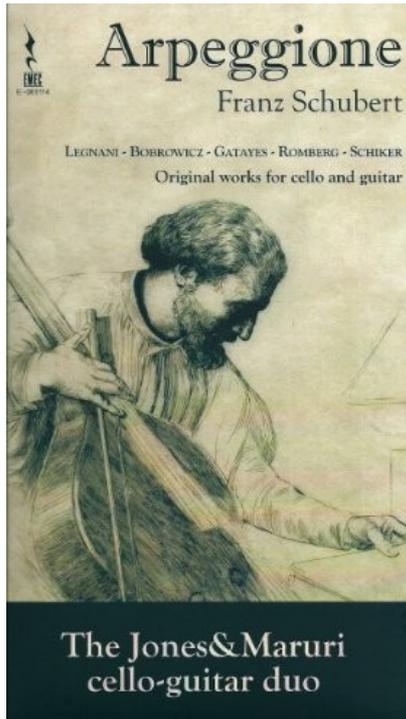


FEATURE REVIEW by [Maria Nockin](#)

ARPEGGIONE—Original Compositions for Cello and Guitar • Jones & Maruri

Cello-Guitar Duo • EMEC 1081/1114 (2 CDs: 113: 40)

SCHUBERT Arpeggione Sonata (arr. A. Maruri). B. ROMBERG Divertimento, op.46. SCHIKER Variations for Cello and Guitar. LEGNANI Introduction and Variations concertantes for Cello and Guitar. Potpourri concertant. BOBROWICZ Souvenir de la Pologne. GATAYES Duo for Guitar and Cello on “D’un bouquet de romarin”



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In 1990 British cellist Michael Jones and Spanish guitarist Agustín Maruri formed their cello and guitar duo. Since then, they have unearthed a great deal of historical repertoire for their instruments and played it in concerts around the world. The original arpeggione was a six-stringed musical instrument, fretted and tuned like a guitar, but bowed like a cello. Created by Viennese guitar maker Johann Georg Stauffer (1778–1853), the shape of the arpeggione was more like a medieval fiddle than either the guitar or cello. For a short time around 1823 it enjoyed popularity and Franz Schubert wrote a sonata for it, which you can hear on this disc. Unfortunately, the work was not published in Schubert’s lifetime, and when it finally was, the instrument had fallen into obscurity. Since the arpeggione was a combination of cello and guitar, the Jones and Maruri Cello-Guitar Duo play it on their individual instruments. It is a perfect piece for them because of its catchy melody and toe-tapping rhythms. Jones and Maruri are accustomed to matching the volume of the cello with the guitar, so that the sound of the latter is never

overpowered. It's not an easy task but they accomplish it gracefully, and the result is very pleasant listening. German cellist Bernhard Romberg (1767–1841) was a composer and musical innovator. Romberg wrote his divertimento for the numerous home musicians of the late-18th and early-19th centuries. The final piece on the first CD is the charming set of variations by Antoine Schiker. He lived from 1790 to 1850 and published this work in Vienna in 1806. Otherwise, we know little about him except that he probably was a master guitarist. Here another master, Agustín Maruri, plays it to enchant 21st-century listeners.

The Introduction and Concert Variations for Cello and Guitar by Luigi Legnani (1790–1877) opens with a long-lined melody similar to those of Vincenzo Bellini. With it, Michael Jones shows his ability to play extended bel canto-type legato phrases. Jones and Maruri have played together for many years and on this recording they seem to breathe as one. They anticipate each other's moves as they make delightful music together. Jan Nepomucen Bobrowicz (1805–1881) describes his Souvenir of Poland as a potpourri that includes a fiery Allegro, a slow movement, an Allegretto for the anniversary of Poland's constitution, an Andantino describing a Lithuanian girl, another Allegretto, and Polish variations. Despite all its references to Poland, Bobrowicz's music bears marked similarities to Western European music of his time. Guillaume Gatayes (1774–1846) called his duo for cello and guitar From a Bouquet of Rosemary, and its musical fragrance makes an excellent finale for this enchanting two-disc set. All of these unfamiliar works are worthy of being heard in today's chamber music concerts. Both the playing and the sound on these discs are first class. I recommend the set to everyone interested in newly unearthed 19th-century music for guitar and cello. Maria Nockin

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.....Michael Kevin Jones's generous tone

The rest of the works heard in this two-disc album, are indeed original compositions for cello and guitar and are thoroughly engrossing. Bernhard Romberg (1767–1841)—not to be confused with the later Sigmund Romberg of operetta fame—was a noted cellist and technical innovator for the instrument. He is credited with lengthening the cello's fingerboard and flattening out the side of it under the C-string to allow greater clearance for the string to vibrate, and he standardized the number of clefs to three (bass, tenor, and treble) in which cello music is notated today. Romberg is also reported to have snubbed Beethoven's offer to write a cello concerto for him on grounds that he only played his own music. I'm sure that went over well.

