

Guitarist Jason Vieaux
with harpist Yolanda Kondonassis and violinist Joan Kwuon

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Classical Guitar Weekend: Four Concerts (May 20-22)

by Daniel Hathaway & Mike Telin

The eleventh annual Classical Guitar Weekend, sponsored by Armin Kelly's Guitars International, brought five internationally recognized artists, guests, and a master luthier to the Cleveland Institute of Music from Friday, May 20 through Sunday, May 22. The featured artists gave individual recitals and masterclasses, and Gaza Burghardt gave a lecture about the traditional Spanish Method of Guitar Construction. The weekend was educational — and entertaining — for the guitar professional and the guitar curious alike.

The well-attended recitals were held in Mixon Hall — a perfect venue for hearing classical guitar — and the repertory was well documented in extensive program notes written by five esteemed annotators: Sérgio Assad, Colin Davin, Erik Mann, Tom Poore and Asgerdur Sigurdardottir. We attended all four recitals and caught one of the masterclasses.

Jason Vieaux with Yolanda Kondonassis and Joan Kwuon (Mike Telin)

The concluding recital of the weekend was played by master musician Jason Vieaux, who was joined by two Cleveland Institute of Music colleagues, harpist Yolanda Kondonassis and violinist Joan Kwuon. Mr. Vieaux began the afternoon with Bach's *Lute Suite in e*, BWV 996. As we have come to expect from his performances, he interpreted the prelude and the succeeding dance movements exquisitely, allowing Bach's inner lines and harmonic progressions to sing out in all their eloquence. Ms. Kondonassis proved to be a first-class collaborator in Alan Hovhaness *Spirit of Trees: Sonata for Harp and Guitar*. The composer's repetitive style, learned from Oriental models, could in the hands of lesser artists become monotonous, but this performance put you into a trance you hoped would not end.

Following intermission, Mr. Vieaux played the world premiere of Dan Visconti's *Devil's Strum*, a bluesy and literally foot-stomping piece written for the performer, which utilizes extended techniques and like its dedicatee is full of musical personality. Mr. Vieaux captivated the packed house with his dramatic performance of the new work.

The concert concluded with Astor Piazzolla's *Histoire du Tango*, which traces the traditional music of Buenos Aires from its origins in the Bordello to the present day (or at least Piazzolla's day). Violinist Joan Kwuon made easy work of some difficult passages and captured the elusive Argentine spirit. Mr. Vieaux rewarded the audience's enthusiastic ovation with yet another expertly played tango.

A year after first hearing him, I continue to be impressed with Jason Vieaux's powers of communicating with an audience without saying a word. It's a quality that is inborn and can't be learned.