



Thursday October 23, 2025 1:00pm

ARGENTINA GUITAR DUO

Federico Díaz, guitar

Juan Almada, guitar

Cinco Piezas Argentinas (1981)

De la Quebrada

Por el Sur

Pa' la Dorita

Manojito de Amancay

Tientos Cruzados

Remo Pignoni

(1915-1988)

arr. Federico Díaz

Still (2017)

Frederic Hand

(b. 1947)

Odyssey (2002)

Frederic Hand

Suite Caminos (2006)

Carlos Aguirre

Milonga Gris

(b. 1965)

Un pueblo de paso

arr. Federico Díaz

Ráfaga

Vuls a Lais

El Barrio, El Candombe

Please switch off your cell phones and refrain from taking flash pictures.

Music in Midtown is a series of lunchtime concerts spotlighting the highly regarded musical performance program at the CUNY Graduate Center. Presented in the warm, intimate, acoustically rich Elebash Recital Hall, these performances feature the music program's renowned faculty, alumni, outstanding performers selected from students in the D.M.A. program and noted guest artists. Norman Carey is Director and John Musto is Assistant Director.

Notes on the Program

The program presented today reveals a strong connection with an instrument that does not appear on stage: the piano. The opening and closing sets of works—by Argentine composers—are transcriptions of piano music for guitar duo, while the language of the other two featured composers displays a striking affinity with pianistic writing. A further thread that binds the program together is the dialogue among the composers themselves, who, directly or indirectly, drew inspiration from one another.

Remo Pignoni, a folkloric pianist and composer, was born in Rafaela, Argentina's Santa Fé province. Highly respected among his peers for his sophistication as a performer, his significance as a composer is only now beginning to gain wider recognition among classical and popular musicians both in Argentina and abroad. The majority of his output was written for solo piano or for piano and voice, often in collaboration with major poets such as Alfonsina Storni, Armando Tejada Gómez, and Hamlet Lima Quintana. Despite his stature, he left behind only three recordings (1971, 1981, and 1985). The *Cinco Piezas Argentinas*, arranged here for guitar duo by Federico Díaz, are drawn from one of Pignoni's most celebrated albums, *De lo Que Tengo* (1981). These works evoke the harmonic and melodic colors of two principal regions of Argentina. The buoyant rhythms and joyful character of music from the country's northwest are captured in *De la Quebrada, Pa'la Dorita*, and *Tientos Cruzados*, in vivid contrast to the lyricism and gentle atmosphere of the pampas in *Por el Sur* and *Manojito de Amancay*.

At the heart of this program stands the music of Frederic Hand. A lifelong admirer of jazz harmony—especially the work of pianists such as Keith Jarrett—Hand has from early on sought to “translate” the idioms of jazz piano into the unique voice of the guitar. His writing is distinguished by inventive chord voicings, often made possible through his frequent use of drop-D tuning. This tuning allows for resonant bass sonorities built on stacked fifths, giving rise to ambiguous and harmonically rich textures. Hand's approach to form is equally distinctive: rather than returning to a theme in its original guise, his works typically present two or three ideas that undergo continuous transformation, development, and variation.

The two major works presented here, among the most significant that Hand has written for guitar duo, embody these hallmarks of his style. *Still* (2017), dedicated to the Brasil Guitar Duo, unfolds from an opening six-note theme that is developed and revisited at various points throughout the work. On many of these occasions, the theme is followed by a spacious pause that evokes a sense of contemplative stillness. A contrasting second theme, built from simple stepwise motion, had already appeared in Hand's earlier *Chorale* (2013). In *Still*, this melody is subjected to a series of fresh reharmonizations, reflecting the composer's ongoing fascination with its expressive potential. The title thus carries a double meaning: the meditative quiet suggested by the silences within the piece, and the composer's enduring—still—interest in this melodic idea.

Odyssey (2002), composed for the Greek Guitar Duo, was conceived as a musical offering brought by the composer to a festival in Crete. Its title evokes not only Homer's masterpiece, but also the composer's own journey to Greece, as well as the expansive length of the work itself. The first theme, marked by energetic groupings of seven sixteenth notes, bursts forth with vibrant

momentum, while the contrasting second theme, a cantabile melody, passes fluidly between the two guitars. Each reappearance of this melody is transformed by strikingly different accompaniments, creating dramatic shifts in mood and expressive power throughout the work.

Carlos Aguirre is a pianist and composer from Entre Ríos, Argentina, and one of the leading figures in the country's contemporary folkloric music scene. Among his many albums, *Caminos* (2006) stands out as his only solo piano recording. His works for classical guitar include *Suite No. 1* and *Suite Imágenes*, both dedicated to guitarist Eduardo Isaac and inspired in part by Frederic Hand's *Trilogy*, a work Isaac recorded and later shared with Aguirre, sparking the composer's fascination with the guitar's expressive and technical range. Federico Díaz, a student of both Hand and Isaac and a long-time admirer of Aguirre's music, arranged five pieces from *Caminos* for guitar duo under the title ***Suite Caminos***. Although the selected works were not originally conceived as a suite, they form a natural and evocative whole when performed together, highlighting the lyricism and rhythmic vitality that define Aguirre's style.

