

Cleveland Classical Guitar Society: Les Frères Méduses at Plymouth (Feb. 24)

by Robert Rollin



Last Saturday night February 24, Les Frères Méduses (The Jellyfish Brothers) completed their Cleveland residency with a concert at Shaker Heights' Plymouth Church focusing on 21st Century music for two guitars. The Duo, Frenchman Benoit Albert and Ohio native Randall Avers, featured their own improvisations, which were tossed off with flair and impeccable ensemble.

The highlight was a remarkably fresh improvisation that began with Avers gently sliding his fingers on the strings to create eerie sounds, as Albert produced penetrating-but-quiet pizzicatos. Next they paired in loud *rasgado* — flamenco-like strumming. A more lyrical section followed, first with gentle harmonics and later with a louder ostinato pattern answered with accented cross-rhythm triplets.

Avers' own composition, *Mekanisk Rhapsodie* (2013) adapted an earlier, flexible length improvisatory multi-media composition commissioned for a tour of Norwegian elementary schools. It incorporated pre-1923 footage by the early silent film creator George Méliès.

The new chamber version begins with an ingratiating loud and fast section using Eastern European 2- and 3-note rhythmic groupings and syncopations. Brief impressionistic descending arpeggios announce the slower and lyrical middle, followed by a codetta using the opening material.

The first of Albert's *Trois Caprices* (2010), inspired by Francisco Goya's painting, "Les Caprices," begins with a lively syncopated section. An intermezzo-like mood follows, emphasizing the lowest three notes of the Phrygian Mode.

The *Second Caprice* begins with a slow recitative. Soon the two musicians united in an enormous crescendo. Moody pianississimo harmonics follow, and rapid statements of the first five notes of the Aeolian Mode dominate the closing texture.

The *Third Caprice* opens with a *presto*, and is soon followed by a *moderato* with interesting octave doublings. A clipped conversation between the two guitars ends with a surprising, soft interrogative phrase.



The Duo worked in local schools and began the concert with a student trio playing the dreamy and entrancing *Aquarium* from Saint Saens' *Carnival of the Animals*. Next, student Damian Goggans joined the soloists in Leonhardt de Cano's *Rondo*. The charming early classical trio elicited considerable applause.

Serbian-American composer Dušan Bogdaović's *No Feathers On This Frog* has much in common with Erik Satie's witty and cryptically-titled experimental compositions. A dense chordal texture alternates with elegant softer thirds and some octave doublings.

An improvisation entitled *Noise* employed tapping on the guitars, an Eastern European scale beginning with an augmented second, and changing groupings of twos and threes. It ends with unisons and a rousing *staccatissimo* chord.

Bulgarian composer-guitarist Atanas Ourkouzounov's *Broken Grooves* and Serbian composer-guitarist Goran Ivanovic's *Ethno Dance* closed the concert. Both used the aforementioned new guitar techniques and featured Eastern European rhythms.

The Duo ended with their own improvised encore, a popular sounding, fast-moving piece with flashy bright colors. At its conclusion the audience burst into appreciative applause.

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