

Jason Vieaux in Saratoga Springs

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Vieaux's performance inspired

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SARATOGA SPRINGS -- Classical guitarist Jason Vieaux has magic in his fingers. On Thursday night at Skidmore College's Filene Recital Hall as part of the Sterne Virtuoso Series, Vieaux gave an inspired and impeccably prepared recital before a large audience. Internationally known since he was 19, the now-36-year-old Vieaux has 10 recordings to his credit that, like his recital, show a versatility and technical capability of marvelous clarity. The pieces, some of which he had arranged, were wide ranging. All of them displayed his fluid and clean technique, mellow tone and strong sense of pacing. His playing on every piece brought a smile and sometimes a sigh.

He began with his arrangement of Albeniz's "Savilla" from "Suite Espagnola" that was a soulful ballad. Vieaux used well-paced rubato and plenty of Spanish flair.

Bach's Lute Suite No. 1 was really a reworking that Bach did of his fifth cello suite with added chords and bass notes. Because Bach didn't play lute, which is a cousin to the guitar, he had two special keyboards made that allowed him to work out the sounds, Vieaux said. The work in six sections was elegant and Vieaux played it with a tasteful attention to the Baroque ornamentation. Each section had its own flavor and Vieaux did not hesitate to use dynamics as inflection, even if that meant playing at whisper level.

The music of Agustin Barrios of Paraguay is having a major revival thanks to transcriptions of old recordings, and the two pieces performed were wonderfully romantic and current. "Julia Florida: Bacarola" was an evocative love song that Vieaux played with a mellow tone and an expressive use of rubato and pacing. The "Vals" was like a flirtatious pretty girl in swirling skirts in waltz time.

The second half showed off Vieaux's interpretive abilities with Leo Brouwer's "El Decameron Negro" -- a programmatic African tale, and Vieaux's arrangements of five Pat Metheny songs put in the Baroque style. The Brouwer had abstract lines, rippling strumming effects, and modern and jazz harmonies, which Vieaux whipped off with éclat.

The Metheny was interesting in that Vieaux kept the melodies and Metheny's harmonies, which crossed over very well. Although the first three songs were beautiful, they tended too much toward the same mood of somberness. But "Question and Answer" and "James" were upbeat and charming.

The encore of a sinuous samba by Jorge Morel had good flash.