

**The Placitas Artists Series
presents
Jason Vieaux
Classical Guitar
in a
Streamed Concert**

Sunday, January 17, 2021 at 3:00 p.m. MDT

**Concert Generously Sponsored by
Wendy Wilkins and Jay Rodman**

Program

Mauro Giuliani (1781-1829)

Variations on a Theme of Handel, Op. 107

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major (trans. D Major), BWV 1007

- I. Prelude*
- II. Allemande*
- III. Courante*
- IV. Sarabande*
- V. Minuet 1 & 2*
- VI. Gigue*

Francisco Tárrega (1852-1909)

Capricho Árabe

*******Intermission*******

Jason Vieaux (b. 1973)

Home

Fernando Sor (1778-1839)

5 Studies

- 1. Op. 6, No. 2*
- 2. Op. 45, No. 5*
- 3. Op. 31, No. 4*
- 4. Op. 44, No. 23*
- 5. Op. 60, No. 23*

Variations on a Theme of Mozart, Op. 9

Isaac Albeniz (1860-1909)

Rumores de la Caleta, Op. 71, No. 6

Program Notes

Mauro Giuliani (1781-1829)

Variations on a Theme of Handel, Op. 107

“The guitar is a miniature orchestra unto itself.” Beethoven is reputed to have said this after hearing the Italian virtuoso of the guitar, **Mauro Giuliani**. This certainly speaks of the high-esteem that Giuliani enjoyed among many of the great musicians of his time. He performed in the premiere of Beethoven’s *Seventh Symphony* and *Wellington’s Victory* (presumably on his second instrument, the ‘cello). He also performed one of his guitar concerti in Prague under the baton of Carl Maria von Weber and was said to have even performed with Paganini and Rossini. The authors of one contemporary guitar method stated that Giuliani’s performances and teaching while a resident of Vienna in 1806-1819 “...formed for us so many outstanding amateurs, that there could scarcely be another place where authentic guitar-playing is so widely practiced as here in our Vienna.” And though he had never been to England, Giuliani’s influence extended even there, where several years after his death a journal in tribute to him entitled *The Giulianiad* was published.

Giuliani’s *Variations on a Theme of Handel, Op 107*, is based on the theme that comes from the last movement of Handel’s *Fifth Harpsichord Suite*. In Handel’s work, it is also the focus of a set of variations, though it is probable that Giuliani actually knew the theme not from the original, but from the variations that his friend and colleague Ignaz Moscheles had written several years prior to Giuliani’s composition. The theme itself has become very popular, and is nicknamed “The Harmonious Blacksmith,” after the rumor that Handel had first heard the tune whistled or sung by a blacksmith, accompanied by the rhythmic clanging of his hammer upon the anvil. In fact, this story is entirely false. It was fabricated well after Handel’s (and even Giuliani’s) death by Richard Clarke in his book *Reminiscences of Handel*, in 1836. Clarke went so far as to reveal the identity of the central figure of his fictitious story – a contemporary of Handel’s named William Powell – and even had an elaborate headstone made for Clarke’s grave naming him as “The Harmonious Blacksmith.” – Erik Mann

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major (trans. D Major), BWV 1007

From our perspective, it’s easy to single out **Johann Sebastian Bach** as the apex of the Baroque era. But this wasn’t obvious at the time. Bach was best known to his contemporaries as an organist, both as a player and an evaluator. (He often was hired to give an expert opinion of any newly installed organ.) As a composer, his renown was mostly local. Bach wasn’t the world traveller that his contemporary Handel was. Further, only a handful of his works were published

during his lifetime. Working in relative obscurity, however, Bach mastered his craft in a way few before or after could equal. “I was obliged to work hard,” he laconically noted, adding somewhat debatably, “whoever is equally industrious will succeed just as well.”

