

FIU music students exhibit their talent at International Miami GuitART festival



Jay Vanparia/ Staff Writer

The FIU School of Music and CARTA jointly presented the Miami International guitART festival at the Herbert and Nicole Wertheim Performing Arts Center, Feb.24-28. The festival covered concerts, lectures, master classes from internationally renowned artists like John Schneider, Corey Harvin, Zuleida Suarez, Benjamin Verdery, just to name a few. The festival also incorporated a composition competition wherein aspiring musicians were provided with an opportunity to be recognized for their talents.

The tickets for various events were available to the FIU students at a discounted price of \$5 and many students took this opportunity to their advantage and came to witness this spectacular festival.

“Although I have zero knowledge about guitars, I am here to experience something new,” said Bhumi Patel, a first year biological science major, “You never know, if I like this event, I might start learning the guitar.”

A remarkable and innovative Luthiers Expo was also a part of the festival where a variety of hand-built guitars were put on display. The featured luthiers were renowned guitar maker Kenny Hill who received the Industry Leadership award by the Guitar Foundation of America and Amalia Ramirez, the fourth generation of the legendary Spanish guitar maker Jose Ramirez.

The festival participants had a chance to meet the luthiers, try their guitars and even buy one! The Expo was held in the Patricia and Philip Frost Art Museum Café area from February 24th to 28th, 10 am to 5 pm.

The festival saw eminent guitarists from around the world come together and provide a fantastic and euphoric spectacle which surpassed the audience’s expectations. On Feb. 27, the FIU guitar students were given an opportunity to showcase their skills and to sway the audience with their outstanding concert. The concert was conducted by Mesut Ozgen, the Artistic Director and Founder of the festival.

“It is honor and privilege to serve as the Artistic Director of the MGIF inaugural edition, which has been a dream of mine for a long time”, Ozgen said.

The student showcase concert was also aided by Benjamin Verdery, professor of guitar at the Yale University School of Music.

“The students were absolutely flawless in their performance, and it was a great honor for me that I was

invited to be a part of this mind blowing festival,” said Verdery.

The students performed modern guitar masterpieces like “Tantra,” “Mountain Mission,” “Aquarela do Brasil” and “Scenes from Ellis Island.”

Interestingly, composers Carlos Rafael Rivera and Benjamin Verdery of “Tantra” and “Scenes from Ellis Island,” were present. Rivera was invited by Osgen for an impromptu conduction of the masterpiece.

According to Osgen, “Even though the students did not rehearse with Carlos, they did a fantastic job, given the fact that [Rivera] has a really spontaneous style of conducting performances.”

Apart from the orchestra, there were several solo performances by FIU guitar students Carlos Serrano, Roberto Rodriguez and Ari Howard, who brought a fresh perspective to the concert. Moreover, the audience remained glued to their seats during a duet performance with Thomas Caprara and Felipe Carvajal accompanying him with the guitar.

The star of the show, however, was the final performance of “Scenes from the Ellis Island.” That was the only orchestral piece of the concert that made use of the organ, played by Dan Hardin. The performance took a slow tempo in the beginning but it was not long that the players picked up their pace, which gave rise to a spectacular euphoria amongst the audience.

Towards the end, the music stopped dramatically, and that is when Benjamin Verdery himself threw himself on stage with his electric guitar and started playing fusion with the students. This unexpected twist left the audience mesmerized from his high energy and effortlessness.

“To be honest, that surprise was a planned one and I had practiced with the students a couple of times prior to the performance,” admitted Verdery. “However, the students did way better than the practice sessions, and all the credit goes to the enthusiastic and encouraging audience.”

Blown away by the final performance, the audience requested the orchestra to treat them to one more fusion performance. Verdery, Osgen and the students readily agreed and the show ended on a high note!

Such events help the FIU community to be recognized at international levels. The MIGF is yet another feather in the cap of FIU, after the South Beach Wine and Food Festival.