

Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival: Duo Melis, partners onstage and off

by Mike Telin



Beginning on Friday, June 8 and continuing through Sunday, June 10 at the Cleveland Institute of Music, the 2018 edition of the Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival will feature thirteen artists and ensembles, five concerts, nine master classes, and three lectures.

“Cleveland is a special place for us,” Susana Prieto said by telephone from her home in Greece. “Apart from the great hall we have a special relationship with Armin Kelly. He presented us as a duo for the first time in the States. He believed in us and we always like to come back to the Festival.”

On Saturday, June 9 at 8:00 pm in Mixon Hall, Susana Prieto will join her [Duo Melis](#) partner, Alexis Muzurakis, in a concert that will include works by Granados, Kapustin, Lhoyer, Piazzolla, Rodrigo, and Scarlatti. The Duo will also present a master class on Sunday, June 10 at 11:30 am in CIM Studio 217. That event is free and open to the public. Click [here](#) to view the Festival’s full schedule. Tickets are available [online](#).

“We like to include a lot of variety in our programs,” Prieto said, “and this one includes pieces from the Baroque era to the 20th century.”

The program will open with *Tonadilla* by Joaquín Rodrigo. “He is one of the most important composers for the guitar in the 20th century,” Prieto said. “Everyone knows the *Concierto de Aranjuez*, but we’re lucky *Tonadilla* was written for guitar duo. It’s an interesting work that is full of Spanish colors.”

The program moves to the classical period with Antoine de Lhoyer's *Duo No. 3*. "We've played several of his duos and we like them a lot. He's a French composer and his music was only discovered a few years ago. We think he must have had a guitar ensemble because most of his works are for duos and trios, and it was not common for composers to write for those combinations rather than solo guitar. His music is interesting harmonically: it's closer to Haydn than to Mauro Giuliani or Fernando Sor."

Also included on the first half of the program will be the Duo's transcription of Nikolai Kapustin's *Toccatina*. "It's very virtuosic with a jazz flavor," Prieto said. "It's a small piece but really fun."

The second half begins with a visit to the Baroque era via three sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti. "It's common to hear his music performed on the guitar and we love playing it. His music is interesting because it is neither Italian or Spanish — it's a mixture in a style that is his own."

Another of the Duo's transcriptions included on the program is Enrique Granados' *Valses Poéticos*, a work Prieto said is often played on solo guitar. "With two players it's easier to be musically free. His music is not as folkloric as many composers from that time like Albéniz or de Falla. Granados is more impressionistic."

The evening will conclude with Astor Piazzolla's *Tango Suite*. "Again we are lucky that it was written for guitar duo. He composed it for the Assad brothers and it's a great piece."

In addition to being duo partners, Alexis Muzurakis and Susana Prieto are also partners in life. Prieto pointed out that they were a couple before they decided to form Duo Melis. "We met at a guitar festival and were both playing solo concerts, and Alexis was already part of a duo," she said. But the couple's move to Germany to further their studies made it more difficult for Muzurakis to continue with his duo.

"At one point we decided to try playing together," Prieto said. "It was a nice experience and we really loved it and decided to concentrate on our own duo. So first we were a couple, and then we became a couple onstage." In addition to concertizing, Muzurakis and Prieto also teach at the Conservatoire National de Région de Strasbourg in France.

Wrapping up our conversation, I asked Prieto how it is that classical guitarists all seem to know each other. "Let's say it's a small world," she said. "Most of our time is spent working at festivals, and because of that you get to stay for a week with your

colleagues. And after so many years you know most of them. We met Jason Vieaux for the first time in Cleveland, and now we see him here and there when he comes to Europe, and it's always very nice. He's a great friend."

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