

**CEDILLE**



# ACROBATS

MUSIC OF DAVID LEISNER

CAVATINA  
DUO

and friends



\*World Premiere Recording

## ACROBATS MUSIC OF DAVID LEISNER

**Acrobats\*** (2002) (12:48)

1 I. In the Wings (3:58)

2 II. Flashback (4:10)

3 III. Up in the Air (4:32)

4 **El Coco** (1999) (3:27)

5 **Nostalgia** (1985) (5:55)

**Dances in the Madhouse** (1982) (12:13)

6 1. Tango Solitaire (4:09)

7 2. Waltz for the Old Folks (2:05)

8 3. Ballad for the Lonely (3:38)

9 4. Samba! (2:10)

**Trittico\*** (1985, rev. 2002)<sup>1</sup> (12:38)

10 I. Allegro giusto (3:17)

11 II. Adagio sospirato (5:11)

12 III. Allegro con brio (4:02)

**Extremes\*** (1987)<sup>2</sup> (12:30)

13 I. Introverted (6:26)

14 II. Extroverted (6:01)

Total Time: (60:08)

### CAVATINA DUO

Eugenia Moliner, flute  
Denis Azabagic, guitar

with <sup>1</sup>Katinka Kleijn, cello <sup>2</sup>Joshua Rubin, clarinet

**Producer** James Ginsburg

**Engineer** Bill Maylone

**Graphic Design** Melanie Germond

**Artist Photos** Javier Albella, Burriana, Spain; pages 2–3 by Garcia's, Burriana, Spain

**Recorded** May 23–25, August 31 (Extremes), and November 18 (Trittico), 2006 at WFMT Chicago



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## PROGRAM NOTES BY DAVID LEISNER

One might consider the flute and guitar odd bedfellows. The generally bright, edgy presence of the flute would not appear to be a natural match for the mellower intimacy of the guitar. Yet, despite and maybe even because of these differences, the combination is popular among performers and composers. In fact, as a composer, I have often turned to this instrumentation and found it to be a source of great variety of color, mood, and expression.

This album contains my complete works to date for flute and guitar. It includes four duos and two trios, one with the addition of a clarinet, the other with cello. These pieces span exactly twenty years, from 1982 to 2002.

The featured performers are the world-class Cavatina Duo. A composer could not ask for more serious dedication and commitment, or more brilliant artistry than what Eugenia Moliner and Denis Azabagic provide here. From the very beginning of this project, they earnestly sought my coaching advice and responded with eagerness, openness,

and always, in the end, originality. They also arranged for me to come supervise most of the recording sessions. In many cases, they play my music more beautifully than I imagined could be done. They are a composer's dream.

### ACROBATS

In Nathan Englander's debut short story collection, *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges*, there is a story called "The Tumblers." In it, a group of Polish Jews during World War II is herded onto trains bound for the concentration camps, but instead, quite by chance, they board a train full of circus performers who are on a tour to entertain the Nazis. The story is set in an atmosphere where fateful decisions about life or death are made in an instant, by a nod of the head or the toss of a coin. *Acrobats* is set in the same atmosphere and begins where the short story ends: with the reluctant, disheveled performers about to go on stage, barely having a clue of what they are supposed to do, but knowing that their lives depend on it. The

piece is not intended to be a narrative description of these moments, but rather an imagined evocation of the inner mental and emotional activity during them. In the first movement, “In the Wings,” the acrobats wait offstage with nervous anticipation, distracted by thoughts darting here and there — premonitions of themes of the second and third movements. This is interrupted by a “Flashback,” the middle movement, a sudden memory of the pain, struggle, and near-death that have brought them to this moment. The performers finally go “Up in the Air” in the final movement, twisting, flipping, and soaring in all manner of risky acrobatics. Just before the end, the guitar remembers an old Yiddish folk song, “Oyf’n Pripetshik,” a recollection of deep Jewish roots in a contemporary world of assimilation. The piece concludes with a return to the precarious acrobatics.

*Acrobats* was completed in 2002 and dedicated to my exceptional guitar student at the time, Luiz Mantovani.

### EL COCO

In “Que viene el Coco” (Here comes the bogeyman), a Francisco Goya print in the Los Caprichos series, a cloaked and hooded bogeyman scarily approaches two frightened little girls who seek refuge in their mother. One might also see the image as the strong overpowering the weak, male intimidating female, dark overcoming light, age (or death) menacing youth.

