26th Annual

CLEVELAND INTERNATIONAL

CLASSICAL GUITAR FESTIVAL®

June 4-7, 2026

The Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival® strives to:

Inspire guitarists and non-guitarists of all ages, genders, national origins, and backgrounds;

Encourage deeper thought, discussion, and understanding about how we perceive, evaluate, teach, and perform fine music;

Nurture new and old musical relationships;

Promote the creation, discovery, and dissemination of fine musical art;

For we believe it is in heightened moments of live musical magic - when art and chance coalesce, time stops, and egos dissolve - that often we become most mindful of our shared humanity.

Welcome And Acknowledgments

Beauty is truth, truth beauty.... **John Keats**

Welcome to the twenty-sixth annual Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival®. This June we look forward to sharing once again world-class classical guitar concerts, premieres, master classes, lectures, private lessons, and a demonstration of fine concert guitars with old friends and new from around the USA and beyond in a celebration of classical guitar and art music: solo and ensemble, old and new.

In presenting this event over the years it has been my pleasure to work with Jason Vieaux, Grammy Award Winner and Cleveland Institute of Music Guitar Department Head; Tom Poore, a devoted guitar teacher and superb writer; and James Stroud, Founder and Director of the James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition. Without these individuals' many generous and varied contributions this Festival would not be possible. As always, many thanks to you all.

Armin Kelly, Founder and Artistic Director
Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival®

We Wish to Thank the Following for their Kind Support

Cleveland Institute of Music Administration, Departments of Marketing, Concerts & Events, Staff and the law firm **Thompson Hine LLP,** for their ongoing generosity and assistance.

Business Partners: Alphagraphics Cleveland, The Augustine Foundation, ClevelandClassical.com, Cleveland Foundation, First Baptist Church of Greater Cleveland, Guitars International, The College Music Society, and WCLV 90.3FM.

Festival Friends: Jeff and Teri Allen, Chip and Kate Andrews, Elizabeth Batts, Cornelia Bergmann, Rosario Cambria and Teresa Cambria Btrvis, Richard Chandler, Mark Cohen, Colin Davin, Martin and Kathy Davin, Joshia de Jonge and Patrick Hodges, Patrick Duncan, Jeffrey R. Elliott and Cyndy Burton, Drs. Jonathan and Melissa Fitzgerald, Robert and Melissa Gruca, Linda and Steve Hall, Christoph and Iris Harlan, David W. Hershberger, Nathaniel Hill, Tom Holland, Patrick Kilkenny, Doug and Carolyn Kohrs, Brian Kozak, Mary Lohman, Krystin O'Mara, Andy Poxon, Nathaniel Hill, Dr. Gary Ralph, Randi Rich, William W. Rowley, Matthew Ryan, Lisa and Michael Sharon, Andy Sutton, and Paul Valenti.

Festival Artists and Participants: Finally, many thanks to all our distinguished participating artists, the James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition Semi-Finalists and Judges, and all of you who have traveled here from near and far over the years, thirty-two states and Canada at last count. Your enthusiasm, support, and diversity contribute immeasurably to making this Festival the jewel that it is widely acknowledged to be.

[One of] two of the most important annual American classical guitar events
(Classical Guitar Magazine)

Who We Are

Our Festival Founder And Director

Armin Kelly (USA), studied classical guitar with Miguel Rubio in Spain and at the Lausanne Conservatory of Music in Switzerland, and with Phillip de Fremery and Oscar Ghiglia at the Aspen Music Festival. Among his most formative musical influences were friends and colleagues classical guitarists Christoph Harlan and John Holmquist. Armin Kelly holds BA and MA degrees in English literature from Columbia University and an MA degree in teacher education with a concentration in English from Harvard University. While at Harvard he founded Guitars International, a business devoted to representing, promoting, and retailing the work of the world's finest contemporary classical guitar makers.

Our Competition Founder and Director

James Stroud (USA) received his undergraduate degree in classical guitar and composition and his MA degree in classical guitar. He is a Board Member of the Guitar Foundation of America and long-standing supporter of a number of artistic and philanthropic organizations. He founded the James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition to help create opportunities for the next generation of classical guitarists, ages thirteen through eighteen, who reside in the United States. Now in its seventh year, he hopes that this Competition will aid deserving guitar students to further their artistic development through advanced musical study and the pursuit of professional musical careers.

Our Resident Writer

Tom Poore (USA) has taught at the North Carolina School of the Arts Community Music Center and the Cleveland Institute of Music Preparatory Department. His background in teaching children includes Suzuki training, outreach programs through the Broadway School of Music and Passport Program, and the Cleveland Public Schools' Arts in Summer Education Program. Former students have gone on to earn scholarships and degrees from the Cleveland Institute of Music, Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University, The Juilliard School of Music, University of Southern California Thornton School of Music, and Aspen Music Festival. Tom Poore earned his bachelor's degree at the North Carolina School of the Arts, under Aaron Shearer, and his master's degree at the Cleveland Institute of Music, under John Holmquist. He was the editor for Aaron Shearer's three volume *Learning the Classical Guitar*.

Who We Are

Our Guest Lecturer

Jonathan Leathwood (England) is Chair of Guitar at the University of Denver's Lamont School of Music. He is passionate about integrating different kinds of skills: apart from guitar performance, he teaches performance-informed music analysis, and he is an internationally certified teacher of the Alexander Technique. Professor Leathwood gained his PhD at the University of Surrey and his bachelor's degree at King's College London. He edits *Soundboard Scholar*, the Guitar Foundation of America's peer-reviewed scholarly journal. As a recitalist, Jonathan has appeared at Wigmore Hall (sponsored by the Julian Bream Trust), the Leo Brouwer Festival in Brazil, the Cheltenham Festival, and many other venues in Europe and both American continents. His recordings are available on the Cadenza and NMC labels.

The Composer Of Our Competition Set Piece

Celil Refik Kaya (Turkey/USA) has received high accolades for his many artistic achievements. Dr. Kaya regularly appears as a soloist and international touring artist in the United States and Europe. He has presented the premieres of concertos by Roberto Sierra (Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra), Derwyn Holder (New Jersey Baroque Orchestra), Leonard Handler, and Suleyman Alnitemiz (Istanbul State Symphony). As a performer he has worked closely with some of his generation's great composers including Lowell Liebermann, Jorge Morel, and Roberto Sierra. Dr. Kaya is known also as an avid composer of more than a hundred compositions including works for orchestra, solo guitar, violin, piano, string trio, duets and many others. His chamber and instrumental works have been performed throughout the world.

Six Free Pre-Concert Lectures
Schedule And Synopses

Zooming In and Out: This year's lectures explore the relationship between the big picture and the small, and the sense of joy, poetry, and ease that can arise from moving fluently between them. Whether we are considering Bach's dance melodies, harmony in the nineteenth-century guitar repertoire, our physical approach to the instrument, or the process of arranging music from another medium, the ability to shift perspective brings insight and poise.

These six lectures are designed for performers and listeners at all levels of experience and musical knowledge. I look forward to seeing you there.

—Jonathan Leathwood

Thursday, June 4th

Thursday, June 4, 6:00 - 7:15 pm, CIM Room 113 - Jonathan Leathwood, guitar

Zooming In and Zooming Out: The Poetry of Large-Scale Relationships in Guitar Music

A great piece of classical music unfolds on multiple levels, from the smallest details to the overarching structure. A compelling performance must do the same. This talk explores how to practice with different structural levels in mind, and how the music itself often shifts attention between long-range continuity and immediate expressive gesture—much like a cinematographer zooming in and out. Examples will be drawn from Bach, Sor, Mertz, and Regondi, with occasional reference to Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms.

Friday, June 5th

Friday, June 5, 6:00 to 7:15 pm, CIM Room 113 - Jonathan Leathwood, guitar
The Song in the Dance: Bach's Melodies

The pianist and critic Charles Rosen wrote of Bach's ability "to sustain the tension of an ornamental line or arabesque at greater length than any other composer before Chopin." The guitarist's Bach repertoire contains extraordinary melodies, often unassumingly embedded in slower dances such as allemandes and sarabandes. This talk examines how Bach sustains melodic tension over long spans and how that capacity shapes both lyrical and more continuous textures. We will consider where this expansive flow comes from and how guitarists can learn to shape it in practice and performance, extending these ideas to faster movements where melodic continuity is less immediately apparent.

Saturday, June 6th

Saturday, June 6, 1:30 to 2:45 pm, CIM Room 113 - Jonathan Leathwood, guitar
Imaginative Arrangement on the Guitar

When arranging well-known classical works for guitar—whether by Bach or by the great Spanish pianists—we often remain too close to the surface of the original, rather than reimagining it in the guitar's own terms. This talk explores how to think more freely and creatively about arrangement: how to translate musical ideas, not just the notes, and how to find solutions that are idiomatic, surprising, and musically convincing. It is intended both for those developing arranging skills and for listeners interested in what lies behind an effective transcription.

