

Northeast Ohio Grammy nominees, Part I: Jason Vieaux up for Best Classical Instrumental Solo

by Mike Telin



Guitarist Jason Vieaux's solo album, *Play*, is among the five 2015 Grammy Award nominees in the category of Best Classical Instrumental Solo. The awards ceremony will take place on February 8 at Los Angeles's Staples Center.

The album, released in January 2014 by Cleveland's Azica Records, includes showpieces by Barrios, Sagreras, Bustamante, and Sainz De La Maza, as well as Tárrega's *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* and *Capricho Arabe*, Vieaux's own arrangement of Duke Ellington's *In A Sentimental Mood*, and Andrew York's *Sunburst*, which had "Encores" as its original working title.

"The album is a culmination of Jason's twenty years as a touring artist, a retrospective of encores," Azica's Bruce Egge, who engineered the recording, said in a recent conversation. "It took us months to figure out the title," said producer Alan Bise. "We wanted it to say something interesting without becoming cheesy."

How much does a title really matter these days? "That's a good question," Egge said. "With so much product coming out, especially in the classical world, you need to put something out there that is a little bit distinctive. What do you call an album of Haydn string quartets?" They settled on *Play*, and Egge admitted that the title has grown on him.

The process of becoming one of the five nominees in each Grammy category is complex, and belongs solely to the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS). "Anyone who is a member can submit a recording for consideration," Bise said. "It doesn't have to be one that they have worked on. It could just be a recording that they really love. Simply being submitted for consideration is not an achievement."

Bise believes that there were over 400 recordings submitted in the Best Classical Instrumental Solo category. “The top five vote-getters become Nominees, and the top vote-getter among the five will win.”

In order to become a member of NARAS, you have to have ‘Credits.’ “You have to be listed as an engineer, producer, or artist on at least five commercial recordings. Then you apply, get approved and pay a membership fee. Then you can vote,” Bise said. “Album designers and liner note writers can also become members, but they are restricted to certain voting categories.”

Both Egre and Bise joined NARAS early in their careers and are part of each year’s Grammy voting process, whether or not they have projects under consideration.

“Voting on the initial 400 submissions is a bit of a popularity process.” Bise added, “That’s when people tend to vote for collaborators and friends.”

“That’s why I think it’s great that Jason was nominated after being a touring artist for 20 years,” Egre said. “You gradually amass a body of work, the voting membership gets to know you, and over time and having built a great career, you get the nomination. It does take time. If you’re a one-off artist and submit something, your chances of getting a nomination are fairly slim.”

“Unlike solo artists,” Bise said, “in the orchestral and choral categories, people can amass voting power by having members of the ensembles become NARAS members. Then you can wield 60 to 100 votes.”

Once the nominees have been declared, each member receives a ballot from NARAS for each category in which they are allowed to vote. “This year, we voted Taylor Swift for Album of the Year,” Bise said. “Jason loves heavy metal, so he was able to vote for Mastodon. Myself, I like Bluegrass/Americana.”

“In the old days you always wondered if anyone was listening to any of this stuff,” Egre noted. “But now, thanks to technology, you get a bright yellow piece of paper that says ‘Vote responsibly. Go to GrammyPro.com and listen to the nominees.’ All the nominated product is available there, so people can listen to everything. That has been going on for a few years now.”

Bise finds that very useful. “If I want to make a decision about the strongest entry in the chamber music category, I can listen to the complete recordings of all five nominees. It’s also helpful to keep up with the latest engineering trends. This is important for us to do and they are making it easy for us.”

Jason Vieaux's nomination has had a positive impact on Azica's business. "We immediately started getting calls from people who wanted to use our production services and to be on the Azica label," Bise said. "The list of inquiries is longer than ever before. I'm having trouble getting through my production work because of receiving so many proposals and chatting with people on the phone. The level of the artists who are coming to us is also stepping up, and this is all part of a growth pattern among record labels."

Egre notes that a Grammy nomination is a big deal. "The importance of a Grammy Award is clear and people find nominations and wins impressive. I'm not sure how this is going to translate into gigs for Jason."

But as Bise added, "Jason's manager has been working on some presenters for months, and in the first week after the nominations were announced, three of them committed to dates. And this is how artists make their money, not on recordings, but on performances."

Bise went on to say, "One reason we are really proud of Jason is that Azica doesn't really have voting power. We voted for him of course, and hopefully our Azica artists voted for him, but the fact that he got the nomination means that there are a lot of people out there who don't have a business or financial interest in him, but they also thought the album was really great. That says something."

Were Egre and Bise surprised about the nomination? "Sure we were surprised," Egre said. "We've been in business since 1992 and have submitted recordings for consideration for 15 out of those 22 years. This is the first recording that's been nominated outside of the engineering category. And you can count on one hand the number of solo classical guitar recordings that have been nominated in the past few years. That also makes it special."

"Jason is a long-time core Azica artist," Bise noted, "and a close friend as well. So for us this is a very special nomination."

Published on ClevelandClassical.com January 20, 2015.

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