

Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival: Petra Poláková and Lorenzo Micheli talk about repertoire

By Mike Telin



The 2016 edition of the Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival will get under way on Friday morning, June 3, at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Today *ClevelandClassical.com* talks with two of the artists who will be performing at this year's festival about their programs.

On Saturday, June 4 at 3:00 pm in Mixon Hall, Czech guitarist Petra Poláková will present a free recital that

centers around the music of Polish-born lutenist Sylvius Leopold Weiss. A contemporary of J.S. Bach, Weiss composed sixty-six lute sonatas, of which thirty-four are thought to be lost. The ones that survive, however, are a treasure trove of late baroque dances.

"I'm preparing a recording project of Weiss's music," Poláková said during a Skype interview. "Although the pieces were originally written for the lute, they work very well when played on the nine-string Romantic guitar that I will be using."

Works by Weiss will include *Tombeau Sur La Mort De M. Comte De Logy*, "Passagaille" from *Suite XIV*, *Suite XXV* "L'infidèle," and four movements from the *Suite II*.

To round out her Baroque-centric program, Poláková will also include works from the 20th century by Manuel de Falla and Maurice Ohana. "The music of Weiss is difficult to combine with other styles of music, so to pair them with modern pieces that have a connection to the baroque style works well," she said. "Of course I could play only music of Weiss, but I wanted to make the program more colorful."

Moroccan-born composer Maurice Ohana (1913-1992) borrowed on the famous bassline *LaFolia* for his set of variations titled *Tiento*. “The piece is from the mid-50s, and you can hear the Baroque influences, but with a modern slant,” Polácková said. “The beginning is very aggressive and full of energy, even a little bit angry. Then the tempo changes and the melodic material is filled with tango accents. Finally, it moves to a quiet, meditative section. It’s a wonderful piece and I think the audience will like it.” Polácková will conclude her program with Manuel de Falla’s *Homenaje* “Le Tombeau de Debussy.”

On Sunday, June 5, at 11:30 am in Studio 217, Petra Polácková will present a master class. “I’m looking forward to this because I was so impressed with the level of playing last time I was here. This year even more people applied for the master class so I’m very happy about that.”

On Saturday, June 4 at 8:00 pm the Italian guitarists Matteo Mela and Lorenzo Micheli, aka SoloDuo, will present a program of music they like. “I would be lying if I said there was a musicological reason behind it,” Lorenzo Micheli said during a telephone conversation, “because it really is just music that we love to play.”

SoloDuo will open their program with three sonatas by Scarlatti. “We’ve been recording all of the sonatas by Scarlatti over the past year, so we’ll select three sonatas out of the fifteen that we play on the recording.”

The program will continue with Mela and Micheli’s own arrangement of Claude Debussy’s *Suite Bergamasque*. Micheli explained that they made the two-guitar arrangement to show that Debussy’s music has something different to say when played on strings, rather than on piano. “It’s not an attempt to sound like a piano,” he said. “Debussy’s music suggests so many colors, and with the two guitars you can capture those hidden colors that can be found in the score. Besides, it’s hard to find somebody who doesn’t like Debussy. It’s very complex music but it appeals to all sorts of listeners, from the most informed to the most casual.”

Mauro Giuliani’s arrangement of Bellini’s “Sinfonia” from the opera *Il pirata* will conclude the first half of the program.

Opening the second half will be the great guitar duo Ida Presti and Alexandre Lagoya’s arrangement of Bach’s *French Suite No. 5*, BWV 816. “We’ve played and recorded this piece many years ago,” Micheli pointed out. “We put it away for a while, and we decided to take it out again, this time to focus on really playing in the French style, with shorter lines and a rhythmic unevenness. Italians tend to see music with long melodic

lines everywhere, so our challenge is having two Italians onstage attempting to play music by a German composer in a French style, which is quite a paradox.”

Another work that SoloDuo has played and recorded is Piazzolla’s *Tango Suite*, which concludes the program. “We’ve been playing this piece forever, and it is the only work we’ve recorded twice. Like the Bach, we play it and then drop it, and every time we pick it up again we discover new things in it. That’s either because we didn’t play it very well before, or because we’ve become better players. I’m not sure what the reason is, but there has to be a reason for why all of a sudden you see new things.”

On Sunday, June 5 at 11:30 am, SoloDuo will present a master class in Studio 113. In addition to their individual teaching positions in Geneva, Switzerland (Mela), and Lugano, Italy (Micheli), SoloDuo are Artists in Residence at the University of Colorado at Boulder. “Performing and teaching keeps us very busy,” Micheli said. “2016 is an active year for us as a duo in North America: we will be there five times, and a couple of those for 20 days or more. But the audiences are great, and the students are wonderful.

On Friday, June 3, we’ll speak with Colin Davin about his program that closes the Festival on Sunday, June 5 at 7:30 pm.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 2, 2016.

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