

DAVID RUSSELL

Kings Place, London
30 October 2008

In this recital we heard the première of *El Llanto de los Sueños*, a work written for David Russell by the British guitarist and composer Stephen Goss, who is professor of Composition at the University of Surrey. Stephen Goss has been writing a number of solo works lately which have been dedicated to performers, such as *The Chinese Garden* and *Raise the Red Latern* which were written for Xue Fei Yang and premièred at the Wigmore Hall in 2007. This latest piece, *El Llanto de los Sueños*, is in three movements: *Cantiga*, *Madrugada* and *Alborada* and draws its inspiration from the poetry of Federico García Lorca, including *Las seis cuerdas (The Six Strings)* and *La Guitarra*. The *Cantiga* began with dream-like arpeggios and David Russell was particularly nurturing in the tone quality here, creating a honey-sweet melody. *Madrugada* had all the expectant, and yet unsure eerie ambiance of that time before dawn. The music was gentle with some nice harmonic choices, but all very understated. The final movement, *Alborada (Dawn)*, was much longer and livelier. Every new work needs to be played in and fortunately David Russell plans to keep this piece on his programme for the coming year.

Couperin can be quite demanding and one really needs to have his impressive technique to make these transcriptions of David Russell's work so well on the guitar. He played three pieces: *Les Barricades mystérieuses*, an elegantly ornamented *Les Silvains* and the technically impressive *Les tours de passe-passe*, which appropriately translated as 'sleight of hand', as the hands need to work like magic.

The two pieces by Albéniz, *Mallorca* and *Malagueña* were very pleasing for the detailed care taken in the individual voices which allowed you to hear the beauty of the composition with great clarity. The *Malagueña* had a good balance of delicacy in the upper voice over a strong, rhythmic foundation.

The concert ended with three light works by Roshegar, *Waltz No.7* and *Lullaby*. The third piece, *Good Luck Waltz* is dedicated to David Russell.

This concert was my first at the recently-opened London music venue called Kings Place, which is very close to Kings Cross Station, built on Regent's Canal. The complex is now home to two of London's renowned orchestras, London Sinfonietta and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and is also the headquarters of the Guardian newspaper. There were no train noises, despite our closeness to the international train terminal at St Pancras, the building sits on rubber shock absorbers, that clearly do the job very well.

Thérèse Wassily Saba

DIMITRIS DEKAVALLAS & KATE STILLMAN (violin)

St Thomas' Hospital, London
10 November 2008

Although the Central Hall of St Thomas's Hospital is not the quietest place to give a recital, I must say that I thoroughly enjoyed the excellent music-making of this violin and guitar duo. The *March et Scherzo Op.33* by Napoleon Coste was elegant salon music and Dimitris Dekavallas had a particularly warm tone and lyrical expression on his new Smallman guitar. This piece and *Les Regrets, Cantilene Op.36* were originally written for oboe and guitar by Coste but worked well on violin and guitar. It was calm and soothing music, appropriate for a recital in a hospital's hall, where the music was enjoyed by hospital staff and visitors.

Villa-Lobos's *Distribution de Fleures* is in some ways a very primitive sounding piece; it is simple but with absolutely seductive melodies on both instruments. Katie Stillman relaxed into the timelessness of the piece with ease and we could appreciate even more the beauty of the tone quality on the very long notes on the violin. That atmosphere continued in Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras No.5*, a piece originally written for voice accompanied by eight cellos. Here it was beautifully played in

an arrangement for guitar and violin, with the violin of course taking the part for voice.

Each of the performers played solos. Katie Stillman, a Canadian violinist who like Dekavallas has won a string of awards and is experienced both as a chamber musician and soloist, played an absorbing interpretation of the *Allemande* and *Sarabande* from Bach's *Partita for solo violin No.2 in D minor, BWV 1004*. She has a particular way of leaning into the end of the phrases which is quite distinctive and completely absorbing to listen to. In her solo the volume increased considerably, which meant that in duo she was very mindful of the more limited volume of the guitar and adjusted her playing accordingly – a guitarist's dream partner for chamber music.

Dimitris Dekavallas gave a sunny performance of Albéniz's *Sevilla* with plenty of drive and momentum, and a moving interpretation of the melody line in the slow section.

The music making continued to be pleasing into the last piece, the *History of Tango* by Astor Piazzolla, which was as impressive as the rest of the programme. Dimitris Dekavallas' rhythm was solid, playful and exciting with the necessary magical interplay between the performers that makes Piazzolla's music really come to life. As a duo Dimitris Dekavallas and Katie Stillman were an excellent match. They both manage to be deeply involved in the music that they are playing at the same time as closely following what the other is doing, with a feeling of equality.

Thérèse Wassily Saba

BERTA ROJAS

Purcell Room, London
27 November 2008

Berta Rojas has recently released a rather special DVD performance of Barrios's works, with each piece set in a place of incredible natural beauty. This concert, entitled 'Berta Rojas: Paraguay According to Agustín Barrios', had a large screen above the centre of the stage and the scene for the concert was set by the opening of the DVD with Berta Rojas sitting in a bar

playing Barrios. Although it may seem an unusual approach for a classical music concert, the result was very effective. We all relaxed and even more so when she did start playing 'live', with her remarkably relaxed technique and distinctive phrasing which works so well in the Barrios because, despite its very classical style, his music also has folk music influences. In her own career Berta Rojas has performed both the serious classical guitar repertoire and has also performed Paraguayan music in various ensembles. Her most recent collaborations in duo with Carlos Barbosa-Lima show her ability to work with ease in both styles.

