

Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival: Kondonassis and Vieaux “Together Again” (May 28)

by Mike Telin



On their debut recording *Together*, celebrated harpist Yolanda Kondonassis and Grammy Award-winning guitarist Jason Vieaux take listeners on a beautiful sonic journey that will mesmerizes from the first note to the last. On Thursday, May 28 at 8:00 pm in Mixon Hall at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Kondonassis and Vieaux will perform all of the music from the album in a recital presented as a part of the 2015 [Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival](#). The program will also include Antônio Carlos Jobim’s *A*

Felicidade (arranged for solo guitar) and Carlos Salzedo’s *Chanson dans la nuit*, for solo harp. CIM student performances will take place in the Pogue Lobby from 7:00 to 7:45 pm.

Recorded at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music’s Clonick Hall, *Together* was released in January of 2015 on the Azica Records, produced by Alan Bise with recording engineering by Bruce Egre. In their liner notes Kondonassis and Vieaux write: “We named this disc *Together* because the harp and the guitar share so many musical, physical, logistical and acoustical similarities. There are times when our sounds are so interwoven that it’s difficult to tell which of us is playing. That kind of collaborative fusion is incredibly rewarding — not to mention just plain fun.”

It is precisely those similarities that initially made me skeptical that two plucked instruments would be able to provide enough variety of sounds to hold your attention for 70 minutes. I never should have doubted the astute musical sensibilities of Kondonassis and Vieaux. With compositions by Máximo Diego Pujol, Alan Hovhaness and Xavier Montsalvatge, as well as commissioned works by Gary Schocker and Keith Fitch, the album is a banquet of evocative musical colors and subtle shifts in mood and musical styles. Kondonassis and Vieaux’s performances are superb, as is the recording’s sound quality.

Argentine composer Máximo Diego Pujol's *Suite Magica* (2008) is a four-movement composition inspired by dances from Pujol's homeland. The piece beautifully sets the tone for the album as well as acting as the perfect prelude to Xavier Montsalvatge's *Fantasia*. Alan Hovhaness's *Sonata for harp and guitar: "Spirit of Trees,"* is heavenly. As downright gorgeous as Kondonassis and Vieaux's performances of these three works are, the premiere recordings of the two commissioned pieces are the highlight of the album.

Composer and flutist Gary Schocker's *Hypnosis* for guitar and harp is a work in five short, musically engaging movements that leaves you wanting more. The second movement, "Elysian," truly captures the essence of the word — this is paradise. The fifth movement, and the album's title track, cries out for lyrics to be written for it. *Hypnosis* is well-crafted and its placement as the third piece on the album brings a welcome contemporary voice to the playlist.

The concluding work, Keith Fitch's *Knock on Wood* for guitar and harp, is seven minutes and ten seconds of musical fun. In this episodic work full of jazzy swaggering rhythms, Fitch has created a musical version of a children's game. As its title suggests, the players tap whimsical rhythms on their instruments, and Kondonassis and Vieaux have fun doing that.

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