

Cleveland Classical Guitar Society: Showcase Concert (Sept. 14)

by Kevin McLaughlin



The Cleveland Classical Guitar Society kicked off its new season at the Maltz Performing Arts Center on Saturday, September 14 with its “2024 Showcase,” highlighting outstanding Cleveland talent and a rising star.

As is customary, an alumnus of CCGS’ Citizens Leadership Academy began the evening. Damien Goggans gave a superb and poised performance, evidence of his own talent and bestowing reflected glory on the educational arm of CCGS.

Goggans, who is a classical guitar performance major at Oberlin Conservatory, has already enjoyed triumphs at Severance Music Center and on national television and radio. Selecting three of Thomas Flippin’s *14 Études on the Music of Black Americans* to play (III. “Don’t Let Nobody Turn You ’Round,” XIII. “Wake Up, Jacob,” and XII. “Don’t Be Weary, Traveler”), he sang the three spiritual melodies with an easy and clear voice before playing the etudes on guitar alone. Goggans’ guitar playing was an extension of his singing voice: sensitive, technically secure, and dignified.

Clevelanders may know Colin Davin — who now teaches at Shenandoah Conservatory in Virginia — as the former co-head of the Cleveland Institute of Music’s guitar department and a Baldwin Wallace Conservatory faculty member.

He is a guitarist of exceptional gifts, with technique from here until Sunday and an unwavering musical will. His playing of the *Koyunbaba* suite was a thrilling episode — creating both an introduction (for this listener) and a lasting impression.

Italian guitarist Carlo Domeniconi (b. 1947) wrote *Koyunbaba* while living in Turkey. Taking its title from the Turkish word for “sheep father,” it is a dramatic and extraordinary journey. Woven around Middle Eastern folk song, the piece draws from

conventional Western gestures — rapid arpeggiation, tender lyricism, and an extended toccata-like finale. A layer of exoticism comes from its peculiar tuning, with its six strings spelling a C-sharp minor chord suited to its crooked scales and harmonies. It was undoubtedly too much trouble to retune, so Davin used a second guitar for the following piece.

Davin's coloration and dynamic manipulation also revealed Jose Luis Merlin's *Suite del Recuerdo* to be a diverse and fiery work, a Spanish dance-card sequence reminiscent of the suites of J.S. Bach. The guitarist's strength in all these movements was his ability to tease out lovely melodic strands from the often busy and thick accompaniment. From start to finish, Davin summoned precision and swagger, climaxed by a rip-roaring "Joropo" finale.

From the moment they walked onstage, the duo of guitarist Moises Borges and percussionist Dylan Moffitt recast the culture and energy of the program.

A Clevelander for decades, Borges remains a cheerful ambassador and unceasing source of Brazilian pride. For Saturday's concert he brought a joyous program, principally taken from his latest album, *Baiano*, and supplemented by sambas, folk songs, and bossa novas by Janet de Almeida, Haroldo Barbosa, and Gilberto Gil.

Borges drew on his *Baiano* heritage ("a person from the state of Bahia in Brazil," he clarified) as well as the rich and beautiful tapestry of his heavily African-influenced origin, contributing his own songs — the cantabile *Pedir ao santo* and rapid-fire *Cora Coralina Coração* — as well as others by fellow Brazilians Denis Brean and Gilberto Gil.

Dylan Moffitt played with bundled sticks on a *cajon* (chest), sometimes waving them in the air for subtle wisps of sound. Though a guest at Borges' party, his contributions were as natural and convincing as if they came from a fellow Brazilian.

Pra que discutir com madame, by Janet de Almeida and Haroldo Barbosa, is a delightful tale in samba style about "a madame with a screw loose" — the point of which was not lost on us. There followed *Eu vim da Bahia* ("I Came from Bahia"), Gilberto Gil's ballad extolling the virtues of Borges' hometown, a place surely as modestly charming as the guitarist/singer himself.

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