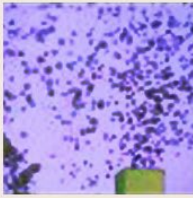


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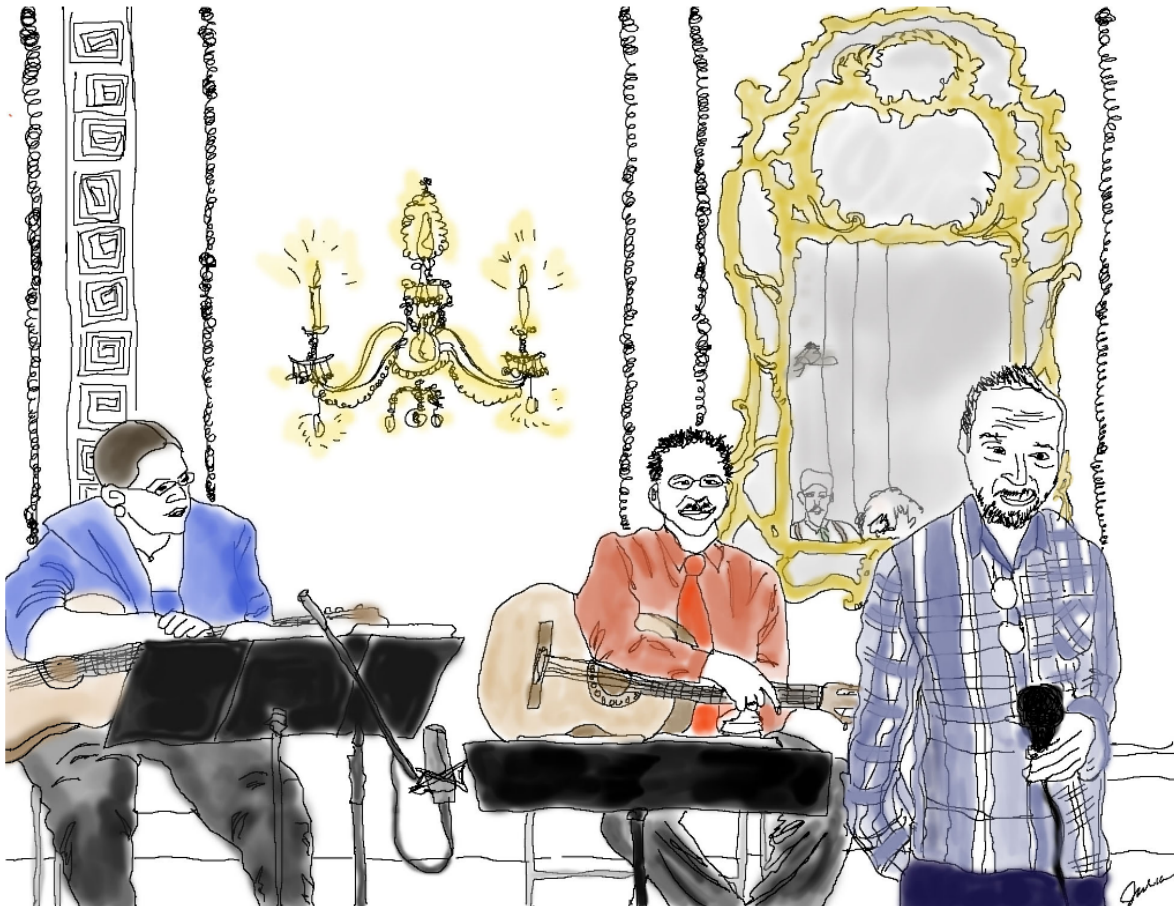


Brouwer's Mythological Beasts Emerge

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## Brouwer's Mythological Beasts Emerge

July 17, 2019 by JCCrowe



Left to right, Laura Oltman and Michael Newman of the Newman & Oltman Guitar Duo and feted composer of the evening, Leo Brouwer. Sketch by Julia Crowe.

The Americas Society presented the opening concert for the 19th New York Guitar Seminar at Mannes in celebration of composer and conductor Leo Brouwer's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday. The evening featured a program of music written entirely by Leo Brouwer performed by Mannes College of Music graduates and faculty, including the premiere of a new guitar duo work, *El Libro de los Seres Imaginarios* ("The Book of Imaginary Beings,") written for Ensemble-in-Residence Michael Newman and Laura Oltman.

Guitarist Celik Refik Kaya performed *Brouwer's Sonata No. 1*, a piece featuring folkloric elements woven with Afro-Cuban rhythms, with a lyrical sensitivity and beautiful, bell-like harmonics.

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The trio of Joao Luiz on guitar, Matthew Lipman on viola and Yeami Kim on flute performed *Paisajes, Retratos y Mujeres* ("Landscapes, Portraits and Women") with vibrant color and vigorous spirit. Written in 1997, this 3-movement piece captures the spirit of a minuet dancer with references to Wagner and Dowland.

Michael Newman and Laura Oltman of The Newman & Oltman Guitar Duo, performed the second half of the program, opening with Brouwer's four-movement *Música Incidental Campesina*, ("Incidental Country Music,") followed by his exquisite arrangement of The Beatles' "Fool on the Hill." The latter piece appears on the Newman & Oltman's album, *Tango Suite! Romance for Two Guitars*.

These pieces served as the appetizers for the main course: the New York Premiere of *El Libro de los Seres Imaginarios* ("The Book of the Imaginary Beings,") which Brouwer wrote out of inspiration after reading Jorge Luis Borges' *Book of Imaginary Beings* (Fondo de Cultura Económica 1969), a literary compilation that offers descriptions of 120 folkloric beasts. The piece, which is in four movements, evokes four well-known creatures: the unicorn, the Minotaur, Fairies and Gnomes, the Gorgon and the Manticore. (A manticore, which derives from Persian culture, is a carnivorous, lion-bodied scorpion with the face of a man.)

The unicorn conjures musical imagery of the beast emerging from a clearing for a brief, shimmering and disjointed moment before it disappears. Fairies shimmer lightly over guitar strings but clearly, gnomes are up to no good. And the Gorgon and Manticore evoke deep, thrumming bass notes with as much menace as two guitars can muster.

Brouwer clearly has a gold mine here in terms of inspiring material, and the Newman & Oltman Guitar Duo win his praise for being able to pull off his challenging, ever-shifting meter. "They could perform a *napkin!*" Brouwer told me.

One revelation I experienced after listening to an entire evening of Brouwer is that his music continues to be the font of pilfering by far less-inspired modern music composers for the guitar, who've have adopted his atonality with less purpose and more strain, serving up creaks and guttural randomness of old floorboards, broken on occasion by a rudely obstreperous thwap of a guitar bass string. They lack Brouwer's sense of drama and ability to tell a story.

It's one thing to color with a palette of gray and black and white because Picasso did. However, if I'm still hearing the gray and black and white without seeing a picture or a story emerge, then I'm listening to crayons rather than music and trees instead of a forest. Brouwer's source of inspiration wasn't tonal at all—he found it in the writings of a storyteller.

The Newman & Oltman Duo is working out plans to record the new music with a possible video. Stay tuned for more details...