

Cleveland Classical Guitar Society International Series to present Vladimir Gorbach

by Mike Telin



On Saturday, April 11 at 7:30 pm at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights, the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society will present the final concert of this season's International Series with a performance by Vladimir Gorbach. "I'm really looking forward to the concert and getting to know Cleveland," the Russian-born guitarist said during a telephone conversation from Los Angeles. "After winning the 2011 Guitar

Foundation of America competition, I did perform in Ohio as part of the winner's tour, but this will be my first time in Cleveland." Gorbach's debut performance will feature works by Miguel Llobet, Domenico Scarlatti, J.S. Bach, Dionisio Aguado, Ástor Piazzolla, and Alberto Ginastera. A special pre-concert performance by students from CCGS's education program will begin at 6:50.

I began our conversation by asking [Vladimir Gorbach](#) to say a few words about his program.

Miguel Llobet's *Variaciones sobre un tema de Fernando Sor*: "This is one of the most popular themes ever. The *tema* is an old Spanish/Portuguese sarabande, and during the 1700s composer-players like Mauro Guilliani would write variations on it. But as the new century came along, Llobet and other players thought these pieces weren't challenging enough so they began to write their own, which are more diverse in color and virtuosity. I'm sure that Llobet played Sor's version in his own concerts, but Llobet was kind of like Stravinsky, who said, 'I like the musical idea, but I would do it this way.' In fact the theme and the first three variations in this piece are Sor's, but the rest are by Llobet."

Domenico Scarlatti's *Sonatas K. 239, 87 and 27*: "Scarlatti's keyboard sonatas have always been an inspiration for guitarists. He spent the majority of his life in Spain, and was one of the pioneers of folk and Spanish flamenco music. But the diversity of his sonatas and the specifics of the keyboard instruments of that time enable guitarists to make very nice arrangements of them. They're short and usually played in sets. I've chosen to use the fast-slow-fast approach, so the three sonatas will work like a multi-movement piece."

Are these Gorbach's own arrangements? "I took the Llobet path. I first used someone else's arrangements but I changed things around a little, so they feel like they're mine. The arrangement of the first one, K. 239, is by David Russell. It's very nicely arranged so I didn't touch a thing."

J.S. Bach's *Suite BWV 997*: "This is one of the real pearls of the guitar repertoire. We're lucky to have it. It is originally for lute or keyboard, but it is our piece. I think that when you look at Bach's output, it is one of the most exciting suites. It has an unusual fugue, which is written in *da capo* form, so the fugue not only begins the movement, but also returns at the end. This approach is unusual for Bach."

Dionisio Aguado's *Andante and Rondo No. 3*: "This is *the* standard piece to learn in all of the guitar repertoire and is often found on repertoire lists of competitions. It is also an example of a piece by a 19th century guitarist and composer who drew on material from music of the day — like operas, popular sonatas and symphonies. When I hear this piece, I can kind of sense that Beethoven was around. Of course there are parts in it where Aguado is showing off his own abilities as a player. He was also a well-known teacher and wrote an extensive guitar method that is still used today."

Ástor Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*: "It's a wonderful piece that's always fun to play. It's also a great arrangement by Sergio Assad, an excellent guitarist and a composer who has such a deep feeling for the instrument. Although the piece was originally written for Piazzolla's quintet, Assad didn't approach his arrangement by leaving out a lot of stuff, like many arrangements of these pieces do. It's a very interesting adaptation that feels 100% like a guitar piece, which is a rare thing."

Alberto Ginastera's *Sonata, op. 4*: "I think this is one of the most important works written for the guitar in the last 50 years. It was written in 1976, and it still stands alone as a stellar work by a major composer. In general, the guitar is considered to be a difficult instrument to write for. There are many challenges that a lot of non-guitar composers cannot overcome — 'why can't you play this chord here, or why can you play it here but not there?' We are all grateful that Ginastera took the time to learn how to write idiomatically for the instrument. It's a very inspiring piece, very modern, and all about the music of South America, specifically Argentina, which is a guitar country."

How did Vladimir Gorbach, who is from Siberia, discover the classical guitar? “Russians really like music and have a lot of access to the piano and violin, but when I was growing up it was easier to get to the guitar. This was during the 1980s, when baroque music from the West started making its way into Russia, so we were able to hear a lot of music performed on the guitar. As a first instrument to learn, it was even more popular than the piano or violin. I have an older brother who played guitar, and I guess that’s how I got hooked. Eventually I spent a lot of time playing it too. I guess my parents saw this and thought the proper path would be to study with a teacher. I did not oppose the idea.”

Is there a Russian school of classical guitar playing? “Yes, but it is very new, although it is now a very strong one given how many emerging young Russian classical guitarists there are. This was not the case in the past. The pedagogical power of the guitar in Russia came to its peak in the 1980s and 1990s, when there were finally enough teachers and music to learn from and play. The work ethic was borrowed from the Russian piano and violin schools — it’s a very systematic and serious approach. In Russia, if you study music you pretty much have the opportunity to do it professionally from an early age. That’s how the system was built. Guitarists were very fortunate to be able to get on that train of education. So there is a Russian school, and although it’s not *Russian* Russian, it has given the world good Russian musicians who play this originally Spanish instrument.”

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