The musical piece, *El Coco*, is a pas-sacaglia whose recurrent bass theme is played almost exclusively by the guitar. It is the bogeyman, or any of its alter egos. At first, the flute takes on the frightened character of the children, in nervous little fragments. The piece climaxes as these fragments coalesce into the strong, long-lined melody of the protective mother. At the end, the two instruments tentatively exchange roles, and the music disappears, as if to ask, was this a dream or reality?

*El Coco* was commissioned by Red Cedar Chamber Music, as part of their “Artistic Celebration for the 21st Century” project and written in 1999. Flutist Jan Boland and guitarist John Dowdall commissioned

seven composers each to write a work of about 3 minutes in length — 21 minutes of music for the 21st century — each inspired by a work of visual art from the permanent collection of the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art in Iowa. The seven works were premiered at the museum in 2000, with the seven art works on display.

### NOSTALGIA

Originally the third movement of my Sonata for violin and guitar (1985), which was commissioned by Clayton Haslop and Jack Sanders, *Nostalgia* was divorced from that piece (an amicable settlement on both sides) and made to live on its own as a short, single-movement work. While the rest of the Sonata was written specifically for violin, *Nostalgia* may be played on either violin or flute. The piece is, by turns, cozy, passionate, sweet and, of course, nostalgic, and its form is a simple A-B-A. A guitar solo provides the transition between the A and B sections, while the flute solo converses with itself as it interrupts the long-arched phrases of the B section, and appears before the recapitulation of A.

### DANCES IN THE MADHOUSE

Commissioned by and dedicated to the Californian guitarist, John Schneider, *Dances in the Madhouse* was written in 1982. Originally for violin and guitar, it was composed with the flute in mind as an alternative. I also arranged it for orchestra in 1989. The inspiration for this piece was a lithograph by the early 20th-century American, George Bellows, called “Dance in a Madhouse.” In it, four groups of asylum inmates are highlighted, and I wrote a dance for each of them. “Tango Solitaire” is for the woman dancing a stylish dance, alone. “Waltz for the Old Folks” is for a happy couple who seem perfectly comfortable with their insanity. A forlorn, despairing couple of women, sitting on the sidelines, prompted “Ballad for the Lonely.” And “Samba!” is for the middle-aged couple performing a wild, dizzy dance.

### TRITTICO

Commissioned by and dedicated to James Smith, Los Angeles-based guitarist and guitar department chair at the University of Southern California, *Trittico* was composed in 1985 and revised in 2002. A

triptych is a form of painting common in the Renaissance period, with three panels, often hinged at the sides, usually with the two outer, smaller panels subordinate to the large one in the middle. They were often used as altarpieces.

For some irrational, yet explicit reason, the abstract music of *Trittico* feels Italian to me — hence, the Italian title and markings. The central movement is an emotionally elaborate rhapsody, with solo passages for both cello and guitar, while the outer movements are light and airy.

### EXTREMES

Unlike many of my instrumental works, which take their inspiration from visual art or a literary source, this trio is an abstract piece. In two movements of equal length, it is an exploration of opposites. The first movement is marked “introverted.” It is chromatic and dark, and constantly turns in on itself, in both melody and gesture. The clarinet introduces the main theme at the beginning, and the flute announces the second theme at a slightly faster tempo. While the guitar mostly accompanies the

contrapuntal discussions of the flute and clarinet, it states the first theme as a soloist early on and takes up the second theme toward the end of the movement in an eerie, high tremolo.

The second movement, marked “extroverted,” is another matter entirely. Mostly diatonic and wide-open, emotionally as well as harmonically, it has the energy and rhythmic intensity of rock music. This movement is in what I’d call a spiral rondo form: Each refrain consists of two “sentences” (made of several phrases); every time the refrain returns, it begins with the second sentence of the previous refrain and then introduces a new sentence, which becomes the first sentence of the next refrain, and so on. The theme of the refrain, always played by flute and clarinet, is a spiraling figure itself, beginning with a short phrase, then repeating and elongating it until it spins out into a larger phrase. Written in 1987, this work was commissioned by the Scarborough Chamber Players in Boston.

**DAVID LEISNER** is an extraordinarily versatile musician with a distinguished career as a guitarist, composer, and teacher. As a composer, Leisner is noted for the emotional and dramatic power of his music, which is widely performed. His most celebrated work, *Dances in the Madhouse*, has received hundreds of performances.

Leisner’s music has been performed worldwide by such prominent musicians and ensembles as Sanford Sylvan, Paul Sperry, Eugenia Zukerman, Juliana Gondek, Susan Narucki, D’Anna Fortunato, and Benjamin Verdery; the St. Lawrence String Quartet, Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, and Cavatina Duo; and orchestras throughout the United States. Leisner’s music may be found on CD on the Sony, Dorian, Centaur, Town Hall, Signum, Acoustic Music, ABC, Athena, Fleur de Son, and Barking Dog labels.

