

## Cleveland Classical Guitar Festival: Davin-Levin guitar & harp duo (June 3)

by Daniel Hathaway



You'd think that two instruments that create their sound by plucking strings might not provide enough variety to sustain interest over the course of a whole program, but guitarist Colin Davin and harpist Emily Levin have news for you.

The Davin-Levin Duo played the second recital of the 2022 Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival on June 3 in Kulas Hall at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

Their engaging program, containing original arrangements of 20th-century works and a recent piece, was the first of four during the festival to feature guitarists playing with other instrumentalists, and Davin and Levin made the most of their opportunity to plunge into the rich possibilities of collaboration.

The combination of plucked instruments works well if you choose the right material and have the musical intelligence and technique to put it across. Surely these properties were in evidence from the very opening work, Philip Glass's *Etude No. 6*, which I and a few others missed by minutes due to parking complications.

Later, those qualities were present in abundant variety in the largest work on the program, Davin's splendid arrangement of György Ligeti's 11-movement *Musica Ricercata*. The composer intended "to build a New Music from nothing, so to speak," and the result is something akin to watching atoms assemble themselves into molecules in slow motion.

Ligeti tempers what might be daunting material with a healthy measure of sophisticated wit, and Davin and Levin successfully put that quality across in their

flawless but relaxed playing. Both players have developed elegant gestures for releases at phrase endings that add a welcome bit of showmanship to their performances.

Between the Glass and the Ligeti, the duo played their own arrangements of Florence Price's *Three Roses* (Yellow, White, and Red), a lovely little salon piece with just a touch of sentimentality, and of Claude Debussy's popular *Suite Bergamasque*, with an unhurried account of the famous "Clair de lune."

Then, an original work, Jonathan Cziner's *Wanderlust*, explored the desire to get out into the world during the height of the pandemic, when so many were confined to quarters. The music of Schubert served that purpose for the composer, and the piece he wrote for the duo gave Davin and Levin a fine opportunity to reflect that itch in their expressive playing.

To end their set, Davin and Levin took the chill off Kulas Hall's air conditioning with a sizzling version of Manuel de Falla's *Ritual Fire Dance*.

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