

# An Evening of Guitar Classics

featuring John De Chiaro

Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

Our Second Annual Sugarmill Music Festival begins with a concert by a local favorite, the classical guitarist John De Chiaro. His diverse program will sample a range of music, from Spanish guitar classics by Fernando Sor and Isaac Albéniz to arrangements of works by Scott Joplin and Erik Satie created by the guitarist himself. Relax and enjoy this wonderful concert, beginning with two pieces by the Renaissance lutenist and composer John Dowland.

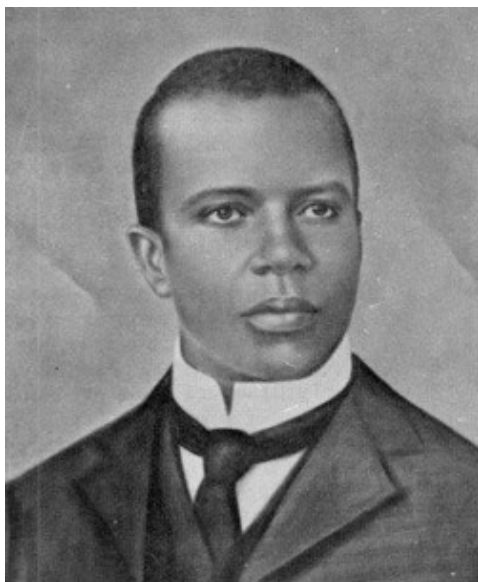


John Dowland

The Englishman **John Dowland (1563-1626)**, a contemporary of William Shakespeare, was in his day considered to be his country's foremost player of the lute – a pear-shaped instrument similar to the modern guitar. Most of the music he wrote was, accordingly, for his own instrument, and his surviving compositions include many solo lute pieces like the *Lachrimae Pavan* and *Allemande* heard this evening. Both the pavan and allemande were popular dances of the Renaissance, although as is often the case undanced versions designed only for concert performance eventually emerged. The pavan was typically a slow, courtly dance with simple steps meant for couples. The Latin word "*lachrimae*" means tears, and here it suggests the melancholic mood of this piece. *Lachrimae Pavan* was well-known in its day, and Dowland would model other compositions on its unhappy melody, including his famous song *Flow, My Tears*. Its melancholic mood also came to symbolize Dowland generally as he took up the Latin motto, "*Semper Dowland, semper dolens*" ("Always Dowland, always doleful"). The allemande was, likewise, a stately dance originating from Germany, set in common time and paced at a moderate tempo. Dowland's contemporary Thomas Morley described the allemande as "a more heavy dance than the galliard (fitly representing the nature of the people whose name it carrieth)." Today, Dowland's music, well-known to classical audiences, has also once again entered the popular consciousness thanks to an album featuring his music released by Sting in 2006 and titled *Songs from the Labyrinth*.

The Spanish composer **Fernando Sor (1778-1839)** was prolific in many genres, but he is best remembered for the compositions he wrote for his own instrument, the guitar. Born in Barcelona and receiving his musical education at Montserrat, he sided with Napoleon against the Spanish monarchy and, upon Napoleon's defeat, was exiled from Spain. No matter, Paris became his adopted home for some years, and his subsequent musical career was largely successful, if occasionally nomadic. One of the leading guitarists of his age, Sor did much to invigorate the early history of the classical guitar: he contributed many new pieces to the guitar repertoire and also wrote technical manuals to teach aspiring guitarists. Whether due to his exile from Spain or simply because the nationalist movement of the mid-nineteenth century had yet to take shape, the majority of Sor's compositions are well-grounded in the internationalist style that had first developed under the Viennese Classicists like Mozart and Haydn. The Sonata No. 1 in D major, Op. 14 also called *Gran solo* is clearly reflective of these internationalist tendencies – in fact, there is little distinctively Spanish-sounding about this piece. *Gran solo* begins with a slow, minor mode introduction and then follows the standard sonata-allegro form that Mozart and Haydn would have known, neatly moving through the phases of exposition, development, and recapitulation. Dating this composition is somewhat tricky: three different versions survive, including one from 1810, another from 1822, and an additional undated copy by Sor's friend, the guitarist Dionisio Aguado.

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* brought his music back into the public consciousness. Today most people will recognize the name Scott Joplin if you as much as hum the opening bars of his most famous piece, *The Entertainer*. This evening we hear two of his works,



**Scott Joplin**

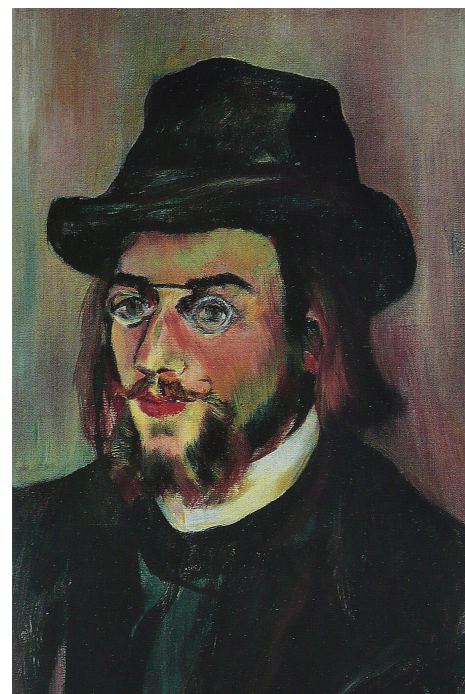
beginning with *The Heliotrope Bouquet* which he called a slow drag two-step. This pleasant piece is actually a collaboration of sorts between Joplin and a younger ragtime pianist, Louis Chauvin. Chauvin apparently possessed an amazing ability to reinterpret anything he heard in his own special way; unfortunately, Chauvin wrote-down few of these arrangements. Joplin greatly admired Chauvin and visited him in Chicago in 1906. To create *The Heliotrope Bouquet*, Joplin took two themes contributed by Chauvin and then matched them with two of his own. *The Rosebud March* was published in 1905 and named after a saloon in St. Louis. It is in a meter uncommon for ragtime, namely 6/8. John De Chiaro himself made the arrangements for guitar heard on this evening’s program; they are among his transcriptions of the complete fifty-two piano rags, waltzes, and marches of Joplin.

