

Cleveland Classical Guitar Society: the Showcase Concert and into the fall

by Jarrett Hoffman



As per tradition, the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society will kick off its 2021-22 series with the free Showcase Concert highlighting musicians from around the region. This year's event, which you can attend in person at the Maltz Performing Arts Center on Saturday, September 18 at 7:30 pm, or via livestream, might aptly be described as a Cincinnati sandwich on Cleveland bread.

There will be three sets, with Cleveland-based musicians on either end. Guitar Society educator Andy Poxon will open the concert with Mauro Giuliani's *Grande Ouverture* before moving to his own arrangement of Handel's D-Major Violin Sonata, where he'll be joined by violinist Jeanelle Brierley.

Occupying the middle portion of the program is guitarist and composer Jeremy Collins, representing his hometown and homebase of Cincinnati, though he also studied at the Cleveland Institute of Music as an undergraduate (Cleveland-bred in addition to the Cleveland bread). He'll perform two of his own pieces, *The Starry Night* and *Reverie*, followed by José Luis Merlin's *Suite del Recuerdo*.

At the finish, bringing an impressive variety of flavors to the table is the guitar-and-flute Gruca White Ensemble. They'll open with three miniatures by Stephen Goss (part of his *From Honey to Ashes*) influenced by music from around the world. They'll continue with Masamitsu Takahashi's *Homage to the Harvest Moon*, in which they'll imitate the Japanese traditional instruments *shinobue* and *koto*. And they'll finish with two movements from Marshall Griffith's *Jazz Impressions of Cleveland*.

While admission is free for both in-person and online attendance, [registration](#) is required. The concert will follow Case Western's current COVID policies, including wearing a mask at all times while in the building.

In a telephone call, Guitar Society executive director Erik Mann explained that Poxon, a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music, has returned to CIM for his artist diploma, and it's there that he connected with Brierley. Both are on the faculty of the school's Preparatory Division. "They did a really fabulous recital together and decided to continue their duo, and I hope they end up continuing it for quite a while."

Guitarist Robert Gruca and flutist Linda White are, as Mann said, an absolutely unique duo. "They improvise, they arrange their own works, they work with composers — they have a completely different sound from anybody else, and we have them right here in Cleveland."

And Collins is a veteran of the series. "We've had him play for us a number of times over the years," Mann said. "I was just reflecting that this is our 13th concert season — the first one was 2009-10, and we actually had Bob Gruca and Jeremy Collins play that season as well."



Collins is not the only composer-performer who is set to perform this season. Sharing that distinction is Turkish-American guitarist Celil Refik Kaya (*left*), who will visit Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights on Saturday, October 23 at 7:30 pm.

Mann agreed that composer-performers are growing more popular — "in classical guitar as well as with other instruments,"

he said. "Of course, not as popular as they were in the 19th century and earlier, but they're coming back a little bit, and I think that's really incredible."

Kaya will be making his second visit to the series “with a completely different program this time,” except for one important overlap, Mann said. “He told me that he does a lot of programs of other composers’ works, but I said, ‘Celil, every concert you do for us, you have to play one of your own compositions.’ He’s written about a hundred works, and they’re incredible.”

Next on the series is Andrea González Caballero (*right*), who will make her Cleveland debut on Saturday, November 20 at 7:30 pm at Plymouth Church. “She gave us two choices,” Mann said. “One program was more eclectic, and the other was the music of Spain. We usually go for the eclectic, but wow, what an opportunity for something really unique.”



Mann became interested in Caballero’s playing after hearing her online, so when he found out she was performing in Buffalo in February of 2020, he jumped at the opportunity. “I always want to hear performers live before booking them,” he said. “So I drove out to Buffalo and back in the same day, and I was just absolutely blown away by the concert.”

On the topic of building a season, Mann said one of the key components is diversity — “artists from all over the world who have very different playing styles.” The spring portion of the series will be announced in the months ahead.

Of course, the reverse of looking ahead is looking back, and given how Mann had earlier reflected earlier on the Guitar Society’s first concert season, I asked him what’s changed since then.

“For one, we’re not a volunteer organization anymore — people have jobs,” he said. “And we’re not asking performers to play for free anymore. That first concert season was all local players, and all free concerts, with maybe thirty to forty people in the audience. So we’ve grown quite a bit since then.”



At the tail-end of our call, Mann shared one last piece of good news: that Guitar Society student Damian Goggans has received a full scholarship to Oberlin Conservatory.

“They start late this year — the beginning of October — but he’s really excited, and he’s started remote lessons with his teacher, Stephen Aron.”

As much as congratulations were in order, I pointed out how it can be sad when a student moves on. “Well,” Mann said, “I’m glad he’s not too far away.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com September 15, 2021.

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