

Cleveland Classical Guitar Society: Brasil Guitar Duo (Mar. 11)

by Kevin McLaughlin



On Saturday evening, March 11 at Plymouth Church, the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society welcomed João Luiz and Douglas Lora, the Brasil Guitar Duo, after a four-year absence from the series.

As is customary for CCGS concerts, the evening began with a student performer. Daziel Pérez Pagán, 17, performed two short pieces. The first, written by Pagán himself when he was sixteen, was a

lovely reflection called *Rewoken*. The second, *River Flows in You*, a work originally for piano by the Korean composer Yiruma and transcribed by Pagán, was beautifully played.

The Brasil Guitar Duo opened their recital with Piazzolla's lively and sweet tango, *Zita*, named for the wife of Aníbal Troilo, the composer's mentor and friend. Immediately the guitarists demonstrated warmth and technical control, qualities that remained throughout the evening.

Written for the Duo in 2017, Fred Hand's *Still* is a nine-and-a-half minute harmonically roving work that invites daydreaming. Warm jazz cohabitates with icy introspection. Interweaving crab-like guitar lines matched without effort, like a synchronous ballet, and the music seemed to emanate from a single source. Eye contact was rare as the two favored telepathic communication over old-fashioned eyeballing — surely a product of their twenty-plus year partnership.

Four short Egberto Gismonti works ended the first half, all arranged for two guitars by Luiz. This is music the Duo knows well, having recently recorded an entire album of Gismonti's works. *Frevo* was all urban sophistication, swiftly moving city dwellers

running from cafe to cafe. The static *A Fala da Paixão* provided a change in tempo and mood, with harmonics interspersed with romantic lyricism. *Aleginho No. 2* (“little allegro”) sported a funky Paul Simon groove. And *Karate* was a lightning-fast physical contest for the two guitars, ending with both players feigning forearm punches. You had to get up and walk around after that one.

After intermission, CCGS executive director Erik Mann noted that the second half would include only the 35-minute Leo Brouwer *Sonata de los Viajeros* (“Sonata of the Travelers”). If anything was to be added, well, that was up to the applause of the audience.

In 2014 the Duo recorded and gave the Cuban premiere of that work, a sort of musical guide to four geographically diverse destinations. First, the tourist wanders north to experience extreme cold (a movement titled “Tierras Heladas,” or frozen lands). Luiz and Lora were effective in evoking Brouwer’s musical sheets of ice and gusts of wind, and the traveler’s longing for home.

The next stop was to sunny Greece and to the Venus of Praxiteles, inspiring a tender melody which our itinerant guitarists understandably lingered over. Going north to Leipzig, Brouwer quotes and reinterprets Bach’s note-dense *Prelude in c*. Here the Duo showed themselves technically suited to the task with a beautiful sense of line. Having reached the Cuban Islands by the Antilles (Caribbean) Sea, the guitarist-travelers set down their backpacks and celebrated with a joyous homecoming dance — an exuberant technical and rhythmic display.

The standing acclaim at the end was genuine, and the audience was rewarded with an encore, *Noites Cariocas* (“Rio de Janeiro Nights”) by Jacob do Bandolim.

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