Six Free Pre-Concert Lectures
Schedule And Synopses

Saturday, June 6, 6:00 to 7:15 pm, CIM Room 113 – Jonathan Leathwood

The Guitarist's Touch: Right – and – Left – Hand Expression

This is a workshop about being a magician on the guitar. For tone production, basic movement and positioning take you ninety percent of the way. But some guitarists are able to produce uniquely expressive sounds and colors with a tiny flick of the right-hand, often bringing in the left hand to give the sound more weight or using a certain kind of vibrato to make the tone 'float'. What are they doing exactly? Let's explore and find out! We'll look at both ends of the tonal spectrum, from gentle and liquid to aggressive and bright, and we'll talk about how to develop your own unique voice on the instrument. This is a practical session: you are welcome to bring your guitar or simply observe.

Sunday, June 7th

Sunday, June 7, 11:30 am to 12:45 pm, CIM Room 113 - Jonathan Leathwood, guitar

Finding Ease at the Guitar: A Workshop in the Alexander Technique

This is a practical workshop: you are welcome to bring your guitar or simply observe. The Alexander Technique is a method for recognizing harmful or awkward patterns of movement and learning to undo them, using awareness and directed thinking. We'll look at some common misuses of the body in guitar playing and ask how a flexible kind of awareness (the zooming in and out that is the theme of this year's lectures) helps us move more easily at the instrument, with consequent benefits for technique and relief of stage fright.

Sunday, June 7, 3:00 to 3:50 pm, CIM Room 113 - Jonathan Leathwood, guitar

Post-Concert Discussion with Nicolò Spera

Immediately following the 1:00 pm concert in Mixon Hall, in which Nicolò Spera performs works written for him as soloist and chamber musician (including several premieres), this session will explore the collaborative process behind these pieces. Come and join in the conversation about how performer and composer work together and what goes into bringing new music to life.

Schedule Of Festival Events

Thursday, June 4th

James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition: Semi-Final Round
Thursday, June 4, 9:30 am - 12:15 pm
CIM Mixon Hall
Free and open to the public, no tickets or passes required

James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition: Semi-Final Round
Thursday, June 4, 1:30 pm - 4:00 pm
CIM Mixon Hall
Free and open to the public, no tickets or passes required

Pre-Concert Lecture presented by Jonathan Leathwood
Zooming In and Zooming Out: The Poetry of Large-Scale Relationships in Guitar Music - See Synopsis p. 6
Thursday, June 4, 6:00 - 7:15 pm
CIM Room 113
Free and open to the public, no tickets or passes required

Concert: Solo Guitar
JASON VIEAUX (USA), Grammy Award Winner
Thursday, June 4, 7:30 - 9:30 pm
CIM Mixon Hall
Tickets: $30

James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition: Finalists Announced
Thursday, June 4, 9:30 pm
CIM Mixon Hall
Free and open to the public, no tickets or passes required

Friday, June 5th

Master Class 1: Hao Yang (China) and Kevin Loh (Singapore), guitars
Friday, June 5, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm
CIM Room 113
Free for public auditors, no tickets or passes required

Master Class 2: Petra Polácková (Czech Republic), guitar
Friday, June 5, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm
CIM Room 217
Free for public auditors, no tickets or passes required

Master Class 3: Colin Davin (USA), guitar
Friday, June 5, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm
CIM Room 228
Free for public auditors, no tickets or passes required

Master Class 4: Nicolò Spera (Italy), guitar
Friday, June 5, 2:00 to 5:00 pm
CIM Room 113
Free for public auditors, no tickets or passes required

SCHEDULE OF FESTIVAL EVENTS

Master Class 5: Jonathan Leathwood (England), guitar
Friday, June 5, 2:00 to 5:00 pm
CIM Room 217
Free for public auditors, no tickets or passes required

Master Class 6: Jason Vieaux (USA), guitar
Friday, June 5, 2:00 to 5:00 pm
CIM Room 228
Free for public auditors, no tickets or passes required

Pre-Concert Lecture presented by Jonathan Leathwood
The Song in the Dance: Bach's Melodies - See Synopsis p. 6
Friday, June 5, 6:00 - 7:15 pm
CIM Room 113
Free and open to the public, no tickets or passes required

Concert: Kaleido Guitar Duo
HAO YANG (China) and KEVIN LOH (Singapore)
Friday, June 5, 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm
CIM Mixon Hall
Tickets: $25

Saturday, June 6th

Demonstration of Fine Classical Guitars from Around the World
Nathaniel Hill (USA), guitar
Saturday, June 6, 10:30 am - Noon
CIM Mixon Hall - Free and open to the public, no tickets or passes required

Pre-Concert Lecture presented by Jonathan Leathwood
Imaginative Arrangement on the Guitar - See Synopsis p. 6
Saturday, June 6, 1:30 to 2:45 pm
CIM Room 113
Free and open to the public, no tickets or passes required

Concert: Solo Guitar
MUXIN LI (China)
Saturday, June 6, 3:00 - 5:00 pm
CIM Mixon Hall
Tickets: $25

Pre-Concert Lecture presented by Jonathan Leathwood
The Guitarist's Touch: Right – and – Left – Hand Expression
Saturday, June 6, 6:00 to 7:15 pm
CIM Room 113
Free and open to the public, no tickets or passes required

Concert: Guitar and Harp
DAVIN-LEVIN DUO (USA)
Saturday, June 6, 7:30 - 9:30 pm
CIM Mixon Hall
Tickets: $25

SCHEDULE OF FESTIVAL EVENTS

Sunday, June 7th

Pre-Concert Lecture presented by Jonathan Leathwood
Finding Ease at the Guitar: A Workshop in the Alexander Technique - See Synopsis p. 7
Sunday, June 7, 11:30 am to 12:45 pm
CIM Room 113
Free and open to the public, no tickets or passes required

Concert: Solo Guitar and Guitar with Flute and Viola
NICOLÒ SPERA (Italy) and FRIENDS (USA)
Sunday, June 7, 1:00 - 3:00 pm
CIM Mixon Hall
Tickets: $25

Pre-Concert Lecture presented by Jonathan Leathwood
Post-Concert Discussion with guitarist Nicolò Spera - See Synopsis p. 7
Sunday, June 7, 3:00 to 3:50 pm
CIM Room 113
Free and open to the public, no tickets or passes required

Concert: Viennese and Modern Guitars
PETRA POLÁCKOVÁ (Czech Republic)
Sunday, June 7, 4:00 - 6:00 pm
CIM Mixon Hall
Tickets: $25

James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition: Final Round
Sunday, June 7, 6:30 - 8:30 pm
CIM Mixon Hall
Free and open to the public, no tickets or passes required

Closing Dinner: Open to All Festival Participants
Sunday, June 7, 9:30 pm
Valerios Ristorante, 12405 Mayfield Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44106
Tel: 216-421-8049 - Attendees Must Pay Their Own Tab

Jason Vieaux (USA)
Guitar

Thursday, June 4, at 7:30 pm
Cleveland Institute of Music, Mixon Hall

Program

Valse 3	Manuel Maria Ponce (1882–1948)
Preludio y Danza	Julián Orbón de Soto (1925–1991)
Three from Cinco preludios	Máximo Diego Pujol (b. 1957)
Fantaisie élégiaque Op. 59	Fernando Sor (1778-1839)

Intermission

Choros #1, Etude No. 8 in C# Minor	Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959)
Estudio Sin Luz	Andrés Segovia (1893-1987)
Julia Florida	Agustín Barrios Mangoré (1885-1944)
Choro / Danza in E Minor	Jorge Morel (1931-2021)
Gratitude	Jason Vieaux (b. 1973)

About the Artist

Grammy-winner **Jason Vieaux (USA**) is "among the elite of today's classical guitarists" (Gramophone). Multiple appearances for San Francisco Performances, Caramoor, 92nd St. Y, and Lincoln Center have cemented his reputation. Vieaux has premiered works written for him by Jeff Beal, Avner Dorman, Vivian Fung, Pierre Jalbert, and Pat Metheny. His various collaborators include Escher String Quartet, Anne Akiko Meyers, Julien Labro, and Grammy-winners Sasha Cooke, Zuill Bailey, and Timothy McAllister. Vieaux has taught at the CIM for 28 years.

Artist's website: jasonvieaux.com/

Notes

When Andrés Segovia embarked on his concert career, he envied pianists their imposing repertoire. In contrast, guitar recitals of his day favored lighter fare. Segovia was especially interested in soliciting ambitious multi-movement works for the guitar. Few composers answered

his call better than the Mexican composer **Manuel Ponce** (1882-1948). In fact, one might say he conjured a musical backstory for the guitar, composing large scale works reminiscent of the baroque, classical, and romantic eras. Ponce's comfort with music of the past was informed by his training. He'd studied piano with the formidable Martin Krause, about whom it was said: "All his students were afraid of him. In front of all the pupils in the conservatory, he would test whether one could transpose at sight a Bach Prelude and Fugue." (Ponce was one of the few who could.) In light of his predilection for larger works, Ponce's 1937 *Valse* is something of an anomaly. Small and lighthearted, it suggests that sometimes even the most serious composers just wanna have fun.

Julián Orbón de Soto (1925–1991) lived the ironic curse "may you live in interesting times." Born in Spain, when he was 15 his family fled from the Spanish Civil War to Cuba. He became a renowned figure in Cuban music—especially lauded for his adaptation of a poem by Cuban poet José Martí into lyrics for the popular song "Guantanamera." Political upheaval again found his adopted home, and he fled the Cuban Revolution when he was 34. But Orbón never lost his affection for either country, though each had devolved into something sinister. In a letter to Orbón, a friend summed up their mutual sadness: "A spell, a key we lost when we were so close to the castle. In the dream, we clutched it in our hands, but by morning it was gone." Composed in 1950/51, *Preludio y Danza* is his only work for guitar.

