

# CLASSICS AND A CONTEMPORARY

*Program Notes Written by Jackson Harmeyer, Abendmusik Alexandria Series Director*

This evening's program features the extraordinary John De Chiaro, recently called "one of the leading lights of classical guitar" by Fred Child, host of public radio's *Performance Today*. This evening, Mr. De Chiaro will play music written or arranged for guitar from throughout the ages. There is early music by John Dowland and Domenico Scarlatti, the *Grand Overture* by nineteenth-century guitar virtuoso Mauro Giuliani, and pieces by Scott Joplin and Isaac Albéniz which bridge the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In addition, Mr. De Chiaro will play a brand new piece by contemporary composer Jackson Harmeyer – his Suite for Solo Guitar, Op. 21 written especially for Mr. De Chiaro. So, please relax and enjoy this special program!

A contemporary of William Shakespeare, the Englishman **John Dowland (1563-1626)** was considered the preeminent lutenist of his day. The music he composed was often for his own use, and among the surviving works are nearly one hundred pieces for solo lute, about the same number of songs for lute and vocalist, and several works for bowed strings with lute. The guitar being a relative to the lute, it is only natural that Dowland's music would be frequently played on guitar today. In his *Melancholy Galliard*, Dowland invokes one of the most popular renaissance dance forms. The galliard was typically a fast, leaping dance in triple meter, popular with young couples; Queen Elizabeth I was highly-regarded for her prowess as a dancer of the galliard. In this piece, however, the tempo of the galliard is slowed to suit the piece's laden melancholy. The gloomy nature of this composition is not at all unexpected for Dowland who once used as his motto the Latin phrase "*Semper Dowland, semper dolens*" ("Always Dowland, always doleful"). The other piece on this evening's program *My Lady Hunsdon's Puffe* provides a nice contrast. Cheerful in spirit, this piece is a reworking of a composition by the Italian lutenist Santino Garsi which Dowland then dedicated to the patron of the title. Today, Dowland's music – although already well-known to classical audiences – has once again entered the popular consciousness thanks to the album released by Sting in 2006 titled *Songs from the Labyrinth* and featuring the music of John Dowland almost exclusively.

The Italian composer **Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)** was an exact contemporary of the other two Baroque giants – Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel – all three composers born in 1685. Like Bach and Handel, Scarlatti was also a keyboardist renowned for his virtuosity. Unlike these two, however, Scarlatti learned much from the guitarists he encountered after moving to Spain in 1729 – the heavy downbeat chords and the modal colorings often

heard in Scarlatti's music are clear signs of this Spanish influence. Scarlatti wrote more than five hundred sonatas for harpsichord, although these are often played on piano or guitar today. The Sonata in E minor is listed in musicologist Ralph Kirkpatrick's catalog of Scarlatti's complete sonatas as number 98. This sonata is almost minimalistic in the way it allows repeated material to unveil something new with each repetition; in this way, its melody is only gradually revealed through broken fragments. Meanwhile, the Sonata in A major, K. 322, is polite and graceful with its dance-like rhythms. There are enough similarities and differences between these two sonatas that their pairing here sounds almost intended by the composer.

The Italian guitar virtuoso **Mauro Giuliani (1781-1829)** was a contemporary of Ludwig van Beethoven and, like Beethoven, spent his most productive years in Vienna. Giuliani, also a cellist, played in the premiere of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. Before ever arriving in Vienna, Giuliani had toured Europe as a virtuoso guitarist, yet in Vienna he also found success as a teacher and composer. Most of his compositions include guitar in some capacity, either as a soloist – his three guitar concerti and numerous solo pieces – or as a partner in a dialogue – chamber works for guitar with string quartet, violin, piano, flute, or another instrument. The *Grand Overture* was published in 1814 as Giuliani's Opus 61. This work for solo guitar takes as its model the Italian operatic overture and, in fact, the multifaceted colors of the orchestra can be heard in this overture for guitar. Apparently, Beethoven also recognized this and – once when listening to Giuliani play – remarked "the guitar is a miniature orchestra in itself."

**Eduardo Sainz de la Maza (1903-1982)** was a Spanish guitarist and composer. Like his brother Regino (1896-1981) – also an accomplished guitarist and composer – he was born in the town of Burgos in northern Spain. Regino, however, found greater acclaim than his brother, as Regino became the dedicatee and first performer of Joaquín Rodrigo's famous *Concierto de Aranjuez*, probably today's best-known guitar concerto. Eduardo Sainz de la Maza's *Campanas del Alba* was written in 1963. Its title means *Bells of Dawn*, and these bells can be heard as defined plucks over a shimmering sunrise of sustained lighter strokes.

