Kyler Robert Michael Fischer, guitar

Retrato Brasileiro

Robert Baden Powell de Aquino
(1937-2000)

Cello Suite No. 1 in G, BWV1007

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

(arr. by Stanley Yates)

Prelude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Menuet I
Menuet II
Gigue

Intermission

Sonata Concertata

Nicolò Paganini
(1782-1840)

Allegro spiritoso
Adagio assai espressivo

Patrick Ray Monson, Mandolin

Electric Counterpoint

Stephen Michael Reich
(b.1936)

Mvt. 1—Fast
Retrato Brasileiro, by Robert Baden Powell de Aquino

You are on a Brazilian beach, listening to the waves crash and people singing and dancing. The sun is setting on the ocean horizon and a guitar is being played. The music that could suit this moment is bossa nova, and a pioneer of the style was Robert Baden Powell. Baden, born in Rio de Janeiro in 1937, was a virtuoso guitarist, whose blend of African, jazz, and classical influences gained him recognition as one of Brazil’s greatest guitarists. Both his father and his grandfather were prominent musicians in Brazil. Powell took up the guitar at the age of seven and after only two years of playing the instrument, he won an amateur radio contest with an unaccompanied classical piece. He first achieved fame in the emerging bossa nova movement through his work with the poet Vinicius de Moraes, who wrote lyrics for many of Baden Powell’s compositions. Throughout his life, Powell lived in many different places such as Paris, Germany, and the United States. In these different areas he recorded as a studio musician and contributed to the soundtracks of major films. In 1989, he made his home in Rio de Janeiro. He continued to record regularly in the 1990s, and in 2000 he passed away in his home town at the age of 63.

Baden Powell’s brilliance can be seen in both his compositional work and his accomplishments in the recording studio. Retrato Brasileiro appears in the first volume of a four-LP collection of improvised samba, jazz, Brazilian songs, and solo pieces. Volume 1, titled L’âme de Baden Powell, was recorded and finished in a two-day session in Paris during 1972. Baden did not use his own guitar but instead borrowed an instrument from Maurice Coulas who was also in the studio. In the recordings, Baden presented eight new compositions, one of them being Retrato Brasileiro. This piece has become standard repertoire for guitar players today.
“Retrato” means “to portray,” or “portrait.” *Retrato Brasileiro* was written to portray the emotions and the life of Brazil. There are two sections that are both played twice (AABB). The first section can be viewed as Powell’s longing for his home or his memory of Brazil’s beauty. The ending of this section sounds unresolved (a harmony that is unfinished). The second section brings out the warmth and happiness of Brazil. The piece is both light in mood and carefree in rhythm, creating a sense of relaxation. The rhythm moves like the swells of the ocean, and Powell performs glissandos (continuous slides upward or downward between notes) in the middle section at the highest points of the phrase. The glissandos might portray the sliding steps seen in Brazilian dance. The musical highlight of this piece is the middle section. It is in a major key, slightly faster, and contains slight variations of rhythm and large chords that use the open strings on the guitar.

*Cello Suite No. 1 in G, BWV1007, by Johann Sebastian Bach*

Johann Sebastian Bach’s name has been remembered throughout the centuries as one of the most influential persons in the world of music. He was born in Eisenach in 1685 but did not have an easy childhood, partially because he lost both of his parents at an early age. Although his life as a child was rough, he was able to become the most well known musical figure at the end of the Baroque period. He is remembered for his virtuosity as an organ player, composer, conductor, and teacher. He is also remembered by the various genres of compositions in which he wrote. These include vocal compositions, keyboard works, solo organ pieces, chamber music, orchestral arrangements, cantatas, and suites.

Although Bach was prominently an organ player, he arranged music for other instruments. Bach’s cello suites were written in Cöthen during his experimentation with
instrumental music, referred to today as ‘orchestral,’ ‘chamber,’ and ‘solo.’ The cello suites were written between 1708 and 1723, as sequels to the violin suites. This collection is the most important set of repertoire for the cello today, but they were not always as widely known. The manuscripts were given to his son Philipp Emanuel after Bach’s death and became famous as solo cello music in the Bach revival period. This suite is part one of six unaccompanied cello suites and contains the following dances: Prelude, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Menuet I, Menuet II (Menuet I Da Capo), and Gigue.