Romberg's Divertimento on Austrian Folksongs, op. 46, for cello and guitar was first published in 1829, and it's an unusual piece, to say the least. It sounds more or less of its time and place, hewing close to Hummel, Weber, and some of the other early Romantics. But beginning at 4:06 and continuing through 5:08 are passages for the cello that will make you roll on the floor laughing. They're filled with some of the funniest-sounding glissandos you will ever hear, as the cello repeatedly skates up to a high harmonic on the A-string. It's really quite hilarious.

Antoine Schiker (1790–1850) is a composer apparently so obscure he doesn't even have a biographical Wikipedia entry, but imslp.org gives the publication date of the composer's 10 Variations for Cello and Guitar as c. 1806. The album's enclosed program note confirms Schiker's virtual anonymity by saying, "Little or nothing is known of his life and work," and

that's all we're told about him. We don't even know if the variations are based on a theme of Schiker's own invention or if he borrowed it from another composer's work.

By no means is Schiker's 10 Variations an insubstantial piece; it runs for a full 20 minutes. But if Romberg's work sounded more or less contemporary with its time and place, Schiker's work sounds rather retro for 1806, more like something by a fetal Mozart. Still, I would guess from listening to the piece that Schiker had to have been a very proficient cellist (and guitarist too), for he spends much effort exploring the upper reaches of the cello, taking it up to notes that are practically off the end of the fingerboard. Jones, who is a technically adept player, really proves his mettle in this work.

Disc two of this album introduces us to Luigi Legnani (1790–1877). He was an Italian guitarist, composer, and singer, whose vocal talents were apparently cultivated enough to land him roles in operas by Rossini and Donizetti; but the trade by which he became best known later in life was that of luthier of violins and guitars. His "Legnani model" guitar was popular with players through the middle of the 19th century. As a point of historical reference, Legnani was an acquaintance of Johann Georg Stauffer in Vienna, the one and the same Stauffer who masterminded the cello-guitar hybrid known as the arpeggione.

Legnani, the composer, was fairly prolific, leaving a catalog of around 250 works, best known of which was his 36 Caprices for Solo Guitar, most likely modeled after Paganini's 24 Caprices for Solo Violin. Legnani is represented by two works on the program, the Introduction and Variations concertantes and the Potpourri concertant. Unfortunately, the album note provides no real information about either of these pieces, telling us only that they are little known and published only recently. This would seem to suggest that these works have not been previously recorded, but they're not claimed to be world premiere recordings, so I can't say whether this is their first time on disc or not. Both works are of the highly popular "brilliant" salon style of the day which one encounters in the duo works of composers such as Chopin, Spohr, and Paganini, in which potpourris and variations were spun out over opera tunes by Mozart, Rossini, Donizetti, and others.

The remaining two works on disc two are by composers practically as anonymous as Schiker—Jan Nepomucen Bobrowicz (1805–1881) and Guillaume-Pierre-Antoine Gatayes (1774–1846). At least Bobrowicz has a biographical entry on Wikipedia. A Polish virtuoso guitarist, he was dubbed the "Chopin of the guitar." He also worked as an editor for the publishing firm of Breitkopf & Härtel, and later founded his own publishing firm which published hundreds of titles, mainly in Polish. At a very young age, Bobrowicz was sent to study in Vienna until he turned 15, and it was during this time that he took guitar lessons from the famous guitarist Mauro Giuliani. Bobrowicz's interests as an author and linguist may have taken precedence over his dedication to music, for as a composer his output numbers no more than 40 works, almost all of which take the form of variations on popular opera arias of the day. Though his work on this disc is titled Souvenir de la Pologne, it is, like the other pieces on the program, a virtuosic salon-type piece that is variations-based.

An Internet search on Gatayes yielded even less information than it did on Bobrowicz. I had to rely on the booklet note to learn that Gatayes was the illegitimate son of Prince Conti (whoever he was) and that Gatayes studied for an ecclesiastical career. His main claim to fame seems to

be his authorship of the first guitar method to be written by a Frenchman. As a throwaway line, the note tells us that Gatayes “also composed trio, duos, and other chamber works with guitar.”

If I’m being a bit critical of the dearth of information provided by the album notes, it’s only because these are all very enjoyable works, superbly written by composers who were obviously highly talented performing virtuoso cellists and guitarists, and inquiring minds would like to know more about them and their music. I cannot be critical of the playing, however, by cellist Michael Kevin Jones and guitarist Agustín Maruri, whose delectable performances are an absolute delight to the ear. The repertoire of original works for cello and guitar, I’m sure, must be quite limited, as is evidenced by Maruri and Jones digging as deeply as it appears they have in order to unearth these rare gems. This is definitely a disc for all who can appreciate this unusual but lovely sounding combination of instruments.

Jerry Dubins

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