

# John De Chiaro

# A Musical Journey

## Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

This evening guitarist **John De Chiaro** will take us on a worldwide tour of classical masterpieces. Our travels will bring us across the globe to **Great Britain** through the music of John Dowland, **France** via Maurice Ravel's famous *Pavane*, to **Germany** for pieces by Johann Sebastian Bach and Felix Mendelssohn, **Spain** by way of Alonso Mudarra and Joaquín Malats, and back to the **United States** for rags by Scott Joplin. A special highlight of our Musical Journey will be the *Koyunbaba* suite by contemporary composer Carlo Domeniconi; although from **Italy**, his music embraces a wide variety of world cultures from **Turkey**, to **India**, to **Brazil**. Plus Mr. De Chiaro will also give a repeat performance of the Suite for solo guitar by **Louisiana's** own Jackson Harmeyer – a composition written for De Chiaro and premiered by him this past November to enthusiastic applause.

Our tour begins in Renaissance England with the famous *Lachrimae Pavan* by **John Dowland (1563-1626)**. The title itself gives us a good indication of the music which follows: while the Latin word *Lachrimae* means “tears” and here suggests the melancholic mood of the piece, the word “pavan” (alternately, “pavane”) refers to a dance quite



John Dowland

popular in Dowland's age. The typical pavan was a slow, courtly dance with simple steps meant to be danced by couples. As was often the case, the musical pavan eventually broke free of the dance, so that a piece like Dowland's *Lachrimae Pavan* might not be danced although the traditional dance steps would still define the rhythm and meter of the music. *Lachrimae Pavan* was well-known in its day, and Dowland would model other compositions on its unhappy melody. Adaptations include further pavans as well as the song *Flow, My Tears* published by Dowland in 1600. The melancholic mood of *Lachrimae Pavan* also came to symbolize Dowland generally, and he went on to use as his motto the Latin phrase “*Semper Dowland, semper dolens*” or, in English, “Always Dowland, always doleful.” Dowland was foremost a player of the lute – a pear-shaped instrument similar to the present-day guitar.

For that reason, most of the music he wrote was for his instrument, and his surviving compositions include solo lute pieces like *Lachrimae Pavan* as well as works which include the lute alongside other instruments or voices. Today Dowland's music is performed as often on guitar as on lute.

We next take our first, brief voyage to Spain for music by another Renaissance master **Alonso Mudarra (c.1510-1580)**. Whereas Dowland played the lute, Mudarra played the vihuela – an instrument which directly prefigured the guitar.

Although the lute was the more popular of the two in the sixteenth century, the vihuela had already made considerable inroads in Spain and eventually became the guitar that we know today while the lute ultimately went out of fashion. Mudarra worked for much of his life at the Seville Cathedral in southern Spain. He is best-remembered for his *Tres libros de musica en cifras para vihuela (Three Books of Music in Tablature for the Vihuela)* published in



Scott Joplin

Seville in 1546. This collection contains more than seventy original compositions and arrangements for vihuela, including several fantasias. As the name “fantasia” implies, this imaginative genre gave composers considerable freedom as opposed to the more common dance genres. Fantasias, by the later sixteenth century, however, had acquired their own contrapuntal expectations.

The Fugue in A minor by **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)** takes us to Germany. Although in his lifetime Bach's music was little-known to the public, composers as far back as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven looked to Bach as the undisputed master of the fugue. This contrapuntal idiom was well-explored by Bach who wrote many fugues for organ, harpsichord, and chamber orchestra, and even imagined what a fugue might sound like for a solo melody instrument like violin or cello. Originally for violin, this evening's Fugue in A minor is the second movement in Bach's Sonata for solo violin, BWV 1001. Bach actually made his own version for lute (BWV 1000), so it is not surprising that this fugue would be heard on guitar today.

## From the Composer – Jackson Harmeyer on His 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 expanding traditional tonality through the use of medieval church modes. Since then, however, my works have explored everything from chromaticism and serial procedures to jazz and the twelve-bar blues. In fact, these explorations often occur in the same composition through various references and associations.

Composed in January 2015, my Suite for solo guitar, Op. 21 witnessed me returning to the modes and to tonality, albeit now suspended over a chromatic substructure. From the beginning, it was intended for guitarist John De Chiaro to play and was written with his usual repertoire preferences in mind as my models. Since I knew John's musical tastes were more conservative than my own, I resolved to write a mostly tonal piece with chromatic underpinnings. I surprised John with the piece one day over lunch and since then he and I have worked together to make it more characteristic for guitar. John has now played the piece across Louisiana, on local radio and television, and as far away as Pennsylvania. When John played its first movement for Fred Child, host of public radio's *Performance Today*, Mr. Child was dually impressed and has asked to hear the remaining movements once they have been recorded. John and I plan to record the full Suite this summer as well as professionally publish its score over the coming months.

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 a concert in January 2015. 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.

