

North American premiere of works for guitar – recital

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Director of the SIU Jazz Orchestra

Studi Abruzzesi per chitarra (Abruzzese etudes for guitar) is one of the projects I developed during my sabbatical a year ago, which I mainly spent in the Abruzzo region of Italy, based in the city of Pescara. While Pescara is a thriving city with tourism and a wide cultural offering just minutes away there is a vast network of cities and towns that capture many of the idyllic scenes of the Italian life and identity.

From an artistic point of view this collage of etudes was inspired by the people, the places I visited, some of my daily activities and even some of the experiences I processed during this brief time for analysis and introspection.

From a pedagogical point of I saw the need to start forging a centralized literature for the guitar that connects its various forms and traditions using them as a bank of resources whether it may be classical, flamenco, tango, jazz or rock. I have also used this opportunity to explore some of my own findings in terms of new technical resources or the adaptation of existing ones.

- **Senza primavera** (without the Spring) – As I returned to Italy, this time for my sabbatical I noticed that the winter lingered around far longer expected. Friends and family would all daydream about the arrival of the spring,

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getting out the house and all, hence the title. This a counterpoint etude set over the chord changes to the popular jazz standard *Autumn leaves* written by Joseph Kosma and Jacques Prévert.

- **Tribu pentatonos** (Pentatonic tribe) – The pentatonic scale is present in many ancient cultures across the globe. The guitar is not immune to its charms as it is tuned to an E minor 11th chord. These are also the notes of the E minor pentatonic scale. This is a short etude built around the A minor pentatonic scale and it employs the use of slurs and some bass funk like popping techniques.
- **Orientis modul** (Eastern modul) – As a guitarist I can hear the echoes of Middle Eastern music in the Spanish genre of Flamenco. It is a sound found in Arabic, Hebraic and even Persian music employing highly ornamented melodies, Phrygian and Harmonic minor textures along side with intricate rhythmic structures. Some years ago I had the opportunity to explore these parallels with a dear friend and fellow musician by the name Ali Behjatian with whom I would get together play works from the *Radif*, an important collection of ancient Persian melodies that have been passed on from generation to generation. This piece is a small offering to all my dear friends and brethren from the Middle East. The changing meters are used to convey the rhythmic manipulations, which are enhanced by ornamented melodic gestures. The right hand employs percussion effects during various sections

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of the piece as well as the occasional *alza púa*, a plectrum like technique that survived in flamenco guitar. It is perhaps influence from the guitars ancestors such as the Arabic Oud however it is not dissimilar on how the index is used to pluck the strings of a Persian setar.

- **Koryu** (old school) – This is an old term used for the schools that passed on the multiple disciplines of the samurai. This piece was inspired by an Italian samurai by the name of Luigi Gino D’Andrea, who has been running the *Accademia di Karate Do* dojo in Pescara, a branch of the National Educational Sports Center for 47 years. Luigi Sensei has taught children, adults, police and the military across the region providing an encounter space for contemporary and traditional martial disciplines much like the Koryu of old. The school has the motto of “progress from within tradition” something that resonates with my view of the guitar. This is a place where everyone is welcomed, accepted and guided which is why maestro Luigi is one of Pescara’s most beloved citizens. I’d like to dedicate this piece to Sensei Luigi, sensei Massimiliano Volante, coach Nucci Daniele and the community of this historic dojo.

Musically speaking I explore the use of space in combination with percussive effects inspired by Japanese Taiko drums and Afro Caribbean hand drums within the Puerto Rican and Cuban cultures.

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In the third section of the piece I use my adaptation for classical guitar/finger style of *selective picking*, a term coined by progressive rock guitarist Tosin Abbasi. In essence this technique allows the player to hammer on notes into the fretboard only using the left hand while the right hand plucks other strings. The independent motion and yet synchronized action of both hands allows some unusual melodic movements in addition to a peculiar type of attack more common in electronic music and keyboards than on guitar. There have been similar concepts employed in repertoire for solo violin such as Niccolò Paganini's 24th Caprice as well as in the bass guitar solos of Victor Wooten.

