

## Review: Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival: Four recitals (May 30-June 1)

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by James Flood, Daniel Hathaway & Mike Telin

### Robert Gruca / Jason Vieaux and Julien Labro

by Mike Telin

Gruca-Robert On Sunday, June 1, the 14th edition of the Festival concluded with two remarkable recitals. Those of us who had the pleasure of hearing both were treated to a fascinating musical collage that began with works by two Elizabethan composers and concluded with an electrifying rendition of Tears for Fears's 1985 hit Everybody Wants to Rule the World.

[...]



**VIEAUX-LABRO** The evolution of classical guitar music continued at 7:30 when guitarist Jason Vieaux was joined by his frequent collaborator Julien Labro on bandoneón, accordion and accordina. One always hopes the final concert of a festival will be something special that sends audiences home in anticipation of the next edition and Vieaux and Labro did not disappoint.

Given the two began their musical partnership with their 2011 celebrated recording on the Azica label titled *The Music of Astor Piazzolla*, it was fitting for them to begin their program with a work by the father of Tango Nuevo. Composed in 1986, *Historie du Tango* consists of four movements that describe the evolution of Tango.

Vieaux and Labro performed the first, “Bordel 1900” and the fourth, “Concert d’Aujourd’hui”.

Originally scored for flute and guitar, the piece is often performed in various instrumental combinations (guitar and bandoneón for this performance) Now for my dirty little secret: I have always hated this piece. That was, until last Sunday night. In the hands of two accomplished musicians who are well-versed in both classical and jazz, Vieaux and Labro’s performance captured the essence of Tango Nuevo. As they would throughout the evening the dynamic duo performed from one musical mind – all unison technical passages, no matter how fast, were perfectly in sync. And they were obviously having a lot of fun during some extended improvisations.

The four movements of the *Suite Retratos* by the 20th century Brazilian composer of classical and popular music Radamés Gnattali pays homage to pioneers of Brazilian choro. Switching to the chromatic button accordion, Labro joined Vieaux to perform the music’s syncopated fast rhythmic changes with virtuosity and to bring out the intricate counterpoint that characterizes choro. Their teamwork as they moved in and out of the waltz theme during “Ernesto Nazareth” was remarkable and the speed at which they took final “Chiquinha Gonzaga” was astonishing. Again the two performers reveled in every opportunity to improvise.

Following intermission came Pat Metheny's *Antonia* which featured heartfelt, extended solos by Labro on the accordina. Written in 1958 for guitar and orchestra, Leo Brouwer's *Tres Danzas Concertants* did, as Tom Poore wrote in his program notes, seem like the "odd man out" on the program. Written when the composer was only 19, the three-movement work lacks the compositional maturity of his later works. Still, Vieaux gave a compelling performance, and Labro, now back on accordion, was a fitting replacement for the orchestra.

The final work brought the performers back to Piazzolla and Labro back to bandoneón. Dating from 1978, *Escualo* (Shark) was written for Piazzolla's longtime band member and friend, violinist Fernando Suarez Paz. Introducing the piece, Jason Vieaux told the audience that the key to the evening's program was finding music that worked for their combination of instruments. Well, this piece certainly worked. Vieaux and Labro's high energy playing achieved an even higher level.

Of course the large crowd was not going to allow it to end there. And just when you thought it couldn't get any better, it did. Jason Vieaux and Julien Labro (with accordina) returned to the stage and the second Vieaux played the opening of the *Tears for Fears* classic, there were more than a few audible laughs from the audience: would the final piece performed at the Festival really be *Everybody Wants to Rule the World*? Yes it was, and what a performance it was, complete with a wild, extended, harmonically crazed improvisation by Labro. Vieaux and Labro may not rule the world, but on Sunday evening they certainly ruled Mixon Hall.

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