Guest Artist Recital: Sergio & Odair Assad, duo-guitarists

Sergio Assad
Odair Assad

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—William Grant Egbert (1867–1928) Founder, Ithaca Conservatory of Music

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SÉRGIO and ODAIR ASSAD
Duo-Guitarists

Variaciones Concertantes, op. 130

- Introduction
- Theme
- Variations

Sonata in F Minor, L. 118*
Sonata in D Major, L. 465*

Scaramouche*

- Vif
- Modéré
- Brazileira

Zita from Suite Troileana
Andante from Tango Suite**
Allegro from Tango Suite**

INTERMISSION

Batuque*

Baião Malandro*
Agua e Vinho*
Infância*

Zamorra**

Rhapsody in Blue*

- arranged by Sérgio Assad; **dedicated to the Assads

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THE ARTISTS

The twentieth century has produced a number of guitar duos formed by happenstance or recording-company intervention. But for Brazilian-born brothers Sérgio and Odair Assad the roots obviously go much deeper. Today’s foremost guitar duo, the Assads have been credited with doublehandedly reviving contemporary music for the instrument. Their virtuosity has inspired a number of composers to dedicate oeuvres to the Assad Duo—such as Astor Piazzolla, Terry Riley, Radamés Gnatalli, Marlos Nobre, Nikita Koshkin, Roland Dyens, Dusan Bogdanovic, Jorge Morel, Edino Krieger and Francisco Mignone.

As children, the Assads’ mandolinist father guided their discovery of Brazilian music. Their uncanny ability to play guitar together was evident at an early age and led them to seven years of study with classical guitarist and lutenist Monina Távora, a disciple and former pupil of Andres Segovia.

The Assads’ international career began with a major prize at the “Rostrum of Young Interpreters” in Bratislava, former Czechoslovakia, in 1979. Presently based in Europe, the Assads perform often in recital and with orchestras in France, Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, as well as Australia, Israel, the Far East, North and Latin America. In the 1996-97 season the Assads’ North American tour included engagements in New York, Boston, Cleveland, Ann Arbor, St. Louis, Dallas, Los Angeles, Miami and San Juan, among many other cities.

Sérgio and Odair have recorded over ten CDs. Their Baroque CD (Nonesuch label, 1994) has received wide acclaim and their 1996 release, “Saga dos Migrantes” (Nonesuch 1996), was a New York Times Critics’ Choice selection. Aside from their duo recitals and their appearances with orchestras, they have been collaborating with artists such as Dawn Upshaw, Gidon Kremer, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg and Yo-Yo Ma. In June 1996 the Assad brothers were featured on “CBS Sunday Morning” with Eugenia Zukerman in a segment entitled “Themselves an Orchestra.”

PROGRAM NOTES

Variaciones Concertantes, op. 130 Mauro Giuliani

Mauro Giuliani was born in 1781 in Italy. He was one of the instrument’s greatest virtuosos together with Fernando Sor, Ferdinando Carulli, etc. He was one of the first composers of guitar music whose notation differentiates between the melodic line, the harmonic filling, and the bass. He wrote music for guitar solo, guitar and string quartet, flute and guitar, three concerti for guitar and string orchestra, and also for two guitars. The Variaciones Concertantes contains an introduction, a theme, and variations. Giuliani played this piece with his daughter, Emilia, a well-known guitarist.
Sonata in F Minor, L. 118  
Sonata in D Major, L. 465  
Domenico Scarlatti

Little in the early career of Domenico Scarlatti suggested that he would ever write music suited to the sound-world of guitar. Scarlatti grew up in the shadow of his famous father, the premiere opera composer of the day, and while the boy showed extraordinary talent for the keyboard, his creative gifts did not seem to be of the same order. In adulthood, he proved at first to be nothing more than a dependably skilled but thoroughly conventional church and theater composer. In 1720 or 1721 however, Scarlatti became Royal Music Master at Lisbon, where his chief duty was to provide challenging keyboard music for the gifted Princess Maria Barbara. Eventually Scarlatti wrote over 500 sonatas for his patroness, and in this genre he found and continued to develop the free-wheeling, scintillating style for which he is now noted—a style marked by narrative paradox, dance-like energy, and exotic instrumental coloring. The princess took Scarlatti with her to Madrid when, through a state marriage, she assumed the neighboring throne as Queen of Spain in 1729. Some of Scarlatti’s subsequent music seems to be influenced by the Spanish guitar style, featuring distinctive strummed chords (with “extra” and dissonant notes that suggest a guitar’s open strings), as well as sparkling repeated-note effects.