Máximo Diego Pujol (b. 1957) began his life as a musician when he found his father's old guitar in a closet. His father, a dentist in Argentina, had in his youth been a successful tango singer. Eager to foster his son's nascent interest, he arranged for eight year old Máximo to study with one of his dental patients, who was a popular local guitar teacher. A year later the precocious child was concertizing and composing. In addition to formal studies at the Buenos Aires Conservatory of Music, he regularly performed at Buenos Aires night clubs, both as a soloist and accompanist. A prolific composer, his list of publications at the Éditions Henry Lemoine website extends to four pages. His *Cinco preludios* have long been a popular staple of the guitar repertoire.

Among guitarists of his time, Spaniard **Fernando Sor** (1778-1839) stood apart. Well trained from childhood as a musician, he was skilled as both a composer and singer. He was also well travelled, in demand as a voice teacher in London, fêted as a composer of ballets in Moscow, and sharing a concert with Franz Liszt in Paris. But by the end of his life, he was oppressed by loss. Like many Spanish intellectuals, he had cooperated with Napoleon's occupation of Spain. When the French were driven out, Sor was no longer welcome in his own country and left, never to return. His wife, famed dancer and choreographer Félicité Hullin, left him to pursue a career in Moscow. (Actually, it's unclear that they ever were married.) The death of a talented young student, Charlotte Beslay, drew from Sor his most tragic guitar work: the Op. 59 *Fantaisie élégiaque*. Here he gives full reign to unrelenting sadness. Indeed, it's hard not to read into the closing funeral march the grief Sor would feel at the death of his own daughter only a short time later.

What the Chopin Études are to pianists, the *Douze Études* of Brazilian composer **Heitor Villa-Lobos** (1887-1959) are to guitarists. Since their publication in 1953, they've been a rite of passage for every aspiring guitarist. In the late 1990s, a 1928 manuscript in the composer's own hand was unearthed. This manuscript often deviated from the standard edition, sometimes drastically so. Ever since, guitarists have been divided over which edition is the true version of the 12 Études. In contrast, his 1920 *Chôros No. 1* suffers no such controversy. It's an early work, tinged by Brazilian popular music. Villa-Lobos called it "an instinctive production of the naive imagination."

In the early 1950s, **Andrés Segovia** (1893-1987) suffered a retina detachment in his right eye. Scheduled for surgical repair, he was told he might lose his sight entirely. On the day of the surgery, Segovia brought his guitar to the operating room. As doctors and nurses looked on, he closed his eyes and played. Upon finishing, he nodded in evident satisfaction. "Now I know I can

go on playing even if I remain blind for the rest of my life." He then told the doctors and nurses he was ready for the surgery. *Estudio Sin Luz* was the fruit of this harrowing experience.

Though Paraguayan guitarist **Agustín Barrios Mangoré** (1885-1944) wrote many solo guitar pieces, his *Julia Florida* is perhaps his most beloved. It stands apart in its gem-like perfection. Barrios wrote it in 1938, reputedly for a young student named Julia Martinez. Years later, Barrios scholar Rico Stover met her. "She told me that Barrios smoked a lot and was a bit nervous. Maybe because she was so beautiful and he of course wanted her but restrained himself. Or maybe not? She never let on to me that anything at all went down between them. But knowing Mangore's history with women, I wouldn't rule it out either."

Though born in Buenos Aires, **Jorge Morel** (1931-2021) was sired by a Sicilian family—his original surname was "Scibona." But this was often mispronounced, so he pragmatically changed it to something easier. Classically trained, Morel often arranged classical piano sonatas for the guitar. Beyond this, however, he was a musical omnivore, collaborating with musical luminaries such as Erroll Garner, Dizzy Gillespie, and Chet Atkins. Through his long and illustrious career, he often championed young up and coming players. In a memorial tribute, concert guitarist René Izquierdo wrote: "He was a friend, a confidant, the voice of wisdom. He always did so in a way that was kind, nurturing, and made you feel that he cared about you and meant every word. I believe he made the guitar community feel the same way."

When COVID-19 brought the world to a standstill, the performing career of **Jason Vieaux** (b. 1973) ground to an abrupt halt. Having no concerts to play was a shock. Recalled Vieaux: "It took a couple months to really figure out how to be a musician because I'm very much a performance oriented animal." But he adapted, and turned part of his basement into a musical haven. "This was the headquarters when everything was canceled. It's where I'd do anything related to music, including a casual performance or all the radio interviews." It was there that he also turned to composing. "I wrote over 60 minutes of solo guitar pieces. Composing is something that always came very naturally to me. I just never had time to do it." Many of the pieces grew out of his reconnection to his young children. Tossing a football to his son, for example, proved a welcome respite in an otherwise dark time. Notes the proud father: "Gabriel throws a good spiral."

- Notes by Tom Poore

Kaleido Guitar Duo
(China/Singapore)
Guitars

Friday, June 5, at 7:30 pm
Cleveland Institute of Music, Mixon Hall

Program

Pastourelle	Stephen Dodgson (1924 - 2013)
Suite bergamesque, L. 75 (arr. Matteo Mela & Lorenzo Micheli) Prélude Menuet Clair de lune Passepied	Claude Debussy (1862 - 1918)
Eight Memories in Watercolour, Op. 1 (trans. Manuel Barrueco) Herdboy's Song Staccato Bean Floating Clouds Suntain	Tan Dun (b1957)

Intermission

Niterói (Hidden Waters)	Roland Dyens (1955 - 2016)
Piano Sonata No. 1 (arr. Sergio Assad) Allegro marcato Presto misterioso Adagio molto appassionato Ruvido ed ostinato	Alberto Ginastera (1916 - 1983)
The Raw and the Cooked Hot Milonga Alba The Hotel Kempinski Tango Brawl The Ajman	Stephen Goss (b. 1964)

About the Artists

Kaleido Guitar Duo brings together two distinctive voices from across the globe. Chinese guitarist **Hao Yang** and Singaporean classical guitarist **Kevin Loh**, both internationally renowned award-winning musicians in their own right, are united by a shared musical heritage and an adventurous spirit for exploring uncharted territories in the guitar duo repertoire. The duo's name, "Kaleido," draws inspiration from the kaleidoscope, an ingenious instrument that creates infinite patterns of beauty from simple elements. Like the kaleidoscope's ever-shifting colors, Kaleido Guitar Duo seeks to discover and reveal the vast spectrum of sonic possibilities within the guitar duo combination. What sets Kaleido Guitar Duo apart is not only their individual achievements as

internationally recognized soloists, but their dedication to expanding the boundaries of what two guitars can achieve together. Rather than retreading familiar ground, they actively seek compositions that challenge both performers and audiences, revealing rich harmonic and textural possibilities.

Artists' website: kaleidoguitarduo.com/

Notes

The British composer **Stephen Dodgson** (1924–2013) wrote extensively for guitar, developing a close working relationship with Julian Bream that produced concertos, solo works, and duo pieces now firmly established in the repertoire. *Pastourelle*, composed for the Amadeus Guitar Duo and premiered at the International Guitar Symposium in Iserlohn in August 1993, represents one of the more unusual corners of that output. It takes its epigraph from a 13th-century poem attributed to Hue de Saint-Quentin: a knight promises a shepherdess a castle; she tells him to take himself elsewhere, she has heard that before. The pastourelle as a medieval form was not purely a gentle depiction of country life. It was also a contest, a negotiation, an argument conducted in the open air. Dodgson honours that duality. The piece moves between the stillness of choral plainchant on one hand, and on the other a driving, rhythmic dance. The pastoral calm of its opening yields, without warning, to something considerably more urgent.

Few works in the piano repertoire cast as long a shadow as **Claude Debussy**'s (1862–1918) *Suite bergamasque*. Composed around 1890 but withheld from publication until 1905, it catches Debussy at a crossroads between his early influences and the shimmering sound world he was about to invent. The third movement, *Clair de lune*, has become so ubiquitous it risks being taken for granted, heard in films, advertisements, and waiting rooms until its strangeness is almost forgotten. Played attentively, it remains deeply strange: a piece that seems to dissolve into light rather than conclude. The arrangement heard tonight is the work of Italian guitarists Matteo Mela and Lorenzo Micheli, who have done more than perhaps any other pair to expand the serious repertoire for two guitars. Their transcription treats the suite not as a reduction but as a reimagining, exploiting the guitars' natural resonance and layered textures to conjure Debussy's mist and moonlight anew.

Tan Dun (b. 1957) has spent much of his career navigating between worlds. Born in Hunan province, China, he came of age during the Cultural Revolution, when Western classical music was banned and traditional Chinese musical life was severely disrupted. Sent to work in the rice paddies, he spent years at some remove from formal musical training, yet he absorbed the folk songs, ritual music, and ceremonial sounds of rural Hunan, all of which would later surface in his compositions. *Eight Memories in Watercolour*, Op. 1, was written in the late 1970s as Tan Dun began his formal studies in Beijing. Modest in scope and deeply personal, the pieces are exactly what their title suggests: impressions, fragments, the kind of half-remembered sonic imagery that surfaces when you have been away from home for a long time. Guitarist Manuel Barrueco's transcription for two guitars gives the music an intimacy that suits it well.

