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CAVATINA DUO RIVER OF FIRE



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Cavatina Duo

River of Fire, a bridge to shared humanity

We meet again with Cavatina Duo, a flute and guitar ensemble formed by Eugenia Moliner and Denis Azabagic, who this year celebrate their twenty-fifth anniversary as Cavatina Duo, celebrating it in the best way, with the release of a new album on Cedille Records, “River of Fire”, “with which we hope not only to celebrate the richness and diversity of Romani music, but also to create an experience that connects deeply with human emotions; this project is very personal to us because it deals with universal stories: migration, resilience and the search for a place to belong”. In fact, with “River of Fire” Cavatina Duo has promoted and enriched the contemporary repertoire, since all are works in world premiere, “collaborations that not only enrich the works, but also foster a bond between composer and performer”, as Eugenia Moliner and Denis Azabagic affirm in this interview. The recording also features contributions from the prestigious Pacifica Quartet, a string quartet that collaborates on some of the album's works, works by creators such as Stacy Garrop, Sérgio Assad, Atanas Ourkouzounov, Clarice Assad and Matthew Dunne.

As in their previous recording, “Folias and Fantasias”, which we talked about a few years ago, with the new album “River of Fire” they now show that they are expanding their repertoire through intersecting paths...

This year we celebrate 25 years as a Cavatina Duo, which is a very special milestone for us. Throughout our career, we have worked extensively in the repertoire for flute and guitar, exploring both traditional and contemporary works. However, since the album “Sephardic Journey” in 2015, we began collaborating with composers to broaden the sonic horizons of our formation, including other instruments such as violin, cello and string quartet. “River of Fire” includes two duos, two trios with violin and cello, respectively, as well as a sextet with our flute and guitar combination and string quartet.

At what professional moment has this new recording caught Cavatina Duo?

This professional moment is particularly significant because it combines our performing experience with our desire to contribute to the repertoire, leaving a musical legacy that can inspire future generations of musicians.

To what extent has Tony Gatlif’s documentary film *Latcho Drom* influenced this project?

Latcho Drom 's influence has been fundamental in the development of this project. This documentary traces the historical journeys of the Romani people from their origin in Rajasthan, India, to their arrival in Spain, passing through regions such as Turkey, the Balkans and Central Europe. The film shows how Romani music absorbs the cultural characteristics of each place, creating a fascinating sonic diversity that remains unified by its emotional and rhythmic essence. When we first saw this film, we felt that it captured the spirit of what we wanted to convey with "River of Fire"; it inspired both our interpretive vision and the compositions themselves. For example, in Sérgio Assad's *Contos Ciganos* , that journey is reflected with sections evoking Punjabi dances, Middle Eastern scales and Brazilian rhythms, culminating in the Romani anthem *Djelem, Djelem* . The idea of constant movement and cultural transformation is central to this project.

Since the "gypsy" culture is nomadic, their music has travelled with them, acquiring influences from the countries in which they have settled, which is *roughly* one of the great peculiarities of "River of Fire", which already carries a very powerful message implicit in its words... Therefore, how could we define gypsy music and where exactly do the original gypsy people come from?

The Roma people have their origins in northwestern India, from where they migrated over a thousand years ago. The various waves of migration took them through Persia, Egypt, Turkey, the Balkans and finally to Western Europe and the Americas, assimilating and transforming elements of the local cultures at each stage of their journeys. This fusion has given rise to genres as diverse as flamenco in Spain, brass bands in the Balkans, cimbalom in Hungary and Romania and Gypsy jazz in France. However, beyond regional differences, what unites all this music is its ability to evoke universal emotions through a mix of melismatic chants, instrumental improvisation and hypnotic rhythms that are deeply tied to the history and experience of the Roma people. Kai Christiansen, a friend and great musicologist, has a very comprehensive article where he talks about our project and Roma culture:

www.earsense.org/article/Gypsy-Music-River-of-Fire

For Denis, is the meaning of "gypsy music" the same as for Eugenia?

Although our perspectives are shaped by our cultural experiences, we share a common vision of Roma music. I (Denis speaking now) was born in former Yugoslavia, in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, growing up surrounded by the rhythmic vitality of the Balkans (7/8, 9/8, 11/8, 13/8), where Roma music was and still is omnipresent; listening to the small brass bands playing in the streets of my hometown of Tuzla is one of the freshest memories I have from my childhood and youth. I remember listening to the trumpets and tubas of the

Roma, also carrying with them a bear on a chain that they made “dance” to the accompaniment of their music. From my perspective as a child, seeing this spectacle on the street was fascinating, whereas now I think of “poor animal”. Another impression of Roma music that has remained very strongly in my memory is the film *Dom za vešanje* (*Time of the Gypsies* , 1988) by director Emir Kusturica, with a soundtrack by Goran Bregović, with one of the most emblematic Roma songs, *Ederlezi* , which remains in my memory. This song was also a starting point for composer Stacy Garrop, who uses it in the third movement of her work *Romani Songs* ; for me this is like a very special musical circle.

And for you, Eugenia?

I am from Valencia, and I associate this music primarily with flamenco. However, training at the Rotterdam Conservatory, now Codarts (Netherlands), allowed me to discover the similarities between flamenco and Indian music, which gave me a broader understanding of the Roma cultural journey. During my student years I also shared a house with another student who played the bansuri and I listened to her play ragas all day long. Many years later we have had the opportunity to travel to India on multiple occasions and play with musicians from there, mixing our sounds and rhythms, with tabla, bansuri, flute and guitar playing Balkan music. For us, Roma music symbolises movement, searching and connection that transcends all borders.