“Prelude”

The prelude is exciting, especially after the short pause in the middle of the movement. The melodies build up suspense with the use of repetition and chromaticism (notes outside the main harmony). According to the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, a prelude is a piece of music designed to be played as an introduction to another composition, such as a fugue or suite. The “Prelude” consists of two contrasting sections. The first half is very technical and has a continuous flow of melody in both the high and low register. It ends with a short sustained chord known as a fermata. The “unfinished” harmony at this point leaves the listeners hanging, awaiting for some type of resolution. The second half has long phrases of notes that follow the same patterns, but at a different pitch. The repetition of the open D string on the guitar builds up the suspense in contrast to the surrounding notes. This suspense is finally resolved with the same harmony that was heard at the beginning of the movement, so at last the listeners feel a sense of conclusion.

“Allemande”
Bach’s “Allemande” contains numerous short running figures that wind up the melody like a spring. The Allemande is a slow dance originating from Germany. It is very moderate in tempo and is in 4/4 time. In Bach’s “Allemande,” the rhythms of the right-hand fingers move just like the dance itself, in a slow fashion. The piece has two repeated sections, and during the repeats, the performer adds decorative notes that embellish the score. The highlight of this movement occurs during the modulation to the darker minor mode in the second section. In this key area, the ornaments are presented during areas of dissonance, or tonal instability, which once again builds the suspense before the arrival of consonant (stable) harmonies.

“Courante”

The technique required to perform this piece is comparable to the characteristics of the original dance. The plucking hand dashes across the strings as if it were running, while the left hand glides from high to low melodies. The courante is a 17th-century French dance that required running and gliding steps to an accompaniment in triple time. This dance is fast with a constant shift of melodic interest between the upper and lower voices. The music is all about sequences, or the repetition of a short musical phrase at higher or lower pitches. Sequences make up most of the phrases that are presented in this movement.

“Sarabande”

The “Sarabande” has a melody that is slow and relaxing. It is a great technical contrast to the previous movement, making it much easier to add ornamentation. The sarabande came from Mexico and moved to Spain in the early sixteenth century. Originally it was a wild love dance; Juan de Mariana wrote that a sarabande is “a dance and song, so lascivious in its works, so ugly in its movements, that it is enough to inflame even honest people.” About 1600, the dance calmed down and traveled throughout France and England. Around the same time, it became a
standard dance in the suite. The mordents, a musical ornament consisting of a quick descent to a lower note and an immediate return to the higher note, are the focus of this piece. The use of rapid short notes are of equal importance; they fill in the gaps between leaps in the pitches of the melody.

“Minuet I and II (Da Capo)”

The short sections of these minuets are compelling and challenging, and their brevity makes them the climax of the suite. A “minuet” is a French country dance introduced around 1650 with a choreographed floor-pattern in the shape of a Z or S. These patterns resemble the pulse of three beats, much like the movement the feet would travel if forming a Z or an S on the ground. The first minuet is in a relaxed mood and suggests that more major material is to come, but the second minuet has a different key area, C minor. This key change makes the minuet dances the focal point of the whole suite. The “Da Capo” in the title means that after the “Minuet II” is played, the “Minuet I” is again performed, but without repeated sections.

“Gigue”

This dance is not only familiar to those listening to it, but it is also familiar to the fingers of the performer. The “Gigue” is the finale to the Suite No. 1. It is characterized by fast passages that contains long-short note durations that produce the effect of notes played off of the beat, a device known as syncopation. The gigue evolved from the Irish or English jig, a popular dance of the sixteenth century that was supposed to be comedic. Bach’s “Gigue,” much like the dance, is comedic because of its use of large intervals between the notes and its syncopated rhythms.

Sonata Concertata by Nicolò Paganini
Nicolò Paganini is known for his violin virtuosity. He began touring and giving concerts at the age of twelve, which led to an extensive career throughout Europe. He was born in Genova, Italy, in 1782. Paganini was educated by his father Antonio and studied in Genova. He gave concerts on a small tour with his father in 1798. Along with the tour, his father also forced little Paganini to practice over 10 hours a day. Extensive practice made Nicolò leave for Lucca against his father’s will in 1801. His life consisted of constant travel and performance, and he came to be regarded as the most virtuosic violin player of the romantic era. He was able to sell out any venue wherever he performed. In many situations he would compose a symphony and improvise a solo violin part over the symphony. He preferred not to notate most of these solo arrangements because he thought they would be too hard, even impossible, for anyone else to play. His talents led to the legend that he was possessed by the devil; myth or not, it gave him a lasting reputation.

