

## Program Notes – Singapore Recital, August 15, 2025

I will begin tonight's program on a Romantic guitar—a replica of the 19th-century Stauffer instrument. Known for its intimate and nuanced sound, this guitar offers a compelling contrast to the modern instrument you'll hear later in the recital.

### John Dowland – *Lachrimae Pavan & Fantasia No. 7*

Though originally written for the lute, these two works by English composer John Dowland (1563–1626) are brought to life here on the Romantic guitar. Dowland, in many ways, was the first “English rock star.” His *Lachrimae Pavan* existed in multiple versions—from the lute song *Flow My Tears*, to a consort arrangement titled *Seven Tears*, to the solo lute version performed tonight. It was one of the most beloved and widely distributed pieces of the Renaissance.

In contrast, *Fantasia No. 7* is a more abstract and ambitious work—less a song and more a virtuosic essay for solo lute. Though I'm not performing these on an actual lute, I believe the timbre of the Stauffer guitar provide insights to their original intent.

### Johann Kaspar Mertz – *Elegy*

*Elegy* is a large, one-movement Romantic work by Johann Kaspar Mertz (1806–1856). Mertz himself played a guitar much like the one I use tonight, making this a particularly authentic pairing. Still, some passages—especially the bass writing—suggest that the piece may have been intended for a seven- or eight-string guitar, requiring some creative revoicing and the occasional awkward fingering.

### \*\*Antón García Abril – *Canción & Evocación No. 2*

(“La guitarra, hace llorar a los sueños”)\*\*

Discovering the guitar music of Antón García Abril (1933–2021) was a revelation. Despite his prolific output and his role as head of composition at the Madrid Royal Conservatory, I somehow overlooked his works for guitar until recently.

*Evocación No. 2*, from the suite *Evocaciones*, immediately captured me—not only through its music but through its subtitle: *La guitarra, hace llorar a los sueños* (“The guitar makes dreams weep”). It set the emotional tone for a recording project and was paired with *Canción*, a more introspective piece from his *Vademécum* collection. Together, they offer a quiet, poetic entry into Abril's expressive world.

### Enrique Granados – *Selected Works*

I'll admit, I'm not usually drawn to arrangements of piano music for the guitar—but Enrique Granados (1867–1916) is the exception. Each time I revisit these pieces, they reveal something new. Even compared to my own earlier recordings, I feel my interpretations have evolved in many ways. Meaningful or not, I will ask that you decide for yourself.

Granados, a key figure in Spanish nationalism during the late 19th century, was also steeped in Romanticism, drawing inspiration from Chopin, Schumann, and Schubert. His tragic death—drowning after returning to the water to save his wife from a torpedoed ship—adds another layer of pathos to his lyrical, deeply expressive music.

## Intermission

### Joaquín Rodrigo – *Tiento Antiguo & En los Trigales*

We open the second half with two works by Joaquín Rodrigo (1901–1999), a towering figure in 20th-century Spanish music. Though blind from early childhood and never a guitarist himself, Rodrigo composed some of the most challenging and imaginative works in the guitar repertoire.

*Tiento Antiguo* (Old Song) and *En los Trigales* (In the Wheat Fields) are both original guitar works. Their rhythmic vitality, harmonic inventiveness, and evocative colors make them enduring favorites—and technical challenges—for guitarists everywhere.

### Mario Barbieri – *La Serra (The Greenhouse)*

Mario Barbieri (1888–1968) was completely unknown to me until I stumbled upon *La Serra*, a suite of seven flower-themed preludes, hidden among a pile of old scores. With very little biographical information available—and my Italian far from fluent—I relied on Google Translate to piece together his story.

Each prelude in this suite is named after a flower:

- Alpine Forget-Me-Not
- Giant Pansy
- Giant of Persia
- Orchid
- Jasmine
- Tumbleweed
- Sensitive Plant

Although Barbieri wasn't a guitarist, these pieces translate beautifully to the instrument, likely thanks to the guidance of Federico Orsolina. They offer a lyrical counterpoint to the often abstract and avant-garde trends of their time.

What touched me most were Barbieri's handwritten notes on the scores—comments not just about tempo or technique, but about feeling, color, and atmosphere. I later came across a rumor, shared in an Italian forum, that *La Serra* may have been inspired by a young woman in his harmony class. Originally dedicated to her, the published score instead bears the name of Orsolina. Whether true or not, the music carries an undeniable tenderness—as if addressed to someone remembered fondly.

### Gerardo Tamez – *Aires de Son*

We close tonight's program with *Aires de Son*, a three-movement work by Mexican composer Gerardo Tamez (b. 1948). I confess I knew little about his music before beginning this project, which is surprising given the close cultural and geographical ties between the U.S. and Mexico.

Born in Chicago and trained in both Mexico and California, Tamez co-founded the Mexico City Guitar Trio and now teaches in Hidalgo. His music pulses with the rhythms and melodies of Mexican folk traditions. *Aires de Son* is a vibrant, rhythmic, and joyful tribute to those roots—full of life and color.

### **Encore**

I have a bad habit of not preparing encores—usually I just play whatever comes to mind. But tonight, I've made an exception. Even if you weren't planning on asking for one... I've already planned to play it anyway. Surprise!