Cleveland Classical Guitar Society

Annual Report

2025-2026





CLEVELAND Classical GUITAR SOCIETY





Building Community

Dear Friends,

We are happy to share so much great news with you. In these pages, you'll find inspirational stories of hardworking youth, a joyous community, and some of the greatest musicians of our time.

Our most crucial work is with our Education Program, now celebrating a decade and a half of serving youth from the City of Cleveland. We provide exceptional instruction, instruments, sheet music, and more, entirely free of charge. The past year featured an enrollment of 150 students, an increase of more than 50%, yet we always focused on depth. We hired three additional teachers to keep class sizes small and to increase our one-on-one lesson offerings, bought over 100 additional guitars so every student could take one home, and held performances at prestigious venues like Severance Music Center and the Cleveland Museum of Art. Thanks to your support, the program continues to be offered completely free of charge. This is what we pour our hearts into, and we are so proud of our students!

Our International Series concerts featured several Cleveland debuts along with the return of audience favorites like David Russell. As always, every touring artist of the International Series worked with our students. We also continued to venture into one of America's greatest art forms, jazz.

In the following pages, you'll find stories that we hope will be every bit as inspiring for you to read as they were for us to experience.



Erik Mann
Executive Director



Gabriel Martinez
Board President

Staff and Board

CCGS Board Members

Gabriel Martinez
President

Scott Fitzsimmons
Treasurer

Tori Ung
Secretary

Kylie Eyre

Ben Sperry

Pam Weaver

CCGS Staff

Erik Mann
Executive Director

Jon Poor
Events Manager

Christopher McDonald
Educator, Training and Data Coordinator, Curriculum Co-Lead

Max Shaffer
Educator, Student Event and Media Coordinator, Curriculum Co-Lead

Max Greenwald
Educator

Additional Personnel

Jeremy Bass
Educator

Gabino Flores
Educator

Sam Hooper
Educator

Adrian Murillo
Educator

Tom Ray
Educator and Guitar Orchestra Director

Damian Goggans
Teaching Assistant

Alshawn Evans
Assistant

Expanding the Education Team!

The 2025-2026 school year saw a 50 percent increase in student registration generated from word of mouth at our current schools. Anticipating the need, we conducted a national search for a third full-time educator and found a stellar person for the job, Max Greenwald.

Max Greenwald earned a board certification in music therapy while at Arizona State University. Max then served as Dr. Stephen Mattingly's Teaching Assistant at the University of Louisville for three years while pursuing two Master of Music degrees, in Guitar Performance and Education. His passion for commissioning new music and chamber performance is realized through his membership in the Chimera Quartet. Max has performed across Arizona, California, Kentucky, and Indiana, and toured throughout Switzerland and Italy with the Arizona Contemporary Music Ensemble. He was employed full-time at an inpatient acute psychiatric hospital, working with children, teens, adults, and geriatric clients, treating a wide variety of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive disorders. Max has also provided clinical care for veterans and patients with traumatic brain injuries.



Max Greenwald



Adrian Murillo



Sam Hooper

We also brought on two additional part-time teachers to help expand the number of one-on-one lessons that we can offer. **Adrian Murillo** earned his bachelor's and master's at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and is completing his doctorate from Indiana University. He has a background in classical and flamenco guitar, lute, and theorbo. Adrian has performed with Apollo's Fire, the San Francisco Opera, Bay Area Classical Harmonies, West Bay Opera, and Opera Neo, among others. **Sam Hooper** is our resident expert in blues, jazz, funk, and more. He is an alumnus of the University of Miami's School of Music and Berklee College of Music, and has toured China, Finland, Japan, and the USA. Sam's original songs have been heard on TV's "All My Children" and "The Young & the Restless."

CCGS educators are supported by an array of professional development opportunities. This included a three-part series on social-emotional learning and trauma-informed principles, methods of teaching young children, and leading guitar ensembles. Austin Classical Guitar's Director of Education and Director of Curriculum and Partnerships visited Cleveland, observing classes and providing feedback and development ideas over the course of several months. Two educators also advanced their knowledge through intensive courses in the Suzuki method.

