

## Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival: Petra Poláčková makes her US debut on May 30

by Mike Telin



“I’m very excited about the recital,” said guitarist Petra Poláčková. “It is my debut at the Festival and my first time in the United States.” On Friday, May 30 beginning at 8:00 pm in Mixon Hall at the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival presents the Czech guitarist in a recital featuring Dowland’s *Preludium*, *Lacrimae Antiquae* and *Semper Dowland Semper Dolens*; Mertz’s *Bardenklänge*, *op. 13* and *Elegie*; Giuliani’s *Rossiniana V*, *op. 123*; Ponce’s *Sonata III* (1927); and Turina’s *Sevillana (Fantasia)* *op. 29*.

“I like to play music from different eras on one concert,” the engaging Poláčková told us via Skype. “First, I think it’s nice for the audience because they

can choose which piece they like the most. Second, I especially like Baroque, Renaissance and Romantic music so I always build programs around those styles. I also like to include something sad and something sweet.”

Why did Poláčková choose this program for her debut recital? “I perform on a Romantic guitar so at least half of the pieces are from the Romantic era. I can also play Baroque or Renaissance music on the instrument because it has eight strings, so it works very well for pieces that were originally written for the lute.”

Poláčková describes Dowland’s *Preludium* as a very short piece that serves as a prelude to the entire concert. “*Lacrimae Antiquae* was inspired by the prelude so the two fit together quite well. And *Semper Dowland Semper Dolens* is a very famous piece that was written during the time Dowland was composing many melancholy pieces.”

The music of Hungarian guitarist and composer Johann Kaspar Mertz follows the pianistic styles of Chopin, Mendelssohn and Schumann, and Poláčková said his *Bardenklänge* is a collection of short pieces of different tonalities. “It’s a typical Romantic piece, and Mauro Giuliani’s *Rossiniana V* is a collection of different motifs

and arias from Rossini operas which Giuliani transcribed for guitar.” Poláčeková added that while these pieces — as well as the Ponce sonata — are staples of her repertoire, Joaquin Turina’s *Sevillana (Fantasia)* is a recent addition.

On Saturday, May 31 from 1:00 pm until 3:45 pm Petra Poláčeková will present a Master Class in CIM’s Studio 113. With over 30 students of her own, what does she focus on when hearing a student for the first time? “Of course it depends on the student, but when you hear them play you can immediately tell a lot. You can feel if a student reacts well and very fast to what you are saying. I mostly like to point out one or two important things, because if you try to point out ten things the student can become confused. You don’t want them to think that perhaps they should leave the guitar in the case, or have them say, stop, this is Too Much Information.”

Poláčeková added that she’s always looking for a player who can transfer emotion to the listener. “There are a lot of academic players. They are at a very high level technically, but they are not playing with emotion. You need to find a story in the piece that will touch on the emotional side of the music.”

What makes a performance emotional for her? “It’s a difficult question because it doesn’t happen so often. But it’s when a performance takes your breath away and you suddenly get goose bumps. Or, you hear something that is magic and you can’t stop listening. That is very special.”

Petra Poláčeková began playing the guitar at age six. Although her parents were not musicians, they did feel it was important for her to study music. “It’s a funny story, because when I was young my parents had to work, and like many kids, I went to the kindergarten. There was a cleaning lady who also played the piano and we would dance and sing. She heard me sing and thought it was very good. Maybe my parents already knew that, because my mother would sing to me when I was young before going to bed. But the lady went to my parents and told them that I could sing very well and also had good intonation and that I should go to music school and learn an instrument. I also think my mother wanted me to study an instrument because she always wanted to but never had the opportunity.”

Interestingly, for all Petra Poláčeková’s musical accomplishments, she freely admits to having a certain degree of stage fright. “People do expect things from you when you perform. Like Armin Kelly, who first heard me on YouTube. He is putting a lot of trust in me that I will perform a good concert. So it is about responsibility. My teacher has also talked to me about how to better prepare for a concert — if you really prepare well you can trust your head and hands and just play. This helped me a lot because before I was more like, OK, lets see what happens.”

Back to the subject of YouTube: does she read what people write in the comments section? “Sometimes I do, but not all that often. I see so many things that people have written, sometimes nice and kind, but it *is* YouTube and you can find millions of videos and everybody can’t like you.”

I did ask if she read a comment that said she looked like Amy from “Big Bang Theory”. “Actually yes, and when I saw that comment I went to Google to find out what the series is and who this Amy is, because I had no idea,” she answered with a laugh.

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