

## Cleveland Classical Guitar Society Showcase at Maltz PAC (September 15)

by Nicholas Stevens



Concerts that feature multiple players on a single instrument come with a risk: the consistency of tone across the evening can come across as a lack of variety. Some instruments, such as the piano, evade this thanks to centuries' worth of diverse

repertoire. Classical guitarists have additional advantages: their community boasts a strong tradition of writing new transcriptions and original works, and each great player has a unique sound. Both of those were in full evidence at last weekend's Showcase Concert for the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society.

The first installment in Case Western Reserve University's new Silver Hall Concert Series, the Showcase on September 15 drew a substantial audience to the Maltz Performing Arts Center at Temple-Tifereth Israel. The roster of featured players ranged from virtuoso pedagogues and rising stars to a much younger talent: Isaiah Rodriguez, Student of the Year in CCGS's Education Program. Rodriguez played a *Spanish Dance and Siciliano* with confidence and poise as the evening began, assuring all present that the future of the instrument is in capable hands.

The program proper opened with Giuliani's *Rossiniana No. 1*, a medley of themes from Rossini's operas played by the masterful, charismatic Colin Davin. Ringing chords introduced a many-hued melodic tapestry, and called attention to a key virtue of Davin's sound: its clean, clear resonance in middle and upper registers. Grace notes and accents came with a hint of attitude and fast finger-work sounded effortless, but Davin truly captivated listeners during an extended series of high harmonics, which peeled forth in flexible tempo.

In spoken comments, Stephen Aron noted the challenges he faced in writing *Menagerie*, his new set of concert studies — among them, the need to demonstrate specific skills while holding the listener’s interest. In this, as in his performance of selected pieces from the set, he more than succeeded. *The Magpie*, a study in trills between multiple strings, sandwiched examples of that technique between occurrences of a darkly alluring theme. The sustained tremolos of *The Albatross* likewise fit into a broader vision, as did the melodic imitations of the faintly bluesy *The Coyote*. Far from mere dexterity drills, these pieces incorporate advanced techniques in artful, seamless fashion. *The Dolphin* was a highlight. As its high melody floated above multi-string tremolos, the mood of the performance shifted to one of pure enchantment.

For the concluding performance of *Impressions for Viola and Guitar*, which guitarist Jeremy Collins wrote for himself and his brother Wesley Collins (principal viola of The Cleveland Orchestra), an amplifier appeared onstage. Used neither for plugged-in playing nor sheer volume, the small speaker doubled Collins’s live acoustic sound and lent it an oceanic breadth. Overtones lingered as the guitarist wove textures that enveloped and supported his brother’s lyrical lines. One major-key moment verged on pop harmony, but also flouted expectations; a prominent Borodin quotation morphed into an original tune. Throughout, the brothers played with flawless coordination.

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