

VLADIMIR GORBACH

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Music review: Vladimir Gorbach puts on jewel of a performance

BY SARAH BRYAN MILLER

The St. Louis Classical Guitar Society, one of the jewels in St. Louis' cultural diadem, is noted for bringing in gifted guitarists from around the world. On Saturday night, the SLCGS presented an unusual talent even by its own standards.

Like many of the Guitar Society's artists, Russian guitarist Vladimir Gorbach is the winner of multiple prestigious competitions. Most recently, he won the 2011 Guitar Foundation of America contest, with prizes including a 50-city concert tour. That win is what brought him to the Ethical Society for his St. Louis debut on Saturday. He performed a program of works by Italian, Spanish and Argentine composers, from the Baroque composer Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757) to the king of nuevo tango, Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992).

As a musician, Gorbach is the complete package. He showed himself to be a master of subtlety and delicacy, as well as the possessor of daunting technique and considerable charisma.

He began his recital with the airy Rondoletto, Op. 4, by Mauro Giuliani (1781-1829), and followed it with three sonatas — one jaunty, one lovely and one fast-moving — by Scarlatti, demonstrating skill with both lyricism and fancy fingerwork.

The first half concluded with a suite, "Collectici Intim," by Vicente Asencio (1908-1979), performed with easy elegance. Gorbach brought out a surprising range of harmonies and colors in the score, with an impressive conclusion to the suite. The second half began with the lovely Andante and Rondo in A minor by Dionisio Aguado (1784-1849). From there he moved to something completely different and showed off his technical chops, in three of Piazzolla's four "Seasons."

Originally written for Piazzolla's tango octet, it was arranged for solo guitar by Brazilian guitarist-composer Sérgio Assad. It's a lot to boil down to one six-stringed instrument, but Assad was up to that considerable challenge.

Gorbach was up to the equal challenge of performing it and its varied moods and tempos, making one of the best cases for the tango form that I've heard.

He concluded the program with "El Mestre," by Miguel Llobet (1878-1938), subtitled "Variations on a theme of Fernando Sor." Musically rich and appealing, an exquisite composition, Gorbach played it immaculately, for a memorable conclusion to an exceptional recital.