



2026-2027 International Series

Showcase Concert

Student Performer: Pearl Justin



The 2026-2027 International Series is presented in part with support from
The Roy Minoff Family Fund.

Welcome to a New Season!

We are so excited to be with you again! We kick off our season tonight with our annual Showcase Concert, a true celebration of community featuring hometown heroes. Our International Series continues on October 17 with a return engagement by audience favorite Berta Rojas, playing music of Argentina and her native country, Paraguay. We then continue with four more concerts in early 2027 by artists from China, Slovenia, Poland, Brazil, and England, including the legendary Sergio Assad with his daughter Clarice. Be on the lookout for shows in other genres, including jazz, to be announced soon.

Our most crucial work is in our Education Program, now celebrating a decade and a half of serving youth from the City of Cleveland. We provide exceptional instruction, instruments, sheet music, and more, entirely free of charge. We teach more than 150 students, yet we are continually focused on providing depth. We offer one-on-one lessons to supplement classroom instruction, performances at prestigious places like Severance Music Center and the Cleveland Museum of Art, guitars to take home, and opportunities to work with every touring artist of the International Series. This is what we pour our hearts into, and we are so proud of our students!

Finally, if you play guitar, you will find some great opportunities to perform and learn in our open recitals and guitar orchestras. Please find out more about us and sign up for our email and mailing lists at this show or at cleguitar.org. We can't wait to see you at the beautiful performance by Berta Rojas next month!



Erik Mann
Executive Director



Gabriel Martinez
Board President

2026-2027
International Series



2026 Showcase Concert

Student Performer: Pearl Justin

Saturday, September 19th, 2026
Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center
at Temple-Tifereth Israel

Visit www.cleguitar.org
for more concerts and events

The 2026-2027 International Series is presented in
part with support from The Roy Minoff Family Fund

Cleveland Classical Guitar Society's programming
is made possible by the generous support of:



Showcase Concert

Saturday, September 19th
Maltz Performing Arts Center

Duet 8

Christopher Parkening
(b. 1947)

Pearl Justin

In A Sentimental Mood

Duke Ellington (1899-1974)
(arr. Jason Vieaux)

Invierno Porteño

Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992)
(arr. Assad)

Lucas Chen

Prelude 5

Heitor Villa-Lobos
(1887-1959)

Violin Partita no. 1, B minor, BWV 1002

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

Sarabande

Bouree

Double

Étude 1

Heitor Villa-Lobos

Prelude from Lute Partita, BWV 997

J.S. Bach

Étude 11

Heitor Villa-Lobos

Nathaniel Hill

Sam Hooper and Ed Ridley will perform a mix of blues, blues-rock, and soul.

About the Artists

SAM HOOPER

Sam Hooper is a captivating American musician from Cleveland, Ohio. His alluring blend of blues, rock, jazz, and funk has thrilled audiences in China, Switzerland, Finland, Japan, and the U.S. His soulful vocals have been compared to Otis Redding, and critics have likened his blistering guitar playing to Jimi Hendrix and Carlos Santana.

His band, the Sam Hooper Group, won the 2018 Northeast Ohio Blues Association Blues Challenge and were semifinalists in the 2019 International Blues Challenge in Memphis, TN.

Hearing “Red House” on Jimi Hendrix’s Smash Hits album for the first time was a turning point for Hooper. It piqued his interest to dig deeper, and he began to discover the music’s rich history through records he borrowed from the library. In order to catch the phrasing just right, he would slow down the music of artists like Lightnin’ Hopkins, Lead Belly, Son House, John Lee Hooker, and others. He’d also take empty liquor bottles to the hardware store and have the necks cut off so he could use them to play slide guitar.

Hooper is an experienced educator. Most recently, he joined Roots of American Music in Cleveland as a Teaching Artist. In this position, he leads classes of high school students in writing and performing songs together about diversity and intolerance. He has taught guitar privately for more than 10 years in Cleveland, Boston, Los Angeles, and Shanghai to students from five years old to adults. He also teaches beginning ukulele, piano, and vocal lessons. In Beijing, China, he and his bandmates each conducted master classes at the contemporary music college, Beijing Midi School. In 2009, Hooper served as a music teacher and staff assistant for the Shaker Heights Youth Center’s summer program for elementary students. There, he taught the class songs that they sang together. In 2012, Hooper was a music counselor at New York’s Camp Jam, guiding youth 11-17 years old in writing, recording, and performing their own songs. Sam

is a graduate of Florida's University of Miami School of Music and an alum of Berklee College of Music's Songwriting Program in Boston.

With five CDs released on the FBJoy Records label, Hooper's songs have been heard by millions on the popular daytime TV dramas "All My Children" and "The Young and the Restless."