You are a flute and guitar duo, and I suspect that you felt the need on “River of Fire” to expand the sonic possibilities, in this case with the Pacifica Quartet, one of the most prestigious American string quartets...

As we mentioned before, we have already collaborated with strings on our Sephardic Journey project. On that project we collaborated with the Avalon Quartet. So incorporating the Pacifica Quartet on the River of Fire album has allowed us to once again explore new textures and dynamics, amplifying the emotional richness of the works. For example, in Clarice Assad’s *Four Scenes* , the combination of the string quartet with the flute and guitar creates a vibrant and narrative soundscape. In addition, working with musicians of Pacifica’s calibre brings an additional level of interpretive depth, enriching our artistic vision for the project.

Let's talk about each piece on the album, and about each author, who has written the music for you, for Cavatina Duo... Let's start with Stacy Garrop's *Romani songs* ...

This work captures the connection of the Roma people to nature and their musical richness. Garrop uses traditional melodies such as *Djelem*, *Djelem* and *Ederlezi* to weave a narrative that encompasses the journey and vitality of the Roma people. For example, in the first movement, *Song from the Twisting Road* , one feels the tension of constant

movement, while the third movement, *Song for the Coming Spring* , evokes hope and renewal. The final movement, *Song of the Boundless Soul* , celebrates the energy and joy of the Roma, with the guitar becoming a percussion instrument and the flute providing clapping and tapping.

It's the turn of Sérgio Assad with his *Contos Ciganos* ...

In *Contos Ciganos* , Sérgio Assad musically traces the journey of the Roma from their origins in India to Brazil. The piece begins with evocative dances from the Punjab and moves through Turkish, Middle Eastern and Spanish influences, before concluding with a tribute to the music of northeastern Brazil. Sérgio names the movements: Punjab – ***Journey to the West*** – *Anatolia* – *Balkans* – *Andalucía* – *Gypsy Anthem* – *Sertao Cigano* . This composition is a masterful example of how Gypsy music adapts and transforms according to the cultures it encounters.

By Atanas Ourkouzounov they offer us *Raga Ibriama* , a duo for flute and guitar...

This work is a bridge between the musical traditions of the Balkans and India. Inspired by the Bulgarian clarinettist Ivo Papazov, *Raga Ibriama* combines the meditative patterns of an Indian raga with Bulgarian asymmetrical rhythms, such as the characteristic 11/8 of the Kopanitsa. The work begins with a raga, as a contemplative introduction, before exploding into a section of great energy and virtuosity.

From Clarice Assad we have her *Four Scenes* , a sextet for flute, guitar and string quartet...

This work addresses the theme of human migration from a Roma perspective, exploring emotions such as struggle, resilience and hope. In the first movement, *Migration* , one senses the tension and courage of displacement, while *Três Meninos* evokes a moment of temporary respite. The third movement, *Um Sonho* , seeks inner peace in the midst of adversity, while the last, *Sigamos* , conveys a message of hope and determination.

And to conclude this Romani journey, the triptych *Three Artisans* by Matthew Dunne, another duo for flute (in C and G) and guitar...

Dunne pays homage to flute player Tal Perkes in *Three Artisans* , which explores three fundamental passions of his life: painting, architecture and music. Each movement has a connection to the Gypsy tradition: the first, *The Painter* , adopts a Gypsy jazz style; the second, *The Architect* , is inspired by a traditional Romani melody; and the third, *The Flute Player* , uses flamenco influences to capture Perkes' musical spirit.

All world premieres... Has the pressure gotten to you at any point?

Premiering works always carries with it a great responsibility, especially when we collaborate with renowned composers. However, rather than a pressure, we see it as an opportunity to contribute to the repertoire and bring to life compositions that reflect not only our interpretative abilities, but also our commitment to musical innovation.

Have you already taken this music to any concert hall?

We have performed excerpts from this repertoire (the works of Ourkouzouov and Dunne) in concerts in the United States, Taiwan and Spain, with very positive audience reaction. We plan to take the full programme to international venues after the album is released, in the hope that this music will resonate with audiences.

Does working directly with composers change the performers' perspective?

Definitely. Collaborating with composers allows us to understand their intentions and nuances, which enriches our interpretations. For example, Stacy Garrop shared details about the traditional melodies she incorporated into *Romani Songs*, helping us to bring out those elements in our performances.

And I ask you the question the other way around, even though you are not the composers... Has working directly with the performers influenced the composer/s?

We think so. For example, in our sessions with Stacy Garrop, we had the opportunity to show how different sonorities and colours combined with the dynamics and timbre of our instruments can convey feelings of calm or bravery, which was the crucial message she wanted to evoke. These collaborations not only enrich the works, but also foster a bond between composer and performer.

In a nutshell, what do you expect from “River of Fire”?

With “River of Fire” we hope not only to celebrate the richness and diversity of Roma music, but also to create an experience that connects deeply with human emotions. This project is very personal to us because it deals with universal stories: migration, resilience and the search for a place to belong. Denis and I are immigrants; we both left our home countries for different reasons decades ago, he because of the war and I in search of high-level musical learning. Fate led us to join forces in Rotterdam and then we continued on to the United States. We often feel like we no longer belong anywhere or anywhere, like constant nomads, and that is why we increasingly understand the true meaning of Roma life, the perpetual traveler, who even without a fixed homeland does not lose his identity or his own tradition. We are excited by the idea that every listener can find something of themselves in this music, whether it is in a rhythm that reminds them of their own roots, a melody that

evokes nostalgia or simply in the energy that invites them to celebrate life. For us, “River of Fire” is not just an album; it is a bridge to the shared humanity that music can reveal.

www.cavatinaduo.com

by **Gonzalo Perez Chamorro**

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