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FEATURE REVIEW by [Maria Nockin](#)

SÁNCHEZ-PORTUGUEZ Guitar Sonata. Interfase a 4. Trazos. 4 piezas para cuatro guitarras. Rondó de vidrio. Pangea1 CASERTA Beauté parfait (arr. Sánchez-Portuguez) • Guido Sánchez-Portuguez, 1Edgar Sequeira, 1Luis Alfredo Sánchez (gtr) • GUIDO SÁNCHEZ-PORTUGUEZ 040232085222 (64:53)

Originally from Costa Rica, Guido Sánchez-Portuguez won the Prize for Best Performance of the Compulsory Work at the JoAnn Falletta International Guitar Concerto Competition in 2008. In 2012, he earned his doctorate from the University of Indiana.

Trazos is the title Sánchez-Portuguez gave this, his first recording of the music he had been composing for the previous 15 years. In the sonata for guitar, composed in 2010, Sánchez-Portuguez mixed some of his older musical inventions with new material as he began with what eventually became the last movement, the fast and furious Toccata. The first movement introduces the guitarist's style and speaks of a lover's touch. The slow, languid second movement, entitled "Mourning," makes me remember sitting under the awning of a Salzburg cafe on a rainy summer day. While the drops fell a few inches away there was time to dream of a life that might have been, if only the dreamer had made better choices. The bright tones of the Toccata bring the dreamer back to reality and to an appreciation of the player's virtuosity.

Sánchez-Portuguez wrote the guitar quartet *Interfase a 4* in 2001 while he was an undergraduate at the University of Costa Rica, and it clearly shows his early burgeoning talent. Inspired by Francis Poulenc's 1960 *Sarabande for Guitar*, Sánchez-Portuguez responds with *Trazos*. His piece captures the spirit of the earlier work and pays exquisite homage to the French composer while exploring a plethora of the instrument's tonal and rhythmic qualities.

Sánchez-Portuguez wrote every piece on the disc except *Beauté Parfaite*, a work by the late 14th-early 15th-century Italian monk Anthonello da Caserta. At the mid-point on this recording, the guitarist varies the style of the music with his arrangement of the Medieval composer's ballad for guitar trio. *Cuatro piezas para cuatro guitarras* (Four Pieces for Four Guitars) again shows Sánchez-Portuguez's compositional ability, and its movements provide the listener with delightfully varied musical selections. After an introduction, the composer provides a charming waltz that invites the casual listener to get up and dance. He follows that with a heart-rending lament, and brings the piece to a close with a contrapuntal tour of varied musical landscapes. *Rondó de vidrio* (Glass Rondo) is another of Sánchez-Portuguez's early works, but in 2000 he was writing for solo guitar. I love the elegiac quality of both his writing and his tones. He is a most romantic artist who can evoke strong emotions from his audience.

The finale on this recording, *Pangea*, describes a supercontinent that existed during the late Paleozoic and early Mesozoic eras. The music was originally to be part of a suite about continental drift. As a trio, it's still an outstanding work of art. Here, Sánchez-Portuguez, the virtuoso who plays all the other guitar parts on this CD with gorgeous musical color, joins Luis Alfredo Sánchez and Edgar Sequeira in a thoughtful rendition of this excellent piece. I enjoyed both the compositions and the playing of Guido Sánchez-Portuguez and I think his work will be of interest to other guitar aficionados. Maria Nockin

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GUIDO SANCHEZ-PORTUGUEZ



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FEATURE REVIEW by [Colin Clarke](#)

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The composer performs his own compositions here: Guido Sánchez-Portuguez, in his first release, presents music for solo guitar, guitar trio, and guitar quartet. Documentation on the physical disc is minimal: Notes can be found at GuidoGuitar.com.

