unfamiliar chamber music performed by fine musicians. It would be worthwhile to hear it all again, especially the Brouwer *Quintetto*, which sounded intriguing but seemed, like several works on the program, to need both more rehearsal time and time for the players to let it settle in.

A significant chunk of this concert, which lasted an hour and 45 minutes, was spent in furniture moving — something the CCGS and BWCO might want to think about in the future. With only five musicians, it seems overly fastidious to break down a setup that will be needed to be restored again only minutes later. And with such unfamiliar music, would a line or two about the composers be more useful to the audience than elaborate bios of the performers?

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