

Concert review: Douglas Niedt displays rare talent in Classical Guitar Society concert on Saturday, September 27, 2014



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Pianist Margaret Peterson, a professor of mine years ago, once observed that great musicians are great regardless of what instrument they play. Doug Niedt is one of those rare musicians whose talent transcends any limitations. Although thoroughly committed to his chosen instrument, the classical guitar, he infuses every note with a vibrancy and color that defy any limitations.

Niedt's season opener for the St. Louis Classical Guitar Society, held at the Ethical Society, paid tribute to his teacher and mentor, Jorge Morel. Accordingly, the first half of the program focused on Latin American and Spanish repertoire, demonstrating the profound richness and diversity of Hispanic music. In pieces describing a Bolivian peasant meandering along a road, a re-working of a Puerto Rican ballad, a Spanish dance, a musical portrayal of a woman from the Mision district of Argentina, along with many others, Niedt splashed every conceivable color and tonal effect possible with the classical guitar.

Niedt noted in his remarks that Jorge Morel was a great admirer of American music as well. The second half of his program featured arrangements of standard American works, including medleys from *West Side Story* and Gershwin favorites from *Porgy and Bess* and "Rhapsody in Blue", as well as Niedt's own arrangement of Dave Brubeck's "Take Five". Far from being lifeless transcriptions, these were all creative and exciting renderings that infused electricity into classic standards. The deep Latin influence in *West Side Story* became all the more clear, as well as the dynamic fusion of blues and classicism in Gershwin.

In a stunning demonstration of virtuosity, Niedt closed with his own arrangement of Henry Mancini's theme from "Peter Gunn". No hokeyness here, just a clean and rapid-fire look at creative forces unleashed. Niedt also included an arrangement with some new touches of what has become one of his signature pieces, the Cavatina from *The Deerhunter* by Stanley Myers. For many, this haunting piece, originally conceived for piano and based on a simple melody, has come to embody the very essence of the Romantic aspect afforded by the classical guitar. Listeners seem never to tire of it, and understandably so.

Niedt's program spoke not just to the overwhelming diversity of Spanish and Latin music, or North American music, but to that of all music. His innate sense of phrasing and his ability to make his instrument sing are a testament to the power of music. Whether we experience one skilled human being and one instrument, or an orchestra and chorus of hundreds, music speaks a vast and inexhaustible language.