- **All the roads we have** – A short reflection on the various paths we have in life. Each road leads to a series of permutations and possibilities. Musically speaking this is a melodic arpeggio and slurs etude based on the chord progression of the jazz standard *All the things you are* by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II.

The piece employs 2-1-2 arpeggio shapes, a technique developed and documented by jazz guitarist and pedagogue Tim Miller. 2-1-2 arpeggios take scales/modes and treats them as a large chord distributing two notes of the scale on one string, one note on the following, two more on the next string

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and so on. Every time two notes are played on a single string they are slurred. This particular type articulation and note distribution provides the guitarist with the cascading effects of unusual arpeggios and intervallic combinations otherwise unattainable. It is plausible this was as well inspired by professor Miller's study of Allan Holdsworth, perhaps the most emblematic and influential of the guitarists from the jazz fusion genre as his improvisations display the use of similar resources.

- **Voci di guerra** (Rumors of war)– I was in Italy when Putin launched his attack on Ukraine. Over the weeks that followed I saw friendships damaged over this situation, refugees arrive to town, members of the local Russian and Ukranian communities horrified and wanting it all to stop right away. The only victors in war are those that send other people's children to die as if they were chess pieces on a board all while distracting and dividing us the common person over any issue whether it may be social class, religion, ethnicity or politics. We all want the same things, to be happy, safe, and to feel loved. In this sense there are no true enemies, only people being manipulated and being pitted against each other.

In this piece I employ a mixture of chordal structures. There are pitch sets with of a leaner quality and quintal/quartal textures, something reminiscent of imperial fanfares while the more chromatic charged pitch sets display an

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uglier and almost grotesque quality analogous to gruesome nature of violence. The faster pace sections of the piece employ tremolos times to provide the illusion of long and sustained melodic gestures as well as to provide a pad to accompany the melody when it is diverted towards the arpeggios.

- **La passeggiata** (The stroll) –Whether you are in Pescara, Ortona or in Monte Silvano people like to get out of the house, meet a friend and go for walk. The cities and towns are always in motion. You see families walking and making a stop for gelato, friends sharing a good laugh over some coffee or making a pit stop for a snack followed by more walking. There is always a town square where people gather or walk to.

The piece itself is written as a 19th century romantic waltz, trying to capture the charm, elegance and lightness of the “passegiata”. It employs distinct textures of bass, chording and melody often played with a rest stroke very much in the tradition of Catalonian composer and perhaps father of the modern guitar Francisco Tárrega.

- **La villa del lobo cubano** – This is a small homage to two of my favorite composers/guitarists Leo Brower from Cuba and Heitor Villa-Lobos from Brazil. In this etude I employ some chordal arpeggios very much in the style

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of Cuban *Nova Trova*. Think about Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez combined with right hand arpeggio patterns that evoke Villa-Lobos etudes no. 1 and no. 11 and rake arpeggios effects found in Joaquín Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*.

The harmonies employ some Brower and Villa-Lobos like use of tonal structures with some non-diatonic pitches in their midst often a half step away from a chord tone much like Alexander Scriabin's Prelude no.4 op. 74. There is also use of large pitch sets in the style of Villa-Lobos done by employing open strings mixed with fretted ones allowing the guitarists to attain otherwise impossible chord voicings.

- **Estudio del aire** (Study of air) – As the name indicates it is a study of an unseen force of nature. We can think about air, wind or even space. The etude has long spaced block chord interweaved with dynamic meter shifts and rhythmic movement.
- **Majella** – This etude was inspired by the group of mountains in the Abruzzo region with the same name. When it is cold people go up to the mountains to ski, enjoy the cabins, the food and the attractions. It is a way to leave the city behind, breathe some fresh air and give into the majestic snow filled surroundings. The notion of going up the mountains is built in the accelerando of the scales as well as the heavy chordal structures

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accompanied by chromatic movement all indicating a steep climb. The second section of the piece represents one has arrived to the top of the mountain. The views from above, the sense of grandeur and space are articulated by the melody harmonized with parallel [0 2 7] trichords superimposed over major seventh chords.

