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OUT OF AFRICA AND AROUND THE WORLD



DENIS AZABAGIC, GUITAR

CEDILLE
FOUNDATION

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Strings D'addario

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OUT OF AFRICA AND AROUND THE WORLD DENIS AZABAGIC, GUITAR

ATANAS OURKOUZOUNOV

(b. 1970)

1 Folk Song Variations (6:54)

VOJISLAV IVANOVIC (b. 1959)

Café Pieces* (25:22)

2 Tear Prelude (3:05)

3 Funny Valse (3:37)

4 Tango Café (Homage á Astor Piazzolla)
(4:34)

5 Nostalgia (4:23)

6 Lullaby (for Srdjan) (4:56)

7 Improvisation and Dance (4:37)

CARLOS RAFAEL RIVERA

(b. 1970)

8 Canción (1:35)

DUSAN BOGDANOVIC (b. 1955)

9 Blues and 7 Variations (5:46)

ALAN THOMAS (b. 1968)

Out of Africa* (19:42)

10 Call at Sunrise (3:40)

11 Morning Dance (3:05)

12 Zenith (5:31)

13 Evening Dance (4:20)

14 Cradle Song (3:03)

TT: (59:40)

*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

Out of Africa... and Around the World

Notes by the composers

OURKOUZOUNOV Folk Song Variations

I wrote *Folk Song Variations* in 1999. The theme comes from the traditional Bulgarian folk song, *Pozaspa li iagodo?* (Are you Sleeping, Strawberry?). Writing the variations was very satisfying. I enjoyed trying out new techniques on the guitar, such as tapping with the left hand while simultaneously playing harmonics with the right, or, as in the last variations, imitating the *tambora*, a traditional Bulgarian stringed instrument (a kind of long-necked lute). Each variation clearly uses the theme, or elements from it.

IVANOVIC Café Pieces

I wrote *Café Pieces* in 1985–86 during my stay in Athens while studying with Costas Cotsiolis. I used to improvise music in different styles for friends and colleagues (which I still like to do, and do extensively when performing solo or with my duo), and I would play “moody” — a particular style that we used to call “Café” music. So what began as a joke

became these Café Pieces. They were not intended to be less “serious” than any other music, however. They are all “Café,” but each has its own particular mood and treats a different musical style. Tear Prelude is a sentimental slow dance, as though sipping a coffee with some tears dropping in. Funny Valse is a persiflage of a Viennese waltz spiced with my own jazzy color. Tango Café is an homage to Astor Piazzolla; it’s a tango with a Balkanian jazz flavor. Not just a melancholic tremolo study, Nostalgia is a concert piece that expresses my state of mind at the time I wrote it: the loneliness of being far from home and, more importantly, that feeling of unquenchable longing that can pervade one’s life. My Lullaby is in a Spanish style. The last piece in the set (in Denis’s ordering) combines a slow, Mediterranean improvisation with a vigorous dance.

Café Pieces are dedicated to Darko Petrinjak and Istvan Romer who were early supporters and champions of my music. The revised version of Tango Café is dedicated to Denis Azabagic, through whose unique performances the Café Pieces have become celebrated around the world.

RIVERA Canción

I wrote *Canción* (Song) as a gift of thanks for director Tom Shadyac. At the time, I was in a band signed to his music label, and he had just thrown a newlywed party for my wife and me at his house. Not knowing what to get him as a thank you gift, my wife suggested I write him a piece. So I wrote and recorded *Canción* at a music studio and sent it to him. Fast forward about four years: Denis came by my house to visit and saw the score lying around. At the time, I felt the piece was too “simple” to put out for public performance. Denis fell in love with it, however, and insisted on taking the score. He began to perform it as his encore, and audiences took to it well. Later on, I would have the privilege of hearing Martha Masters, Scott Tennant, and other guitarists perform *Canción*. But it was Denis who initially took my gift to Tom and shared it with the world.

Canción contains no borrowed folk melodies or rhythmic patterns. It is one of those pieces that seemed to have already been written, and I was fortunate enough to stumble upon.

BOGDANOVIC Blues and 7 Variations

Written in the same year as my concerto for guitar and strings, *Blues and 7 Variations* (1979) is one of my early attempts at synthesizing popular and classical idioms. It is a virtuoso set of variations based on an unorthodox thirteen-bar blues in 9/8 meter. Most of the variations present very particular stylistic characteristics: the first and second variations are in what could be called “finger-picking” style; the third uses a big band orchestration; the fourth introduces a sort of “Gershwinian” rendition of the subject; the fifth is a humorous commentary on Fernando Sor’s *Mozart Variations*; and the seventh is built on a Brazilian carnival rhythm. The seeming incongruity of idioms and compositional styles points to my interest in developing a widely based musical world — an interest that has only grown stronger in recent years.