The first piece heard is the guitar sonata of 2010. The first movement, “Tiento,” is a sonata form that actually sounds far freer than this formal designation might suggest. Perhaps more successful is the central “Planctus,” inspired by Medieval lament (Sánchez-Portuguez lists Medieval as one of his two big influences, the other being progressive rock). Here, by utilizing themes from the first movement and anticipating the music of the final Toccata, he makes the movement into a sort of pivot. The final Toccata (actually the first music to be written) is another sonata form. The composer’s own description of the final movement is as “virtuoso and aggressive,” but it certainly appears less so on the recording. Its central point of stasis is most appealing, however.

Moving back in time to 2001, *Interfase a 4* was written for a student guitar quartet at the University of Costa Rica. Clearly enjoying the extra polyphonic opportunities allowed by the use of multiple guitars, it is more harmonically adventurous. (The composer describes it as “atonal,” but let that not imply any dryness; his harmonies are actually quite rich and lush.) Sitting in between these two pieces in Sánchez-Portuguez’s timeline, *Trazos* of 2005 (from which piece the disc gets its title) is a reflection on Poulenc’s 1960 *Sarabande* for guitar. Intentionally cast in post-Poulenc mode, it is the most elusive music on the disc so far, containing a hint of French perfume, perhaps. It’s back to the composer’s love for Medieval music, though, for a setting of the Medieval ballade *Beauté parfait*. Brief yet compelling, it is an expert realization, though the only piece on the disc not explicitly by Sánchez-Portuguez.

Again from 2001, the *Cuatro piezas para cuatro guitarras* is an expertly written, enjoyable little suite. An “*Entrada*,” a sort of fanfare opening, leads to a slow “*Al oleo*,” an expertly written cross between a waltz and a *barcarolle*; it is perfectly complemented by the ensuing, gentle “*Ausencia*.” The polymetric counterpoint of the final “*Periplo*” offers the most rewarding listening of the set.

Written for solo guitar, *Rondó de vidrio* (2000) is harmonically one of the most approachable pieces on the disc. Finally, there is the *Pangea* of 1999 for guitar trio, in which again the clear influence of Medieval music can be determined, sometimes morphing into a sort of easy listening.

A fascinating disc, expertly played and recorded. It is available via iTunes, CD Baby, Amazon, and Google Play. Colin Clarke

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Feature Article by [Robert Schulslaper](#)

Brushstrokes: A Conversation with Guitarist/Composer Guido Sánchez-Portuguez

[Trazos](#)

[MP3 Music](#)

[Guido Sánchez-Portuguez](#)

Having played with and arranged for a variety of ensembles over the years, Guido Sanchez-Portuguez felt the time was right for *Trazos*, a CD of his own. We spoke recently about the influences and experiences that contributed to that significant event.

Tell me a little about yourself.

I was born in San José, Costa Rica and lived there until I began my graduate degree in guitar (which at the time, in 2003, wasn't offered in any university in Costa Rica). I was accepted at the Jacobs School of Music in Bloomington, Indiana, where I did my master's and doctoral degrees. I still live and work in the Midwest (currently in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois), and have now been here for 11 years!

I started studying the guitar when I was 15—I told my mom that I wanted to learn how to play the guitar, and she grabbed the yellow pages (this was in 1989). My instructor was mostly a guitarist of popular Latin American music and taught me all the basic chords, strumming patterns, and after a couple of years he introduced me to the world of classical guitar. I was a high school senior when I realized that I wanted to do music professionally. I then auditioned for the University of Costa Rica's School of Music and was accepted in their guitar department, where I did my undergraduate studies.

Why the guitar?

Hands down, the electric guitar is what excited me initially. As a 15-year-old, I spent a lot of my time listening to cassettes and records, and watching MTV (when MTV was about music)—essentially time being mesmerized by bands like Metallica and Megadeth but also soloists like Joe Satriani, Yngwie Malmsteen, and Steve Vai. Eventually, during my first two years of college, my taste shifted into flamenco, although I never really learned to play flamenco properly. That's when I discovered the music of Paco De Lucía, John McLaughlin, and Al Di Meola. From that point on I put the electric guitar aside and completely fell in love with the nylon strings. At the same time this shift in interest took place I was taking my first formal semesters of classical guitar at the university. It would take me a couple more years to make the final transition into classical guitar, but by the time I graduated I had already won the school's student of honor competition three times and made it to the final round of the Leo Brouwer competition in Havana, Cuba.

