

Cleveland Classical Guitar Society: Celil Refik Kaya at Plymouth (Oct. 14)

by Daniel Hathaway



Turkish guitarist Celil Refik Kaya opened the new Cleveland Classical Guitar Society Series with elegant performances of music by Giuliani, J.S. Bach, Granados, Morel and Rodrigo, including a piece by the guitarist himself, on Saturday evening, October 14 at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights.

Kaya warmed up his audience with a fluent reading of Mauro Giuliani's *Sonata Eroica*. Distinguished by the performer's graceful runs and lyrical treatment of its vocal-inspired tunes — some poached from the composer's own rhapsody on themes from Rossini operas — the piece is an opera overture in everything but name. It served as a lovely curtain-raiser for what followed.

Turning to more serious stuff, Kaya selected the aria and six of Bach's Thirty Variations, popularly known as the Goldberg Variations, transferring them from their original conception for double-manual harpsichord to the handful of strings available on the classical guitar. The transfer worked beautifully, thanks to Kaya's canny choices, meticulous transcriptions, and thoughtful playing.

Another set of transcriptions, this time from Enrique Granados' piano *Valses Poeticos*, received nuanced and expressive treatment from the guitarist. Here, as elsewhere in the evening, Kaya's playing seemed tailored to a more intimate space than Plymouth Church. He might wisely have adapted his approach to reach all the corners of a larger room.

Kaya began the second half of the evening with his own *Sonatina*, a cheerful, complex three-movement work dedicated to his mentor Adam Holzman, that changes harmonies on a dime, features a bit of polytonality and impressionism, and transforms ideas from the first movement into more humorous versions in the toccata-like finale. The eventful piece was fun to listen to.

Moody Argentine music by Jorge Morel (*Milonga del Viente*, *Romance Criollo* and *Little Rhapsody*) mixed classical elements with jazz and Latin rhythms. Then Kaya turned to music by Joaquín Rodrigo to close out the evening. Rodrigo's virtuosic *Toccata*, originally written for guitar but highly pianistic in nature, is festooned with repeated notes, and interesting inner voices peek out between chords. Kaya gave it a masterful reading, leading to a standing ovation.

For an encore, Celil Refik Kaya turned to traditional music of his birthland. *Morning in the Village* paid homage to his oud-playing grandfather, and began with an improvisation, as he explained that most Turkish traditional pieces do. Fluent and exotic, Kaya's playing rounded out a highly satisfying concert.

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