THOMAS Out of Africa

It is in the spirit of Karen Blixen’s classic book (and subsequent, beautifully realized film) that I chose the title *Out of Africa* for this suite for solo guitar. I’m a big fan of many different strands of

African music-making, but was afraid of copying or appropriating African music in a sort of ethno-tourist way. This is not African music, but rather music that is inspired by my distilled memories of particular African styles of singing, for example, or the use of additive rhythms, irregular metric groupings, and pentatonic or pandiatonic scales. I also sought to pay homage to two great plucked-string instruments of the African continent: the kora (in movement 2) and the oud (movement 3). Needless to say, these pieces barely scratch the surface of the musical traditions and languages of Africa, but they do attempt to bring at least a bit of this rich heritage under the guitarist's fingers.

The suite consists of five different movements, which are played in two different groups without pause (movements 1–2 and movements 3–5). To give the different pieces a sense of unity and direction, I decided to chart the course of a day, from sunrise to sleep. The music's "day" begins with a "Call at Sunrise," a melody presented in canon that gradually develops into a vibrant ostinato and vocalic melody.

The second movement, "Morning Dance," is again built on an ostinato bass line, and has the exuberance and feel typical of South African popular music. By using cross-string scalar patterns (in which notes ring over each other in what guitarists call *campanella*), I tried to evoke the sound of the kora. This instrument comes from a different part of Africa but the cross-breeding of different musical traditions is precisely what I was aiming for in this piece.

The heat of midday is depicted in "Zenith," which draws on North African/Arabic music in its central and final sections. Particularly in the middle section, the sound of the oud (arguably the guitar's great-great grandfather) is evoked, including microtonal inflections facilitated by de-tuning the guitar's third string. The final section builds to a climax via an exploration of the guitar as a percussion instrument. A transition leads to the fourth movement, "Evening Dance," which in turn transforms at its end into the final movement, "Cradle Song." This gentle lullaby brings the day to a serene close, drawing on musical material from the first movement to create a cyclical return to (the next) morning.

About the composers



Bulgarian guitarist and composer **Atanas Ourkouzounov** is an important voice in the new generation of music for guitar. Ourkouzounov's works have been published by leading publishers such as

Doberman-Yppan, Production's D'OZ (Canada), and Henry Lemoine (Paris). He has placed in composition competitions including the Michele Pittaluga at Città di Alessandria (1997), Paolo Barsacchi (1997) and Il fronimo from Suvini Zerboni in Italy (1998); Ciudad de Montevide in Uruguay (1998); and Carrefour mondial des guitars in Martinique (1998). His works are widely performed by internationally recognized artists including Zoran Dukic, Denis Azabagic, Scott Tennant, Shin-ichi Fukuda, Alberto Vingiano, Eduardo Isaac, Pablo Marquez, Antigoni Goni, Duo Gruber-Maklar, Thibault Cauvin, Dimitri Illarionov, Carlos Perez, Thomas Muller-Pering, Duo Palissandre, Ensemble Nomad, and Patrick Kearney, among others.

Atanas Ourkouzounov performs widely as soloist and with his wife, flutist Mie Ogura and serves on juries at conferences and conservatories in Europe, the United States, and Japan. Ourkouzounov teaches at the Conservatoire Maurice Ravel in Paris.



Guitarist and composer **Vojislav Ivanovic** has garnered numerous national and international prizes and distinctions, including from competitions in the former Yugoslavian cities of Sarajevo (1975)

Ljubljana (1977), and Skopje (1979); Volos (1983), Greece; and the "Prix d'Italia" (1991). He has appeared as a soloist in recitals, in various chamber ensembles, and with orchestras in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, Russia, Greece, Italy, England, Germany, and Spain.

Ivanovic's diverse compositional output includes music for solo and accompanied instruments (guitar, cello, piano, flute, voice, etc.), choral and orchestral works, songs, a string quartet, and

concertos for piano and guitar. Solo guitar works such as his Sonata, Concerto, and 6 Café Pieces have won particular acclaim from audiences and guitarists worldwide, notably Zoran Dukic, a prominent advocate of his works. Ivanovic's continuous interest, both as a composer and a performer, in traditional, improvised, and jazz music includes performing and recording with world renowned musicians such as Arild Andersen (double bass), Paolo Fresu (trumpet), Bendik Hofseth (saxophone), Paul Vertico (drums), Savina Yannatou (vocalist), and Vlatko Stefanovski (guitar), among others. Ivanovic's current focus is performing in the Levante Guitar Duo, with Aleksandra Lazarevic, in a program of compositions he has written specifically for the duo. Vojislav Ivanovic's music is distributed by distinguished publishers Chanterelle and Doberman-Yppan.