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Do you play other instruments?

I also play the drums, a legacy from my metal band teens! The band rehearsed at my parents' house, so the drummer always left his drum set there. Needless to say, I practiced as much guitar as I practiced the drums back in those days. I also sing. I've been singing since I was very little, when my parents put me in a choir. As a guitarist I think it's indispensable to be able to sing, although I know that not everybody feels comfortable doing it, especially in public. Since I have played with multiple bands of very diverse genres from rock to bossa nova and from country to salsa, I sometimes do backing vocals and occasionally take the lead. I even produced and directed a CD with the Latin American Popular Music Ensemble from the Jacobs School of Music in which I'm featured as the main singer on two tracks.

Who are some of the people who have helped you to become the musician you are today?

My first guitar teacher was Joaquín Ramírez—he was the guy my mom called when I was 15. He came to my house every week for a 30-minute lesson and is the one responsible for putting the guitar on my lap for the very first time. He also taught me how to read music and prepared me for my undergraduate audition at the University of Costa Rica, which has a pretty solid guitar department. At the time, there were four guitar teachers, and I was assigned to Mario Solera, who became my mentor throughout my entire undergraduate studies. Mario has probably been one of the most influential teachers in my life: he not only worked on my technique but also showed me how to view music critically and analytically. His lessons were full of discussions about history, style, technique, anecdotal stories about pieces and composers—but most importantly, humor. Every lesson, before coming into his studio, I knew that it was going to be a great session, provided I had practiced of course!

Towards the very end of my undergraduate studies I met the Cuban guitarist Jorge Luis Zamora, who relocated to Costa Rica in order to teach there. I studied with him for about two years. His lessons were probably the most intense technical workouts that I ever encountered during my formative years as a classical guitarist. With him I gained the confidence to start doing competitions. Under his guidance, I won the Costa Rican Guitar Competition in 2003.

After that is when I began my master's and doctorate at the Jacobs School of Music. There, I studied with Maestro Ernesto Bitetti, who became a great source of inspiration to me because of what he has achieved in past decades. Coincidentally, the first classical guitar recording I ever owned was a two-CD compilation, *Antología de la guitarra clásica*, by Ernesto Bitetti! It was a gift from my grandmother during my early undergraduate years. Nobody would have suspected that more than 10 years later I was going to be his student!

Bitetti also continued to push me to do more competitions, and in 2008 I won the Best Performance of the Compulsory Work at the JoAnn Falletta International Guitar Concerto Competition. However, competitions have never been something that I have enjoyed doing. What I really love to do is to perform on stage, to reach out to the audience and to share a little knowledge about music and guitar. I'm especially interested in playing my own works, so my programs are usually a mixture of my music and standard classical guitar repertoire.

Did you study composition formally?

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I studied composition during my undergraduate years with Costa Rican composer Luis Diego Herra. When I started my DM at the Jacobs School of Music, my minors were theory and composition, and I studied with Per Martensson, Sven-David Sandstrom, Don Freund, and Gabriela Ortiz. I've also taken lessons with the Cuban composer and guitarist Leo Brouwer, who is one of the great composers for guitar of our time.

In music, "no man is an island": Musicians draw from their surroundings while developing their particular style. What can you tell us about your evolution as a composer?

My first creations were back in the late 1980s when I formed a metal band with my brother. I was 15 years old and completely influenced by the music of the big four thrash bands. I don't know if you can consider these real compositions, but definitely those were the beginnings of my creative output. During those days I was learning how to play the guitar and, at the same time coming up with riffs and putting them together in order to form songs. I think that if it hadn't been for that band and the lessons I learned with it, I wouldn't have decided to study music formally.