Most notable was Bach’s omnivorous embrace of all music available to him. Even as a child, he quickly learned everything put before him. His older brother Johann Christoph owned an anthology of more advanced music, but wouldn’t allow his younger brother to study it. Undeterred, Johann Sebastian spent months secretly copying the anthology at night while everyone was asleep. (Later caught in the act, his painstakingly purloined copies were confiscated.) As an adult, Bach amassed a huge library of music. Quality wasn’t always what he sought – music historians are often bemused at how much bad music Bach collected. Rather, he simply wanted to know what was going on around him. And then he set out to surpass it.

Because of this, many instruments can claim Bach as a cornerstone of their repertoire. For the solo violin, he wrote three sonatas and three partitas. The partitas are collections of dance movements; the sonatas are more abstract, each featuring a knotty and challenging fugue. Works for solo violin weren’t unknown in Bach’s day. Indeed, he was friendly with several violin virtuosos who composed solo music for their instrument. Bach, however, plumbed greater depths, both in technical difficulty and musical substance. Such is the influence of the first sonata (BWV 1001) that Hungarian composer Béla Bartók used it as a model for his own 1944 *Sonata for Solo Violin*, even quoting the opening chord.

Bach’s *Suites à Violoncello Solo senza Basso* are more innovative. Although there were some tepid solo cello works before Bach, the cello then was still pigeon-holed as an accompaniment instrument, dutifully chugging away in the basement of any musical texture. Bach swept aside this stereotype for good. Of his six suites, the first is beloved by cellists and audiences alike, especially for its serenely lyrical prelude. Musicologist David Ledbetter praised this prelude as “an extraordinary and classic example of Bach’s ability to make his material grow from the inherent nature of an instrument, from the smallest motifs to the broadest structures.”

Francisco Tárrega (1852-1909) *Capricho Árabe*

Convinced the guitar was unsuitable for classical music, **Francisco Tárrega** studied piano and composition at the Madrid Conservatory. But his composition teacher Emilio Arrieta, on hearing Tárrega play a guitar recital, embraced him and exclaimed, "The guitar needs you, and you were born for her!" *Capricho Árabe* is a tribute to Moorish history, with echoes of the Arabic lute and guitar harmonies.

Jason Vieaux (b. 1973) *Home*

I wrote *Home* during the first month or so of the Covid-19 pandemic, along with about 60 minutes of other short concert pieces and developmental etudes, many of which I’ve premiered

during the pandemic in various virtual and live concerts. I was talking with a colleague about how there are many right-hand tremolo pieces for the guitar, but not many that have a more idiomatic left-hand scheme that allows a player or student to better concentrate on the development of their right-hand tremolo. Composing has been a real bright spot in 2020 for me, as a musical endeavor in the absence of traveling and live recitals.

Fernando Sor (1778-1839)

5 Studies

Variations on a Theme of Mozart, Op. 9

Of **Fernando Sor**, music historian Richard Long writes, “[Sor's] pieces for guitar, especially the large-scale works and the studies, were composed in the international classical style, and demonstrate a polyphonic approach and an academic concern for form which are often missing in the flamboyant works of his guitarist contemporaries...”

Variations on a Theme of Mozart, Op. 9 is the most well-known of these larger-scale works. Sor's variations are based on a theme from Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*. This theme appears twice in the opera: briefly as Papageno sings "Schon' Madchen, jung und fein" (“Beautiful Maiden, young and fine”), and during the chorus "Das Klinget so herrlich" (“That sounds so wonderful”).

Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909)

Rumores de la Caleta, Op. 71, No. 6

Though he never wrote for the guitar, much of the music of **Isaac Albéniz** imitates the sound of this quintessentially Spanish instrument. In fact, after hearing the guitarist Francisco Tárrega play an arrangement of one of his pieces, Albéniz commented, “That is what I imagined.”

Albéniz, though from Cataluña in the north of Spain, especially loved flamenco music from the southern region of Andalusia. In flamenco one can hear the influence of many Eastern cultures, including the Moors (who ruled Spain for about seven centuries), nomadic gypsies (who some believe originated in northern India), and the Jews. As a consequence of this eclectic mix, flamenco music has an unmistakable and exotic sound. *Rumores de la Caleta* is an example of the flamenco form called *Malagueña*, a regionalized form of the fandango, from Málaga.

Program Notes provided by Jason Vieaux