

Yolanda Kondonassis, harp & Jason Vieaux, guitar

Harpist Kondonassis and guitarist Vieaux team for joyful concert on Arts Renaissance Tremont series

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By **Donald Rosenberg, The Plain Dealer**

It's tempting to call the duo of harpist Yolanda Kondonassis and guitarist Jason Vieaux high-powered. After all, both musicians are heralded around the world for prowess on their respective instruments.

But is it possible for harp and guitar, together or alone, to have a potent impact? Kondonassis and Vieaux proved without doubt Sunday at Pilgrim Congregational Church in Tremont that penetrating artistry has little to do with volume or overt virtuosity.

These musicians are masters on instruments that require special gifts for the works at their fingertips to weave any kind of spell. Harp and guitar are plucked, which means connecting notes into smooth lines is a major challenge, and they speak in modest voices.

So Kondonassis and Vieaux deserve to be termed magicians for the way they shaped phrases with natural fluidity, grace and, when required, fiery drama. Their program of duo and solo pieces,



presented by Arts Renaissance Tremont, was a joy from top to bottom.

The players devoted most of the program – their first complete concert together – to appealing duets by composers who explored music of many cultures. Argentine guitarist Maximo Diego Pujol's Suite Magica embraces various dance forms (waltz, tango) even as it brings individual flavor to Spanish and West African sources.

Alan Hovhaness' "Spirit of Trees" was an apt choice for this concert, which celebrated Earth Day. The five

Artist Management

movements constitute something of an international journey, with stops in the Middle East, Asia and Spain.

The most alluring of the duets was Spanish composer Xavier Montsalvatge's Fantasia for Guitar and Harp, whose three movements abound in charismatic and haunting imagery, with folk elements often catapulting the activity. Taps on the body of the guitar and harp add rhythmic zest and color.

The musicians' tonal radiance and crisp articulation were but starting points for performances that sounded like the most civilized of conversations. Their playing had sweetness and sweep, as well as a shared sense of balance.

In his solo piece, Fernando Sor's Variations on a Theme of Mozart, Op. 9, Vieaux revealed how agile and multi-faceted the guitar can be in inspired hands. Every fleet figure came across with utmost clarity, and Sor's tweaks of

Mozart's theme, from "The Magic Flute," received fresh delineation.

Kondonassis turned to two works she has recorded for her solo fare. French composer and harpist Carlos Salzedo's "Chanson de la Nuit" had elegant shimmer and piquant character, while Kondonassis' arrangement of Gershwin's Prelude No. 2 (originally for piano) was a bluesy pleasure.

Arts Renaissance Tremont winds up its season at 7:30 tonight at Pilgrim Congregational with a bonus concert, a recital by violinist Jinjoo Cho and pianist HyunSoo Kim previewing Cho's program for the Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition next week. The program includes music by Bach, Paganini, Schumann, Ysaye, Kissine, Poulenc, Waxman and Beach.

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