The first piece of the set, *Milonga Gris*, is perhaps Aguirre's most recognized composition. The rapid sixteenth-note motion evokes the bustling energy of a crowded city street, where the flow of pedestrians resembles the movement of ants. *Un pueblo de paso* ("A Town Passing By") is a gentle 6/8 movement that captures the experience of driving through the countryside and seeing the silhouette of a small town on the horizon. Here, the ostinato figure suggests the horizon line, the high notes imitate church bells, and the melodic phrases trace the contours of trees and rooftops. *Ráfaga* is written as a *chacarera trunca*—an Argentine folk dance—featuring an accompaniment reminiscent of Remo Pignoni's style. Its interlude pays homage to Claude Debussy, inspired by the brief transitional passage before the recapitulation in *Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum* from *Children's Corner*. *Vuls a Luis*—a playful word inversion of "Vals a Luis"—is a slow waltz dedicated to Aguirre's friend Luis Barbiero. The suite and concert conclude with *El Barrio*, *El Candombe*, a celebration of the Afro-Rioplatense *candombe* tradition originating in both Uruguay and Argentina. In this musical tradition, three types of drums—the tambor chico (small drum), tambor piano (bass drum), and tambor repique (improvising drum)—form the rhythmic foundation. In the practice of candombe, neighbors gather on street corners, warming the drumheads over fire before setting out to play and march through the neighborhood. Aguirre's piece masterfully evokes this living tradition, capturing the sensation of the drums approaching, passing by, and fading into the distance, as if one were immersed in a neighborhood where candombe fills the air.

About the Artists

Formed in 2022 by guitarists Juan Almada and Federico Díaz, the **Argentina Guitar Duo** emerged from a profound artistic and personal connection. With a strong commitment to chamber music, the duo brings a fresh and innovative voice to the guitar duo repertoire, blending tradition with new perspectives. In 2024, they embarked on their first European tour, performing in Italy, France, Belgium, and Germany, and serving as jurors at the 10th International Hannabach Guitar Competition in Augsburg. Their second European tour followed in May 2025, with performances at the Ljubljana Guitar Festival (Slovenia) and in major cities across Italy and Spain. The duo's upcoming projects include a North American and European tour in the fall of 2025, featuring appearances at leading festivals and concert series such as the 22nd Miguel Llobet International Guitar Competition (Barcelona, Spain) and the 15th Latin American Week (Frankfurt am Main, Germany), among others. In 2026, they will release their debut album, featuring works by Frederic Hand, Carlos Aguirre, and Remo Pignoni.

Born in Mendoza, Argentina, and based in New York City, **Federico Díaz** is a versatile guitarist, arranger, and composer whose artistry bridges classical, tango, Argentine folklore, and contemporary music. His collaborations span a wide range of genres and include celebrated musicians such as Philippe Quint, Lionel Cottet, Daniel Binelli, Juan Falú, Silvia Iriondo, and Bruno Cavallaro, among others. Widely recognized for expanding the guitar repertoire, Díaz has premiered numerous works written for him by composers including Frederic Hand, Diego Schissi, Miguel Barreiros, Agustín Castilla Ávila, Andrea Casarrubios, and Matías Tozzola. His performances have taken him to major venues and festivals across North America, Latin America, and Europe, including Lincoln Center (New York), the Kennedy Center (Washington, D.C.), the Irvine Barclay Theatre (Los Angeles), Teatro Solís (Montevideo), Festival Guitarras del Mundo (Argentina), the Laeiszhalle (Hamburg), and the Solitär (Salzburg).

As a soloist, he has appeared with the Polish Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Sopot, Magdeburgische Philharmonie, Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, and Allentown Symphony Orchestra, among others. His recording credits include projects for Sony Classical and Epsa Music, with collaborations alongside Nora Buschmann, Sol Liebeskind, Pablo Lanouguere, Juana Luna, Solange Merdinian, Emilio Teubal, and Emiliano Messiez. In September 2025, Díaz released *Adentro*, an album of his own compositions, which has been met with enthusiastic critical acclaim.

Federico studied at prestigious institutions, including the National University of Cuyo, University Mozarteum Salzburg, Manhattan School of Music, and the Graduate Center CUNY, where he completed the highly selective Doctor of Musical Arts in Performance, classical guitar, in 2021. His former mentors include Eliot Fisk, Ricardo Gallén, David Starobin, and Frederic Hand.

Recognized by audiences and critics as one of the leading Argentine guitarists of his generation, **Juan Almada** has built a distinguished career as a soloist, chamber musician, and educator. He earned his degree in classical guitar at the Faculty of Fine Arts (UNLP) and pursued postgraduate studies in Latin American music under Eduardo Isaac at the Luis Gianneo Conservatory (Mar del Plata). With the support of a National Arts Fund Grant, he studied Baroque repertoire with Miguel de Olaso. Prizewinner in competitions in Spain, Uruguay, and Argentina, Almada performs extensively throughout Latin America and Europe in both solo and chamber settings and is a founding member of the Argentina Guitar Duo.

Equally active as an orchestral musician, Almada frequently appears as guitarist and mandolinist in productions at Buenos Aires's Teatro Colón Opera. He has been invited to festivals worldwide, including the Art Llobet Festival (Barcelona), City of Castalla International Guitar Festival (Spain), Latin American Week (Frankfurt), Hands-On Research Symposium (Aveiro, Portugal), Campo Grande International Guitar Festival (Brazil), Guitar Camp Academy (Colombia), and Rosario University International Guitar Festival (Argentina), among many others. His album *Weiss – Brouwer* received wide critical acclaim: Leo Brouwer himself praised Almada's "surprising technique, sound which achieved all orchestral nuances that reminded me of Julian Bream, and a very solid construction of the whole piece," while Argentina's leading newspaper *Clarín* awarded the highest rating, calling his interpretation of Weiss's Suite "impeccable."

In addition to his international masterclass activity, Almada currently teaches classical guitar at the Faculty of Fine Arts (UNLP) and the Rosario University Music School (UNR). He performs exclusively with Hannabach Strings.