

REVIEW: Kithara Duo gently pushes into new worlds

By Gayle Williams, Herald-Tribune

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There is a loyal, dedicated and growing group of guitar music aficionados in our community if the attendance at Guitar Sarasota's opening concert featuring the guitar duo, Kithara is any sign. The entire evening was warm, inviting, and so friendly- qualities reflected by the humble yet inspiring Fellowship Hall at St. Paul Lutheran Church designed by famed architect Victor Lundy and the event organizers and volunteers.

But it was the two performers themselves, Fernand Vera and Olga Amelkina-Vera who created such a circle of camaraderie with their way of being on stage and the delightfully diverse program of music that they shared with a admirably seamless level of musicality and technique.

Whether fast, slow, Renaissance or contemporary, the music they performed was calm and soothing. Certainly the entire classical guitar repertoire contains many fiery and brash selections, yet I imagine that the instrument naturally relieves stress more than most others.

One would not be surprised by two selections each by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Isaac Albeniz, composers well represented in the guitar repertoire. More fascinating was Galliard and Coranto, an arrangement dances originally for viol da gamba by Alfonso Ferrabosco the Younger, a now largely unremembered English musician during the reigns of Elizabeth I and her successor, James I.

With a pair of Japanese folk songs and an arrangement of an Ecuadorian songuzos, by Fernand Vera's grandfather, Toribo, this evening was a friendly and relaxing stroll through some favorite music of our performing duo. There was also much beauty to be found in the subtle differences

and well as cultural flavors of these selections. Astor Piazzolla's 'Lo Que Vendra', elegaic with glimpses of tango was a real crowd pleaser.

The real discovery of the evening were three original compositions by Olga Amelkina-Vera who gently stretched the expectations sharing her delightful musical imagination. Prelude and Bagatelle was soft-spoken, like its composer, with a hint of piquant harmony. In the three movements of Beings, she abstractly evoked the spirits of mythological characters: the minotaur, sylphs and the salamander. Her Gustav's Dream, an homage to Mahler who composed nothing for guitar, was a much enjoyed encore for the appreciative audience.

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