Maurice Ohana and the Guitar: From Spanish Inspiration to a Universal Message

Moroccan-born Anglo-French composer Maurice Ohana (1913–1992) wrote haunting, unique works for the guitar. Although Ohana is perhaps best known for his *Tiento* (1957) and his guitar concerto *Tres Gráficos* (1950-57), the whole of Ohana’s significant contribution to the guitar literature has been increasingly valued since Ohana’s death in 1992.

Ohana’s rich cultural origins and diverse sources of inspiration are little-known, and they are key to understanding and appreciating his music. Therefore, I will begin my talk by touching on Ohana’s biography and aesthetics. Then, I will describe Ohana’s three main stylistic periods—the first, motivated by flamenco (*Tiento, Tres Gráficos*), the transition, inspired by Debussy (*Si le jour paraît …*), and the final, characterized by Ohana’s mature style and informed by utopian ideals (*Cadran Lunaire, Anonyme 20th century*). I will discuss Ohana’s guitar work in the context of all his musical output and I will talk about his collaboration with guitarists Ramon Cueto, Ramón Montoya, Narciso Yepes, and Abel Carlevaro.

My presentation celebrates the centennial of Ohana’s birth and will feature live performances of his guitar music. In addition, I will show photographs, Ohana’s poetry, autograph drafts, the harpsichord arrangement of *Tiento*, and a video of Abel Carlevaro performing Ohana–Carlevaro’s *Estelas*.

Biography

Isabella Abbonizio is an Italian, New York-based classical guitarist and musicologist. Her passion for music manifested early in life and led her to pursue both instrumental and musicological studies. After graduating in guitar from the G. B. Martini Music Conservatory of Bologna (Italy), and in musicology at the University of Bologna, she received her Ph.D. in musicology at the University of Rome Tor Vergata. She is currently visiting scholar at New York University’s Centre for European and Mediterranean Studies. As guitarist, Isabella studied under Griselda Ponce de León and attended master classes with renowned guitarists Roland Dyens, Frédéric Zigante, Martha Masters, and Joao Luiz. She performs as a soloist and in chamber ensembles, including the Brooklyn Guitar Quartet and Contemporanea Guitar Duo. Her repertoire consists of twentieth and twenty-first century music and she has premiered a number of works for guitar. As a musicologist, her pioneering analysis of the guitar works of Maurice Ohana (1913-1992) was published in the journal *Il Fronimo*. Her current research focuses on twentieth-century Italian and French music, musical exoticism, Italian music and politics, colonial/postcolonial studies, and music education. She has participated in international conferences, including the International Musicological Society (IMS) and the Italian Society of Musicology (SIdM). She has lectured in academic and cultural institutions, including New York University and New York City Classical Guitar Society, and published in international scholarly journals. Currently on the faculty of the Harlem School of the Arts, Isabella is also a professional music and guitar teacher with more than ten years of public and private school experience in Italy and the U.S.A. A guitar promoter, she is the North American correspondent for the Italian guitar magazine *GuitArt*, as well as co-founder and artistic director of Lanciano International Guitar Seminars.

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