

## Guitarist Paul Galbraith to present recital featuring works by Bach and Mozart (May 30)

by Mike Telin



On Saturday, May 30 at 4:00 pm in Mixon Hall at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Paul Galbraith (Scotland) will present a recital as part of the Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival. Galbraith's program will feature Bach's "Allemande" from the *Lute Suite in E minor*, BWV 996 and *Cello Suite No. 5*, BWV 1011 and *No. 1*, BWV 1007. The program also includes Mozart's "Allemande" from the unfinished *Suite in C*, K. 399 and the *Piano Sonata in F*, K. 570.

Due to Paul Galbraith's touring schedule, we were unable to speak to him by telephone, although he graciously agreed to answer some questions via e-mail.

*Mike Telin: Why did you choose these specific pieces?*

Paul Galbraith: This program came about through an open invitation from the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. They had asked for Bach/Mozart programs to be submitted by musicians for their approval, with a view to presenting a program consisting solely of those two composers. I submitted a group of pieces which was a kind of idealized program, showing links between Bach and Mozart, and presenting as a centre-piece a very demanding transcription of Mozart's K. 570 piano sonata. In fact, I hadn't yet learnt it when I sent the program to Washington, but as I was fairly convinced they wouldn't select a guitarist for such an event, I must admit I wasn't overly concerned. But then, they did select me, and I suddenly had a tremendous job on my hands! Anyway, the sequence of the program worked well, and I decided to continue playing it for a period, especially since this music never really gets tiring to play or work on — there's always

something new to explore. On the other hand, the Mozart in particular stretches you to the limit, with the added challenge that you have to make it seem easy.

*MT: Why have you chosen to play the first and second works (Bach and Mozart), without a pause, as well as the two Bach cello suites that will conclude the program?*

PG: The two initial Allemandes, one by each composer, sound very similar — as if Mozart had modeled his c-minor Allemande specifically on Bach's e-minor one from the 1st lute suite, improbable as this might sound. But Mozart's genius manages to have it both ways in that he simultaneously sounds like Bach and, unmistakably, like mature Mozart. So I play them without a break to highlight this connection.

In the case of the two Bach Suites in the second half, I paired them on purpose so that the third Lute Suite's a-minor key (on guitar) forms a gateway to the first cello suite's D-Major: you feel as if you've arrived home when you hear the opening of the second of the two suites. The two suites compliment one another beautifully, like spring following winter.

*MT: Are these your own arrangements?*

PG: Yes they are. My eight-string guitar is weird enough to ensure that everything I do these days ends up being a transcription, even original guitar works. All the fingerings are unique to my guitar with its special tuning.

*MT: What difficulties, if any, did you encounter when arranging Mozart for the guitar?*

PG: Mozart is notoriously difficult to transcribe, not just for guitar. He was a very instrumentally-aware composer. Bach by comparison was far less concerned about an instrument's color and peculiarities — his late *Art of Fugue*, for instance, was famously written with no instrumental specifications at all. Mozart would never have thought of doing such a thing. His inspiration was very much bound up with the instrument he was writing for. (In fact, you can even sometimes sense his relative dislike for a specific instrument, by a certain lowering of inspiration.)

He obviously enjoyed performing his own works, and the two instruments he most enjoyed playing were the keyboard — e.g. his extraordinarily mature piano concertos — and the viola (he lead from the first viola part of his great string quintets). Somehow you can tell he was writing for himself in those instances.

In any case, the late piano sonata I have chosen to transcribe for my guitar here is technically very gratifying to play — for the pianist! For the guitarist, it works, but only once you've developed a new set of techniques to cope with its many demands. But then,

this is one of the important ways — besides performing challenging original works, of course — in which his instrumental technique evolves.



*In a 2012 interview with this publication, Paul Galbraith talked about his 8-string “Brahms” guitar made by David Rubio (pictured above at Galbraith’s recital on the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society series at Plymouth Church, photo by Erik Mann.)*

*Mike Telin: What led you to make the decision to create this hybrid instrument?*

Paul Galbraith: I was aware of some of the limitations that the 6-string guitar imposes early on, in fact as early as when I was twelve, when learning my first Bach lute suite. When facing that material on guitar, you’re confronted with having to make decisions and compromises: you don’t have the necessary range to play what Bach writes, so you have to re-arrange things to fit. And it struck me even then: why don’t we have a wider-ranging instrument to play this great repertoire? Soon after, the same questions arose when playing the lute music of Dowland. Meanwhile, there were one or two prominent players who used instruments with a wider range.

Anyway, I kept the idea in the back of my mind, until one day it really became inevitable for me that a guitar with a wider range would better cope with the entire repertoire. It’s not just a question of the lute repertoire, or even transcriptions: much of the original

guitar repertoire, even by such central repertoire composers as Rodrigo, Tedesco and Henze, pushes the guitar to new limits, which frequently lie beyond the natural scope of the six-string instrument.

*MT: Did you need to make adjustments to your technique?*

PG: Not that many, as it turned out. I'd already previously played six-string guitar for years in a vertical position, which allowed for a wider range of technical options than those normally available in the standard guitar posture, using a footstool or equivalent. Things like a ready, open stretch available at any given moment to the left hand, and access to what Kreisler called "the lungs of the string player — the free wrist" in the right hand. So when the eight-string was finally ready, I dived straight in, feeling that I was still basically dealing with those same technical challenges that I had already been facing since I changed posture, only now extended to a wider set of coordinates.

*MT: On your website you write: "As a guitarist, I feel I am now able to start out again with a whole new world of unfolding possibilities, made available to me thanks to David Rubio and the development of the Brahms Guitar." Have you discovered advantages that you did not anticipate?*

PG: I knew Rubio would probably produce an instrument with his typical rich sound — he always was incredibly consistent — but I hadn't reckoned on quite how rich he would go with the sound of this new project! The first "prototype," as he called it, had a sound equivalent to the taste and feel of soft, dark Swiss chocolate... hence maybe the name he gave it: 'Brahms Guitar.'

*MT: You also write on your website: "Then I came to the idea that I could take advantage of my already cello-like vertical posture, and use a cello end-pin, whilst sitting up on a chair again, thus liberating the full resonance of the instrument. Later on, a resonance box, designed to further enrich the sound and volume of the guitar, was to complete his stage equipment." Can you explain how the resonance box works?*

PG: The resonance box simply enhances and subtly amplifies what's already there. It also helps smoothen out any rough edges. My second Rubio eight-string initially had a rather bright sounding first string, for instance, which the resonance box helped mitigate. The box gives a feeling similar to that of releasing the soft pedal on a good piano: with the box, you have a fuller resonance, one that seems more complete.

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