Hooper's Sam Hooper and Mike Null – "HOODOO BLUES" CD was the winner for 2015 Best Self-produced CD in the Cleveland Blues Society's annual International Blues Challenge competition. On the recording, Hooper and Null give fresh life to treasures by Junior Wells, Albert Collins, ZZ Top, and John Lee Hooker and introduce a new Sam Hooper original. Ted Drozdowski of *Nashville Scene* said of the CD, "Without eschewing the gritty soul of traditional blues, guitarists Hooper and Null break stereotypes by sidestepping standard shuffles and stomps for fresh takes on classic tunes that buoy their sweet molasses vocal performances with jazz informed chord changes, rhythms and melodies. And Hooper's original, 'Itching To Be Your Man,' has the hip, sophisticated vibe of a lost Mose Allison gem."

Hooper and Null met in China in 2010 when Hooper was a special guest, and Null led the house band celebrating the Fifteenth Anniversary of Shanghai's legendary House of Blues and Jazz. A perennial crowd favorite, Sam Hooper Group has performed over 300 shows at the venue.

Sam Hooper Group has opened for American blues greats, Shemekia Copeland, Coco Montoya, Ronnie Earl, Curtis Salgado, Samantha Fish, Matthew Curry, Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson, John Nemeth, Walter Trout, and also for England's Number One Blues Guitarist, Matt Schofield.

The group has showcased at New York City's Soul of the Blues Festival and Alabama's W.C. Handy Music Festival. Sam Hooper Group was a finalist in Boston's "Battle of the Blues Bands." Hooper has toured as a featured performer in Chinese recording artist Zhu Ming Ying's "Dream of an Artist" tour, playing in front of over 84,000 people in 14 cities in China. In 2009, Hooper won the "King of the Blues" competition hosted by Guitar Center's Cerritos, CA store. A documentary of Hooper's musical journey was produced by a Boston-area cable TV provider and can now be enjoyed on YouTube.

After years in Boston and Los Angeles, Hooper returned to his hometown roots in Cleveland seven years ago. He and his new bandmates have been winning over new fans with performances

at popular locations including Nighttown, Beachland Ballroom and Tavern, House of Blues, Bop Stop, Happy Dog at the Euclid Tavern, Hard Rock Rocksino, JACK Thistledown Racino, Music Box Supper Club, The Winchester Music Tavern, internationally renowned Tri-C JazzFest, and on TV's FOX 8 Morning Show.

ED RIDLEY

Well-respected and seasoned, keyboardist Ed Ridley's playing has impacted Northeast Ohio, the U.S., and abroad for more than 35 years. The varied experience of accompanying major artists including Walter Hawkins, Aretha Franklin, Jon Hendricks, Vanessa Rubin, Peter Yarrow, and Lauryn Hill is an excellent example of his versatility.

Ridley has amassed dozens of recording credits, more than 100 professional theater credits, and numerous composer and arranger credits. His world is constantly full of musical adventure. Performer, composer, arranger, producer, conductor, musical director, and educator are all roles that Ridley has maintained consistently throughout his musical career.

NATHANIEL HILL

Nathaniel Hill is a classical guitarist and conductor recognized for his refined artistry, dynamic leadership, and deeply expressive musical voice. He is currently pursuing a Double Graduate Diploma in Guitar Performance and Orchestral Conducting at the Cleveland Institute of Music (CIM), studying with Jason Vieaux and Tito Muñoz. He previously earned his Bachelor of Music in Guitar Performance from CIM under the guidance of Jason Vieaux.

As a guitarist, Hill has established himself as a compelling soloist and collaborative artist, presenting recitals across the U.S. and performing extensively in chamber settings with a wide range of instruments and voice. He was awarded third prize in the Open Division of the Queens International Guitar Competition and has been named CIM's "Most Gifted Classical Guitarist" for five consecutive years. A dedicated advocate for expanding the guitar's role in ensemble music, he regularly performs in duos, trios, quartets, quintets, and mixed-instrument groups.

As a conductor, Hill has built a growing presence on the podium, known for his clarity, musical insight, and collaborative approach. He began his conducting studies under the mentorship of the late

Dwight Oltman and has since worked with distinguished conductors including Darko Butorac, Anthony Parnter, David Chan, Delta David Gier, Miriam Burns, Kathleen Horvath, and Harry Davidson. At CIM, he has conducted a wide range of repertoire, including the Cleveland premiere of Pavel Haas's Suite for Orchestra and Jerod Tate's Woodland Songs.

Bridging the disciplines of performance and conducting, Hill brings a uniquely integrated perspective to music-making—combining technical precision, interpretive depth, and a commitment to expressive, collaborative artistry.

LUCAS CHEN

Yuhao Lucas Chen is a Chinese classical guitarist who began his formal training at age 14 in Shanghai under classical guitarist Fan Ye. He is currently pursuing a double major in Classical Guitar Performance and Music Theory at the Cleveland Institute of Music (CIM), studying guitar under the tutelage of Grammy Award-winning artist Jason Vieaux.

