

Cleveland Classical Guitar Society Ana Vidović Recital (Oct. 20)

by Nicholas Stevens



Concerts can inspire a range of moods: passionate engagement at best, shades of frustration or offense at worst. One such mood, rare and therefore precious, arises when it dawns on the listener that something amazing is happening onstage, and the sheer quality of the performance prompts rapt absorption. Audience members at guitarist Ana Vidović's concert for the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society last week would eventually solicit an encore with a

high-volume ovation. During the main program, however, near-silence descended over the pews of Plymouth Church, dozens straining to hear each masterful nuance.

On Saturday, October 20, the program opened with a performance by Damian Goggans, a current student in the CCGS Education Program. Also a composer, Goggans took up the guitar a mere two years ago. One would never guess as much from his performance of Villa-Lobos's *Prelude No. 1*, which opened with an attention-grabbing slide. With his highly promising mix of technical skill and temporal subtlety, he made for a more than worthy opener.

For the Allemande that opens Valter Despalj's transcription of Bach's Partita for flute, Vidović opted for pointed notes, and a primary theme that returned, shadowed, at the end. In the Corrente, Vidović's command of meter allowed her to create clear phrases on a grand scale even as shorter notes unfurled organically, like leaves on the fronds of a fern. Silence spoke volumes in the meditative pauses that punctuated her reading of the Sarabande, such that the grandiosity of the Bourée's main theme felt like a 180-degree turn.

Even the first ten seconds of Vidović’s rendition of Giuliani’s *Gran Sonata Eroica* amounted to a study in contrasts. Smooth sectional transitions and tonal variety marked the rest of the performance. Playing Tárrega’s *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*, Vidović showed no apparent effort even as three separate lines, each with its own shape and direction, rose and subsided in her hands. Her reading of the composer’s *Capricho Arabe* offered clean opening harmonics, and the *Lagrima* provided a sweet musical moment. Clear intention animated each gesture of the *Danza Mora*, with the drone bass producing an alluring groove.

Bright, resonant high notes and impeccable harmonics introduced Mangoré’s *La Catedral*, in the movement “Preludio Saudade”. In Vidović’s hands, the “Andante religioso” hinted at a complicated credo, intimate at first but varied in mood over the following minutes. She finished the suite with displays of fluency and fluidity in the “Allegro solemne”.

Vidović’s delivery of Domenico Scarlatti’s *Sonata K. 332* featured both stateliness and motion, and even the releases of notes in his *Sonata K. 380* were subtle and precise.

Honeyed melodies, sharp strums, and syrupy-thick bass made Piazzolla’s *Verano Porteño* an irresistible cocktail, with multiple flavors emerging from a single repeated note in the middle section. Despite a never-identified commotion in the balcony, the same composer’s *Milonga del Angel* sounded at the threshold of audibility, soft as feathers. Pitch bends, colossal strums, and beautifully caustic chords contributed to the energy of the closing *La Muerte del Angel*.

Invited back for an encore, Vidović asked the audience for suggestions. From whisper-quiet to roaring, and nearly-still to hyperactive, the resulting performance of Albéniz’s *Asturias* confirmed what all present already knew: that, even as the wind tore down trees outside, one of the world’s truly great classical guitarists had just offered a comparably forceful performance.

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