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One Assad is out, another is in for 9th Tucson Guitar Festival

By Cathalena E. Burch Arizona Daily Star Nov 6, 2017 Updated 24 min ago



Grammy nominated classical guitarist Berta Rojas joins the ninth annual Tucson Guitar Festival.

Jeisson Rodriguez



Berta Rojas plays "Salsa Roja" by Vincent Lindsey-Clark
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The famed Brazilian guitar duo of brothers Odair and Sergio Assad were set to headline the ninth annual International Tucson Guitar Festival this month, but when Odair had to bow out a few weeks ago, festival organizers didn't have to look far for his replacement.

If you go

What: Ninth International Tucson Guitar Festival.

Featuring: Iliana Matos, Berta Rojas, Sérgio Assad and Clarice Assad, and the Beeston Guitar Competition.

Presented by: Tucson Guitar Society and the University of Arizona Fred Fox School of Music.

When: Saturday, Nov. 11 through Sunday, Nov. 19.

Where: Holsclaw Hall at the UA School of Music, southeast corner of East Speedway and North Park Ave.

Schedule and costs:

- Iliana Matos, 7 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 11; \$25, with discounts.
- Beeston Guitar Competition Finals, 4 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 12; \$10.
- Berta Rojas, 7 p.m. Nov. 18; \$30, with discounts.
- Sérgio Assad & Clarice Assa, 1 p.m. Nov. 19; \$30, with discounts.

Tickets: Fine Arts Box Office, tickets.arizona.edu or tucsonguitarsociety.org

Et cetera: Several of the artists will lead free masterclasses at the Slonaker House on the UA campus. The lineup: Matos, from 5 to 8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 13; Sergio Assad, from 5 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 15; Rojas, from 5 to 8 p.m. Nov. 17.

Odair's pianist niece Clarice will join her father Sergio for the festival, which kicks off Saturday, Nov. 11, and runs through Nov. 19.

The Assads from Brazil are on a lineup that celebrates Latin American guitarists. Also set to perform: three-time Grammy-nominated guitarist Berta Rojas from Paraguay and Cuban guitarist Iliana Matos, who opens the festival Saturday with a 7 p.m. concert in Holsclaw Hall on the University of Arizona campus.

The festival marks a Tucson debut for Rojas, the three-time Grammy nominated guitarist who is coming here from Boston, where she teaches classical guitar at the Berklee School of Music. Rojas is working with the school to create a classical guitar program.

"I'm looking forward to Tucson," said Rojas, whose program on Nov. 18 will include works by Argentinian and Paraguayan composers and an English composer. A highlight will likely be the works she performs from fellow Paraguayan Agustín Barrios, whose compositions, she said, draw on influences from western classical music and Latin American folk traditions.

"He was a pioneer of classical guitar in Latin America and he traveled with his guitar to 20 countries in Latin America and captured the rhythm of those countries," she said.

The festival is also a chance for Clarice Assad to return to Tucson after more than a dozen years. The last time she was here was 2004, when the "Assad Family: A Brazilian Songbook" tour played Centennial Hall.

"I cannot believe it's been that long since I was last there. Wow, I am glad that this is being changed now," the 39-year-old wrote in an email last week from Japan.

Assad, who plays piano, sings and composes, said she and her father will pull from their year-old album "Relíquia," which the pair has been touring on this fall. It is the first time father and daughter has toured as a duo.

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“The opportunity to play in Tucson as a duo took me by surprise, but the timing was good for the two of us and I am really happy to be coming back,” she said of the Nov. 19 matinee performance.

Here is the rest of our email conversation with Assad:

The Guitar Society has assembled a pretty enviable cast of Latin American women for this show. Tell me what that means for you and is it often that you get to perform on this sort of lineup?

“How wonderful to see this amazing lineup of women artists and, of course, I am honored to be among them now. Because of my Brazilian background, it is not that uncommon for my music to be presented alongside the music of other Latin American composers or performers, since it works well within the thematic programming. Though people sort of know what to expect, the music from all these places is very different from one another and I often hear from concertgoers that they are pleasantly surprised by the variety in it.”

What can we expect?

“The program we put together has a ton of energy and diversity within the realm of the thematic we are highlighting, which is rooted in the rhythm/dance/musical style called samba. Recently, my dad did an extensive research on this musical genre, among other Brazilian music and rhythms from different parts of the country. It was really incredible and he taught a course at the University of Chicago as a visiting professor. Towards the end of the class he invited me to sing and showcase some of this music in an open lecture in campus. It was very successful so we are now expanding on this idea.”

What sorts of touristy things do you hope to do in Tucson? I'm assuming Sonoran Mexican food here tops your list.

“I definitely will take advantage of the amazing food! What I love the most is the landscape.

There's something really appealing to me about the way it feels and looks. Also I really love the weather, it agrees with me for some unknown reason. I say unknown because I was born in one of the world's most humid spots ever, Rio de Janeiro. All of this to say, I cannot wait to be back and to share the stage with my dad playing this lively music on our first tour ever as a duo."

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