

Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival: recital by SoloDuo (June 4)

by Daniel Hathaway



Most classical guitar recitals are one-player-on-the-stage affairs, so SoloDuo's excellent recital on the evening of Saturday, June 4 in Mixon Hall at CIM was a double-your-pleasure, double-your-fun occasion. Italian guitarists Matteo Mela and Lorenzo Micheli wowed and delighted a sold-out crowd with intelligent and probing performances of arrangements of music by Domenico Scarlatti, Vincenzo Bellini, J.S. Bach, Claude Debussy, and Astor Piazzolla.

Micheli spoke frequently during the evening, at first to correct information about the guitars being used and to re-arrange the order of the program, and after that to comment wittily on some of the pieces. Usually that's redundant information if there are printed program notes, but here it was welcome because Tom Poore's amusing written commentary dealt more with biographical details than with the music itself.

The duo began the evening with three contrasting Scarlatti Sonatas in which Mela and Micheli made suave transitions between styles and demonstrated impressive ensemble and passagework in the toccata-like third piece.

Viennese guitarist Mauro Giuliani's duo arrangement of the Sinfonia from Bellini's opera *Il pirata* received eloquent, understated treatment from SoloDuo, who created fine changes of color and gradation of dynamics — in addition to adding a bit of distracting toe-tapping as things heated up toward the end.

Micheli prefaced Bach's *French Suite No. 5* with a hilarious commentary about the true meaning of the subtitles "French," "English," and "Italian" for Bach's keyboard music. Then the duo embarked on a beautifully-balanced performance of Ida Presti's and Alexandre Lagoya's arrangements of Bach's seven dance movements, played without

breaks. The Sarabande featured a lovely *double*, the Gavotte enjoyed a sharper, contrasting style of articulation on its repeat, the Loure leapt gently, and the Gigue was glistening.

An uncredited but marvelous arrangement of Debussy's *Suite Bergamasque* followed intermission. Tone color abounded in the Prélude. The Menuet ended on a note of evanescence. "Clair de lune" was drop-dead gorgeous, and the final Passepied was full of Gallic charm.

Mela and Micheli ended with a strong, pungent account of Astor Piazzolla's *Tango Suite* punctuated by tapping on the bodies of the guitars and decorated with virtuosic flights of fancy.

After volleys of applause, Mela and Micheli returned to spend a long moment in whispered conversation. Mela finally said, "We can't agree on an encore, so we'll play two pieces." No complaints from the audience about that.

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