- **The whole ton** – The literature of the guitar has few scale etudes in which the player is focused on that particular skill instead of juggling it alongside with chords and/or counterpoint. This etude works on scale movement by chromatically manipulating the whole tone scale to providing momentary tone rows of various lengths. The final cadence of the “A” section evokes the scale movements combining open and fretted strings found on Heitor Villa-Lobos’s *Etude no.12*. Section B concludes the piece acting more as a Coda with larger gestures employing [0 1 6] trichords.
- **Not your dad’s scales** –This scale etude is built around the [0 2 7] trichord which also converges with the root, second and fifth degree of a major scale and minor scale. As the set is transposed and manipulated it generates various textures, which take place over the terrain of a jazz waltz.

While the page displays a single melodic line with legato signs varying in length it is meant to be performed in the way Jazz guitarist Jim Hall approached J.S. Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin. Mr. Hall did not

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used the pieces as a source for guitar transcriptions nor performed them within the correct historical parameters. He rather would try to sustain as much voices as possible, employed an ample use of cross strings thus discovering unusual chord voicings, colors and implied counterpoint he would later employ in his own jazz guitar playing. In a similar fashion we sustaining the notes of the indicated clusters in the piece to explore some smaller timbres that might not be as typically associated with solo guitar playing.

- **Milano** (Milan) – Inspired by the city of the same name. While it is not part of the Abruzzo region along side with Rome, Pisa, Naples, and Sicily it is one of the most visited cities of Italy. A capital in the industry of fashion and a centric cultural destination, Milan is an exciting place that invites the visitor to discover a modern and thriving Italy that is aiming towards the future, innovating, creating and expanding.

This is a brief etude that explores the use of two handed tapping, a technique in which both hands are used to fret pitches independently, much like a keyboard would. While the guitar in general is limited in what it can do in this realm, the effect adds a peculiar timbre that is fluid and yet percussive at the same time. This is a technique that due to amplification and softer

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action it is more suitable for the electric guitar but nonetheless it can be an interesting resource for the acoustic versions of the instrument.

- **Pump the chord** – Inspired by Freddie Green, the emblematic guitarist of the Count Basie orchestra. Mr. Green's way of accompanying became a point of reference for generations to come. While playing in what is considered one of the earliest examples of the modern rhythm section Mr. Green found a way to voice his chords and attack the strings that supported the rhythm section, added color to the band's texture and yet did not fight for space with neither the piano nor the bass. His way of playing the guitar is still a model to emulate for aspiring jazz and blues guitarists.

The piece is a harmonic *contrafacta* of George and Ira Gerswhin's *I got rhythm* augmented by chord substitution techniques such as deceptive resolutions, tri-tone substitutions and even John Coltrane's *Trane Changes* which are comprised of V7 I temporary tonalizations taken through a circle of major thirds thus providing an alternate harmonic path to the conventional ii V I chord progression.

- **Vals de las terceras** (Waltz of the thirds) – I have always enjoyed the elegant gestures behind a good waltz. This particular waltz is divided in two parts. The first part is a fantasy that combines melodic traits from flamenco

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and tango alongside with gestures in 3rds, toying with the idea of the waltz or a tango but never fully committing.

The “B” section of the piece finally goes into a jazz infused waltz which leads to a final cadence. The same Green style voicings are augmented by quartal structures or color tones un the upper voice while the inner voices play the guide tones and the lowest voice takes on the role of the bass.