The Sonata in F minor is a luxuriant lament, much of its poignancy stemming from the rhythmic conflict produced by a languorous triplet figure. The D Major Sonata is a brilliant “hunting” piece marked by elfin horncalls and coruscating repeated-note passages.

Scaramouche  
Darius Milhaud

In 1937 Milhaud scored a French theatre play named “Scaramouche.” In its version for two pianos, the piece became widely known as a favorite among piano duets. The first movement (vif) is based upon a very popular theme from the time (“Trois esquimaux autour d’un brasero”); the second one (modéré) is the most developed of the three, recalling slightly Satie’s harmonies. The final movement (Danza brazileira) is an echo from Rio de Janeiro during the 1930s where Milhaud lived and worked as “attaché culturel” at the French Embassy.

Zita from Suite Troileana  
Astor Piazzolla

Andante from Tango Suite  
Allegro from Tango Suite

Pianist and composer (pupil of Nadia Boulanger) Astor Piazzolla, in addition to an important production of Argentinian popular music, wrote some chamber music works, one opera, and numerous film scores. In 1980 he wrote his first piece for guitar—five original works dedicated to the Argentinian guitarist, Roberto Aussel.

The Suite Troileana was written for a movie called “Lumiere,” and was inspired by Troilo, whom Piazzolla so much admired. The suite consists of three movements, one of which (Zita) is heard here. The title of each movement was given hommage to the personal passions of Troilo.
Internationally recognized as the "King" of the tango with his own particular style, Piazzolla was so inspired by the playing of Sérgio and Odair Assad, that he wrote his *Tango Suite* and dedicated it to them. This program features the *Andante* and *Allegro* from that suite.

**Batuque**

*Ernesto Nazareth*

Ernesto Nazareth was born in Rio de Janeiro on March 20, 1863. Composer and pianist, mostly a self-taught musician, he created an expressive fusion between European musical styles. In his work he used both Brazilian rhythms and melodies that showed his admiration for Chopin.

Although he was considered a popular musician (a reputation he didn’t like), Nazareth’s music was mostly played by classical composers; Francisco Mignone and Radames Gnatalli frequently performed his music in their programs. Villa Lobos considered him the ‘real soul of Brazilian music.’ Among Nazareth’s most well-known works is *Batuque*, arranged for two guitars by Sérgio Assad.

Nazareth died in Rio de Janeiro, completely deaf and under tragic circumstances, after having been confined to a mental institution.

**Baião Malandro**

*Egberto Gismonti*

*Agua e Vinho*  
*Infância*

After studying classical music for fifteen years, Egberto Gismonti went to Paris and studied orchestration and analysis with Nadia Boulanger and composer Jean Baralaque, a disciple of Schoenberg and Webern. Back in Brazil, he began to glimpse a reality broader than the world of classical music. He was attracted by both Ravel’s ideas of orchestration and chord voicings, as well as by the *choro* tradition—the popular instrumental music of Rio which combines various types of guitars and features improvisation. He therefore made a transition from piano to guitar, beginning on the six-string classical instrument and switching to the eight-string guitar. He spent two years experimenting with different tunings and searching for new sounds. By the early 1970s he had laid the groundwork for his subsequent compositional conception of fusing popular and art-music idioms. For him, these idioms did not need to remain opposite poles: “There’s no difference,” he often said, “between the two kinds of music.”

Today, Gismonti strives to bring two influences together—Western European music and the music of Brazil. His melodic lines have a special cantabile uniqueness. In harmonic terms, he has found a way of combining two cultures, such as one might find also in the music of Villa-Lobos, Baden Powell, or João Gilberto. His extremely fragile and carefully constructed rhythms never suffer from a lack of pulsating energy.
Zamorra

Zamorra is one of 26 pieces that all involve guitar, either solo, duo, trio, quartet, or in combination with other instruments. Each piece takes its title from a letter in the Spanish alphabet and the whole collection is called “The Book of ABBEYOZZUO.”

From the first moment I heard the Assads’ marvellous ensemble playing, I was greatly impressed with its intricate detail and freedom, as well as their artistic mastery and effortless attunement to each other. Zamorra was written as an offering to their poetic artistry.

Terry Riley
January, 1997

Rhapsody in Blue

Born in Brooklyn, New York of Russian-Jewish immigrant parents, Gershwin won early fame as a composer for Broadway and Tin Pan Alley, the bastions of mainstream American show business and popular music. Throughout his life, he was drawn to the music of African-Americans. In Rhapsody in Blue, his first extended instrumental composition, he incorporated elements of jazz and blues. At its premiere in 1924, the work was billed as a “jazz concerto.” Sérgio Assad has arranged the work for two guitars.