Composer of Cuban-Guatemalan descent, **Carlos Rafael Rivera's** works incorporate a large diversity of musical influences that reflect his multi-cultural upbringing in Washington, DC, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama, Miami, and Los Angeles. His music has been



performed by Arturo Sandoval, Colin Currie, and Chanticleer; and by the Cavatina Duo, American Composers Orchestra (ACO), New England Philharmonic, and Los Angeles Guitar Quartet. He has been awarded prizes by the ACO, Herb Alpert Foundation, Guitar Foundation of America, BMI, and ASCAP, and received commissions from the Simon Bolivar Youth Symphony, Miami Symphony Orchestra, and American Wind Symphony. His works are featured on the Warner, Sony, Naxos, and Cedille recording labels, and published by Mel Bay and Doberman Editions.

Dr. Rivera was appointed Composer-In-Residence with the Miami Symphony Orchestra in 2011 and is a faculty member at the University of Miami's Frost School of Music.



Described as a "musical world-builder" (*Gitarre & Laute*, Germany), composer and improviser **Dusan Bogdanovic** has developed a personal synthesis of contemporary classical, jazz, and world music. His Yugoslavian origins and longtime involvement with jazz strongly influence his musical language. As a soloist and in collaboration with various artists, Dusan has toured extensively throughout Europe, the United States, and Japan. He has over one hundred published works, including a variety of commissions for solo guitar, chamber ensembles, and orchestra. Bogdanovic's music can be heard on close to 20 recordings. He currently teaches at the Geneva Conservatory.

Guitarist and composer **Alan Thomas** was born in Atlanta and completed his studies at Indiana University. After moving to England in 1997, he quickly established himself as one of the UK's foremost new music soloists and ensemble players following his first-



prize win at the International Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition in Holland (becoming the only guitarist ever to take the top prize). Since then he has pursued an active career as a soloist and chamber musician.

Alan Thomas's compositions focus on the guitar in both solo and chamber music settings, and draw freely on a broad range of styles and techniques, ranging from Renaissance polyphony to Ligeti and other modern masters. Other influences include the music of Africa and the Balkans, as well as computer sound processing and algorithmic composition. From these diverse sources he has attempted to create music that is both rigorously constructed and accessible.

DENIS AZABAGIC



Denis Azabagic is one of the most compelling classical guitarists on the international concert circuit today. He performs around the globe, maintaining a balance between solo recitals, chamber music with the

Cavatina Duo (with his wife, flutist Eugenia Moliner), and engagements as soloist with orchestras.

In 1993, at the age of 20, Azabagic became the youngest winner of the prestigious Jacinto e Inocencio Guerrero International Guitar Competition in Madrid, Spain. Between 1992 and 1999 he won 24 prizes in international competitions, including 11 first prizes. His book, *On Competitions*, based on his experience during these years, is published by Mel Bay.

Azabagic has recorded 10 CDs for several international labels including Naxos, Cedille, Opera Tres, Bridge, and Orobroy, plus two DVDs for the Mel Bay Company. Critics have praised his recordings and live performances for his elegant approach to music and unique way of communicating and reaching audiences' hearts.

As a guest instrumentalist and soloist, Azabagic has appeared with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Sinfonietta, Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra, Illinois Sym-

phony Orchestra, Sacramento Chamber Orchestra, Madrid Symphony, Traverse Symphony, Monterrey Symphony, and L'Orchestre Royal de Chambre de Mons, among others.

He has performed at Chicago's Symphony Center; Savannah on Stage; the Ravinia Festival; the Royal Concertgebouw in Amsterdam (on the Masters of the Guitar series); the Aix en Provence Festival in France; El Palau de la Musica in Valencia, Spain; the National Chang Kai-Shek Cultural Center in Taiwan; the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing, China; and on Radio France in Paris.

Azabagic's repertoire includes solo and orchestral music from the Baroque era to the present. As a member of the Cavatina Duo, he plays a vast chamber music repertoire, including many works written expressly for the duo.

Azabagic's love for performing extends to sharing his knowledge of music-making with others. He frequently offers master classes while on tour, teaches at University of

Illinois, and is the head of the guitar department at Roosevelt University in Chicago.

Praise for Denis Azabagic

"The recital by Bosnian guitarist Denis Azabagic was certainly the finest guitar recital that I have heard in a lifetime of concert-going, and one of the best concerts of any kind I have heard."

—NC Arts Journal

"Once he started playing his guitar he became ageless. One couldn't imagine where the man, the instrument and the music separated, if at all."

—Los Angeles Valley Star

"Azabagic's playing is virtually flawless and his technical facility is a joy to see as well as hear; increasingly I hear him mentioned in the same breath as John Williams, and while such comparisons are invidious, this one is not without merit."

—Soundboard Magazine

Denis Azabagic uses D'Addario strings.

For more information visit:
Azabagic.com
CavatinaDuo.com