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Vida Guitar Quartet

CHRIS STELL, guitar
MARK EDEN, guitar
AMANDA COOK, guitar
MARK ASHFORD, guitar

2:30 pm, Sunday, January 28, 2024
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
University of the Pacific

SÉRGIO ASSAD UAREKENA (1997)
(b. 1952)

ANTONIO VIVALDI CONCERTO FOR FOUR VIOLINS IN B MINOR,
OP. 3, NO. 10, RV 580 (1711) (arr. Mark Eden)
Allegro

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH BRANDENBURG CONCERTO NO. 3 IN G MAJOR,
BWV 1048 (1711-1720) (arr. Mark Eden)
Allegro

FRANZ SCHUBERT FANTASY IN F MINOR, D. 940 (1828) (arr. Mark Eden)
(1797-1828) Allegro molto moderato—Largo—Allegro vivace—
Finale: Allegro molto moderato

— INTERMISSION —

FRANCIS POULENC SONATA FOR PIANO FOUR HANDS, OP. 8 (1918, Rev. 1939)
(1899-1963) (arr. Chris Stell)
Prélude : Modéré
Rustique : Naïf et lent
Final : Très vite

JOAQUIN TURINA LA ORACIÓN DEL TORERO, OP. 34 (1925) (arr. Colin Downs)
(1882-1949)

HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS BACHIANAS BRASILEIRAS NO. 5 (1938) (arr. Mark Eden)
(1887-1959) Aria (Cantilena)

LEONARD BERNSTEIN WEST SIDE STORY (1957) (arr. Amanda Cook/Mark Eden)
(1918-1990) Mambo—Maria—Tonight—Somewhere—I Feel Pretty—America

The Vida Guitar appears by arrangement with Lisa Sapinkopf Artists
chambermuse.com ▪ vidagq.com

Season Sponsor: C. A. Webster Foundation

ARTIST PROFILE



VIDA Guitar Quartet brings together four guitarists of exceptional artistry who share a passion for chamber music. Since forming in 2007 VIDA GQ has performed to critical acclaim in major UK venues including King's Place (London), The Purcell Room (London), The Sage (Gateshead) and St George's (Bristol). They are sought-after festival artists throughout the UK, Europe, and North America. Since making their US debuts in Los Angeles and New York in 2012 they have appeared on some of North America's most prestigious stages for classical guitar, including the Long Island Guitar Festival and the Allegro Guitar Series in Dallas, Fort Worth, and Las Vegas. They were chosen as the keynote performers for the 2015 Guitar Foundation of America conference and toured extensively on the "Live on Stage" USA touring network in 2016. 2017 marked the quartet's debut in China as part of the Changsha International Guitar Festival where they were invited to play the closing night concert. 2019 was a busy year for VIDA with extensive tours across multiple US states, and a first tour of China performing in concert halls in Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Dalian, Nanchang and Haian.

The VIDA Guitar Quartet's ability to "conjure up an orchestral palette of color and effects" (Classic FM) combined with their "exquisite tonal and dynamic control" has firmly established them as a passionate and masterful ensemble who sparkle with "vitality and spontaneity" (Acoustic). VIDA's seemingly effortless sense of ensemble and their broad range of timbres and dynamics evokes "listening to an entire orchestra and not merely to four guitars. There is only one word for it: magic." (Gramophone)

Since forming in 2007, VIDA has performed to critical acclaim in major UK, USA, and European venues. They are sought-after festival artists throughout the UK and Europe, and they have given masterclasses, workshops, school concerts, and other outreach activities in connection with nearly every public concert they have performed.

Assad: Uarekena

Together with his brother and duo partner Odair Assad, Brazilian-born Sérgio Assad is presently one of the most prominent classical guitarists. He has augmented the repertoire with his own contributions plus inspired composers to create contemporary music for the guitar.

Launching with recurring notes and hammering pulse, this piece conducts audience members on a journey of unpredictable rhythms, flowing crests, and percussive intervals.

The Uarekena, an aboriginal people of Brazil near extinction, inspired the work's main theme, and Assad wrote this composition as a tribute to all of Brazil's indigenous groups.

The composer adds: *"Many tribes suffered extinction as a consequence of the European settlement or were assimilated into the Brazilian population. The Indigenous population was decimated by European diseases, declining from a pre-Columbian high of 2 to 3 million to some 300,000 as of 1997, distributed among some 200 tribes.*

"This piece was written for and dedicated to the LAGQ, who were the first quartet to play and record it. The piece was written while I was living in Paris and in those days, I was really inspired by French impressionism, therefore the piece has some moments inspired by that kind of musical vocabulary."

