

**Review: Four artist recitals at the
Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival
(May 28-31)**

by ClevelandClassical Staff

The number of recitals during the fifteenth edition of the Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival at the Cleveland Institute of Music increased to six. ClevelandClassical correspondents attended the recitals by Jason Vieaux and Yolanda Kondonassis, Ricardo Gallén, Paul Galbraith, and Antonis Hatzinikolaou, all of which attracted large, enthusiastic audiences to Mixon Hall between May 28 and May 31.

Jason Vieaux and Yolanda Kondonassis (Thursday, May 28 at 8:00 pm)

by Daniel Hathaway



Guitarist Jason Vieaux (USA) and harpist Yolanda Kondonassis (USA) joined forces for the first recital on Thursday evening, revisiting the repertoire on their recent CD, *Together*, and adding one solo piece each.

The two artists brought a winning stage presence and a wonderful sense of ensemble playing to their performances. A mix of serious and lighter pieces and a variety of approaches to combining two plucked instruments of contrasting character precluded ear fatigue during the lengthy program.

Alan Hovhaness's *Sonata, Op. 374: "Spirit of Trees"* is the piece that first brought Vieaux and Kondonassis together. Its wide-ranging forms and multiple movements offer up vintage Hovhaness — exotic scales, diatonic melodies, ethnic dances, a canon, a fugue, and a variety of dialogues between the players.

Probably the best-constructed and most idiomatic work was Xavier Montsalvatge's *Fantasia*, which ended the program. Cadenzas explored the full sonic capabilities and ranges of both instruments, combining virtuosity with melodic elegance.

On the lighter side, Máximo Diego Pujol's *Suite Magica* brought a note of Argentine jazz, pop, and tango to the program, while Gary Schocker's *Hypnotized* allowed the performers to demonstrate their splendid ensemble playing in five widely varied styles.

Keith Fitch's *Knock on Wood* added a heady, playful *gravitas* to the evening, challenging Vieaux and Kondonassis to some tricky rhythmic interplay as well as some especially well-placed tapping effects.

Solo pieces (Jobim's beach-music-like *A Felicidade* and Salzedo's innovative *Chanson dans la nuit*) gave Vieaux and Kondonassis a refreshing moment alone with the audience, an appreciative crowd they sent home with a joint encore: Thiele and Weiss's *What a Wonderful World*.

Ricardo Gallén (Friday, May 29 at 8:00 pm)

by Mike Telin



On Friday evening, May 29 a relaxed Ricardo Gallén (Spain) presented a recital consisting of J.S. Bach's complete works for lute. Performing on a copy of a Johann Georg Stauffer romantic guitar built by Bernhard Kresse, Gallén produced a beautiful tone. His playing throughout was technically clean, full of expressive nuance, and rhythmically solid. His ornamentation sounded spontaneous and all transitions made musical sense — as if he were channeling the master composer.

He's a no-fuss performer. He bowed, sat down, and got on with the task at hand. Beginning with the *Suite*, BWV 995, Gallén's playing held the large audience in rapt attention as he nimbly tossed off even the most complicated technical passages. The "Sarabande" was lovely and the final "Gigue" brought the piece to a rousing conclusion. His inspired playing continued during the *Suite*, BWV 997. The first half ended with a wonderful pairing of the *Prelude*, BWV 999, and *Fuga*, BWV 1000.

During the second half, Gallén brought special spice to the "Courante" and "Bourée" of the *Suite*, BWV 996, and the "Prelude" and "Gavotte en Rondeaux" from the *Suite*, BWV 1006a, were splendidly played. His performance of the evening's final work, *Prelude, Fugue, and Allegro in Eb*, BWV 998 was spellbinding and the audience responded with an ovation. Alas, there was no encore, but what more could possibly have been said?

Paul Galbraith (Saturday, May 30 at 4:00 pm)

by Jeremy Reynolds



Inserting his endpin into his resonator box, guitarist Paul Galbraith (Scotland) launched into a program of Bach and Mozart. Galbraith is known for his innovative work with the instrument: he plays an upright eight-string “Brahms” guitar designed by English guitar-maker David Rubio and uses the resonator box to amplify his instrument’s enhanced range.

Beginning with the “Allemande” from the *Lute Suite in E minor*, BWV 996, Galbraith demonstrated an unusual approach to Bach’s music. Where many musicians will stretch or speed up the tempo for musical effect (*rubato*), Galbraith performed the “Allemande” — as well as the two cello suites on the latter portion of the program (No. 1, BWV 1007, and No. 5, BWV 1011)— with a rock-steady pulse. His brow furrowed in concentration, the guitarist produced a reverent murmur, each musical line distinct. The lower register of his extraordinary instrument added a depth of timbre that enriched the entire recital.

While he played Mozart’s “Allemande” from the *Baroque Suite*, K. 399 with the same consistency of rhythm as the Bach, Galbraith took ample liberty with Mozart’s *Piano Sonata in F Major*, K. 570. The fluidity of tempo allowed him to toss off the virtuosic passages with spritely nonchalance and to press forward during less demanding passages, always keeping the music exciting. Galbraith encoed with two Catalan folk songs.

Antonis Hatzinikolaou (Sunday, May 31 at 2:30 pm)

by Jeremy Reynolds

At the end of the first work on his Sunday afternoon program of 20th-century guitar music — “The Old Oak” from Konstantin Vassiliev’s *Three Forest Paintings*, Guitarist Antonis Hatzinikolaou (Greece) — shuddered passionately, using his entire body to help vibrate the final chord as it died away.

From Igor Stravinsky’s contemplative *Elegy* to Manuel de Falla’s exotic dirge, *Homenaje (pour le tombeau de Claude Debussy)*, Hatzinikolaou played with conviction, alternating between relaxed elegance and fiery vigor. In Nicholas Maw’s *Music of Memory* — the



longest work on the program — Hatzinikolaou delivered the passionate, improvisatory sections with the same care as the refined quotations from Felix Mendelssohn’s *String Quartet in A minor*, Op. 13.

Easily the highlight of the afternoon, Joaquin Rodrigo’s *Sonata Giocosa* allowed Hatzinikolaou to demonstrate a less dignified, more lighthearted exuberance. He smiled slightly, racing through the jocular passages with assurance. Though technical inconsistencies peppered his program, listeners leapt to their feet at the close of the concert.

Before sitting again to perform an encore, a choked up Hatzinikolaou told his audience: “I’m a little bit emotional ... I hope you’ll excuse me.” He explained that this was his first performance in the United States. “I’m going to play you a very nice largo I heard recently. I hope I remember it well enough to finish!” At the delicate final cadence, his audience was again on its feet, giving Hatzinikolaou a very warm welcome to the States indeed.

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