After that, I formed Lydian, a group with which I expanded my musical language to include elements of jazz, flamenco, and Latin American music. Harmony and improvisation became a keen focus for me during this time. I would spend countless hours studying new jazz chords and learning all sorts of scales that would go well with them. This was a very important period in my musical life because it also coincided with my early classical training at the university.

Towards the end of my undergraduate studies, I already knew that I wanted to compose as much as perform. Since my earliest compositions, I have been influenced by rock, Latin American folk music, and Medieval counterpoint. I have also studied and analyzed a lot of 20th-century music. I find myself partial to Stravinsky's first period and to the avant-garde compositions of the 1950s and 60s. My music displays elements derived from all these sources, but if there's one element that is ever-present it's rhythmic vitality. Rhythm is for me the most important component of music. I guess that that's my Latin American soul speaking!

I can certainly hear some of that Latin American soul in Trazos, although it's sometimes a subtle presence.

As I've said, with my music, you can always identify three influential elements: rock, Medieval counterpoint, and sometimes Latin American rhythms. The third movement of my sonata has some tinges of three against two polyrhythm in the style of a Costa Rican parrandera or an Argentinean malambo, but the piece that most strongly displays a Latin American musical background is Pangea: Several of its sections feature a 6/8—3/4 metric construction typical of a lot of folkloric music from Mexico to Argentina.

In addition to the three main streams of influence I've mentioned, I've been exploring music from regions that I'm not that familiar with, such as South and Southeast Asia, especially India and Indonesia. There are some really fascinating aspects about those musical traditions that I'm sure will eventually make their way into my own language as a composer.

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Trazos includes four pieces for guitar quartet. How does writing for four guitars compare to writing for a conventional string ensemble?

It's very different. When you write for a guitar quartet there are things you can do that you can't with strings. For instance, you have more harmonic possibilities, as each instrument can play several voices at the same time in the form of chords or counterpoint. With a string quartet, although you can write polyphonically for each instrument, there are limitations, and for the most part you usually write single lines. Another difference is that string instruments can sustain notes indefinitely because of the bowing, which is impossible on the guitar. And there's, of course, the fact that in a guitar quartet all the instruments share the same register, in which case it would be more accurate to compare a guitar quartet to a cello quartet.

Pangea is another of your pieces for multiple guitars.

Pangea was written for Erio, a guitar trio I formed in 1999 with Luis Alfredo Sánchez and Edgar Sequeria: Erio was one of the more exciting projects in my early career as a guitarist/composer. Both Luis Alfredo and Edgar shared the same view of music I had in those days. We had a great connection and the trio was probably one of the most professional chamber groups at the time in Costa Rica. Our rehearsals used to be pretty serious, but funny at the same time. Sometimes we'd start rehearsals on the chalkboard trying to figure out how to put together a complex polyrhythm! Although it was a short-lived project I feel very proud of it, very fortunate to have worked with Luis and Edgar, and very lucky to have recorded four of my pieces with Erio.

We take it for granted that many orchestral composers past and present have been pianists, but there have also been some guitarists among them.

There are a few examples of guitarists writing for orchestra, starting with Fernando Sor and Mauro Giuliani in the early 19th century. Paganini is also an example of this tradition, though his guitar pieces carry considerably less weight than those of his guitarist contemporaries. Berlioz knew how to play the guitar, but the few pieces he wrote are very basic and are intended as studies for beginners. Schubert also played the guitar, and some people even argue that he composed a lot of his music on it! In the 20th century the figures of Villa-Lobos and Brouwer are essential to the guitar concerto repertoire. Although Villa-Lobos only wrote one, Brouwer has been tremendously prolific, having written a great many concerti for guitar and orchestra, usually named after a city. In my case, I wrote a concerto for guitar and small orchestra, which was premiered with me as the soloist in the spring of 2012. I'm currently revising it and I'm planning to finish by the end of the year.

Getting back to Trazos, what does the title mean?