Roland Dyens (1955–2016) wrote with the fluency of someone for whom music came before thought. Trained in Paris and born in Tunis, he spent his life absorbing styles: bossa nova, jazz, tango, French chanson, weaving them into music that belonged entirely to him. *Niterói* takes its name from a city across Guanabara Bay from Rio de Janeiro, whose name in the Tupi language means "hidden water." The city is home to one of the great landmarks of modern architecture: Oscar Niemeyer's Museu de Arte Contemporânea, completed in 1996, a building that appears to hover above the bay like a spacecraft that has not quite decided to land. Dyens was drawn to exactly this quality, the sense of something suspended between states, neither fully grounded nor free. The piece drifts between tenderness and unease, never quite settling.

The first piano sonata of Argentine composer **Alberto Ginastera** (1916–1983), written in 1952, announces itself without apology. It is a ferocious work, the kind of piece that leaves its

performers visibly winded. Ginastera drew on Argentine folk idioms not as decoration but as structural material, hammering them through neo-classical and expressionist filters until they became something elemental. The arrangement for two guitars by **Sergio Assad** is an act of inspired reinvention: Assad does not simply redistribute the notes but reconceives the work for two players who can disagree with each other, push and pull, and collectively generate the kind of percussive weight Ginastera demanded. It is one of the more demanding works in the duo repertoire, and one of the most rewarding.

The title of **Stephen Goss**'s (b. 1964) *The Raw and the Cooked* is borrowed from the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who used the distinction between the raw and the cooked as a metaphor for the passage from nature to culture, the moment in any civilization when fire and craft begin to transform the world. Goss, a Welsh composer and guitarist who teaches at the Royal Academy of Music, treats the idea with characteristic wit. The movements heard tonight move from the visceral heat of "Hot" through a *milonga*, a dawn song (*Alba*), two pieces named for hotels, and a "Tango Brawl" that is exactly what it sounds like. The whole adds up to something like a musical travel journal: several continents visited, several altercations survived, one or two mysteries left unresolved.

- Notes by Kevin Loh

Muxin Li (China)
Guitar

Saturday, June 6, at 3:00 pm
Cleveland Institute of Music, Mixon Hall

Program

Collectici íntim La Serenor La Joia La Calma La Gaubança La Frisança	Vincente Asencio (1908-1979)
Scherzo-Vals	Miguel Llobet (1878-1938)
Sonata(Omaggio a Boccherini) Allegro con spirits Andantino, quasi canzone Tempo di Minuetto Vivo ed energico	Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968)

Intermission

Sonata giocosa Allegro moderato Andante moderato Allegro	Joaquin Rodrigo (1901-1999)
Mazurka Apasionata	Agustín Barrios Mangoré (1885-1944)
Introduction et Caprice	Giulio Regondi (1822-1872)

About the Artist

Guitarist **Muxin Li** is from Hangzhou, China. She began her guitar studies at the age of three. She made her solo concert debut at age ten at the Concert Hall of Shanghai Conservatory of Music Middle School. In 2019, she was admitted to the Central Conservatory of Music Middle School in Beijing, the same year, winning the third prize of the Junior Division at the Guitar Foundation of America (GFA). In 2022, Muxin entered the Curtis Institute of Music, where she studies with David Starobin and Jason Vieaux. When sixteen, Muxin Li won first prize in the Senior Division of the GFA competition and in June 2025, in the the GFA Concert Artist Division (ages 18-35), Muxin the youngest contestant took second prize.

Artist's webpage: facebook.com/muxin.li.2025

Notes

"Those who cannot do, teach" is an an old and smug truism. But Spanish composer and pianist **Vicente Asencio** (1908-1979) broke the mold. He was highly influential among Spanish musicians, and helped form the Grupo de los Jóvenes—roughly translated: "The Young Ones." Its mission was to forge a distinctly Mediterranean musical voice. Declared Ascencio: "I believe the current atonal movement, recently introduced in Spain and long-standing in Europe, is interesting as a movement trying to renew itself. But I don't think its aesthetic suits us Mediterraneans, because dodecaphonism is an essentially cerebral movement, and we are substantially intuitive." As a Spaniard he was drawn to guitar, even though he didn't play it. He composed his *Collectici Íntim* in 1965 for Narciso Yepes.

Miguel Llobet (1878-1938) stands as a link between two titans of the guitar. He studied with Francisco Tárrega, often called the father of modern guitar playing, and he taught Andrés Segovia, who dominated the mid 20th century guitar scene. (Though, characteristically, the headstrong Segovia later declared that he learned little from Llobet.) He was also a pioneer in the nascent recording technology—perhaps as early as 1912 he made a recording at Bell Lab in New Jersey, but wasn't satisfied with the sound. Though not a prolific composer, his 1909 *Scherzo-Vals* stands out as a delightful and virtuosic miniature.

Italian **Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco** (1895-1968) was one of many talented artists driven away by the fascism that darkened 1930s Europe. Drawing on his connections to Arturo Toscanini and Jascha Heifetz, he emigrated to the United States in 1939. There he found success in Hollywood, composing some 200 film scores. As a teacher, his students included Jerry Goldsmith, Henry Mancini, André Previn, Nelson Riddle, and John Williams. His guitar works are now a popular mainstay of the repertoire. Composed in 1934 for Andrés Segovia, *Omaggio a Boccherini* is a tour de force meant to showcase the virtuosity of its dedicatee.

Blind from the age of 3, Spanish composer **Joaquín Rodrigo** (1901-1999) wrote one of the most beloved works of the 20th century: *Concierto de Aranjuez*. That a guitar concerto became immensely popular did much for the guitar's reputation as a mainstream classical instrument. It also cemented Rodrigo reputation as a guitar composer, even though he didn't play guitar. (In fact, his guitar works often need judicious tweaking to make them playable.) *Sonata giocosa*, Rodrigo's first sonata for the guitar, was composed in 1958 and dedicated to Renata Tarragó. (Perhaps it was a expression of gratitude, since Tarragó had edited the first edition of *Concierto de Aranjuez*.) Spanish writer Sergio Fernández Bravo described this light-hearted work as "full of reveries and references to a past steeped in history."

Paraguayan guitarist **Agustín Barrios Mangoré** (1885-1944) languished for years in the shadow of Andrés Segovia. It didn't help that Segovia pointedly ignored his music. And though Barrios toured Europe and the United States during the 1930s, he remained relatively unknown outside of South America. Yet his music gradually trickled into the guitar repertoire. His ultimate—if belated—big break came in 1977, when Australian guitarist John Williams released an all Barrios LP. In an ironic twist, Williams was a former student of Segovia, the former nemesis of Barrios. And to be frank, Williams seemed to delight in tweaking the nose of his old teacher.

Swiss born guitarist **Giulio Regondi** (1822-1872) is evidence that a nice guy can overcome early adversity. As a child prodigy, he was ruthlessly exploited by his father. Actually, it's unclear whether the man in question was his father. After amassing a small fortune of £2,000 from young Giulio's performances, his father (or whoever he was) took the money and vanished. Left almost penniless, the amiable 15 year old Regondi was taken in by well heeled and sympathetic patrons. Decades later he received a desperate letter from his prodigal father, who was dying and needed money. Regondi responded compassionately, and tended to his reputed father's needs for the rest of his life.

- Notes by Tom Poore

Davin-Levin Duo (USA)
Guitar and Harp

Saturday, June 6, at 7:30 pm
Cleveland Institute of Music, Mixon Hall

Program

Etude no. 6 Etude no. 20	Philip Glass (b. 1937)
Spaces	Leo Brouwer (b. 1939)
Suite Mágica Preludio Vals Tango Candombe	Máximo Diego Pujol (b. 1957)

Intermission

Alborada del gracioso	Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)
Passacaglia in C minor, BWV 582	J.S. Bach (1685–1750)

About the Artists

Davin-Levin Duo is comprised of **Emily Levin**, Principal Harp of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and **Colin Davin**, Associate Professor of Guitar and Director of Guitar Studio at Shenandoah Conservatory. Since their first performance together in 2015, the Duo has revolutionized their genre, expanding its repertoire through commissions and arrangements and establishing their instrument combination as a dynamic chamber music experience. In so doing they have appeared throughout the USA. Their first album *Banter* has been praised for its "riveting pacing and subtle rubato…a masterful performance" (Cleveland Classical) and being "a marvelously varied and engaging disc…Encore!" (Classical Guitar Magazine).

Artists' website: davinlevin.com/

Notes

The collection of twenty piano etudes by **Philip Glass** (b. 1937) represents a particularly personal view of the celebrated minimalist composer's musical mind. Over the course of the collection, Glass develops an array of musical ideas and approaches, giving the performer and listener a chance to explore the range of his artistry through the intimate and relatively accessible medium of solo instrumental music.

