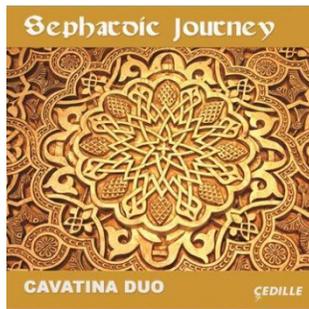


# Soundboard

Review by Al Kunze

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## “Sephardic Journey” – Cavatina Duo (Cedille Records)

This disc features arguably the finest guitar/flute duo extant, the Cavatina Duo, guitarist Denis Azabagic and his wife flutist Eugenia Moliner. The story of the provenance of the disc is fascinating, involving the deep story of the families of the duo, and a support network provided by several organizations and augmented by a Kickstarter campaign. It was definitely worth all of the investments both artistic and monetary. All of the music was composed for the duo – with assisting artists – and four of the pieces were specifically commissioned for the disc. Before discussing the individual works I will tell you immediately that these pieces and the performances are on the very highest level: the playing and the music are not just fine as *guitar* music, but fine as *music* period.

A tone of *gravitas* is immediately apparent in *Trio Sefardi* by frequent Cavatina collaborator Alan Thomas, aided by the addition of ’cello to the duo. Each of the three movements is based on a Sephardic song. Thomas’ music is compositionally sophisticated, but without any sacrifice of power or urgency. The longest movement is the first, free variations on a song of lamentation. The next two movements, while shorter and lighter in tone add to a work which is an important addition to the repertoire. Joseph Williams’ *Isabel* is for the duo alone, an impressive work based on a song – complex in layers of meaning – called “Durme, durme mi linda donzella”. Carlos Rafael Rivera is an eclectic Miami-based composer. Even in the first few minutes of his *Plegaria y Canto (al Bodre de la Mar)* he achieves an emotional intensity rare in the guitar world. This is masterfully maintained for the 15 minutes of this very impressive work. David Leisner and Clarice Assad (Sergio’s daughter) contribute music for the duo with string quartet. The three movements of Leisner’s *Love Dreams of an Exile* are, in his words, “stream of consciousness meditations on Sephardic folk tunes.” It is a work of substantial power, with the almost programmatic second movement being particularly noteworthy. The phantasmagorical opening of the final movement defies description, but is finally resolved in a tender, peaceful ending. Clarice Assad’s *Sephardic Suite* sometimes embraces almost-avant garde techniques in an amazingly inventive work, which has brilliant writing for the flute and guitar. The ending, utilizing percussion from the players is wonderful.

This is an essential disc for any lover of contemporary music. Beautifully recorded and with absolutely wonderful liner notes which are in themselves worth the price of the disc.