

## Gruca White Ensemble to feature guitarist/composer works at Bop Stop

by Mike Telin



It's no secret that the Cleveland area has a vibrant classical guitar scene. But it wasn't until flutist Linda White relocated here from Wyoming, that she discovered the breadth of repertoire that has, and continues to be written for flute and guitar.

"Before I moved here, I can say that I had never heard a classical guitarist perform live, let alone work with one," White said during a telephone conversation. "As I began to learn the concert repertoire, it

spoke to me because of all of the different colors and sounds the instrument is capable of producing."

On Saturday, March 4 at 8:00 pm at the Bop Stop, Linda White will join classical guitarist Robert Gruca, performing as the Gruca White Ensemble, in a concert that will feature music by three guitarist/composers. "Many composers don't know how to write for the instrument," White said, "but guitarists do such a beautiful job of finding different ways of making it speak."

White described Welsh composer Stephen Goss's *Autumn Song* (2011) as an atmospheric piece that was originally written for guitar and cello. "There are a lot of wonderful guitarist/composers coming out of the Balkans, and Atanas Ourkouzounov's *Four Legends* (2007) really captures the traditional style of that region. And Nathan Kolosko's *Nayarit* (2010) is based on John Steinbeck's book *The Pearl Fishers* and is very spacious, modal sounding. Kolosko is from the States, and he works a lot with flutist Carl Dimow, who's also a composer."

As with all Gruca White Ensemble programs, Saturday's will include a little bit of jazz and improvisation. "We're going to play Dave Brubeck's *Blue Rondo à la Turk*, because it uses the same rhythms as the Ourkouzounov, which makes it a good lead into the Balkan style. We have little games that we play with the improvisations. We figure out who will start, what key we'll be in, and the musical style — it's fun because we never know what is going to happen."

White did not begin to toy with the idea of improvising until she graduated from college and joined a rock band. As she became more interested in jazz, learning to improvise became a necessity — although she still considers it a work in progress. "Bob started out as an improviser and later turned to classical music, but until we formed the ensemble neither of us had been part of a group that incorporated classical and improvisation. Doing both is part of what separates us from the many other good flute and guitar duos."

As artists-in-residence at The Music Settlement, Gruca and White often play concerts designed for kids that they call the "PB&J Jam." They also perform for children ages three and four who are enrolled in the Settlement's early childhood program.

"In addition to teaching private lessons, Jane Berkner and I tag-team direct the Flautrageous Flute Choir. I also direct Mix and Mingle, a program for adult amateur musicians who come together to play chamber music. The participants are very committed, and they enjoy the opportunity to play. In fact, about half of my private students are adults, and the same is true of both ensembles. It's a great way to meet people — it's their haven away from work."

Teaching at the Music Settlement also gives White access to the school's bass and contrabass flutes. Just how many types of concert flutes *are* there? "The piccolo is the highest, and the C-flute is one octave lower, White explained. "The alto flute is a fourth lower than the C-flute, while the bass flute is one octave lower than that. The contrabass is even an octave lower than the bass — and that instrument has become popular in flute choirs, because it can produce a lot of percussive sounds."

At Saturday's concert, White will perform on the C, alto, and bass flutes. "I love the color the alto flute produces, and I'll use that one during the Brubeck."

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