Glass composed the first book of ten etudes in 1994, as he sought to explore a range of piano techniques and textures, in part as a tool to improve his own playing. *Etude no. 6* belongs to this first book; it was also known by the title "Now, So Long After that Time" as a work written for the 50th anniversary concert for the public radio station WNYC. Set in F minor and with a relentless

rhythmic pulse, this etude is full of appealing harmonic progressions and seemingly simple rhythmic combinations that gradually unfold into ever more complex variety and developing energy. The use of polyrhythm - two seemingly incompatible rhythmic divisions happening at the same time to create new composite rhythms - is prominent throughout. This effect reaches its peak with the right hand of the piano playing 5-note scale shapes in a triplet rhythm (in our arrangement, this is played by the harp) while the left hand plays a simple eighth-note harmonic accompaniment (played here by the guitar). The cumulative effect is at once disorienting and exhilarating.

Etude no. 20, dating from 2012, is something altogether different. In his later piano etudes, Glass moved away from pieces that focused on matters of technique and instead sought to explore ideas of musical language, expression, harmony, rhythm, and structure. Written just after Glass had created music for the film "The Visitors," which explores humanity's hypnotic relationship with technology, *Etude no. 20* has an earnest, lyrical quality, in a harmonic language reminiscent of mid-19th century German Romanticism. While *Etude no. 6* is energetic and driving, *Etude no. 20* is spacious, sweet, sad, and searching.

Written in 2022 by **Leo Brouwer** (b. 1939) for the Davin-Levin Duo, *Spaces* represents the legendary Cuban composer and guitarist Leo Brouwer's first composition for harp and guitar. It draws its inspiration from the Czech writer Milan Kundera's "The Unbearable Lightness of Being," a philosophical and political novel that, much like Brouwer's music, grapples with dualities: lightness and heaviness, freedom and order, masculine and feminine. All of this is framed in the context of tangled personal and romantic relationships, and the absurd demands of obedience from the communist government in Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The opening movement is titled "Rejection and Privilege," and refers to a real historical episode referenced in the novel, surrounding the apparent suicide of Joseph Stalin's son Yakov Dzhugashvili in a German concentration camp during World War II. Stalin famously refused to trade a German field marshal captured at Stalingrad for his own son's freedom. This descent from his famous lineage as the son of the Soviet leader (privilige/heaviness) to the raw physical indignities of the German prison camp (rejection/lightness) pushed Dzhugashvili to his death. Brouwer captures these extremes in the music, moving between moments that are carefree and even elegant to those that have a distinct sense of desolation and despair.

"In the sunset of dissolution," the second movement of *Spaces*, connects with Kundera's idea that an historical event, no matter how consequential or horrifying, might as well have never happened at all if it happens only once. Such events fade quickly into memory and myth, so that people cannot feel the visceral reality of their importance or agony. However, if history repeats itself (to borrow a tired yet somehow relevant cliché), the weight of past events becomes extremely heavy to those experiencing such an echo. Brouwer expresses this idea musically through constantly recurring themes that are interspersed with improvisatory interludes, as though events insistently repeat themselves throughout life while we try in futility to make a different meaning out of them each time. In Brouwer's setting, these repetitive motifs prevail, bringing us to a gradually fading conclusion in this enigmatic work.

Suite Mágica by **Máximo Diego Pujol** (b. 1939) represents a rarity in the Davin-Levin Duo's repertoire: a "standard" piece for the harp and guitar duo combination. There are only a handful of works that even qualify for that label, as despite a few prominent examples (Narciso Yepes and Nicanor Zabaleta; and Cleveland's own Jason Vieaux and Yolanda Kondonassis come to mind) there have not been many prominent duos to build a substantial repertoire. After about a decade of performing exclusively our own arrangements and newly-commissioned works, we are excited to explore this well-loved gem from Pujol.

Pujol's music is well-known to guitarists for its vibrant exploration of Argentinian popular folk styles, conveyed through idiomatic guitar writing that brings out the best sonic qualities of the instrument. The composer himself says of this particular suite: *"The origin of the title, 'Magic*

Suite,' comes from the third section guitar solo of the Candombe, which was written in a few minutes. It was a magic moment for me and I wrote the rest of the piece using material from those eighteen bars."

After opening with a pensive "Preludio," *Suite Mágica* moves through three popular dance forms. A jaunty "Vals" brings a syncopated twist to the waltz form, a dance which has become embedded in many Latin American traditions despite its faraway origins in Austria. The "Tango" that follows is a percussive and highly expressive dance, a form with origins in the diverse immigrant communities in and around Buenos Aires. Its influences include Argentine *milonga*, Cuban *habañera*, African *candombe*, and European *polka*. Pujol concludes the suite with his own exciting take on the *candombe*, a dance of Afro-Uruguayan origin featuring ensembles of large drums: *chico, piano*, and *repique*. In this version, the work intersperses the signature driving rhythms of *candombe* with contrasting melodic sections, ending with a thrilling flourish of percussion and sweeping harp *glissandi*.

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) had an affinity for Spanish music and themes which appears throughout nearly his entire compositional career, from the *Habanera* of 1895 to the *Boléro* of 1928. In search of new harmonic modes and influenced by the trends of exoticism exemplified in the Parisian World Fairs around the turn of the century, the so-called "Impressionist" composers of early 20th century France found inspiration in many musical traditions beyond Europe; or from marginalized ethnic minorities within Europe. Such was the case with the modes, rhythms, and gestures of Spanish flamenco, rooted in Romani communities and with strong influences from North African, Arab, and Jewish traditions.

Alborada del gracioso comes from a set of five piano pieces entitled *Miroirs* (Mirrors), and is one of three from the collection that Ravel later reimagined for full orchestra. The title itself is a curious combination. *Alborada* refers to the dawn, and perhaps the tradition of a "dawn song" in which a faithful friend looks out for the safety and secrecy of clandestine lovers spending the night together, singing a song to warn them that the morning is coming and the time to part has arrived. *Gracioso*, meanwhile, refers to a Spanish comedic character from the traditions of *troubadours* and *trouvères*, a jester figure who, like many a literary fool, held the unique ability to speak truthfully about the follies of the powerful, through humor and wit. How these two fit together is left up to the imagination of the listener.

Ravel's music here is full of energetic flourishes and evocations of Spanish song and dance. Like many of his Iberian counterparts from roughly the same time, such as Isaac Albéniz and Manuel de Falla, Ravel must have had the guitar in mind on some level in this music. This arrangement for harp and guitar allows for a clear evocation of this distinctly Spanish sound, while also exploring a range of colors and textures inspired by Ravel's brilliant orchestration.

Considered among the earliest masterpieces **of Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685–1750) his *Passacaglia in C minor, BWV 582* expanded the variation form through its inventiveness and its grand scale, and is a landmark among works of its kind.

The *passacaglia* form traces its origins to Spain in the 17th century, referring to the simple strummed music guitarists would play as an interlude between strophes of popular song. It is thought that the name comes from the words *pasar* (to walk or to pass through) and *calle* (street), possibly referring simply to such performances taking place outdoors. The guitar has held a close connection to the form, with the earliest notated examples appearing in *alfabeto* guitar chord notation in early 17th century Italy.

Ultimately, the *passacaglia* came to exceed its pedestrian origins and solidified into a variation form built on a repeated ground bass. By the late 17th century it had decidedly more serious connotations. Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber's *Passacaglia in G minor* for unaccompanied violin (1676), for example, serves as the emotional centerpiece of his deeply spiritual cycle of "Rosary Sonatas," and was almost certainly a model for Bach's own unaccompanied works for violin.

Originally composed for organ, the *Passacaglia in C minor* takes its 8-measure ground bass on a wide-ranging emotional journey from its initial unadorned statement through 20 constantly evolving variations. Among Bach's many innovations in the work is the transfer of the ground bass into the upper voices of the texture, weaving the foundational thread through each layer of a musical tapestry, sometimes obscuring the theme almost entirely while somehow still retaining a sense of continuity.

After the dramatic set of variations concludes, Bach splits the *passacaglia* bass line to create the two subjects of a double fugue, building a complex web of imitative counterpoint as the seemingly simple theme is transformed through yet another epic musical journey.

While nominally an abstract, secular work, many performers and scholars have suggested the presence of religious symbolism in this piece, as they have in many other works by Bach. Indeed, Bach was a deeply religious person, signing many of his manuscripts with a dedication to God (*Soli Deo gloria)* and composing a huge body of sacred music in his lifetime.

Among the evidence presented are supposed statements of several Lutheran chorales throughout the variations; that the 21 statements of the passacaglia subject are organized in 7 groups of 3, representing the sacred numbers of the Sabbath and the Holy Trinity; and that the 12 statements of the fugue subjects are representative of the 12 apostles.

Whether Bach explicitly intended these supposed theological symbols remains a subject of debate among researchers and performers. Regardless, the cumulative musical effect of such intricate detail rendered at a grand structural scale tends to have a profound emotional and spiritual effect on the casual listener and the obsessive scholar alike.

