

KACHERSKI/MORITA DUO

Jay Kacherski, guitar. Lina Morita, piano.

Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

The Sugarmill Music Festival prides itself on introducing unfamiliar music to our audiences. Though we, of course, enjoy programming the classics of Western art music, we are also glad when we can introduce music which is unknown even to enthusiasts of chamber music. We have already encountered this feature in the concerts by the Rose City Trio and the New Music on the Bayou Ensemble. This is largely the case again for our program this evening by guitarist Jay Kacherski and pianist Lina Morita. Kacherski, a member of the Texas Guitar Quartet, has performed around the world. One of his special interests is Mexican guitar music, an underappreciated body of works which he has promoted not only through concerts but also the creation of a Mexican Guitar Music Catalog. Morita, a native of São Paulo, Brazil, has also led an active performing career, including recent recitals in Mexico City at the *Museo Mural Diego Rivera* and *La Escuela de Musica*. Since 2007, she has served as professor at McNeese State University in Lake Charles. The majority of the music Kacherski and Morita share with us this evening is connected to the Spanish-speaking world, owing to their own connections with this heritage as well as the guitar's prominent place in many national traditions. These are works which are unfamiliar to many listeners, but that will undoubtedly have a wide appeal.

Our program starts with the *Preludio* for harpsichord and guitar by **Manuel Ponce (1882-1948)**. Mexican composer Ponce was his country's leading musician during his lifetime. He created works for many instruments and ensembles, not least for his own instrument—the piano—and for the guitar—the instrument with which his music is most associated today. Indeed, the legendary classical guitarist, Andrés Segovia, once noted that, in his opinion, it was Ponce who had the greatest influence on the revival of the guitar repertoire in the twentieth-century as well as opening the guitar's potential as a concerto soloist. Segovia was a fierce advocate of Ponce's music, and his recitals could sometimes consist entirely of works by this composer. Ponce, moreover, created a national idiom for Mexican symphonic music, one which infused Mexico's rich tradition of nineteenth-century Romanticism with

elements of impressionism and neo-Classicism. In this pursuit, he was followed by his gifted pupil Carlos Chávez and others of this younger generation like the iconic Silvestre Revueltas. Ponce's *Preludio*, performed this evening on piano and guitar, is a late work by this composer, written in 1936. It demonstrates just how far Ponce's music had come from the nineteenth-century tradition; ironically, this means it almost sounds like it had been created in the eighteenth century and not the twentieth. The keyboard and guitar parts are well-paired, so that they both contribute to a continuing sense of line while each making their own idiomatic additions to its flow.

The Viennese composer and music publisher, **Anton Diabelli (1781-1858)**, is primarily remembered today for the challenge he issued to his fellow composers and the unexpected response he received from one of these men—namely, Ludwig van Beethoven. In 1819, Diabelli sent a waltz of his own creation to Austria's leading composers, including Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Carl Czerny, and Johann Nepomuk Hummel, asking each to respond with a single variation which he intended to publish in an anthology of Austrian music. Beethoven, instead, took this opportunity to write thirty-three variations! Submitted five years too late, his work is commonly referred to as the *Diabelli Variations*, preserving this lesser composer's name for posterity. Among guitarists, however, Diabelli's own compositions are well-regarded. Credited to Diabelli are some six hundred original compositions and arrangements for solo guitar or which utilize guitar in various chamber configurations. Diabelli taught both guitar and piano, so it is not surprising that he would compose a work like the one we hear this evening for these instruments in combination. This work is his *Grande Sonate brillante* in D minor, Op. 102 for piano and guitar. We hear only its first movement, marked *Adagio - Allegro*, in which the two instruments trade responsibilities as soloist and accompanist.

Two works by contemporary composers follow. The first of these is *Lake Avondale* by **David Mitchell (born 1970)**, a composer and educator based in Atlanta, Georgia. Mitchell is a guitarist by training, though his compositions are for a

variety of media, including acoustic instruments as well as music for films and videogames. His ambient work depicts a morning stroll around Lake Avondale, a small lake in a historic Atlanta neighborhood. It contrasts the natural beauty of the lake with its noisy urban environs. Afterwards, we hear *Brazos de Dios* by **J. Todd Frazier (born 1969)**. Frazier is a composer and music therapist based in Houston where he is director of Houston Methodist Hospital's Center for Performing Arts Medicine. Frazier has written of his piece, "*Brazos de Dios*... my grandfather calls the Brazos by that name... the 'Arms of God.' I've seen it written that way on a map of the Republic of Texas from 1842. What a name! Of all the rivers in Texas, the Brazos is the most intriguing to me." The Brazos runs southeast from the area of Abilene, passing through Waco, College Station, and the Houston metropolitan area; it eventually drains into the Gulf of Mexico. It was at Washington-on-the-Brazos, an Anglo-American settlement, that Texas declared its independence from Mexico in 1836.

The final piece on this evening's program is by Spanish composer **Manuel de Falla (1876-1946)**. Falla, a contemporary to Ponce, played a similar role in the development of Spain's national idiom in the twentieth century. His music likewise moves from a Romantic style, through impressionism, and a more astringent application of neo-Classicism. Falla spent the formative years of his career in Paris: he lived there from 1907 to 1914 where he worked as a close colleague to the era's leading innovators, including Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Igor Stravinsky, and the impresario Serge Diaghilev. To conclude their program, Kacherski and Morita perform the famous *Danza Española* No. 1 from Falla's opera, *La vida breve* (*The Brief Life*). This work was already complete before Falla ever arrived in Paris; nevertheless, once there—and with the encouragement of Debussy—he modernized it, replacing the old-school aria-recitative format with a more continuous flow of musical ideas. In *La vida breve*, as in other works, Falla attempted to elevate Spanish Gypsy music into an artform without inadvertently also removing it from its sensual, primordial origins. The opera's first version was complete by 1905, for which it won a competition hosted by the *Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando*. It was when this award failed to win it a staging that Falla—frustrated with his limited artistic prospects in Spain—relocated to Paris, then the cultural capital of Europe. Even with the powerful connections Falla made there, its premiere still had to wait until April 1, 1913 when it was finally staged in French. It was soon staged again in Madrid after Falla was forced to return to Spain with the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

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About Jackson. Jackson Harmeyer graduated with his Master of Music in Music History and Literature from the University of Louisville in May 2019 upon the completion of his thesis, "Liminal Aesthetics: Perspectives on Harmony and Timbre in the Music of Olivier Messiaen, Tristan Murail, and Kaija Saariaho." He has shared this pioneering research through presentations given at the American Musicological Society South-Central Chapter's annual meetings in Asheville, NC and Sewanee, TN and at the University of Tennessee Contemporary Music Festival in Knoxville, TN. During his studies in Louisville, he was the recipient of the Gerhard Herz Music History Scholarship and was employed at the Dwight D. Anderson Memorial Music Library where he did archival work for the unique Grawemeyer Collection which houses scores, recordings, and documentation for over five thousand entries by the world's leading contemporary composers. Previously, Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars' College in Natchitoches, LA. Then, from 2014 to 2016, Jackson served as director of the successful chamber music series, Abendmusik Alexandria. He has remained a concert annotator and organizer, co-directing the annual Sugarmill Music Festival. The scholarly writings he has produced for this festival have even attracted the attention of the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. Aside from his studies, he is a composer, choral singer, and award-winning nature photographer.

Read additional program notes by Jackson at www.JacksonHarmeyer.com.