Each group of pieces was introduced by Berta Rojas, giving snippets of biographical information about Barrios. Although this can be disturbing in some performances, here it seemed to fit perfectly with the atmosphere she had created, which felt very intimate, despite the large film screen just behind her head on the stage. The programme included *El Ultimo Canto*, *Aconquija*, *Maxixe*, *Choro da Saudade*, *Julia Florida*, *Las Abejas*, *La Catedral* – all favourites of the Barrios repertoire. It was an unforgettable performance. For those who may not be lucky enough to hear Berta Rojas play in concert, then it is some consolation that one can purchase the DVD, however, both are the ideal.

Thérèse Wassily Saba

AGNEW AND MCALLISTER DUO

Ilkley Manor House, West Yorkshire, 28 November 2008
Flautist Aisling Agnew and guitarist Matthew McAllister had the ideal setting for their concert on this very cold and blustery Friday night, namely the art gallery and occasional concert venue that is Ilkley Manor House. The room was of moderate size but surrounded as we were by all manner (no pun intended!) of pots, glass objects and pictures it seemed all the more intimate.

Libertango by Astor Piazzolla proved a very good opener, immediately establishing the musical credentials of this fine duo that made its intricacies seem very easy indeed. The first thing I was made aware of was the rather unusual sitting position adopted by McAllister, who placed the guitar on top of his lap almost vertically,

necessitating him to have to hold on in quite a different way to the normal. When asked afterwards he stated that it gave him much more freedom to move with the music as other instrumentalists can, and usually do, but we, the guitarists, normally cannot. Fair enough, it certainly did not detract from his playing in any way. Egberto Gismonti's *Agua e Vinho* was slow and hauntingly played whilst the choro *Quebra Queixo* (apparently a type of gummy, chewy sweet) by Celso Machado flowed beautifully. Francis Poulenc's quirky *Mouvements Perpetuels* followed, a composer whose music is always a pleasure to listen to, so fresh and tangy as it is with so many surprising details, and then Debussy's solo flute piece *Syrinx* which gave Aisling Agnew a chance to show how lucky the flute is to have a composition by Debussy, and how unlucky we guitarists are not to. It was all at once wistful and exotic and could have been written by no one else. The *Carmen Fantasie* of Francois Borne, based on Bizet's original melodies closed the first half. The fireworks were hugely in evidence as both players met the piece's extreme difficulties with disarming ease.

The last two movements of Bach's *Sonata in E minor BWV1034* were followed by McAllister's solo version of Peter Maxwell Davies' *Farewell to Stromness* which was a stunning arrangement not apparently committed either to paper or yet to a recording, a factor which he should rectify as soon as possible! Three of the four movements of Piazzolla's *Histoire du Tango* were, as always, a pleasure to hear live and proved a fitting end to the concert proper, except for the encore piece *Arisaig* a slow Scots Air that could not have been more beautifully played. Altogether this was a fabulous concert of wonderfully diverse music played by a quality duo that deserves to be heard by anyone interested in good music.

Chris Dumigan

ANTONIS HATZINIKOLAOU

St Martins-in-the-Fields, London
23 January 2009

This was an excellent lunchtime recital by the Greek guitarist Antonis Hatzinikolaou, who offered well-balanced and contrasting repertoire. He opened with

an engaging performance of the Paganini *Andantino Variato* where his choice of tone qualities in the different voices showed his empathy with the work. This, as with all the pieces on the programme, was played with a very secure technique which was absolutely at the service of his interpretation. The two movements from *Sonata BWV 1005* by Bach were arranged by Hatzinikolaou. They worked very well on the guitar and harmonically speaking provided much pleasure. The *Largo* was a majestic, stately piece and the *Allegro assai* was a fast-paced but very long movement which was well structured in terms of pace and phrasing, and therefore was very exciting to listen to. Four pieces by Barrios followed including a very intimate performance of *Prelude in C minor*. In Barrios's *Mazurka Appassionata* again we saw Hatzinikolaou's skill at shaping long pieces, so that it feels captivating, as if listening to an epic story. For a complete contrast of styles, he played Roland Dyens's *Saudade No.3* and here even more did we experience his broad range of expressive tone qualities and timbres, and the rhythm was solid. He ended this thoroughly enjoyable recital with an equally impressive performance of *Sonata Giocosa* by Rodrigo.

Antonis Hatzinikolaou has been a prizewinner at the Koblenz International Guitar Competition 'Hubert Kappel', the Ivor Mairants International Guitar Award and won the coveted Julian Bream Prize. Since completing his post-graduate studies at the Royal Academy of Music, he has remained living in London. We hope to hear more of this fine young performer.

Thérèse Wassily Saba

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**TIM PANTING,
Reviews Editor**