- Notes by Colin Davin

Nicolò Spera (Italy), Guitar
with
Christina Jennings (USA), flute and Matthew Dane (USA), viola

Sunday, June 7, at 1:00 pm
Cleveland Institute of Music, Mixon Hall

Program

Canto (World Première)	Roxanna Panufnik (1968)
The Book of Trees (World Première) *	Lorenzo Micheli (1975)
Quaking Aspen	
Red Oak	
Spring Verses for flute and guitar	Christopher Theofanidis (1967)
Galliard I: Esuberante	
Galliard I: Esuberante	
Galliard II: Grazioso	
Pavane I: Elegante, maestoso	
Galliard III: Energico, giocoso	
Pavane II *(for Henry)*: Introspettivo, malinconico	
Galliard IV: Spiritoso	

Intermission

Cinque Pezzi per l'Intuizione Italiana (World Première) **	Carter Pann (1972)
Vecchia Canzone	
Ruote della Gioia	
Duetto	
Giorni di Scuola	
La Luce di Caravaggio	
What Do I Know? *Essais* (World Première) **	Martin Bresnick (1946)
(...of Stumbling Blocks and Stepping Stones)	
(...of Tyranny)	
Vaghe Stelle dell'Orsa for guitar, flute, and viola	Christopher Theofanidis (1967)

* 10-string guitar
** 6-string guitar

About the Artists

Guitarist **Nicolò Spera** (Italy) performs on both six-string and ten-string guitars. A primary goal of his creative work is to expand the guitar repertoire. He has commissioned, performed, and recorded new works ranging from solos to programs with choirs, ensembles, and orchestras. His recordings include the complete works by Maurice Ohana; new pieces for guitar and choir; Bach's Cello Suites; transcriptions of Mompou and Granados; a recording on the passacaglia form; the complete works with guitar by Christopher Theofanidis; new song cycles for guitar and tenor; and new works for solo guitar. Nicolò's passion for choral music and his interest in new works for

guitar and choir have also led him to a close collaboration with Eugene Rogers and EXIGENCE Vocal Ensemble in the US, and with Giovanni Cestino and ITER Research Ensemble in Italy. His most influential teachers are Oscar Ghiglia, Jonathan Leathwood, and Lorenzo Micheli. Since 2011, Nicolò teaches guitar at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Artist's website: colorado.edu/music/nicolo-spera

Flutist **Christina Jennings** (USA**) r**elishes an artistic life comprised of sharing music with audiences and students. Her search for beauty and meaning leads her to explore diverse music and approaches with a wide range of artistic partners and young musicians. The Houston Press declared, “Jennings has got what it takes: a distinctive voice, charisma and a pyrotechnic style that works magic on the ears.” Highlights from upcoming and recent seasons include the premiere of “Glimmerglass,” a new concerto for flute and wind ensemble by Kevin Day; collaborations with the pianist Simone Dinnerstein performing music of J.S. Bach; and creative teaching with Tonebase, an online music teaching platform. Jennings is an artist teacher who strives to bring creativity, play and stellar music making into each part of her musical life. A passionate teacher, Jennings is professor of flute at the University of Colorado Boulder where her flute studio is one of the most prominent and respected flute studios in the United States.

Artist's website: christinajennings.com/

Violist **Matthew Dane** (USA) serves as principal violist of the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra in Houston and Opera Colorado, and is also a member of the Boulder Piano Quartet. Chamber music festival appearances include OK Mozart, Portland (Maine), Chamber Music Quad Cities (Iowa), Ruby Mountains (Nevada), Land’s End (Calgary), Snake River (Colorado) and Tanglewood. With the Boulder Piano Quartet and Jon Manasse he recorded quintets of Lowell Liebermann for Koch Records. Dane has appeared as soloist with the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Baroque Chamber Orchestra of Colorado, ROCO and St. Martin’s Chamber Choir, among others; his chamber performances have been broadcast on NPR’s *Performance Today* and BBC’s Channel *3*. Dane co-founded the Brightmusic Ensemble in Oklahoma City with his wife, flutist Christina Jennings. Also an avid violist d’amore, Dane has worked with many composers, including Reena Esmail and Michael Theodore, to create many new works for the unusual instrument.

Artist's website: daneviola.com/

Notes

If the transcription process is no different from translating a work of poetry into another language, *Canto* by **Roxanna Panufnik** (b. 1968) was translated from viola to guitar by the composer herself, with Jonathan Leathwood and Nicolò Spera’s help in reimagining the viola language and the piece’s spirit on guitar. Roxanna Panufnik writes: "This piece was commissioned by the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition, for its 2019 contestants. When I discovered that Lionel Tertis was Ashkenazi Jewish, I looked into some Cantorial chants and found this haunting and beautifully ornate 'Y’HI ROTZON' (May it be Thy will), an invocation for the new month’s blessing. I start with the first couple of lines of the original, then elaborate on its elegant figurations and modal language for the rest of the piece. The title evolved out of my admiration for the gorgeously warm singing tone of the viola and was endorsed by my discovery that Tertis’s father was a cantor at Princess Street Synagogue in Stepney."

Lorenzo Micheli (b. 1975) writes: Composed in the spring of 2026, *The Book of Trees* was commissioned by the University of Colorado Boulder and is dedicated to Nicolò Spera, a courageous champion of the ten-string guitar and its repertoire. The three movements may be paired in different combinations: the work can be performed as a diptych (I-II or II-III), or in its entirety. An old and precious friendship binds me to Nicolò. This bond has grown stronger over

nearly thirty years, despite Nicolò's move from Milan—our home city—to Colorado, and it has always been nourished by many shared affinities, including our mutual love for trees. *The Book of Trees* was born from our conversations on this subject; the three musical portraits that make up the piece are inspired by three extraordinary trees of the North American continent.

I wrote *Quaking Aspen* after reading an article about "Pando," often called the largest living organism on Earth—a massive colony of aspens in Utah. Aspens often grow in large clonal colonies, meaning an entire grove can share a single underground root system. Like the "Pando" aspen, the movement is a tangle of ever-shifting roots and branches, yet all share a common and recurring musical DNA that extends "underground" to the other two movements.

Red Oak is a sort of slow and majestic Sarabande, inspired by the enormous Red Oak in Bodega Bay under whose shade Nicolò stopped on a summer afternoon a few years ago while traveling with his children. The piece is built upon a *basso ostinato* that sinks its roots into the low C of the ten-string guitar, exploring the resonances of the instrument's last four strings through a series of variations.

Christopher Theofanidis (b. 1967) writes: *Spring Verses* is a set of six Galliards and Pavanes commissioned by the wonderful guitarist, Nicolò Spera, for guitar and flute. Both Renaissance dance forms of the Galliard and Pavane are based on characteristic rhythms which are loosely threaded throughout the movements of my piece—the two pavanes with a stately half-quarter-quarter processional rhythm, and the four galliards often with a triple meter feel combining even and dotted rhythms in pattern. I've always been strongly drawn to Renaissance dance with its variety of affects, and indeed to Renaissance music in general, especially in its modal harmonic orientation.

I thought of this suite as a kind of divertimento of six contrasting character pieces, with each movement lasting only two or three minutes. *Spring Verses* is dedicated to marvelous poet, Melissa Studdard. The second pavane is in memory of Henry, Melissa's cat who died during the pandemic, and was written as a kind of consolation and reflective space for her.

Carter Pann (b. 1972) writes: ***Cinque Pezzi per l'Intuizione Italiana*** (Five Pieces for the Italian Intuition) was commissioned by the Ritter Family, and written for Nicolò Spera. This is my first solo work for guitar. I knew immediately that I wanted to write a work without a hint of obscurity or abstraction. My hands have never been close to facile on the instrument, and every musical pathway was going to be challenging – so why not challenge myself and write something Nicolò would love to put his hands to. He is a consummate musician, full of joy, passion, seriousness, and a vitality that wants to be omnipresent and always in the moment.

Knowing that I was going to embark on a suite of pieces for my Italian friend, I looked mostly at the music of old Italian and Spanish composers. Even so, it is difficult to write well for this instrument while it sits in its case in the corner of the room. I needed Nicolò to show me how he plays, up close. *La Luce de Caravaggio* was written first (took a long time), and we sat down to work it out together. He played through the piece, suggesting some edits, always encouraging what my ears wanted. It was this first session that inspired the other four pieces in the suite… and they were written much faster than this first attempt. Sometimes all you need is that "foot in the door" moment to set you on your way.

We have enjoyed several more sessions working on the suite together. My gratitude swells when I think of how much time Nicolò has put into this first work of mine for guitar. He has made these pieces his own… and has brought a fluency to the gestures, phrasing, and style which I could not bring to the work were it not for his caring nature.

Martin Bresnick (b. 1946) writes: *"What Do I Know?", Essais for 10-String Guitar*, refers to Michel de Montaigne's motto *Que sais-je?,* the subtitle of his great collection of essays. In a

similar spirit, the composer asks - What do I know?...of Stumbling Blocks and Stepping Stones, ...of Tyranny.

Vaghe Stelle dell'Orsa is the first verse of Le ricordanze/The Recollections, by Giacomo Leopardi:

Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa, io non credea
Tornare ancor per uso a contemplarvi
Sul paterno giardino scintillanti,
E ragionar con voi dalle finestre
Di questo albergo ove abitai fanciullo. [...]

"Shimmering stars of the Bear, I never thought
That I'd be back again to see you shine
Over my father's garden,
And talk with you from the windows
Of this house I lived in as a child." [...]