The self-proclaimed "King of the Ragtime Writers," **Scott Joplin (c.1868-1917)** was one of the most significant figures in American music at the turn of the twentieth century. Although Joplin's music was forgotten for several decades after his death, the ragtime revival of the 1970s reaffirmed his position as the central figure in ragtime, especially after

the 1973 film *The Sting* featured his music. *The Entertainer* is perhaps the best-known of Joplin's many piano rags. The title "entertainer" was likely a reference to himself as that was his nickname at the Maple Leaf Club where he had been employed as house pianist. Composed in 1902, *The Entertainer* followed a return to writing in smaller forms, and scholars hear more sophistication in *The Entertainer* and the other rags Joplin wrote at this time than in previous compositions. John De Chiaro himself made the arrangement for guitar heard on this evening's program. Yet, there seems to be historical justification for playing Joplin's rags on guitar: Joplin had connections with the popular mandolin ensembles of his day, and even dedicated *The Entertainer* to one such group called James Brown and his Mandolin Club. The mandolin is, of course, a plucked string instrument with some similarities to the guitar, and this dedication suggests the influence these mandolin ensembles might have had on Joplin's compositions.

The final piece on this evening's program is by the Spanish composer **Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909)**. Although Albéniz originally wrote most of the compositions he is remembered for today for piano – his own instrument – the majority of these are better-known in their arrangements for guitar or for orchestra. That is certainly the case for his piece *Sevilla* which is heard this evening on guitar, but which had been premiered by Albéniz on piano in January 1885. *Sevilla* is the third movement from his first *Suite española* and is one of the many compositions by Albéniz with Spanish inspirations. Albéniz was a devoted nationalist, and he fully utilized the elements and even the melodies of Spanish folksongs within his compositions. Each movement of the *Suite española* depicts a different region of Spain, including a final movement dedicated to Cuba – at the time still a Spanish holding. *Sevilla* is no exception, inspired by the southern city of Seville and its native folksong genre the *sevillanas*.

### **Jackson Harmeyer – Suite for Solo Guitar, Op. 21**

I began composing in November 2008. Throughout the majority of my compositions, I have sought to create music that is forward-looking musically while also being enjoyable and accessible to the listener. My earliest works were electronic, but by summer 2010 I had begun writing instrumental chamber music, and have since that time written several trios for various combinations, two string quartets, and a few pieces for solo instrumentalists. In April 2011, cellists Paul Christopher, Milovan Paz, and Christina Lake introduced my *Contrapunctus No. 1* for three cellos, Op. 11 – this was my first composition to ever be performed. At the time, I was very much interested in finding new ways of approaching tonality, and *Contrapunctus No. 1* was a modal work. In fall 2011, however, my composition instructor Richard Rose introduced me to atonality and serialism. The resulting Composition No. 1 for piano, Op. 17 was purely serial in its approach, but already by my next piece Piano Trio, Op. 18 I was finding ways to incorporate

divergent elements into a chromatic language still with serial roots. The final movement of my Piano Trio takes up the rhythmic-melodic structure of *Contrapunctus No. 1* and, through a gradual process of allusion, resolves the otherwise chromatic composition in a tonal manner. Subtitled *Jazz Cats*, my Trio for clarinet, double bass, and piano, Op. 20 also establishes a consistent and approachable chromatic language through reference – this time through reference to the characteristics of jazz. Over the coming years, I intend to release an album of my compositions, including the Suite for solo guitar, Op. 21 which will be heard at this evening's concert. Learn more about my music at my brand new website [www.JacksonHarmeyer.com](http://www.JacksonHarmeyer.com).

My Suite for solo guitar was written in January 2015 following John De Chiaro's performance earlier that month at Abendmusik Alexandria. It was always intended as a piece for him to play – I had wanted to write such a piece for some time, but it took until I had heard him play several times for me to come up with the necessary inspiration. I knew John's musical tastes were more conservative than my own, so I resolved to write a mostly tonal piece, although there are still some chromatic underpinnings. I shared the piece with John over lunch and, since that time, he and I have worked together to make it more characteristic for guitar while he has rehearsed and memorized the piece.

The Suite for solo guitar is set in four movements. Its movement titles are more "images" of their musical forms than they are exact adherents to these forms. The first movement is called *Leyenda* – a Spanish word meaning "legend" – and its model is the *Leyenda* by Isaac Albéniz which John played at January's Abendmusik. Although there is nothing musical borrowed from Albéniz, a similar Spanish desert scene is heard in my *Leyenda*. The second movement is called *Blues*, and it is in fact a setting of the twelve-bar blues form characteristic of that genre; there are two repetitions of the twelve-bar blues before a chromatic breakdown. The third movement takes its name *Scherzo* from the original definition of "scherzo" as "joke." The joke here is that this is a chromatic movement among tonal neighbors, and that – although the melodic material seems to want to develop into a true theme – it never can find a way of doing so. The fourth movement is called *Fugue* and, if perhaps not a literal fugue, the two melodic lines are certainly setup contrapuntally to each other. The theme of the fourth movement is derived from that of the first and – considering this and the way the movement switches into major in its concluding measures – *Fugue* brings a nice resolution to the entire composition.

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