

Review**Cleveland Chamber Music Society: Cuarteto Casals
with guitarist Manuel Barrueco at Plymouth (October 29)**

by Daniel Hathaway



Last Tuesday evening at Plymouth Church, Cuarteto Casals warmed up a chilly, drizzly evening with sunny Iberian music that invoked the Mediterranean Sea and the night sounds of Madrid — with a bit of a detour into neighboring France in the middle. The Barcelona-based string quartet brought along the esteemed, Cuban-born guitarist, Manuel Barrueco, for quintets written by or inspired by those of Italian cellist Luigi Boccherini, who spent two extended sojourns in Spain, and the large audience was swelled on this occasion by members of the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society, who co-sponsored the event with the Cleveland Chamber Music Society.

Catalonian composer Eduardo Toldrà (1895-1962) subscribed to an anti-modernist movement, "1900-ism". Though his cheerful and tuneful 1920 quartet, *Vistes al mar*, based on three sea-related poems by Catalonian poet Joan Maragall, may have bucked against prevailing trends, the piece is thoroughly engaging and makes a delightful concert opener. Its lyrical lines, solid sense of form and rhythmic thrust were masterfully revealed by the players, who achieved an elegant blend and brought a catalog of nuances to their task.

Debussy's sole contribution to the string quartet repertory also received a finely-wrought performance by Cuarteto Casals, who dazzled with the soft colors they laid over the rhythmic intensity of the first movement, found the lyricism underneath the second movement's predominant pizzicatos and applied subtle voicings even to the vibrant and passionate finale.

Boccherini took over in the second half, first with Puerto Rican-born composer Roberto Sierra's *Fantasia sobre la "Musica Notturna delle Strade de Madrid de Luigi Boccherini,"* commissioned by Manuel Barrueco for this United States tour with Cuarteto Casals. The Boccherini original, a string quintet, collected various nocturnal urban sounds the composer heard as he wandered the streets of the Spanish capital. Sierra wrote, "my 21st century sounds are superimposed on this 18th-century landscape. In my *Fantasia*, the past stands in a dialectic relationship to the present; they do not negate each other, the result is a harmonious atemporal soundworld."

The result is actually something like Charles Ives meets Boccherini, though in this case a gentle, gauzy chaos is accomplished by layering rather than through direct musical collision. The quartet and guitar simulate trendy ambient effects and a variety of random sounds over Boccherini's evocative, old-style music. The effect is ear-tickling but goes on rather too long before the piece ends with a lyrical guitar *coda*.

Unretouched Boccherini ended the evening: the famous D-major "*Fandango*" quintet began with a gentle pastorale subtly colored by the guitar and proceeded to a second movement the cellist-composer obviously wrote as a showpiece for himself — flights of virtuosity including high harmonics were handled splendidly by Boccherini's stand-in, Arnau Tomàs. The concluding *Fandango* — like a jazz piece — gave everybody (including violinists Abel Tomàs and Vera Martínez, and violist Jonathan Brown) an opportunity to shine in variations over a repeated, two-chord matrix. Dozens of heads suddenly turned when Arnau Tomàs doubled on castanets toward the end.

A delighted and enthusiastic audience demanded several call-backs and were rewarded with an extra piece, a dance by DeFalla dedicated to Manuel Barrueco, whose final performance of the tour was Tuesday evening. Throughout the second half of the concert, Barrueco contributed a special voice to the musical texture, both subtle and irreplaceable. We hope he'll return for a solo recital some day soon.

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