“Sonata Concertata” was composed while Paganini was experimenting with the guitar during his stay in Lucca. It is reported that he stayed on a farm with a mistress named Emilia de Negro. The suite was written between the years 1801 and 1804 for the violin and guitar. After his return to Genova, Paganini presented the suite for the governor. This suite has been performed by many guitarists and violinists, as well as mandolin players. The word “Concertato” in the title is a term that is connected with various definitions of “contrast” or “rivalry.” The concerto derived from two different Latin roots; concertare, “to fight” or “to contend,” and from conserere, “to join together” or “to unite.” The instruments constantly chase each other in Paganini’s duet.

The first movement, “Allegro spiritoso,” translates to fast with spirit, and the technicality of this piece is outstanding. Paganini’s composition is demanding and rewarding. There are three
different section in this piece. In the first, the melody is passed between both instruments repeatedly. This section is in major and it presents the thematic material that will return at the end of the first movement. The melody in the second section, now in a different key, is also passed between the guitar and the mandolin. It ends with a “kadenz,” or cadenza (a passage of brilliant improvisation) from the guitar. The final section of the first movement returns to similar thematic material as the first section, but this section is shorter and is at a higher pitch.

“Adagio assai espressivo” translates to “slow with much expression,” and the slow dance feeling to the piece is the focal point. We have the sense that the parts are acting together, yet at the same time they carry individual roles. Melodies are imitated back and forth between the two instruments, and are also sounded simultaneously on various occasions. A highlight of this piece is the modulation to a major mode towards the end of the movement. It is completely unexpected and lasts only for a very short duration.

*Electric Counterpoint, Mvt. 1—Fast by Stephen Michael Reich*

Steve Reich, a twentieth-century American composer, is one of the first masters of a repetitive style of music called “minimalism” that emerged in New York in the mid-1960s. Reich was born in New York City in 1936, but his childhood was divided between New York and California due to the divorce of his parents, involving him in long rail journeys. Although he took piano lessons in his boyhood, and studied drumming, his principal focus was philosophy at Cornell University (1953-57). During his education at Cornell, he also attended William Austin’s music course, spanning from Bach to the twentieth century. When Reich returned to New York, he devoted himself to studying composition, first privately with Hall Overton from 1957 to 1958, and then at the Juilliard School during 1958-61. From there he went to Mills College in
California for a masters in composition. He stayed in San Francisco where he composed many famous minimalist pieces. Repetitive, pulse-driven figures have remained a characteristic of his music.

*Electric Counterpoint* has pushed twentieth-century art music into the hands of guitarists. It is the third virtuoso sonata composed by Reich for electric guitar and tape, and was created in 1987 for jazz guitarist Pat Metheny. The suite has been performed by many different solo guitarists and guitar ensembles, including Johnny Greenwood of Radiohead and the guitar ensemble from University of Southern California. The movements are titled “Fast,” “Slow,” and “Fast,” reflecting past suites from the Baroque era.

To perform this piece, either a previously recorded tape can be used or the performer can choose to record the tracks individually. I chose to record each of the ten guitar tracks and four bass guitar tracks to accompany my live guitar. I have also mixed the recordings into a surround-sound setting where a three-dimensional effect will be produced throughout the various tracks. All the sounds you are hearing came from my fingers.

This movement is very minimal in rhythm; however, its dense chords and counterpoint create a sense of flowing in and out of time. “Mvt. 1—Fast” reflects the Baroque-style opening to a suite. The form is binary, consisting of two sections. The elements that make up the first section are the dense pulsating chords and the key changes. There is a one-note repetition pattern within each track. When heard simultaneously, the individual notes combine to build chords. The different notes change at different moments, which produce subtle contrasts between the chord changes. Subsequently, this creates an effect of pulsating chords. The B section begins when a short melodic motif is introduced. The small phrase is repeated instead of the previous one-note repetition in the A section. This section continues to grow in density with the increasing
entrances of additional motifs. After eight different motifs are playing simultaneously, the
pulsating chords reenter in the bass guitar tracks and the lower electric guitar tracks. Like the A
section, this section is divided into three parts, distinguishable by three key areas. The key
changes, or direct modulations, give the piece a sense of rising and falling. Repetitive fast notes
drive the piece, while the volume changes at the entrances and exits of each track, from soft to
loud, and back to soft, direct the music.

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