

Vieux retunes his classical guitar to jazz

Arts Features By Alexander Varty

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Jason Vieux is drawn to the solid melodies of Pat Metheny's music.

As head of the guitar department at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Jason Vieux feels an obligation to represent every aspect of his instrument. And that's why the repertoire he's selected for his upcoming Vancouver concerts reads like a mini survey of the classical guitar's history: he'll tackle some baroque music, give a nod to the Spanish masters of the 19th century, and play a folkloric piece from a rising South American composer. But Vieux is compelled to stretch his artistic

boundaries, and to that end he's also going to present something just a little bit out of the ordinary: his own arrangements of jazz guitarist Pat Metheny's music, in the form of a five-song suite.

Vieux acknowledges that Metheny's exuberant melodies—which Vieux recorded for his 2005 CD, *Images of Metheny*—aren't conventional classical-guitar fare. But he obviously enjoys a challenge.

"The idea isn't about finding common ground between classical and jazz; it's more about combining two things that are very different," he explains from Florida, where he's visiting family. "But Metheny's music, harmonically and melodically, is so solid that it seems you could transform it into any style or genre, so I just went with that."

Vieux—whose five local concerts include four Music in the Morning shows, with a 10:30 a.m. start time, at the Vancouver Academy of Music from Tuesday to next Friday (March 13 to 16), plus a 6:45 p.m. appearance at the Vancouver Art Gallery next Thursday (March 15)—first explored Metheny's music while teaching himself jazz improvisation. And he notes that he was already at work on *Images of Metheny* when the idea for the *Five Songs in Baroque Style* suite fell into place.

"With most of my transcriptions, I was trying to maintain the vibe and feel of the original recordings," he says. "But one night I'd been up late and was just going to bed when suddenly I could 'hear' one of Pat's tunes as sort of like a harpsichord piece, like a gavotte played on the harpsichord. It was his song 'James', which has a kind of Latin, bossa-style beat. And then I kind of heard it as a gigue—the same thing, but in a 6/8 metre.

"By that point I was out of bed," he adds, laughing. "So I stayed up for a couple of hours trying to find four other songs that I could make a little suite out of. It all happened pretty quickly. In a week I had it figured out, and it made a very nice addition to the record."

Lest listeners peg him as a crossover artist, Vieux plans to dedicate his next CD to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. But he's had positive feedback about *Images of Metheny* from the jazz star himself, and if the opportunity to collaborate came up, he wouldn't say no.

"From my end, of course I'd love to," he notes. "He's a very big musical hero of mine."