

## Cleveland Chamber Music Society: a multifaceted “Spanish Journey” (Feb. 11)

by Stephanie Manning



Ever since Punxsutawney Phil popped his head out to predict six more weeks of winter, Clevelanders have seen no respite from the cold and snowy weather. So February 11 was as good a winter day as any to escape to sunny Spain, via the latest concert from the Cleveland Chamber Music Society.

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center visited Disciples Church in Cleveland Heights for “Spanish Journey,” a program in collaboration with the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society. While a celebration of Spanish music would not be complete without its characteristic dance styles, the evening’s focus on sensitive, romantic selections created a nicely balanced sampling of what that culture has to offer.

Manuel de Falla, Joaquín Rodrigo, and the other featured composers were recognizable names to those familiar with Spanish music, particularly those with an interest in classical guitar. Jason Vieaux took on the concert’s only solo selection with Isaac Albéniz’s *Mallorca*, a peaceful interlude between the other two works on the first half. The guitarist handled the piece’s gentle, lulling melodies with his characteristic sensitivity and grace.

Vieaux also paired with soprano Vanessa Becarra for two memorable duets. The seven movements of Fernando Obradors’ *Canciones clásicas españolas* allowed the performers to cover a wide range of emotion, from the plaintive “La mi sola, Laureola” to the humorously melodramatic “Coplas de Curro Dulce.”

Vieaux’s clarity of playing came through most in the playful “Al amor,” where Becarra coyly delivered lyrics beseeching endless kisses from her lover. The beautiful, bittersweet “Con amores, la mi madre” then highlighted the soprano’s impressive ability to sustain high notes. Joaquín Rodrigo’s *Tres canciones españolas* came across more

unevenly, although the situation certainly was not helped by an egregious cell phone interruption during most of the third movement.

Pianist Soyeon Kate Lee became Becarra's duet partner for Manuel de Falla's *Siete canciones populares españolas* ("Seven Spanish Folksongs"). The third movement, "Asturiana," was particularly arresting, as was the concluding "Polo," a lashing out against the pain of love accented by piano strikes. The pianist's innate phrasing and musicality was a welcome feature both here and in Enrique Fernández Arbós' *Tres piezas originales en estilo español*, a trio with violinist Kristin Lee and cellist Clive Greensmith.

One of the most energetic and dance-influenced works of the night, Arbós' piece is often a flurry of notes, employing bouncy string techniques like spiccato and pizzicato. The third movement highlighted solo cello passages from Greensmith, who easily conjured both a deep low register and a singing tenor.

Kristin Lee's playing here may have ventured into overenthusiasm, but her assured performance of Pablo de Sarasate's *Romanza andaluza* from *Danzas españolas* included both an impressive feat of descending double-stops and a delicate fluttering of trills that dovetailed into a shimmering final note.

The piano, violin, and cello combination reunited for Joaquín Turina's *Trio No. 2 in b*, a gem of a piece full of lush, sweeping melodies and cascading lines passed between Lee, Greensmith, and Lee. The three musicians eagerly seized on all those elements, with a vivacious quality that brought to mind the first green leaves of our eventual spring.

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