As a performer, Lucas has established himself as an active soloist and collaborative artist, presenting recitals across the United States and China.

On the competition stage, he was awarded First Prize in the Shanghai region of the 2021 Hummingbird Music Competition, and his performance work at CIM has earned him the Rosalia Ablan Memorial Prize in Guitar for two consecutive years (2025–2026). Dedicated to broadening his musical perspective, he regularly engages in both solo and ensemble settings.

Deeply committed to international artistic exchange, Lucas has refined his art in masterclasses led by distinguished classical guitarists and pedagogues, including David Russell, Alvaro Pierri, and Meng Su, among others. Combining performance excellence with a strong foundation in music theory, he brings an integrated and expressive approach to his music-making.

Student Spotlight: Pearl Justin



Pearl began her guitar journey with CCGS just one year ago. Spurred on by a family-wide love of music, she quickly learned the ropes. Pearl is an MVP in her 6th grade ensemble at Buhrer Dual Language Academy. She encourages her classmates, practices hard, and makes everyone laugh with her humor and wit.

Tonight, Pearl will perform “Duet 8” from Christopher Parkening’s Guitar Method. She first heard this piece performed by two older students in February and asked to learn it immediately. The piece is divided into an arpeggiated accompaniment and a beautiful melody in E minor.

Beyond playing guitar, Pearl enjoys acting, gymnastics, soccer, roller coasters, and much much more.

2026-2027

International Series

Tickets On Sale Now!



Berta Rojas
October 17, 2026



TY Zhang
January 16, 2027



Slavic Sessions
February 6, 2027

**Sergio and
Clarice Assad**

March 6, 2027



**Alexandra
Whittingham**

April 17, 2027

Get tickets today!

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cleguitar.org/international-series

All International Series concerts will take place at

Maltz Performing Arts Center

1855 Ansel Rd, Cleveland, OH 44106



Cleveland Guitarist Community

CCGS provides opportunities for guitar players in the Greater Cleveland area to learn, play, perform, and connect with other musicians.



CCGS Guitar Orchestras offer amateur guitarists a chance to experience classical guitar in an ensemble setting. CCGS offers two guitar orchestras, Community Guitar Orchestra and Cleveland Guitar Orchestra, with the latter being the more advanced. Tom Ray directs both orchestras. There is still time to sign up for the fall session. Visit our website or email us at info@cleguitar.org.

Open Recitals provide a fantastic opportunity for guitarists of all ages and skill levels to perform for a supportive audience at no cost. We encourage performers to invite friends and family to attend these recitals. Open Recitals are not intended to be professional performances, but rather opportunities for wonderful, enthusiastic people who love the guitar to gain valuable performance experience. We currently have three recitals scheduled and will add a spring 2027 date soon.

Visit our website for details, including dates, times, and locations cleguitar.org/play.



More Live Music!

We are delighted to have you here for the kickoff of our 2026-2027 International Series, and hope you'll return to Maltz later this season for our other world-class performances

Our International Series remains dedicated to bringing the best classical guitarists from around the globe here to our hometown. In recent years, CCGS has worked with local promoters and venues to present artists of other genres on Cleveland's stages. These concerts have included blistering nights from guitarists like New York jazz player Mark Whitfield, Brazilian virtuoso Diego Figueiredo, a five-guitar octet with Michigan-based guitarist Randy Napoleon, and an evening of solo bebop guitar with Pasquale Grasso.

Stay tuned for more!

Please visit our website to learn more about our International Series artists and for upcoming concert announcements.
cleguitar.org



"The best guitar player I've heard in maybe my entire life is floating around now, Pasquale Grasso," - Pat Metheny

On the evening of July 18th, CCGS joined forces with Jim Wadsworth Productions to present an incredible talent named Pasquale Grasso. The sellout crowd at Market Garden's Irishtown Bend Taproom was treated to two sets of beautiful solo guitar arrangements of bebop-era jazz.



Randy Napoleon brought his Waking Dreams ensemble to Visible Voice Books on May 22nd. This incredible octet featured five guitars and played selections from Randy's 2025 release, a collaboration with composer Gregg Hill titled *Waking Dream*.

CCGS offers life-changing experiences.



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Cultural Arts Center at Disciples Church
Cleveland Heights



Preconcert talk with Kevin McLaughlin, 6:30 pm
HAYDN String Quartet in G major, Op. 76, No. 1
KORNGOLD String Quartet No. 3 in D major, Op. 34
BRAHMS String Quartet in A minor, Op. 51, No. 2

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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3

AWAKENING

Esmail: Testament from Vishwas

Foss: Renaissance Concerto
Anthony Trionfo, flute

Strauss: Metamorphosen



SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7

BECOMING

Fauré: Masques et bergamasques, Op. 112

Hanson: Concerto for Organ, Harp and Strings, Op. 22, No. 3

Jonathan Moyer, organ

Beethoven: Symphony No. 1 in C



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We thank you for your generous support!