



The Royal Gazette

Foot-tapping fun from guitar duo

By Mike Jones
June 4, 2008

Once again, Steve Crawford and his crew at the Bermuda School of Music have contrived to attract unique and mind stretching performances into this fifth Bermuda Guitar Festival, namely the visit of two unassuming young men of enormous talent, Joao Luiz and Douglas Lora who form the Brasil Guitar Duo.

A packed St. Andrew's Church was there on Friday to give them a welcome in the best Bermuda tradition. In their introduction, Douglas explained that some years ago they had visited Bermuda on a cruise stopover and, coincidentally, had walked past St. Andrew's, little knowing that it would eventually be a concert venue for them. Both Douglas and Joao were relaxed and energised, though recent rapid time zone, humidity and climate changes had played some havoc with their guitars' tunings, which had to be constantly (and unobtrusively) refined.

The first half of the evening was devoted largely to traditional classical music, the second, to the music of Brazil.

First impressions of new performers tend to stick in the mind with great immediacy, and so the Duo's first offering, Scarlatti's Sonata K 251 in C Major was a pace and style setter for the evening.

Three things became immediately apparent. First, **the duo's playing is informed by an overriding and powerful technical precision which is finely nuanced emotively; second, this emotive intelligence is evident in their continuous interaction; third, this interaction presages changes in musical mood and gives clues to the audience of what is about to come.**

The sonata they chose exhibits a **near perfect technical and voicing balance between the two parts,** to the extent there's the feeling that the players are intuitively completing each others' arpeggios.

Another impression of the playing is that we are definitely hearing two guitars; we're not hearing two guitars trying to emulate a keyboard. Among the highlights of the first half of the concert were three preludes by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco. (The duo has recently completed recording the complete guitar works of this important but neglected composer, shortly to be released on the Naxos label).

The preludes they selected were a wonderful mixture of moods. Insouciant, cheeky F sharp was followed by a chopped syncopation in B major which formed a dizzying circular game of musical tag, and finally the E major re-established a Schumannesque romantic calm and order.

Douglas' own composition, 'Valse', followed. It's in exactly the wrong time signature for a waltz, namely 5/4, but it still sounds like a waltz, in a baroque fugue-like way. This piece is completely unconventional and **shows simultaneous musical mastery and playfulness.**

The first half ended with the duo's version of Piazzolla's 'Zita'. It's a high energy and blazingly fast tango which formed a neat transition between the two halves of the programme.

The second half of the concert was dedicated to the music of Brazil. As the players commented later, Brazilian music known abroad tends to be Bossa Nova. However, within Brazil, Bossa Nova is regarded as an attenuated and rather bloodless outgrowth of the more authentic national forms of the Choro and Samba.

These forms have an enormous range of emotive content and rhythmic variety and yet are virtually unknown outside the country. The duo demonstrated these for us with a wide variety of compositions.

First, Djavan's (Djavan Caetano Viana, 1949-) 'Serrado'. After a brief lyrical introduction **the music becomes driven by a fast samba like rhythm making huge technical demands on the performers, with slurs, bends, hammers and percussion effects.**

Egberto Gismonti's '7 aneis' (seven rings) followed, a very romantic piece full of yearning and dense arpeggiation. The piece had echoes of Villa-Lobos, Leo Brouwer and Sabicas together with rain forest effects.

Among the highlights of the rest of the programme were Jacob do Bandolim's 'Noites Cariocas' (Nights in Rio), Edu Lobo's 'Valsa Brasileira' and finally a composition written for the duo, 'Bom Partido' by Paulo Bellinati. This title of this last piece has multi level meanings of "Handsome guy", or "Intricate Samba". **This is serious, foot tapping, head-boppin' samba which brought the entire audience to its feet with a roar of appreciation.**

The Brasil guitar duo have arrived in Bermuda. We all look forward to seeing them again soon.