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The West Australian

Review: LA Guitar Quartet Plays Rodrigo

By William Yeoman, November 12, 2012

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Flamenco and Andalusian folk music filled the Perth Concert Hall on Friday night as the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, joined by the WA Symphony Orchestra under Michael Stern, began their first Australian tour with a fiery, melancholic performance of Joaquin Rodrigo's *Concierto Andaluz*.

The evening started with an equally engaging performance of Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite*, the artful simplicity and transparency of the piano duet original preserved in WASO's highly expressive handling of Ravel's luminous orchestration.

Argentine-born composer Osvaldo Golijov's *Sidereus*, an evocation of Galileo's lunar and planetary discoveries after the invention of the telescope, introduced the second half of the program by opening up vast musical vistas in a relatively short space.

It made an ideal introduction to Stravinsky's 1945 suite derived from his ballet *The Firebird*, which later put his name on the musical map when it was premiered by the Ballets Russes in 1910.

Throughout, WASO, under Stern's alert, flexible conducting, animated Stravinsky's dynamic, colourful score which owes so much to the music of his former teacher, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

Los Angeles Guitar Quartet

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But it was the *Concierto Andaluz*, which came after Ravel's Mother Goose suite, which was the highlight of the evening.

Written in 1967 for the legendary father-and-sons guitar quartet Los Romeros, Rodrigo's extraordinary concerto draws on the music of the Romeros' native Andalusia to create a musical triptych in which the rhythms of the bolero, the sevillana, the zapateado and other Spanish dances flare out in skeins of muscular strumming, filigree scale passages and darker, heartfelt melodies redolent of the cante hondo, the deep song, of flamenco.

The LA Guitar Quartet - John Dearman, Matthew Greif, William Kanengiser and Scott Tennant - studied with Los Romeros and can lay claim to a certain authority when it comes to this music.

And whether in the tight ensemble strumming and electrifying passagework of the outer movements or the haunting cantabile playing of the central adagio, which recalls the famous slow movement of Rodrigo's more famous Concierto de Aranjuez, they certainly revealed a deep understanding of the music.

But in terms of sheer virtuosity and a demonstration of how four guitars by themselves can give an entire orchestra a run for its money, the LAGQ's encore, the Ritual Fire Dance from Manuel de Falla's ballet Love the Magician, made an unequivocal statement: this is the best guitar quartet in the world.

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