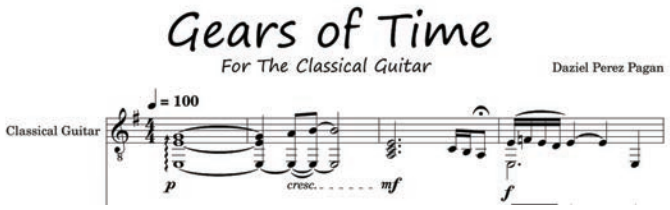
Education Program

100+ Guitars Bought



This year, we purchased more than 100 guitars to help better serve our growing student base. These guitars were sent home with students, used in our classrooms, and were even used by Cleveland Metropolitan School District music teachers in their general music classes. In addition to our fleet of classroom guitars, we also added some concert-level instruments to our collection for students who are taking the next step in their guitar education.

To supplement our curriculum, we commission student works by both national and local composers. In the past year, we commissioned three works for solo guitar by alumnus Daziel Pérez Pagán: “Gears of Time,” “Rain Drops,” and “El Último Baile” (“The Last Dance”). Local jazz/blues guitarist, singer, composer, and bandleader Sam Hooper also wrote two ensemble works, “Sunny Afternoon” and “Laredo Nights.”





Some of the most rewarding payoffs to all the hard work of our students and educators are our numerous performances. Throughout the year our students are given opportunities to perform as soloists, in chamber groups, or as part of large, multi-school ensembles. Our largest concert of the year takes place each spring with students from all our partner schools and organizations.



Congratulations to two eighth grade students who earned their black wristbands! This is the highest achievement a student can accomplish after several years in our group classes (similar to a black belt in karate) and is a testament to their hard work and dedication. At our end-of-year concert, we gifted guitars to them along with other eighth grade students so they can continue to explore their love for the guitar as they graduate from our group classes. We wish these students the best of luck as they enter high school.

Student Experiences

It's one thing to have your heartstrings pulled by a performer on stage, but it's something truly special to sit down with them one-on-one and ask questions. This year we wanted to offer our students more opportunities to engage with artists and perform in highly esteemed venues. These immersive and unique experiences both encourage their pursuit and allow students to grow and evolve.

What we value in our international artists is their ability to reach and connect with students. Renowned jazz guitarist Randy Napoleon gave a technique workshop for a select group of students last autumn. He discussed chords, melodies, and the crossover between jazz and classical playing. The name Thomas Flippin may be familiar for several reasons, notably for composing *14 Études on the Music of Black Americans* for our students in 2021. This year, during his return with Duo Noire, Thomas took the time to attend a rehearsal with our Advanced Ensemble. Thomas shared tips on playing in a group and conducted their performance of his piece *Poor Rosy*.



Randy Napoleon giving a technique workshop to students



Thomas Flippin of Duo Noire works with one of CCGS's advanced students.

Education Program

It takes a lot of energy and passion to keep up with a roomful of students, but internationally renowned guitarist An Tran had more than enough of both. With the help of our partner school Buhrer Dual Language Academy, students were able to spend a day with An Tran at our Midtown office. Students took part in one-on-one lessons, a technique workshop, received coaching as an ensemble, and enjoyed an intimate performance of modern classical works, including those of his home country of Vietnam. In the spring, we were fortunate to again host Grammy-winning and unparalleled musician David Russell. David's warmth and brightness radiate not only from his guitar, but through his personability and teaching as well. He offered meaningful advice to students based on their skill level



An Tran working with students at the first ever "Student Day" held at the CCGS office space on Euclid Avenue.



David Russell and CCGS students strike a pose after the student masterclass held in April.

