

Cleveland Classical Guitar Society welcomes the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet

by Mike Telin



When the [Los Angeles Guitar Quartet](#) last appeared in Cleveland in March of 2015, that occasion coincided with the release of their CD *New Renaissance*. When John Dearman, Matthew Greif, William Kanengiser, and Scott Tennant return to the [Cleveland Classical Guitar Society](#)'s International Series on Saturday, November 3 at 7:30 pm at First Unitarian Church of Cleveland, there won't be a new album, but you can hear the new work that Pat Metheny wrote for them. Tickets are available [online](#).

“We met Pat at a guitar festival in Montana about four years ago,” Kanengiser said during a recent telephone conversation. “Unbeknownst to us, he was a closet LAGQ fan, which was a shock and an honor because we idolize him. He said, ‘Hey, I might write a piece for you guys,’ and we said that would be awesome.”

As it is with busy people, Kanengiser said the Quartet did not hear from Metheny for a while — until an email arrived from him saying that he was indeed going to write that piece. Although the LAGQ members expected to receive a 10- to 12-minute work, a month later the composer/guitarist contacted them saying he had sketched out a 6-movement, 25-minute piece.

“*Road to the Sun* is what I call a mini symphonic tone poem for guitars,” Kanengiser said. “It’s an eclectic piece that begins and ends with an achingly beautiful melody, and that along the way goes through some trademark Pat Metheny driving grooves

with rich jazz harmonies and some quite contemporary-sounding sections. He's a brilliant composer, but he did something amazing here. It's been a thrill for us to perform it."

While crafting the composition, Metheny worked closely with the LAGQ. "He wanted to know about our guitars and how we sat. And when we received the score, the parts didn't say guitars one, two, three, and four, they said John, Matthew, Bill, and Scott. The integrity and honesty of the piece comes through, and I think that's why it has affected audiences the way that it has. If you're a fan of Pat's, you won't be disappointed. You'll hear his 'isms' in a new and formal way."

Kanengiser said that learning *Road to the Sun* has stretched him and his colleagues as musicians. "It forced us to get inside the groove element, and to imitate the way that Pat strums — subtle and polyrhythmic — that is very different from anyone else. He was adamant that we avoid any inkling of Flamenco or Spanish elements, which is our go-to style when we start strumming. Now that we've played it for almost two years, we feel like it's in our wheelhouse. We're relaxing and having fun with it."

Regarding the work's title, Kanengiser recalled that the day after Metheny heard the LAGQ's concert at that festival in Montana, he visited Glacier National Park. "He took a road called Going to the Sun. We thought the piece was about that road, but when we talked about it he said, no, it is not about the road, nor is it about anything that I can define. He said that music is not definable; it is about an emotional journey."

Saturday's concert will also include a new piece by Boston-based guitarist/composer Robert Beaser. "It's the world premiere of *Chaconne*, but not exactly," Kanengiser said. "It was commissioned by the Boston Guitar Orchestra, and LAGQ were co-commissioners so we're doing the premiere of the quartet version. Bob is a legend in the guitar world, and anyone who is going to sit down and write a chaconne certainly has Bach sitting on their shoulder. The theme is quite long and the piece goes on its own journey — sometime neo-Baroque, then quasi-minimalist, at times romantic, then very dark, and it ends in an up-tempo Argentine tango. It's a lot of fun to play."

Rounding out the program are three transcriptions by LAGQ members, beginning with John Dearman's arrangement of Rossini's Overture to *The Barber of Seville*, which Kanengiser says works great on guitars. "What instrument would they play in Seville? It's a real hoot, although I think that like me, my cohorts in the quartet first heard it on TV with Bugs Bunny, so it is deep in our DNA." The program also celebrates Spain with Kanengiser's arrangement of six selections from Bizet's *Carmen*.

Kanengiser said that Scott Tennant's arrangements of excerpts from Thomas Morley's *The First Booke of Consort-Lessons* by Byrd, Dowland, Allison, and Morley make a nice foil to the modern intensity of the Metheny that follows. "Morley compiled the hits from his time and arranged them for the group The Broken Consort. Scott assumes the role of the leader of the group, who was always the lutenist. They're lovely, sparkling, refreshing pieces."

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