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Faculty Tuesdays

A Wondering Guitar

Nicolò Spera, classical guitar

Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2026, 7:30 p.m.

Grusin Music Hall

Program

Canto

Roxanna Panufnik (b. 1968)

The Book of Trees

Lorenzo Micheli (b. 1975)

- I. Quaking Aspen
- II. Red Oak
- III. Plains Cottonwood

Cinque Pezzi per l'Intuizione Italiana

Carter Pann (b. 1972)

- I. Vecchia Canzone
- II. Ruote della Gioia
- III. Duetto
- IV. Giorni di Scuola
- V. La Luce di Caravaggio

Capricho Catalán

(from España, Op. 165)

Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909)

Program Notes

Canto

Roxanna Panufnik (b. 1968)

If the transcription process is no different from translating a work of poetry into another language, this piece was translated from viola to guitar by the composer herself with Nicolò Spera's help for reimagining the viola language and the piece's spirit on guitar.

"This piece was commissioned by the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition, for its 2019 contestants. When I discovered that Lionel Tertis was Ashkenazi Jewish, I looked into some Cantorial chants and found this haunting and beautifully ornate *Y'HI ROTZON* ("May it be Thy will"), an invocation for the new month's blessing. I start with the first couple of lines of the original, then elaborate on its elegant figurations and modal language for the rest of the piece. The title evolved out of my admiration for the gorgeously warm 'singing' tone of the viola and was endorsed by my discovery that Tertis's father was a cantor at Princess Street Synagogue in Stepney."

Program note by Roxanna Panufnik

The Book of Trees

Lorenzo Micheli (b. 1975)

Composed in spring 2026, *The Book of Trees* was commissioned by the University of Colorado Boulder and is dedicated to Nicolò Spera, a courageous champion of the ten-string guitar and its repertoire. The three movements may be paired in different combinations: the work can be performed as a diptych (I-II or II-III), or in its entirety.

An old and precious friendship binds me to Nicolò. This bond has grown stronger over nearly 30 years, despite Nicolò's move from Milan—our home city—to Colorado, and it has always been nourished by many shared affinities, including our mutual love for trees. *The Book of Trees* was born from our conversations on this subject; the musical portraits that make up the piece are inspired by three extraordinary trees of the North American continent.

I wrote *Quaking Aspen* after reading an article about Pando, often called the largest living organism on Earth—a massive colony of aspens in Utah. Aspens often grow in large clonal colonies, meaning an entire grove can share a single underground root system. Like the Pando aspen, the movement is a tangle of ever-shifting roots and branches, yet all share a common and recurring musical DNA that extends “underground” to the other two movements.

Red Oak is a sort of slow and majestic Sarabande, inspired by the enormous Red Oak in Bodega Bay under whose shade Nicolò stopped on a summer afternoon a few years ago while traveling with his children. The piece is built upon a basso ostinato that

sinks its roots into the low C of the ten-string guitar, exploring the resonances of the instrument's last four strings through a series of variations.

In arid environments such as the Great Plains, the *Plains Cottonwood* was historically one of the few large trees present, serving as a crucial landmark for Native Americans. Typically a riparian species, it grows extraordinarily fast along rivers, streams, and wetlands across the central plains of the United States and southern Canada, providing shelter and food for numerous bird and insect species. It is, in short, a tree of great visual and symbolic impact. The score, which contains echoes of Scriabin's music, depicts the life that teems and finds refuge within this majestic, isolated sanctuary.

Program note by Lorenzo Micheli

Cinque Pezzi per l'Intuizione Italiana

Carter Pann (b. 1972)

Commissioned by the Ritter Family and written for Nicolò Spera, this is my first solo work for guitar. I knew immediately that I wanted to write a work without a hint of obscurity or abstraction. My hands have never been close to facile on the instrument, and every musical pathway was going to be challenging—so why not challenge myself and write something Nicolò would love to put his hands to? He is a consummate musician, full of joy, passion, seriousness and a vitality that wants to be omnipresent and always in the moment.

Knowing that I was going to embark on a suite of pieces for my Italian friend, I looked mostly at the music of old Italian and

Spanish composers. Even so, it is difficult to write well for this instrument while it sits in its case in the corner of the room. I needed Nicolò to show me how he plays, up close. Movement five (*La Luce di Caravaggio*) was written first (took a long time), and we sat down to work it out together. He played through the piece, suggesting some edits, always encouraging what my ears wanted. It was this first session that inspired the other four pieces in the suite ... and they were written much faster than this first attempt. Sometimes all you need is that “foot in the door” moment to set you on your way.

We have enjoyed several more sessions working on the suite together. My gratitude swells when I think of how much time Nicolò has put into this first work of mine for guitar. He has made these pieces his own ... and has brought a fluency to the gestures, phrasing, and style which I could not bring to the work were it not for his caring nature.

Thank you, Nicolò. You have turned another composer into a lover of the guitar!

Program note by Carter Pann

Capricho Catalán **(from España, Op. 165)**

Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909)

This recital closes with Isaac Albéniz’s *Capricho Catalán*, originally written for piano in 1890 as the fifth movement of the composer’s six-part suite, *España*. It has become a standard in the classical guitar repertoire, and I first heard this back in my early days as a guitarist on a VHS tape, when Andrés Segovia

performed it as the opening soundtrack in the documentary film *The Song of the Guitar* (1976). I have been in love with this piece ever since, and I am presenting it here for the first time to provide unity to all the works in the program, which want to celebrate the guitar sound-world and its wondering—as in “curious, open to exploring wonders”—nature.

The program I am presenting is then claiming its right to exist simply in the realm of imaginative, evocative music, beyond the constraining label of “new music.” Each work may explore the language of tonal music in different contexts, shifting familiar idioms into non-traditional environments, but its grammar stays familiar and can guide the listener through this exploration of new soundscapes with our beloved companion: a wondering guitar.

Program note by Nicolò Spera

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