Trazos means "strokes," as in a painter's brushstrokes. I just thought it's a nice single word that sums up what this CD is about.

Although this is the first album devoted primarily to your music, you've played on a number of other CDs in the past.

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I've recorded three CDs with the Orquesta de guitarras of the Universidad de Costa Rica and two with the Orquesta de guitarras de Costa Rica (I was first guitar with both). These were recorded between 1996 and 2001. We toured in many countries: All of Central America, Cuba, Ecuador, the U.S., France, Germany, Austria, The Netherlands, and Switzerland. It was a fun period of my career!

I also did a lot of work for Paisaje Urbano, a CD that I recorded as the director of the Latin American Popular Music Ensemble at the Jacobs School of Music. Almost all of the arrangements are mine and I play on several tracks as well. I even sing on a couple of pieces! I'm extremely proud of that CD and of the work I did with the students of the ensemble.

As I understand it, the Latin American Popular Music Ensemble performs under the auspices of the Latin American Music Center, formerly directed by Carmen-Helena Téllez. I had the pleasure of interviewing her for *Fanfare* not that long ago: It's a small world sometimes....

After a couple of years playing with the Latin American Popular Music Ensemble as a student, I became its main arranger, writing in several styles for a lot of different instrumental combinations. Eventually I became the musical director of the ensemble, working hand in hand with guests of the caliber of Pablo Ziegler (Piazzolla's pianist), Adam Del Monte (one of the most famous flamenco guitarists), and Gonzalo Grau (a Grammy-award winner Latin Jazz pianist and percussionist). I've already told you about Paisaje Urbano [see above] but I also produced a CD with Grammy-award winning singer Sylvia McNair that features several of my arrangements and in which I also play [Romance: A Collection of Latin Love Songs].

It was a very productive time in my musical career. Carmen-Helena Téllez was the director of the Latin American Music Center at the time. It was she who appointed me as the resident arranger and later as the musical director of the LAPME. I'm extremely grateful to her for giving me the opportunity to lead such an outstanding group and for believing in me as a performer, composer, producer, and director.

Are you working on any new CDs?

I'm planning to record a new one this year. I still haven't decided what its contents will be, though. One of the projects could be to release some old recordings of the Erio Guitar Trio. I have three more tracks that we recorded back in 2000 that have never seen the light. I'm also currently working on my Second Guitar Sonata, a guitar octet, and reworking the guitar concerto that I wrote in 2012.

Following the old show business adage that "you should always leave 'em laughing," are there any amusing anecdotes you'd like to share with us?

Here's one for you: The other day I read that by law, musicians will finally be allowed to carry instruments onboard airplanes, provided they fit into the overhead bin. For many years this has been one of the biggest hassles for guitarists around the world—there are lots of horror stories about guitars (and other instruments) shredded to pieces or otherwise destroyed or lost. Once I was flying from San José, Costa Rica to Atlanta. As soon as I starting boarding I was stopped by a flight attendant at the entrance of the plane, and she would not let me go inside unless I checked my guitar. Of course, I was determined not to check the guitar! I basically stood my ground and argued with her for about 10 minutes. A huge line formed behind me and things were getting pretty heated....Finally, and probably because of all the

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fuss, the pilot came out of the cockpit. He looked at me, then looked at the case and asked me to open it. I did, and after he looked at the guitar he said, “It’s okay—I’ll take it with me in the cockpit.” It’s funny that this off-stage moment felt like one of the most rewarding and triumphant in my career. The downside was that the flight attendant wasn’t all that nice to me during the flight to Atlanta!

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Over the last 15 years, Costa Rican guitarist **Guido Sánchez-Portuguez** has established himself as an innovative classical guitarist and composer. His music has been performed by soloists and ensembles around the world. His first solo release, **Trazos**, includes music for solo guitar, guitar trio and guitar quartet. All the pieces in the album are Guido's own compositions with the exception of *Beauté parfaite*, which is a medieval ballade by Anthonello da Caserta adapted by Guido for guitar trio.

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