Nicolò Spera writes: I wish to thank **Christopher Theofanidis** (b. 1967) for welcoming into his sound world the love for Leopardi's poetry that my mom (to whom this work is dedicated) and I share. Giacomo was a special poet in countless ways, but he is often celebrated as the poet of the moon and the stars, for the many starry nights he was able to paint with his words. Christopher captured the magic of Giacomo's starry nights, as well as the turmoil that often comes with being an immigrant, far from home and from the people you love the most. A turmoil that wakes you up at night, and that can find moments of peace in a quiet dialogue with the stars above us. Our music and our hearts are with refugees in every part of the world. We are always for peace and non-violence, for dialogue and brotherhood.

- Notes by Nicolò Spera

Petra Poláčková (Czech Republic)
Viennese and Spanish Guitars

Sunday, June 7, at 4:00 pm
Cleveland Institute of Music, Mixon Hall

Program

"The Art of Polyphony"

Canción del Emperador Seys Diferencias Sobre El Himno 'O Gloriosa Domina'	Luys de Narváez (c. 1500-1555)
Farewell, P. 3 A Fancy, P. 6 Fantasia (Tremolo), P. 73	John Dowland (1563-1626)
Prelude & Fuga BWV 997	Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Intermission

"Of Love, Life and Death"

Elegy	Jeremy D. Collins (b. 1986)
Nocturno	Federico Moreno-Torroba (1891-1982)
Castles of Spain Manzanares el Real Sigüenza Montemayor Alcázar de Segovia	
Ciaccona from Violin Partita Nr. 2 BWV 1004 (arr. P. Pegoraro, P. Poláčková)	Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

* 9-string romantic guitar by Jan Tuláček (2014)
** 6 string guitar by Domingo Esteso (1926)

About the Artist

Classical guitarist **Petra Poláčková** (Czech Republic) has received "sustained international acclaim" (The American Federation of Musicians), travelling the world to perform and teach. Her performances on her landmark debut CD *Weiss* have garnered wide praise for their elegant phrasing, tonal beauty, and emotional intensity. In April 2025, she released a recording on Bridge Records, also highly acclaimed, devoted to romantic guitarist and composer Joseph Kaspar Mertz (1806–1856). Petra Poláčková has been co-organizer of Guitar Festival Mikulov, Czech Republic, since 2010 and in November 2024 was appointed Professor at the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt in Weimar (Germany).

Artist's Website: petrapolackova.com

Notes

"Polyphony" literally translates as "many sounds." It's an all encompassing term that can apply to a simple melody played over a continuous drone. (A bagpipe tune, for example.) But it can have a more rigorous meaning: the simultaneous interweaving of two or more independent melodies, each composed so it blends pleasingly with the others. The specific study of how to do this well is called counterpoint. Often explained as "note against note," counterpoint seems a murky art, truly grasped only by the musical cognoscenti. But really, most of us have done it. If you've ever sung "Frère Jacques" in a group as a round, then you've done counterpoint. It's one of music's best innovations. Done creatively, it imbues music with a richness of intriguing detail. It's so effective that it permeates every musical style. One can find counterpoint in the sinuous vocal parts of a Palestrina Mass, the closely interlocked harmony of a barbershop quartet, or the buoyant overlapping lines of the Beach Boys "Good Vibrations."

In art music, counterpoint harks back to medieval times. It helped that European cathedrals were purposefully built as acoustic shells for vocal choirs. The Notre Dame Cathedral for example was known for its stereo effect of strategically placed choirs. (A modern commentator called it a "mirrored funhouse for sound.") In fact, one might think of stereo as the spatial equivalent of counterpoint. So counterpoint evolved to exploit such felicitous spaces. By the dawn of the renaissance era, counterpoint had firmly established its foothold in music.

One might think counterpoint would be too knotty a challenge for solo instrumentalists. But ingenious players couldn't resist the allure of making one instrument sound as though two or more people were playing it. The Spanish vihuelist **Luys de Narváez** (c. 1500-1555), steeped in the vocal music of his day, often adapted choral works to his instrument with clever virtuosity. A contemporary wrote of his "extraordinary skill in music, that over four organ parts from a book, he would suddenly add four more on the vihuela, something most miraculous."

By the late renaissance, English lutenist **John Dowland** (1563-1626) was foremost among instrumentalists breaking free from counterpoint's vocal lineage. A formidably skilled player, Dowland composed multi-voiced pieces that fell more idiomatically on the lute than the human voice. An obvious example is his *P. 73 Fantasia*, with its finale of an independent bass line against a rapid tremolo—a technique that would've confounded any singer of the time.

It was with **Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750) that counterpoint reached its zenith. Sometimes called "the father of counterpoint," he made a thorough study of his predecessors like Palestrina and Frescobaldi. He then took counterpoint far beyond their examples. After Bach's death, composers influenced by him read like a "Who's Who" of music. Mozart, hearing a Bach motet for the first time, demanded to see the sheet music—spreading the parts on the floor to examine, he exclaimed: "Now here's something we can learn from!" And above all, what he and others learned was how to write a fugue. The fugue is a complex work in which a short melody is introduced by one voice and successively imitated by others in interwoven melodic lines. The fugue is considered the apex of contrapuntal music, and Bach was its undisputed master.

* * *

Though counterpoint may seem intricate and arid, it also can be subsumed into something emotionally evocative. (After all, "Frère Jacques" isn't just a contrapuntal exercise—it's also a fun tune.) In the hands of creative composers, counterpoint does an apparent vanishing act, overshadowed by the deeper emotions infusing love, life, and death. Listen closely, however, and you'll hear the subterranean magic of note against note, mirroring on a granular scale the full canvas of human experience.

Those who've followed the many talented students who've passed through the Cleveland Institute of Music's guitar program may recall the quietly modest but prodigiously talented **Jeremy Collins**

(b. 1986). He composed *Elegy* in 2010 while a graduate student at the University of Southern California. Wrote Collins: “After experimenting with several new tunings I was struck by a particular tuning which featured both diminished and augmented chords as the open strings. I loved how the augmented triad can modulate so easily and unpredictably by raising or lowering any of the three pitches by a half step or more. I felt that this type of harmony was very hard to explore in standard guitar tuning. The tuning I settled on, from low to high, is C#, A#, E, G#, C, and E.” Belying this arcane description, *Elegy* is a warm and (dare we say) sentimental work. In it are woven short quotes from Brahms and Ravel.

Federico Moreno Torroba (1891-1982) loved his native Spain. Its folklore is woven into his “Castillos D’Espana,” in which he portrays various ancient Spanish castles. Indeed, we might consider it a musical tour, conjuring exotic landmarks without ever departing from our recital hall seats.

Had **Bach** written nothing else, his BWV 1004 *Ciaccona* for violin would’ve secured his enduring fame. It towers over almost every other solo instrument piece he wrote. (And considering their high quality, that’s saying something.) It’s often speculated that Bach wrote it upon the sudden death of his first wife. The raw emotion of the piece, however, seems transfigured into something otherworldly and universal. Computer scientist Bernard Chazelle wrote of Bach: “Envy. Greed. Lust. Jealousy. This is the bread and butter of opera. [Bach] never went there. He had no interest in that. His music tries to express things like awe, grace, fear, trepidation, hope. In that sense, he thinks of death very differently. Different times, different circumstances, and for us it can be very surprising to see these reactions.”

- Notes by Tom Poore

2026 James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition

Welcome to the seventh annual James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition. This year's sixteen Semi-Finalists have travelled here from eleven states - California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina - and range in age from thirteen to eighteen. Their level of musical accomplishment is exceptional. Please take time to read their profiles in the following pages.

While only one student can win First Prize, this Competition is about much more than winning: It is foremost about learning, learning to become a more empathetic more complete human being, about forging lifelong friendships, inspiring others, and along the way, becoming a deeper more insightful musician and artist. To this end it is my hope that all this year's Semi-Finalists will make the most of this unique Festival's wonderful and varied offerings - concerts, master classes, lecturers, camaraderie - have many inspiring experiences while visiting Cleveland, and leave here having gained insights that will enhance their lives forever.

In conclusion, I wish to thank Armin Kelly Founder and Artistic Director of the Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival® of which this competition is proud to be a part, the Cleveland Institute of Music administration and staff for providing their lovely facilities and support, photographer Pat Kilkenny, Celil Refik Kaya for writing our Semi-Final Round set piece, and this year's esteemed judges for so generously sharing their time, experience, and artistic insights with us.

Sincerely,
James Stroud, Founder and Director
James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition

2026 Stroud Competition Judges

Preliminary Round: Stephen Aron (USA), Pamela Kimmel (USA), James Stroud (USA), Gohar Vardanyan (USA), Alexandra Viliteau (USA)

Semi-Final Round: Christoph Harlan (USA), Celil Refik Kaya (Turkey/USA), Adam Kossler (USA), Lynn McGrath (USA), Marco Sartor (Uruguay), Mari Sato (USA), Nicolò Spera (Italy)

Final Round: Colin Davin (USA), Jonathan Leathwood (England), Kevin Loh (Singapore), Petra Polácková (Czech Republic), Nicolò Spera (Italy), Jason Vieaux (USA), Hao Yang (China)

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Semi-Finalists' Biographies

Ashwin Ashok, 17, is a junior at Wando High School in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, and a passionate classical guitar student of Adam Holzman and Chris Teves. He has won competitions in North Carolina and Florida and performed for the Charleston Music Club. Ashwin has participated in master classes with several esteemed guitarists and attended the Brevard Music Center summer program and Peabody's Summer Guitar Intensive. He also plays cello in the Wando High School Honors Orchestra and has served as an alternate for the Regional Orchestra. In his spare time he shares his guitar playing at local retirement communities and plays club soccer.

