

## Cleveland Classical Guitar Society: Cavatina Duo makes Cleveland debut (Nov. 15)

by Jarrett Hoffman



Chamber groups and marriages alike have their moments of unity and discord. The Cavatina Duo was the perfect case study Saturday night at Plymouth Church. Making their Cleveland debut with the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society, the married couple duo of guitarist Denis Azabagić and flutist Eugenia Moliner together made sweet, sweet music — and also aired some of their dirty laundry in extensive onstage talking.

One of those sweet spots was Piazzolla's *Adiós Nonino*, which held special significance for the duo. The composer wrote it in memory of his father, and before beginning the piece, her voice breaking, Moliner revealed that her own father had recently passed.

It's always a question whether that level of emotion will weigh down or ignite a performer, but the latter certainly won out for this duo. They unfolded the performance like storytellers holding you close with every word — or every musical gesture, like Azabagić's aggressive strumming, Moliner's fiery, shooting air sounds, or the duo's super sudden drops in volume. The piece seemed to navigate different stages of grief, including anger, reflection, and listlessness. Only one mournful section seemed overdone, a bit amped up on flute vibrato.

A programmatic piece about whales, Takemitsu's *Towards the Sea*, for alto flute and guitar, was another highlight. Moliner brought out the alto flute's distinctly thicker, breathier sound, and in it you could feel the deep, ethereal atmosphere of the sea. Her flutters and Azabagić's playing filled out the environment with waves and smaller inhabitants of the sea. A gorgeously timed pause in the opening movement, "The Night," showed the duo's excellent sense of pacing and painted the quiet of the sea. The middle movement, "Moby Dick," captured sly whale hunters, but the closing "Cape Cod" didn't feel much different musically from anything that came before.

We could've done without the spoken introduction to the Takemitsu. First the performers seemed to go through a charade over which of them would speak. Then, when Azabagić finally went ahead, Moliner interrupted him to disagree about the facts of the piece. Azabagić mimed zipping his mouth shut and holding up his hands: *fine, go ahead*. "We're not fighting," Moliner insisted.

The mock-bickering extended to the tuning. Azabagić took much longer at it than Moliner, who rolled her eyes and sighed, drawing some laughs from the audience. Azabagić mocked her eye-rolling before the Takemitsu, and when he was alone onstage for Alan Thomas's vibrant solo piece *Out of Africa*, said, "Now I can tune all I want."

Fortunately a strong program mostly overshadowed the talking. J.S. Bach's *Sonata in C Major* for flute and continuo, BWV 1033 was a fine start to the evening, the duo setting the scene with a comfortable Andante. They closed each half with impressive, lively numbers in Claire Assad's angular *Three Balkan Pieces* and Fernando Sor's stirring *Variations on "O Cara Armonia" from Mozart's The Magic Flute*, arranged for flute and guitar by Alan Thomas. A warm standing ovation brought more Piazzolla — an encore performance of "Oblivion."

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