

Classical Guitar Festival: Colin Davin & Duo Melis

by Jarrett Hoffman



The last in a series of split-bill, pre-recorded recitals in this year's Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival debuted on June 11, containing excellent performances by Cleveland's own Colin Davin on the first half, and Duo Melis of Spain and Greece on the second.

The centerpiece of Davin's program was Leo Brouwer's *Sonata No. 2* for guitar, also known

as *Sonata del Caminante* or "The Wanderer's Sonata." Not only does it explore different regions of Brazil, but it also shifts in style frequently, moving among spare beauty, a violent and extended tonality, and bluesy reflectiveness — together, a fascinating world of sound.

After an illuminating spoken introduction to the piece, Davin delivered a tour-de-force performance full of sensitivity, virtuosity, vibrant phrasing, and plenty of groove — in certain passages, you could see him give a little shimmy, enjoying the moment.

Short works surrounded the Brouwer. Davin began the program with a brief, improvised prelude — slow and melancholy — before launching into a set of three pieces played without pause: Antonio Lauro's *Valses Venezolanos* Nos. 2 and 3, and Pedro Elías Gutiérrez's *Alma Llanera*, the latter arranged by Alirio Díaz. Davin connected *Alma Llanera* to the waltzes via another short improvisation.

That set was fully convincing, with smooth transitions, but what was especially brilliant was the way Davin navigated the flow of each individual piece. Moving from one phrase

into the next, at certain moments he made use of delicate rubato and an extra dose of sensitivity, and at others opted for an exciting burst of energy.

Following the Brouwer, another improvisatory prelude — this one gentle, and sparkling with harmonics — set the stage beautifully for Manuel María Ponce's *Estrellita*, arranged by Celil Refik Kaya. Davin played that lovely gem with engagingly subtle expressivity. Finally, he paid tribute to the late Jorge Morel, playing his *Danza Brasileira* with a cool and easygoing sense of style, like dancing without breaking a sweat.



Spanish guitarist Susana Prieto and Greek guitarist Alexis Muzurakis of Duo Melis formatted their program very differently, beginning with the longest piece — Antoine de Lhoyer's *Duo Concertant*, Op. 31, No. 2 — and following with four short-to-medium-length works.

The Lhoyer showcased several of the duo's virtues: their tight ensemble, which comes across as second-nature, their beautiful blend, and their close interpretive kinship — in the first movement, *Allegro moderato*, they built on each other's phrases impressively, tossing back and forth the passages of rapid articulation. The piece itself doesn't make the strongest impression, especially for its length, but it's certainly worth stopping by the third movement, *Adagio cantabile*, where Prieto and Muzurakis took turns capturing soulful melodies and gentle accompaniment.

A pairing of keyboard works by Joseph-Nicolas-Pancrace Royer brought together the understated *L'Aimable* with the especially memorable *Le Vertigo*, where the composer's insistent rhythms inspired a delightfully fiery approach from the players. Another highlight followed: Isaac Albéniz's *Mallorca*, where Muzurakis made the melody sing with his sensitive phrasing, and offered a nicely paced cadenza to boot.

All together, the broadcast ran on the long side at 90 minutes, but the ending was a special reward. In his early *Danzas Argentinas*, originally for piano, Alberto Ginastera conjures a remarkable combination of the abstract and the visceral, and in the hands of Duo Melis, the piece made quite an impact on two guitars.

The outer movements showed off the players' impeccable timing and easy virtuosity, while the middle one shone a spotlight on Prieto, who delivered a beautiful melody spiked with chromatic tension. But most special in this arrangement are the unique harmonics in the second movement, and the work's final bars, which bring with them the emphatic punctuation of a string slapping against the fretboard.

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