Paloma Chaprnka, 16, is a junior at Interlochen Arts Academy, Michigan. She has won prizes at multiple international and national competitions, most recently being the Traverse City Philharmonic Youth Concerto Competition and performing the 1st movement of Joaquín Rodrigo's Concierto de Aranjuez with the TC Phil. Paloma was recently selected as one of NPR's *From the Top* Fellows. She has performed along the Camino de Santiago in Spain and for Guitar Sarasota. She is a Strings by Mail artist and has recorded at Guitar Salon International, Siccas, and at Pepe Romero Jr. Guitars. Paloma founded the Buckley Classical Guitar Project. She enjoys cooking, hiking, and listening to music.

Justin Chen, 14, is a classical guitarist from Los Angeles, California. He began studying the guitar in 2020 at the age of eight and is currently a student of Dr. TY Zhang. In a short time, Justin has earned recognition in international competitions and continues to grow through focused study and performance. He is especially drawn to Spanish repertoire and expressive lyrical works and enjoys taking on new challenges. Outside of music, Justin enjoys playing video games and basketball.

Wohaan Dissanayake, 15, is a freshman at Mendon High School in Rochester, New York. He began playing classical guitar at the age of seven and currently studies with Dr. Kenneth Kam and Dr. Lynn McGrath at the Eastman Community Music School at the University of Rochester. Wohaan has won prizes at the Southern Guitar Festival, Albania Guitar Competition, Connecticut Suzuki Guitar Festival, Appalachian State GuitarFest, and the University of Florida Guitar Extravaganza. He has participated in master classes with Adam Kossler, Bokyung Byun, and Rupert Boyd. When not playing guitar, Wohaan enjoys playing tennis and clarinet in his school's Concert Band.

Damian Gadiyak, 13, is in 8th grade at Mt. Airy Christian Academy in Maryland. He has been studying classical guitar since he was seven with Franco Platino in the Peabody Preparatory Department. Damian has participated in master classes with Manuel Barrueco, Gabriel Bianco, Celil Refik Kaya, and Petra Poláčková. He opened the Marlow Guitar Series concert for Laura Snowden after winning the MGI Myrna Sislen Youth Guitar Competition. Damian participates in Baltimore Classical Guitar Society events and performs solo and in duet with his little sister. Besides music Damian's biggest passion is fishing and he can be found on a river or pond in his free time.

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Semi-Finalists' Biographies

Augie Ho-Chen, 17, is a Junior at DeLaSalle High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He began playing classical guitar at age five and currently studies with Alan Johnston. He won the Schubert Club Competition in 2025 and has taken master classes with Adam Holzman and Xavier Jara. Augie was part of a guitar quartet that toured Germany and was selected to be on NPR's *From the Top* in 2023. He also plays the double bass in the top orchestra of Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies and plays the piano. Outside of music, he loves tennis, speech, and is a top 0.1% Valorant player.

Ryan Ivanov, 18, is a classical guitarist from Arlington Heights, Illinois. He currently studies with Zhivko Nikolov at the 6VibeZ School of Music in Mt. Prospect, Illinois. Competing since 2022, Ryan has won awards at the Chicago Guitar Festival, Latino Arts Guitar Festival, Redi Marku Competition, and he was a finalist at the UF Guitar Extravaganza. He has also participated in master classes with An Tran, Domenico Mottola, Denis Azabagic, Kevin Loh, Thomas Viloteau, Bokyung Byun, and Alberto Quintanilla. Ryan plans to pursue a dual degree in civil engineering and classical guitar performance at Northwestern University. In his free time, he plays club and high school soccer.

Ru Qi Jiang, 17, is a pre-college student at the Curtis Institute of Music where she studies with David Starobin and Jason Vieaux. She began studying classical guitar at ten with Li Le in China, and later with Professor He Qing at the Tianjin Conservatory's affiliated school. In August 2019, she won the solo championship in Group A at the 5th GTA (Qinling) International Guitar Art Festival. She later won first prize in the Junior Division of the International Network Guitar Competition in The Hague, Netherlands and the youth category at the 10th Changsha Classical Guitar International Network Art Festival. Besides music Ru Qi enjoys dancing and painting.

Tae Kim, 15, attends Stuyvesant High School in New York City. He studies classical guitar with Gohar Vardanyan. He has performed in master classes for Manuel Barrueco, Eduardo Fernández, Eliot Fisk, Sharon Isbin, David Russell, Jason Vieaux, Franco Platino, Bokyung Byun, Jaxon Williams, and Marko Topchii. He has participated in the Peabody Summer Guitar Institute, Boston Guitarfest, the Long Island Guitar Festival, and the Guitar Lab Intensives. He has earned prizes in competitions hosted by the Philadelphia Classical Guitar Society (first place, Youth Division) and the Guitar Foundation of America (two-time finalist, Junior Division). Outside of music,

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Semi-Finalists' Biographies

Lukas Lin, 16, is a sophomore at Homestead High School, California. He began his musical journey at age three, and currently studies classical guitar with Yuri Liberzon. Lukas has won competitions at both the state and national levels and has performed as an opening act for Petra Poláčková. At school, he serves as a teacher's assistant in the guitar program, helping classmates strengthen their technique and musicianship. Beyond classical guitar, Lukas enjoys producing music and exploring sound in his home studio and play electric guitar, piano, and bass. He enjoys playing tennis and gaming.

Micah Montgomery, 16, is a sophomore from San Jose, California. He began studying guitar at the age of five with Robert Miller at the California Conservatory of Music. Micah is a prizewinner in the James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition, the Denver Guitar Competition, and the South Bay Guitar Competition. He has opened concerts for Paul Galbraith, Ben Verdery, and Kevin Loh. Micah has performed in master classes presented by Jason Vieaux, Manuel Barrueco, Sharon Isbin, Jonathan Leathwood, João Luiz, Denis Azabagić, Meng Su, and Marco Tamayo. He has also received instruction from Rene Izquierdo and Thomas Flippin. Micah enjoys basketball and volleyball.

Campbell Muffly, 16, is a pre-college student at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he studies guitar with Angelica Artelt and Scott Cmiel. He has performed in master classes for some of the world's most prominent guitarists, including Sergio Assad, Manuel Barrueco, David Russell, Meng Su, Marko Topchii, and the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet. An enthusiastic performer, Campbell has helped open concerts for Leonela Alejandro, David Russell, Manuel Barrueco and Duo Exaudi. Outside of guitar, Campbell is a sophomore at the Woodside Priory School in Portola Valley, California and enjoys acting, playing tennis, reading, and listening to music.

Andrei Orasanu, 17, is a senior at Norwalk High School, Connecticut. He began playing guitar when he was five. He studies with Dr. Tudor Niculescu-Mizil and Hao Yang. Andrei has participated in and won over thirty prizes in national and international competitions such as Southern Guitar Festival, Sinaia International Guitar Festival, Guitar Extravaganza, CSU Guitar Symposium, and Guitar Foundation of America. He has had the opportunity to work with prominent musicians such as Rene Izquerdo, Judicael Perroy, Matteo Mela, and Joao Luiz. As part of Music for Youth, he performs solo and duo in various venues in Fairfield County. His hobbies include saxophone, tennis, and boxing.

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Semi-Finalists' Biographies

Noah Richer, 18, began playing guitar at age 5 and is taught by Multi Grammy Award-Nominated David Veslocki. He has won competitions at the CSU Guitar Symposium, Mid Maryland Festival, Boston GuitarFest, Connecticut Suzuki Guitar Festival, and Kithara Project Festival. He has performed at prestigious venues such as Carnegie Hall, SubCulture NYC, and on top of the World Trade Center. He enjoys producing music, playing electric guitar, composing for the guitar, and playing the piano. Next fall, he will be a junior at Greens Farms Academy Connecticut. Outside of guitar, he is an avid tennis player and enjoys traveling.

Alicia Suen, 16, is a junior at American Heritage School in Broward County, Florida. She began playing the guitar at the age of eight and currently studies with Andrew Zohn and Christopher Mallet. Alicia has participated in master classes with renowned guitarists Jason Vieaux, Adam Holzman, and David Russell. Outside of her studies, Alicia enjoys sharing music with her community by performing at senior centers. She also runs a small organization thatpartners with her local library to promote youth readership and donate books to young readers. This year, Alicia hopes to explore different facets of music to further inspire and shape her artistic creativity.

Catalina Wert, 13, is from Cincinnati Ohio. She loves music ranging from Bach to Taylor Swift. Her favorite part of classical guitar is working on musical interpretations. In her free time you will find her drawing, reading, running, building something, or teaching her cat and her betta fish some new tricks. Her guitar journey is guided by Stefan Schmidt, and she is mentored monthly by Stephanie Jones. She is a prize winner in the following competitions: Columbus State, Philadelphia, App State, Louisville, Indiana, and The Guitar Studio Foundation. She has performed at Carnegie Hall, opened for Brandon Acker, and has had master classes with Kevin Loh and Denis Azabagic.

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