Vivaldi: Concerto for 4 Violins

The Italian Baroque composer Antonio Vivaldi wrote the Concerto for Four Violins and Cello (continuo) in B Minor as the tenth piece in *L'Estro Armonico* (Harmonic Inspiration), a 1711 collection of twelve concertos for one, two and four violins.

A virtuoso violinist, the composer wrote hundreds of concerti for the violin but rather few for four violin soloists. Published early in his career, this concerto in three movements (fast-slow-fast) contributed to his international reputation. A highly creative, even experimental work, its novel instrumentation stimulated Vivaldi's imagination. Eighteenth-century listeners were amazed, even elated, by the rhythmic

drive and unexpected intensity of expression in Vivaldi's concertos. The driving finale of the B minor concerto is positively full of sting and bravado.

Impressed with this work, Bach arranged it as a concerto for four solo harpsichords. Following in that tradition, today's performance is arranged for four guitars.

Bach: Brandenburg No. 3

Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos, as they have come to be known because of their dedicatee, are among the most perfect examples of the Baroque concerto extant. Few works in the history of music match their tireless invention, their colorful instrumentation, or the tremendous demands they make on performers. They are widely regarded as some of the greatest orchestral compositions of the Baroque era.

The collection was composed circa 1711–1720 and dedicated (probably in revised form) in 1721 to Christian Ludwig, the margrave of Brandenburg and the younger brother of King Frederick I of Prussia. For reasons that remain unclear, the margrave never paid for Bach's work, and it is likely that these concerti were never performed at the Brandenburg court.

The Third Concerto, originally written for nine solo strings (three each of violins, violas, and cellos) and continuo, thereby excluded winds from this work. The piece ends with a vigorous fugal Allegro, which we hear today.

Schubert: Fantasy in F Minor

During Schubert's lifetime, an increasing number of middle-class Viennese families could afford to buy pianos. Since these families often included two or more piano players and the cost of a second piano was prohibitive, the market for "piano four hand" (two players at one piano) sheet music for home performance was particularly fruitful. In fact, this genre of hausmusik became a primary source of income for Schubert.

Given his gift for melody and his grand resourcefulness at the keyboard, Schubert was particularly good at four-hand piano music. There is little question that Schubert was the greatest and most productive of all composers in this specialized field, and this is

altogether one of his most important piano works.

Schubert used the title "Fantasy" in only a few of his works: the "Wanderer" Fantasy (D. 760) for solo piano and the Fantasy in C major (D. 934) for violin and piano are two well-known examples. Considered one of the great masterpieces of ensemble piano repertoire, the Fantasy in F minor is Schubert's most often performed piano duet. Completed shortly before his death in 1828, the work demonstrates his mature style and is filled with his best writing.

A "fantasy"—sometimes spelled as "fantasia", "phantasie" or "fantasie"—refers to an instrumental piece in which the composer's imaginings are not constrained to any specific musical form or design and is a term dating from the Renaissance. In Schubert's time, it became a stylistic link between the traditional sonata form with four distinct movements and the essentially free-form tone poem. In this transitional instance, the Fantasy is in four movements, but they are inter-connected and played without pause. However, they are spiced with the Schubert trademark of abrupt shifts in key.

Poulenc: Sonata for Piano 4 hands

Young Francis Poulenc infused the musical styles of jazz, cabaret, and other popular music genres into his 'serious' compositions. He was still in his late teens when he composed his *Sonata for Piano Four Hands*, a work both serious and farcically comedic. It competes seriously with the new trend of musical primitivism introduced by Stravinsky and Bartók.

The first movement, *Prélude*, opens with barbarous, repetitive rhythms, and the lyrical melodies of the middle section of this movement could have come straight out of *Shrovetide Fair*.

The second movement, *Rustique*, is suggestive of the layered textures of Balinese gamelan music. Note especially the markedly curious figuration patterns from its concurrent use of similar melodic material in both 8th- and 16th-notes.

The last movement, *Final*, while still regularly driven, is not quite so persistent in its patterns of rhythm and melody, using a wider variety of rhythms. Respecting Classical tradition, it remembers themes from previous movements, then although appearing set to build up for a fantastic conclusion, does an about-face and ends in a late-night jazzy close.

Turina: *La Oración del Torero*

Joaquín Turina was the youngest of the group of four that became a rather elite club of Spanish composers including Albéniz, Falla, and Granados. Like his colleagues, the Seville-born Turina was compellingly attracted to Paris, which was debuting the music of Debussy and reveling in the music of Ravel.

