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THE DAYTONA BEACH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

Bach gives way to Brazilian beat in masterful concert

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NEW SMYRNA BEACH -- After the Brasil Guitar Duo finished with that Bach dude at their Saturday afternoon concert at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, Douglas Lora made an announcement: He and his partner, Joao Luiz, are on a mission to "bring the pop music of the streets of Brazil to the classical world."

Poor Johann Sebastian.

Yes, the two Sao Paulo natives waltzed with aplomb through Bach's French Suite No. 3 in B minor, their opening piece. Armed with Luiz's masterly transcription, the duo would have made Bach envious over how two six-string guitars and four busy hands were able to play leap-frogging trills and thus usurp the 88-plus keys of the master's harpsichord.

Likewise the Brazilians danced through works from "The Well-Tempered Guitars," Italian composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's guitar homage to Bach's "The Well-Tempered Clavier."

Then Lora made his "streets of Brazil" pronouncement, and the duo dived into contemporary works by their fellow countrymen -- works that Lora said could be heard on radio in their homeland.

"Zanzibar," by Brazilian bossa nova singer, guitarist and composer Edu Lobo, was a shocker. While still sounding "classical" in the hands of Luiz and Lora, the piece quickly latched onto funky, start-stop-start riffs that were as muscular and dramatic as Led Zeppelin's "Black Dog."

The piece had such a groove that Luiz's head began bobbing as he and Lora took turns coaxing high hummingbird-like trills while the other laid down low-end, rockish riffs.

The piece managed to surprise right to its very end, when Lora and Luiz struck thunderous, simultaneous power chords to conclude this lovely beast of a song.

There was more drama to come. Lora introduced two pieces by Egberto Gismonti by saying the pianist and guitarist also is "one of Brazil's greatest composers."

Proof of that came with Gismonti's "Don Quixote," which found the duo skating upon a lilting melody worthy of Paul McCartney before the piece took a U-turn into startling sour chords that still served the song.

But the duo's take on Gismonti's "Sete Aneis" was the concert's highlight.

The piece began quietly and mannerly, as if to fit comfortably into the classical repertoire. But then Lora and Luiz abruptly leapt into a weird little melodic motif that sounded like a cross between a ticking clock and the theme from "The Twilight Zone."

Each musician periodically returned to that motif while the other galloped through dark, minor key runs, while occasionally Luiz literally would punch his guitar strings to summon harsh chords.

That suspenseful work was the sonic equivalent of the climax of a Hitchcock film.

Yes, Johann Sebastian, your repertoire works well when transcribed to classical guitar. But there are two new kids on the classical guitar block -- they're from Brazil, and they're armed and ready with the music of Sao Paulo's streets.