Please visit my website [www.JacksonHarmeyer.com](http://www.JacksonHarmeyer.com) to read more about my compositions and listen to audio samples.



Jackson Harmeyer

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Later we hear two rags by **Scott Joplin (c.1868-1917)** who was one of the most significant figures in American music at the turn of the twentieth century. Considered in his day the "King of the Ragtime Writers," Scott Joplin was well-known in his lifetime for his popular piano rags, although his music was forgotten for several decades after his death until the ragtime revival of the 1970s. Even today, the sheer variety of Joplin's music often goes unappreciated: most Americans know his *Entertainer* and *Maple Leaf Rag*, but even many scholars forget that he wrote a large quantity of piano music in various genres as well as two operas, a ballet, and other orchestral compositions. Joplin's capacity for sweet, slowly-paced melodies is on display in the *Rose Leaf Rag* heard this evening. Joplin wrote this rag in 1907 soon after departing his home in Missouri in an ambitious attempt to make a name for himself in New York. Joplin's 1902 composition *Cleopha* follows. *Cleopha* is not actually a rag at all since it lacks syncopation. The arrangements of these pieces for guitar were both made by John De Chiaro as part of his complete cycle of guitar transcriptions of Joplin's piano originals.

The *Canzonetta* by German composer **Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)** comes from his String Quartet No. 1 in Eb 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.

*Pavane pour une Infante défunte (Pavane for a Dead Princess)* by **Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)** takes us not only to Ravel's native France but also back to Spain. As Ravel himself once commented, his piece is "an evocation of a pavane that a little princess might, in former times, have danced at the Spanish court." Composed in 1899 while Ravel was still a student, the *Pavane* became increasingly popular after its premiere by Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes in 1902; Ravel subsequently orchestrated it in 1910. By 1912 though, Ravel had grown sick of this piece, writing "alas, I perceive its faults very clearly." The beautiful *Pavane* is full of



**Maurice Ravel**

nostalgia but avoids sweet sentimentality: there is something foreign about it but also something very familiar. As with the preceding Joplin compositions, the arrangement for guitar performed this evening was made by John De Chiaro himself.

Italian guitarist and composer **Carlo Domeniconi (born 1947)** has taken an international approach to both his career and his

compositions. Since 1969 he has lived in Berlin with an influential stint from 1977 to 1980 in Istanbul, Turkey. In his music he has insisted that classical guitarists look beyond what has traditionally been called “classical,” and has tirelessly sought to expand the palette available to these musicians through his own wide-ranging compositions. To this effect, Michel Lydon of *Soundboard* magazine has written “Domeniconi’s music seeks repeatedly the synthesis of East and West. He seems able to take the quintessence of different cultures and tell them anew.” His suite *Koyunbaba*, Op. 19 marked a breakthrough for the composer who himself made its first recording in 1985. Its title can be understood in two ways – either as a word meaning “shepherd” or the name of a region in southwest Turkey. This geographic region is full of natural wonders, and appropriately it is also Domeniconi’s belief that only the shepherd has both the time and the insight to fully comprehend the true vastness of nature. From a musical perspective also take note that Domeniconi requires the guitarist to considerably retune his instrument – a technique called *scordatura*. In fact, the tuning is so unconventional in this piece that Domeniconi has written two versions, one which shows the way it is to be played and another which shows the way it will sound. This evening Mr. De Chiaro will play the first and fourth movements of *Koyunbaba*.

We return to Spain to conclude this evening’s program with the *Serenata española* by **Joaquín Malats (1872-1912)**. Based in Barcelona, Malats ranked with Isaac Albéniz and Enrique Granados as one of the leading Spanish pianists of his day. He called these two men friends, and occasionally the three would even give concerts together as colleagues. In fact, Albéniz also saw Malats as an important part of the

inspiration for his *Iberia* about which he remarked to Malats “I am writing... essentially because of you and for you.” Malats went on to be one of its first performers. Malats composed a good quantity of salon pieces for piano with *Serenata española* becoming by far the best-remembered. Its self-assured melodies and rhythmic drive are what make this composition particularly memorable. These days *Serenata española* is most often heard on guitar with notable transcriptions having been made by Francisco Tárrega and Andrés Segovia.

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**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 will remain active in as concert annotator and creative consultant. Jackson has in fact written program notes for many of Central Louisiana’s key music presenters, including the Rapides Symphony Orchestra, Arts Council of Central Louisiana, and Northwestern State University. 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. Jackson has followed classical music around the world, including trips to Colorado’s Aspen Music Festival and the BachFest Leipzig in Germany. As a composer, he has worked to integrate a modern vocabulary into established classical forms in ways that are not only innovative but also engaging to the general listener. His four-movement Suite for solo guitar, Op. 21 received its world premiere on November 5, 2015 and has also been aired on public radio. In fall 2016, Jackson will begin graduate studies at the University of Louisville with the ultimate goal of earning his doctorate in musicology.



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