Eager to show off the skills they've gained, many of our students have sought out performances in the community. One such student is high schooler Guadalupe Quintero. Guadalupe joined our friends at the Julia de Burgos Cultural Arts Center in celebrating Spanish culture with a performance at the Feria de Cleveland festival. Other students seeking chances to perform seized the opportunity at our solo recitals and other community performances. Students performed pieces as solos and in small ensembles, sharing their artistry and hard work with families and friends.



A CCGS student performs at the Feria de Cleveland festival held at Julia de Burgos Cultural Arts Center.





Many of our younger students begin playing because they are inspired by hearing their older siblings. Sometimes they even form family ensembles.

Advanced Ensemble and Honors Recital



Advanced Ensemble performs at Mandel Hall in Severance Music Center for MLK Day celebration.

Last summer, Dr. Christopher McDonald envisioned an ensemble of highly motivated students performing complex music at a high level and in various venues. This vision, what would become the CCGS Advanced Ensemble, was manifested by the excitement and hard work of these skilled and passionate students. The newly created Advanced Ensemble consisted of five members in their inaugural year, each representing a different Cleveland school. This group brought together some of most dedicated students to learn, create, and grow through challenging repertoire, rigorous training, and exciting performances.

The Advanced Ensemble displays the beauty that emerges when talented young artists embark on a shared passion and goal. Their first performance was in December 2025, when Julia de Burgos Cultural Arts Center served as a beautiful venue for a holiday performance of Carol of the Bells. They then held back-to-back performances at the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Concert Hall at Severance Music Center in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. The group gave the opening performance for Grammy winner David Russell in April. They concluded the season as they joined several soloists in the first annual Honors Recital in June at the stunning Reinberger Chamber Hall at Severance Music Center. With each successful performance, interest from other students has continued to blossom, with 11 members joining in fall 2026 and plans to showcase this outstanding group in a Chicago tour in spring 2027.

Connecting with our Community

The CCGS mission has three main pillars: Teach - Inspire - Connect. While “Teach” and “Inspire” refer to our Education Program and professional concerts, the “Connect” pillar refers to our efforts to provide opportunities for guitar players in the Greater Cleveland area to learn, play, perform, and engage with other musicians. Over the 2025-2026 season, CCGS held five Open Recitals, which are performance opportunities open to players of all ages and skill levels; two public masterclasses with An Tran and David Russell; and two CCGS Guitar Orchestra performances.



Tom Ray directs The Community Orchestra during their spring performance.



David Russell gives a public masterclass, in addition to the CCGS student class, in April, 2026.

With all of the new guitars we purchased, you might wonder what happens to guitars that are retired. We’re proud to announce a new partnership that gives us a way to donate guitars nearing the end of their lifespan. Arun Ranchod, a guitarist who teaches through Renovare at the Northeast Ohio Reintegration Center for incarcerated women has put these to excellent use. Formerly, those who wanted to learn guitar as a part of their rehabilitation had to share instruments during class, and now they each have their own. We save our older guitars so that as their program grows they never have to worry about having enough.



Thank you cards to CCGS made by members of the Northeast Ohio Reintegration Center guitar class.

Alumni Corner

In the 2025-2026 school year, we were fortunate to have two of our stellar alumni, Damian Goggans and Daziel Pérez Pagán, working as assistant teachers while earning extra money and gaining valuable experience working with all three full-time educators. Each worked immersively in the classroom, assisting and leading portions of classes, while on extended breaks from school and other work (Damian is a frequent returnee). CCGS educator Max Shaffer reflects on their contributions in the classroom: “Daziel was very professional, a great communicator, and the kids liked him a lot. One of the biggest ways he helped me was in supporting a neurodivergent student. That was a new experience for both of us, yet he quickly learned how to help them, and the class ran at its very best when he was there. Damian was a big hit, and kids were very excited to see him return from the previous year. One of the wonderful roles he played was working with a student who was much more advanced than the rest of the class. I gave her harder parts but had to spend most of my time working with the other students, while Damian truly helped her to thrive.” During Damian’s residency, he also recorded videos of pieces and tutorials, jumpstarting CCGS’s most robust archive of materials to date for students to use to learn at home.

