

SARASOTA
Herald-Tribune

CONCERT REVIEW: Cavatina Duo astonishes and delights

By [Gayle Williams](#), *Herald-Tribune*

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If guitarist Denis Azabagic and flutist Eugenia Moliner set out to amaze their audience then it was a job swiftly accomplished. GuitarSarasota hosts world-class guitar soloists for their concert series. On occasion a chamber ensemble fills the bill, in this case a duo with flute.



Opening with a widely familiar Sonata in E minor, BWV 1034 by J.S. Bach, Denis Azabagic covered the original role of harpsichord and continuo to accompany the flute soloist role. It's a challenging role for guitar, here and in a number of the selections on this program, but thankless at the same time. All ears were on the extraordinary artistry of flutist Eugenia Moliner. Playing with a full-bodied, somewhat woody sound, Moliner's baroque

style was superb as she captured the nuances of phrasing, articulation and ornamentation with exquisite skill.

Journeying to "Three Balkan Pieces" arranged by Clarice Assad, we entered an entirely different sound world of asymmetrical meters, jabbing accents, punctuated rhythms, and still, a soulful song of faraway lands. The two musicians perform seamlessly together, firing our imaginations with exotic new sounds, including a surprisingly malleable use of flutter tongue in the flute.

"Out of Africa," an original suite by composer Alan Thomas inspired by not the soundtrack of the eponymous famous movie, but by the original book served as the only

solo spotlight on the incredible musical gifts of Azabagic. Deepening the trek into exotic lands through sound, each movement evoked specific times of day and environments. Azabagic pointed out in his remarks that the modified tuning in the middle movement serves to mimic the ancient Middle Eastern stringed lute, the oud. Further effects of percussion on the body of the guitar and what sounded like prepared strings for a metallic sound created an mimicked an ensemble of musicians performing in the Sahara or the forests of middle Africa.

This incredible duo went on to perform two sets of variations on operatic themes. The first on "O Cara armonia" from Mozart's "Magic Flute" and the second, a Fantasy on themes from "La Traviata," both arranged by Alan Thomas. The entire point of such pieces is to showcase the virtuosity of the musicians. We felt a little breathless from the thrill. Azabagic downplayed his role and deferred the credit to Moliner, who is technically and musically the most extraordinary flutist I have ever heard in Sarasota, and the best I have heard in years.

As if playing to my heart alone, the couple featured two works by Astor Piazzolla, his "Adiós Nonino" and, for the encore, "Oblivion." High in contrast and pathos, their performance was transporting. With an overflowing palette of sounds, the Cavatina Duo did nothing but astonish and delight.

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Cavatina Duo. Denis Azabagic, guitar, Eugenia Moliner, flute. GuitarSarasota. Reviewed March 19 at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota.