

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Pro Musica
October 27, 2016

Jason Vieaux, Guitar
Yolanda Kondonassis, Harp

Máximo Diego Pujol (b. 1957)

Suite Magica

Argentinian composer Máximo Diego Pujol follows an arduous career as a guitarist and composer after studying with numerous distinguished composers at the Buenos Aires Conservatory of Music. One of his earliest works written for a final exam there was awarded first prize in several important competitions in Argentina. Along with his academic pursuits, Pujol has played in Buenos Aires night clubs where he thoroughly explored the tango, an art form native to Argentina. In 2016, Pujol performs in Germany, France, and the UK as well as in the US and his own country. Throughout his studies and performances, Pujol always honors the genius of Astor Piazzola by striving to fuse the traditional tango with serious academic ideas of music. With its four movements, the *Suite Magica* clearly reflects Pujol's intentions.

The somber opening *Prelude* introduces the magical combination of guitar and harp. The following *Vals* (Vale) further explores that combination in a merry waltz form. A certain lightness of spirit persists in the following *Tango*, the syncopated form so unique to Argentinian music. The last movement *Candombé*, with its striking drumming effects, is a reference to the African dance form closely related to the tango.

Antônio Carlos Jobim (1927-1994)

A Felicidade

Antônio Carlos Jobim's *A Felicidade*, as performed by Jason Vieaux, is an arrangement for guitar by French guitarist and composer Roland Dyens who teaches at the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris where he is Professor of Guitar. Jobim's original work was scored for voice and jazz orchestra, but Dyens loses nothing of that breadth in his colorful arrangement which underscores the congratulatory meaning of its title.

Alan Hovhaness (1911-2000)

Sonata for Harp and Guitar, Op. 374, "Spirit of Trees"

Alan Hovhannes was born in Somerville, Massachusetts and died in Seattle, Washington after spending many of his creative years there. Despite these American origins, he maintained throughout his life and music a strong association with his Armenian descent. Interestingly, his mother insisted that the family move to Arlington, Massachusetts because of the discrimination against Armenians in Somerville. One might wonder if this early experience was influential in turning him against American music of the 20th century for which he declared he had no sympathy. Indeed, Hovhaness turned to such composers as Sibelius whom he greatly admired but in 1936, after hearing a performance an Indian dance troupe and orchestra, established his lifelong interest in Indian music. Despite his commitment, however, Hovhaness was not against honoring classical form as indicated in this remarkable Sonata for Harp and Guitar, Op. 374. His prolific output included no less than sixty-seven symphonies including his Symphony No. 2, "Mysterious Mountain," premiered by Leopold Stokowski and the Houston Symphony. He also composed a concerto for xylophone and orchestra, *Fantasy on Japanese Woodprints*, based on his musical studies in Japan. In 1963 he composed *Circe*, a ballet score for Martha Graham.

Hovhannes's penchant for the Oriental is immediately recognizable in the opening *Andante cantabile* of the Sonata for Harp and Guitar and is maintained in the majestic but freely expressed *Maestoso rubato*

section. Exoticism remains in the brief second movement *Canon* despite its traditional form in which the two voices imitate each other. The opening *Andante maestoso* of the third movement gives us another majestic moment before the spirited and complex *Fuga* takes over and leads to the gracious conclusion of the movement. An Asian quality is sustained and treated with spirit in the fourth movement and in the final *Andante appassionato* which, as the marking indicates, is treated with great passion before a quiet ending.

The subtitle of the work is surely based on Hovhannes's belief in the spiritual significance of nature which he referred to as "the clothing of God."

Gary Shocker (b. 1959) **Hypnotized**

Gary Schocker is a flutist, composer, and pianist who has performed with such notable orchestras as the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the New Jersey Symphony, and the Dallas Symphony. Winner of the International Clarinet Association's annual composition competition and the National Flute Association's annual Newly Published Music Award, Schocker serves on the NYU faculty and has private studios in New York City and Easton, Pennsylvania.

While it is often dangerous to assign programmatic qualities to a piece, it is somewhat irresistible to do so in the case of Shocker's *Hypnotized*. Its five movements seem to suggest two musicians hypnotized as they arrive at an *Entrance* to an idyllic room from which they *Float Out* to synchronize their musicianship *Together* and *Awaken* to true happiness as they perform together. In his beautiful work, Schocker captures the procedure with great musical accomplishment.

Jason Vieaux and Yoland Kondonassis recorded the work for Azica Records in 2015 in an album entitled *Together*.

Carlos Salzedo (1885-1961) **Chanson dans la nuit**

French-born Carlos Salzedo was renowned not only as a composer but also as a performer and teacher. At the invitation of Arturo Toscanini, he first visited America in 1909 to perform with the Metropolitan Opera. He returned to the US in 1916 for solo recitals and performances with his Trio de Lutèce, the Salzedo Harp Ensemble, and with many leading sopranos. He co-founded the International Composers Guild with Edgar Varèse and became prominent in the new music circles of New York. His teaching career brought him both to The Juilliard School and The Curtis Institute of Music where he founded the harp programs. His numerous paraphrases for harp include the treatment of works by Bach.

Salzedo's many original compositions for harp include the *Chanson dans la nuit* published in 1955. In some three minutes, Salzedo seems to treat every possibility of the harp in luminous glissandos, inventive harmonies, and even percussive adventures. After all of that, the amazing work seems to slip away into the night.

Xavier Montsalvatage (1912-2002) **Fantasia**

Spanish composer Xavier Montsalvatage studied and taught at the Barcelona Conservatory and was strongly associated with the 20th century interest in ancient music of Catalonia as it was revisited by such composers as Enrique Granados and Isaac Albéniz. Montsalvatage later moved on to twelve-tone technique and was much influenced by French composers Olivier Messiaen and Georges Auric. In 1985, the same year in which he wrote the *Fantasia* we hear on this program, he was awarded Spain's Premio Nacional de Música for composition. It is considered one of his most important works.

Both the title of Montsalvatage's *Fantasia* and the naming of its three movements say much about the work. A *fantasia* is defined as a work free in form which certainly describes this piece. The first movement, *Claroscuro*, is a reference to the better-known Italian version of the word, *chiaroscuro*, meaning the play of light and dark, which is strikingly present in the movement with its thrilling air of mystery expressed by both instruments.

The second movement, *Cadencial*, can be taken technically as a reference to the musical term *cadence* that indicates the ending of a musical phrase, but it goes far beyond that with its suggestion of things beyond. Highly creative effects are offered by both harp and guitar.

The third movement *Brasilado* certainly brings to mind the music of Brazil, but its rich color also suggests the redness of Brazil wood. More importantly, it offers a great climax to this wonderful work.

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