- **Cor** – This piece was directly inspired by maestro Andres Segovia. Coming straight from Miguel Llobet and Francisco Tárrega’s musical lineage Segovia approached the guitar like a miniature symphony full of colors he would use to orchestrate the pieces he played. This simple piece is devoted to exploring set sonic possibilities. With careful listening and some imagination one can pick some cello like passages as well as bell and harp like effects among other things.
- **Vientos del sur** – One of the most exciting and also scariest experiences of my younger years as a music student was to see Paco de Lucia performing at Bass Hall, in Forth Worth, Texas. Just as when I first saw Allan Holdsworth perform at Dan’s Silverleaf in Denton, Texas this was a pivotal moment in which someone was redefining what was possible in the guitar right before our very own eyes. In all honesty after that performance I seriously considered abandoning my career in music.

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Once I was able to calm down and gather my thoughts I started to research Flamenco in order to understand the musical language and its components and I am glad I did. There is so much to learn and to try just in this one genre, a lifetime is not enough to even scratch the surface.

This piece is based on the *Solea* structure, which is usually composed in a minor key with sections that feature the Andalusian cadence (i bVII VI V). Flamenco is a genre that evolved from Gypsies that came to the Iberian Peninsula from India and set in the south of Spain. Their eclectic musical language is built around *Palos*, accent patterns moving over rhythmic groups of two and three sounds not dissimilar in a sense to the *Talas* seen in Indian classical music.

While the piece sticks to the *Solea* structure I immediately drift away from the minor mode on to a twelve-tone harmonic language.

From the technical side it is a *tour de force* of the expected flamenco gestures such as the fiery melodies adorned by left hand slurs, intricate strumming patterns, 5 note tremolos and the *alza púa* effect where the thumb is used as a plectrum in the lower registers of the guitar.

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- **As filhas do mar** (The daughters of the sea) – The last piece of this set was inspired and dedicated to my mother in law Clarisse Saracenni and her daughters Giulia and Dr. Rossana Cauti, my wife and our viola professor at SIU.

I share with dona Clarice an affinity for the sea which also reminds her of her native Brazil, as well as her home in Pescara, Italy which is charming city right on the beach. Pescara is also the city from where her father immigrated to Brazil so the sea is something close to heart of the Saracenni and Cauti families. Clarisse and I also share an affinity for Brazilian music, which often leads to sharing tunes or talking about the all time greats such as João Gilbert, Elis Regina, Roberto Carlos and Tom Jobim among many others.

The piece is framed around Brazilian Samba and Bossa and employs the expected harmonies as well as some jazz infused melodic movement. The bass almost always present and there are gestures of call and response, as well as interplay in between the voices suggested through the piece. Since my earlier experiences with Brazilian music came from an American Jazz perspective I tried to capture to effect of the improvised solo and the interaction of a jazz ensemble moving through a set of chord changes.

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Letter from home is one of the pieces in my **Four Pat Metheny themes** suite for solo guitar. The presentation of the basic form and harmony of the piece is pretty much a loose arrangement of what pianist Lyle Mays and guitarist Pat Metheny performed on the title track for the Pat Metheny Group's 6th album released in 1989 also under the title name *Letter from home*.

The second part of the piece presents a highly ornamented version of theme in the style of what a baroque musician would do when performing works like Vivaldi's Trio in G minor RV 85 or his concerto for lute in D major RV93.

Omaha Celebration is more of a fantasy that departs from Metheny's theme and continues to drift away through the entire piece. There are allusions to bluegrass and Mid West music, which seemed fitting since Metheny is from Less Summit, Missouri. The elements in this fantasy are like characters that come in and out featuring the banjo-esque bluegrass gestures, funk/r&b bass, brass and a mandolin like gesture that drifts between Americana and Indian Sitar like sounds. The later seemed also fitting since around the early 90s Metheny would employ an electric sitar on some of his pieces.

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The final cadence is preceded by a section of trade fours, which in a traditional jazz ensemble is when the ensemble's soloists alternate improvising four bars with the drummer. They use the form of the piece as the terrain for set exchanges. Since this is a solo piece we aim to imitate the gesture of such exchanges right before the final cadence, which leads to a brief recapitulation of the main theme.