The *Canzonetta* by German composer **Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)** comes from his String Quartet No. 1 in E-flat major, Op. 12 where it serves as the quartet’s second movement. The delightful *Canzonetta* with its nimble, tiptoeing motion recalls the fairy music heard in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The Quartet was written in 1830 while Mendelssohn was in London, and is dedicated to his friend and sometime romantic interest Betty Pistor. **Eduardo Sainz de la Maza (1903-1982)** was a Spanish guitarist and composer. Like his brother

Regino – also an accomplished guitarist and composer – he was born in the town of Burgos in northern Spain. Regino, nevertheless, found greater acclaim than his brother Eduardo: 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 French composer **Erik Satie (1866-1925)** was well-known in his day as an eccentric; only later in life, however, did he also gain a reputation as an *eccentric composer*. Youthful studies at the Paris Conservatoire were unproductive; although he lingered on there for several years, he left with a severe distaste for the tonal tradition and especially the Romantic stylings taught at the conservatory. In 1887, undistinguished as either a composer or a pianist, he set out for the bohemian Montmartre district of Paris, apparently introducing himself to the owner of the cabaret *Le Chat noir* as “Erik Satie, *gymnopediste*.” There were plenty enough Hydropathes (afraid of water, they drink only wine) and Symbolists (sleepwalkers and poets) at the club already, he presumed, so Satie wanted to be something a little different. The *gymnopédie*, albeit, was a dance performed naked by boys in ancient Sparta who wished to display their athletic prowess. Well, Satie had to do something to confirm his new title and, at the very least, he decided he would compose three piano pieces with this name. His *Trois Gymnopédies* were written from February to April 1888. Their mostly static harmonies have led Robert Orledge to remark, “it is the haunting beauty of the floating melodies that have given the *Gymnopédies* their enduring popularity: an effortless distillation of a bygone classical age.” Beauty has been left to wander aimlessly, and, for this reason, they have come to be seen as important forerunners to ambient music. Their transcriptions for guitar were created by John De Chiaro.

The Spanish composer **Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909)**, like Sor before him, wrote in many different genres, his other works almost completely overshadowed by those he wrote for his own instrument – in his case, the piano. That these works were originally composed for piano is often obscured, however, because so many of them are better-known in their guitar or orchestral arrangements. Albéniz,



**Erik Satie**

unlike Sor though, was a devoted nationalist, fully-utilizing the elements and even the melodies of Spanish folksongs in his compositions. Ultimately, Albéniz was able to fully-realize the vision that had begun with Felipe Pedrell, the composer often regarded as the father of Spanish nationalism; in turn, Albéniz inspired many other Spanish composers to do the same. Originally for piano, *Leyenda de Asturias* is heard this evening in a transcription by the celebrated Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia. *Leyenda* is actually the fifth piece from the first *Suite española*, a set of eight pieces depicting different regions of Spain. *Leyenda* highlights Asturias, a mountainous province of northwestern Spain situated on the Bay of Biscay. Although Albéniz drafted the original *Suite española* in 1886, the *Leyenda* that appeared in its final version some twenty years later was actually the Prelude to his *Cantos de España* composed between 1891 and 1894. It was instead Albéniz's publisher who gave the Prelude the title *Leyenda* and placed it in the *Suite española*. *Leyenda* is in three sections: the first thrills with its quick pulsations while the second is reminiscent of an operatic recitative with its measured declaration; the third section is a repetition of the first with an added coda.

© Jackson Harmeyer 2017



**About Jackson.** Jackson Harmeyer is a composer, music scholar, and advocate of music. Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars' College located in Natchitoches, Louisiana in May 2013 after completing his undergraduate thesis "Learning from the Past: The Influence of Johann Sebastian Bach upon the Soviet Composers." As series director of the successful Abendmusik Alexandria chamber music series from May 2014 to April 2016, Jackson played a vital role in the renewal of interest in chamber music across Central Louisiana. This interest has encouraged the creation of the annual Sugarmill Music Festival and the new series Nachtmusik von BrainSurge, both of which Jackson remains active in as concert annotator and creative consultant. He also blogs at

MusicCentral where he shares concert experiences, gives listening recommendations, posts interviews with contemporary composers, and offers insights into his own compositions. As a composer, Jackson has worked to integrate the vocabulary and grammar of modern music into pieces which are not only innovative but also engaging to the general listener. In fall 2016, Jackson began graduate studies in musicology at the University of Louisville where he has recently been awarded the Gerhard Herz Scholarship in recognition of his accomplishments. His current research interests include French spectral music and the compositions of Kaija Saariaho. He also sings with the University of Louisville Chorus and participates in the School of Music Composition Seminar. Learn more about Jackson Harmeyer, his scholarship, and his compositions at [www.JacksonHarmeyer.com](http://www.JacksonHarmeyer.com).