

## Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival: Drew Henderson and Petra Poláčková

by Cait Winston



Online recitals pose the question: can a virtual format preserve the precious conversation between a musician and their audience? In a recently streamed concert, guitarists Drew Henderson and Petra Poláčková proved that such communication can still exist outside of a live setting, when the music is played with generous expressivity and technical finesse. Henderson and Poláčková's performance,

presented by the Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival, was pre-recorded and streamed on Friday, June 4th.

Henderson began the evening with his own arrangements of three movements from J.S. Bach's Suite No. 4 for solo cello. The Prelude features a series of descending patterns interspersed with virtuosic passages, and while these passages effectively highlighted Henderson's technical skills, he also demonstrated dramatic expertise by playing each descending pattern with different nuances of emotion. The Sarabande, with its poise and stately pace, was juxtaposed beautifully with a lively Bourrée, where notes flurried in quick succession, but Henderson never sacrificed precise articulation for musical momentum.

Bach was followed by J.K Mertz's arrangement of the Schubert Lied *Lob der Tränen*, where achingly beautiful melodic material was made even more lovely by Henderson's steady yet expressive phrasing. Compared to the more reserved first verse, the second is thrillingly virtuosic, complete with full, striking strums and slide ornaments. In one of his brief pre-performance discussions, Henderson says that this two-verse structure is inspired by Franz Liszt's arrangement style.

Henderson finished with Joaquín Turina's *Sonata para guitarra* Op. 61, which opens with a flurry of picked notes that he articulated perfectly. Throughout, his tone was clear and rich, and his phrasing maintained an engaging pace while also giving time for each melodic idea to sink in.

Poláčková began her program with four pieces by John Dowland. According to her program note, these pieces mark the beginning of idiomatic composition for the guitar. This is made obvious by the dynamic plucked passages in the Preludium that were masterfully executed by the technically brilliant guitarist.

Throughout the Dowland set, Poláčková showed her talent for storytelling through phrasing choices. She turned each musical phrase into a clear dramatic statement through subtle changes in tempo and dynamics, resulting in a highly narrative performance. Poláčková's demonstrated her technical dexterity along with her dramatic abilities in *Fantasy Mr. Dowlande*, where she flew through the guitar's registers, conquering each dynamic melodic passage with ease and clarity.

Poláčková traded her 9-string romantic guitar for a 6-string classical guitar in *Three Catalan Folk Songs*, arranged by Miguel Llobet. Her dramatic prowess was perfectly suited for the rich harmonies and lyrical melodies of the music. Some of the most poignant moments of this set come in the heartbreaking *El testament d'Amèlia*, when a melody from the guitar's low register is tenderly reiterated in a higher register. Poláčková drew all possible emotion out of this gesture, leaving one anguished but yearning for more.

Poláčková ended with a return to Mertz and the 9-string guitar. During the four-piece set, she brilliantly negotiated the guitar's lack of sustain through dynamic pacing.

The performance is available on demand, and can be accessed [here](#).

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 9, 2021.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)