“CCGS has been a huge part of my life, and I am forever thankful that I got to be a part of the program. It’s really rewarding to be able to work with them, to give that same experience to somebody else,” said Daziel.

Damian reminisced: “Teaching for CCGS last winter was very special for me. At the time, I was recovering from a really interesting health scare. I was forced to take a medical leave of absence from school. I was very much unsure of what life had next for me. But being able to work with CCGS and their amazing students—students who immediately recognized me from when I previously worked there and who had shown significant improvement since — rekindled a light in me. It gave me a purpose again and allowed me to see that my story wasn’t over. I’m so glad to have been able to come back home.”



Damian Goggans and Daziel Pérez Pagán

More Live Music!

Throughout the 2025-2026 concert season, CCGS continued to inspire Cleveland audiences with world-class artists from around the region and the globe.

International Series

Our International Series remains dedicated to bringing the world's best classical guitarists to our hometown. Here are some highlights from 2025-2026.

Leonela Alejandro from Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, winner of the Rose Augustine Grand Prize in the 2024 Guitar Foundation of America International Concert Artist Competition, performed in her Cleveland debut.



Leonela Alejandro with her student opener after their October performance.



David Russell with friends after his concert last May.

Decorated Cleveland favorite, **David Russell**, performed Don Quixote, a five-movement sonata written for him by Stephen Goss. Accompanying images were rotated by David's wife, Maria, as she followed along with the score.

An Tran performed three world premieres and highlighted the music of his native Vietnam. An also gave a public master class and spent time working with students at the first CCGS Student Day.



An Tran performing a program of all living composers and building a bridge to the music of his homeland, Vietnam.

Branching out

We continued to expand our live music offerings with the jazz-, classical-, and Brazilian-blending Diego Figueiredo (in two nights, featured in a duo and quartet), a five-guitar octet called Waking Dream led by Randy Napoleon, and a sold-out performance by the phenomenal jazz guitarist Pasquale Grasso.



Diego Figueiredo



Randy Napoleon's Waking Dream Ensemble



Pasquale Grasso

Ambassador Series

In the fall of 2025, CCGS launched the new Ambassador Series with three goals: to spread general awareness about our organization and the work we do; to offer a paid performance opportunity to local guitarists; and, most importantly, to spread the joy of great music. We achieved this by connecting two incredible Cleveland guitarists with communities and organizations eager to hear them. Nathaniel Hill and Nolan Juaire, both of whom have studied with Jason Vieaux at the Cleveland Institute of Music, performed at area retirement communities and libraries for enthusiastic and appreciative audiences.



Nathaniel Hill



Nolan Juaire

2026-2027 Lineup



2026 Showcase

September 19th, 2026



Berta Rojas

October 17, 2026



TY Zhang

January 16, 2027



Mateusz Kowalski and Mak Grgic (Slavic Sessions)

February 6, 2027



Sérgio and Clarice Assad

March 6, 2027



Alexandra Whittingham

April 17, 2027

Help us offer life-changing experiences!



Your donations provide students with:

- Professional Instruction
- Instruments and equipment
- Instructional materials
- Lessons and classes
- Special programs
- Performance opportunities

Online:

Please scan the QR code or visit the link to donate.
cleguitar.org/donate

By mail:

Cleveland Classical Guitar Society
PO Box 19162
Cleveland OH 44119

The Augustine Foundation

Cleveland Foundation

cuyahoga arts & culture
strengthening community

D'Addario Foundation

The George Gund Foundation

The Louise H. & David S. Ingalls Foundation

National Endowment for the Arts
arts.gov

The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation
1959

The Char and Chuck Fowler Family Foundation

Thank You!

To the foundations who generously supported CCGS in 2025-2026

Ohio Arts Council

Paul M. Angell Family Foundation

The Past Presidents Foundation

WC & EJ Thornton Foundation

The Roy Minoff Family Fund

cleguitar.org