Turina received his basic training in piano and composition in Seville. He went to Madrid with the score of an opera in hand. While the opera was unsuccessful, he did have moderate success with a performance of his zarzuela, *Fea y con Gracia* (Ugly and Graceful). At a later appearance as pianist and composer he performed his Piano Quintet, Op. 1, a work strongly influenced by César Franck and D'Indy. Both Albéniz and Falla were present at the concert, and they advised Turina to look to his native Spanish folk music for inspiration.

Taking his friends' counsel, Turina decided to "fight bravely for the national music of our country." He returned to Spain in 1913 and wrote *La oración del torero* (The bullfighter's prayer), originally scored for four lauds.¹ The essence of the piece is meticulously Spanish, and the writing is thoroughly impressionistic. Written in 1925 for Quarteto Aguillar and arranged the following year for string quartet, string orchestra and piano trio, it makes clear that the impact of his Paris stay was still fully influential.

Turina described his inspiration: "*I saw my work during an afternoon of bull fighting in Madrid arena. I was in the court of horses. Behind a small door there was a chapel, filled with incense, where toreadors went*

prior to facing death. It was then that there appeared in front of my eyes, in all its plenitude, this subjectively musical and expressive contrast between the tumult of the arena, the public that awaited the fiesta, and the devotion of those who, in front of this poor altar filled with touching poetry, prayed to God to protect their lives."

Villa-Lobos: *Bachianas Brasileiras* #5

Not until 1888, the year after Heitor Villa-Lobos was born, did his native Brazil legally abolish slavery. So, the young composer came of age in Rio de Janeiro in an era of revolutionary change.

Villa-Lobos earned his early living by playing cello at a café, learning the styles of common popular music as an active participant. By 1905, he had begun collecting examples of folk music in northeastern Brazil—a few years before Bartók began his famous ethno-musicological field research. He delighted in spinning lengthy, colorful tales out of the genuine facts of his expeditions (including accounts of his alleged detention by cannibals).

Even though he did study at the National Institute of Music in Rio, Villa-Lobos emphasized the non-academic aspect of his approach to composition. "*My music is natural, like a waterfall,*" was a typical assertion. Despite this claim, he later became the creator of a system of music education that has had a profound impact on Brazil's cultural life.

Villa-Lobos lived in Paris at various times in his life, which engendered intriguing associations with the European tradition such as both exporter of Brazilian idioms and importer of the music of masters like J.S. Bach, a lifelong hero.

At some point in Villa-Lobos's youth, his aunt Zinha gave him a copy of J.S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and the *Bachianas brasileiras* (Bach-inspired Brazilian pieces) embody the composer's fixation with J.S. Bach. Written between 1930 and 1945, they are comprised of nine suites with extensively varying instrumentation/voice. In their musical content and form, they represent a distinctive meeting of Baroque techniques and ideas with the folk and popular music of Brazil that

were Villa-Lobos's essential or animating force. Each allude to the terminology of Bach's Baroque instrumental suites in the composite titles he gives most of the movements.

Originally written for an eight cello orchestra and soprano, Suite No. 5 is Villa-Lobos's best known work. We hear the first of its two movements, *Aria* (Cantilena), which suggests a Bach slow movement but in 5/4 meter. Listen for entwined chords reminiscent of a vaguely baroque chord progression. Its middle section implants a vernacular emotional response into the movement and sets a poem by the Brazilian writer Ruth Valadares Corrêa (also a soprano, who sang the *Aria*'s world premiere). The poem is an ode to the moon's gentle rise against "the drowsy, beautiful firmament."

Bernstein: *West Side Story*

West Side Story, an American musical film released in 1961, is a retelling of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* tragedy. Shakespeare's feuding families are portrayed as two warring New York City gangs. Riff, the leader of the white Jets, wants a rumble with the Puerto Rican Sharks and challenges Bernardo, leader of the Sharks, at the local dance. At the dance ("Mambo"), Tony, a former member of the Jets, and Maria, Bernardo's sister, fall in love despite the gangs' protestations. Later, Tony serenades her ("Maria") on a fire escape instead of a balcony. They profess their love ("Tonight"), the two dream about a peaceful world ("Somewhere"), and Maria dreams about Tony ("I Feel Pretty"). Meanwhile, the Shark girls contrast Puerto Rico with the mainland ("America"). The gangs meet and switchblades are drawn. As in Shakespeare's play, everything goes as horribly wrong as possible, and catastrophe strikes repeatedly until the climactic and heartbreaking ending.

West Side Story's rhythms and pulses toss together Tin Pan Alley, cool jazz, and Latin dances in an eclectic postwar urban soundscape.

notes © Dr. Michael Spencer

¹ Although laud can be translated as "lute", it's likely Turina had mandolins in mind.

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"From My Life" is the title of
which composer's string quartet?*

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