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The Assads bring much more than a guitar recital to San Francisco Performances

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Clarice Assad between her uncle Odair and her father Sérgio

courtesy of San Francisco Performances

Last night at the SFJAZZ Center, [San Francisco](#)

Performances (SFP) presented the last of the five concerts in their **Guitar Series**, arranged in conjunction with the 35th **Dynamite Guitars** season organized by the Omni Foundation for the Performing Arts. The concert marked the seventh appearance of the duo of the Brazilian-born brothers Sérgio and Odair Assad, who have been playing for SFP since 1992. However, last night also marked the SFP debut of Sérgio's daughter, Clarice Assad, who joined the duo as both vocalist, pianist, and composer.

The overall tone of last night was jazzy, although a few composers from the classical genre were also included. Most notably, the program opened with the first two pieces from Isaac Albéniz' twelve-piece collection for solo piano *Iberia*. Albéniz was a virtuoso pianist and the complexity of the *Iberia* compositions borders on notoriety. That complexity, which has been discussed **elsewhere**, often requires more than the usual two staves. Usually, it involves a "crowd scene" rhetoric, superimposing a large number of activities, some of which often involve guitarists playing their music.

It is therefore a bit ironic that many of Albéniz' evocations of guitar music for the piano should find their way back to actual guitars. Many guitarists have prepared and performed arrangements of some of Albéniz' simpler (at least relatively) pieces; but Sérgio Abreu was the one who took on arranging *Iberia* for two guitars. His ability to sort out the full breadth of Albéniz'

complexity is nothing short of awesome, and the Assad brothers' skill in capturing every detail in Abreu's arrangements made for an arresting opening to an evening that would be filled with a diverse array of technical fireworks. Having launched the first round of those fireworks, they then filled out their opening set with duo performances of short pieces by Astor Piazzolla (Argentinian) and Baden Powell de Aquino (Brazilian).

Clarice then joined her father and uncle to fill out the first half of the evening with four vocal selections. These included Sérgio's composition "Cidade," as well as the lesser-known "Melodia Sentimental" by Heitor Villa-Lobos in an arrangement by Sérgio. Clarice's delivery tends to be understated but with a solid sense of pitch. However, her approach to embellishment involves a rather unique approach to scat that seems to honor roots in both bebop and Brazilian style in equal measure. This set also included an intriguing synthesis of classical and [jazz](#), beginning with a two-guitar arrangement of the E minor prelude from Frédéric Chopin's Opus 28 collection and then shifting into Antônio Carlos Jobim's song "Insensatez" (how insensitive), which uses the harmonic progressions of the Chopin prelude. Sérgio was again responsible for the arrangement, including the synthesis of the two pieces to highlight their "shared root."

Following the intermission, Clarice took a solo set at the piano, still singing and occasionally punctuating her scat with "body music"

percussion. She opened with two songs by Milton Nascimento (“Cravo E Canela” and “Ponta de Areria”), after which she moved on (apparently at Sérgio’s suggestion) to a breezy medley of Jobim tunes. The program then concluded with the trio performing a few of Clarice’s original works. This set began with “The Last Song” (which, as Sérgio observed, was *not* the last piece on the program).

The conclusion was actually a joint effort by Clarice and Sérgio, a three-movement suite entitled *Back to Our Roots*. As one might guess from their last name, those roots extended to Lebanon and Syria, from which Sérgio’s grandfather moved to escape religious persecution. (Things don’t change very much, do they?) For this piece Sérgio shifted over to a sazouki, a “hybrid” instrument based on the rebetika instruments from both Greece (bouzouki) and Turkey (*saz-bozuk*). The opening movement, “Leaving” depicts sailing for Brazil out of Marseille. This is followed by “Nostalgia,” which is highly improvisatory and depicts the problems of adjusting to a new life in an unfamiliar land. Adjustment and optimism are then realized in the final movement, “Hope.” This was definitely the most ambitious piece of the evening; but it was highly satisfying in taking on what amounted to a rather complex topic for “program music.”



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