David Leisner has received composition grants from the American Music Center, Alice M. Ditson Fund, New England Foundation for the Arts, and Meet the Composer. He also maintains a busy career as a concert guitarist, performing in recital

and as a soloist with orchestras around the world. A winner of top prizes at international guitar competitions in Geneva and Toronto, he is a featured solo artist for Azica Records and has also recorded on the Telarc, Koch, Etcetera, and Naxos labels. David Leisner is currently the co-chair of the guitar department at the Manhattan School of Music.

For further information: [www.davidleisner.com](http://www.davidleisner.com)

### PUBLISHERS

#### Acrobats

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**El Coco** ©2000 Merion Music, Inc.\*

**Nostalgia** ©1999 Merion Music, Inc.\*

#### Dances in the Madhouse

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#### Trittico

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#### Extremes

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## THE CAVATINA DUO

The Cavatina Duo, comprised of Eugenia Moliner, flute (from Spain) and Denis Azabagic, guitar (from Bosnia), has become one of the most impressive combinations of its kind. Their powerful and versatile performances have captivated audiences in concert and at chamber music festivals across Europe, the USA, and Asia, including at the Aix en Provence summer festival (France), Eem & Veem festival in Groningen (Netherlands), International Guitar Festival in Frechen (Germany), Dame Myra Hess Series (USA), The Link (Netherlands), and the National concert Hall in Taipei (Taiwan). Cavatina's original programs and exquisite musicianship are now making their way through concert halls in North and South America, Europe, and Asia. The duo's performances have been broadcast by radio and television stations in Europe and North America. Their mixture of Spanish passion and Balkan sensibility make Cavatina Duo concerts a unique experience.

Cavatina's commitment to increasing the original repertoire for flute and guitar has inspired composers from around the world to dedicate new works to the duo, including Carlos Rivera (USA): *La Maja y el Hechicero*; Alejandro Yagüe (Spain): *Viaggio*; Erik Otte (Netherlands): Sonata for flute and guitar; and Michael Karmon (USA): *Roominating* (commissioned by the Cavatina Duo). Sérgio Assad (Brazil) has also arranged numerous Piazzolla pieces for the Cavatina Duo.

### THE CRITICS RAVE:

*"This is not the sort of playing that comes from discussion and careful score markings. These two feel the music deeply and are of one mind as they play."*

— American Record Guide

*"Outstanding communicative abilities"*

— Classical Guitar Magazine

**EUGENIA MOLINER** has been acclaimed as a brilliant young musician by British Flute Society magazine. She performs with pianist Rob Broek and with The New Opus Trio, as well as in the Cavatina Duo. Eugenia's discography includes CDs for the Opera Tres and Orobroy labels.

**DENIS AZABAGIC** is considered among the world's elite guitarists. Recognized for his marvelous tone and technical virtuosity, Denis has played with orchestras and on concert series in Europe and the USA, including at the Concertgebouw in Holland and on Radio France. Winner of ten prestigious international competitions, his discography includes CDs on the Opera Tres, Printemps de la Guitarre, and Naxos labels. Denis Azabagic is a member of the guitar faculty at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University.

For more information: [www.cavatina duo.com](http://www.cavatina duo.com)

Cellist **KATINKA KLEIJN** is a native of The Netherlands, where she won the Dutch national Princess Christina Competition at age 16. Kleijn joined the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1995 and is also a member of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) and The Chicago Chamber Musicians. Her solo credits include appearances with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Sinfonietta, The Hague Philharmonic, the Marlboro Festival, and at the Mostly Mozart Festival in Lincoln Center. Katinka Kleijn teaches at DePaul University. She has earned rave reviews for her previous performance on Cedille Records: David Baker's Cello Concerto with the Chicago Sinfonietta conducted by Paul Freeman, on Cedille's *African Heritage Symphonic Series, Volume III* (CDR 90000 066).

Clarinetist **JOSHUA RUBIN** enjoys an active career as a chamber musician and has been featured in performances at concert halls, universities, and music festivals around the world. He has appeared as a soloist at the Mostly Mozart Festival in Lincoln Center, Cal Performances (California), and in Poland, Norway, and Mexico. He is a founding member of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) and the percussion and clarinet duo Breekbaar. He is also a member of the New York Miniaturist Ensemble, which has commissioned hundreds of works from composers including Charles Wuorinen, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pauline Oliveros, and Christian Wolff. Joshua Rubin has previously recorded on the Bridge, Focus Recordings, and Naxos labels.

