**Kithara Duo**

Acclaimed for its “touching musicality, elegant presentation, and seamless coordination” by *Fort-Worth Star-Telegram*, **Kithara Duo** (Olga Amelkina-Vera and Fernand Vera) are celebrating 20 years of playing together. The duo has performed in Europe, South America, and throughout the US since their founding in 2002. Their playing has been described as “state-of-the-art” by *American Record Guide,* which also stated “if you haven’t discovered them, you should.” *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* praised the ensemble for its “admirably seamless level of musicality and technique.”

Kithara Duo’s critically acclaimed debut CD, *Beings*, was released by Soundset Recordings in 2011. The duo is home to an international award-winning composer, Olga Amelkina-Vera, and their first album is a world premiere recording of her music for guitar duo. Olga'sworks have been called “the discovery of the evening” (*Sarasota Herald-Tribune*), “brilliant” (*The Royal Gazette*), “incandescent” and “hypnotic” (*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*). In addition to Olga’s original compositions, Fernand and Olga have contributed to guitar duo repertoire through their arrangements and transcriptions. Their second CD, *Lingua Franca*(2015), features their arrangements of music from the Renaissance to the 20th century. Kithara Duo are currently signed to the LA-based Frameworks Records, and are excited about the recent release of *Ka Ao: Works for Guitar* (2022), an album that features Olga’s recent guitar compositions performed by a star roster of artists, including three tracks recorded by Kithara Duo.

Kithara Duo have been invited to perform and teach at numerous festivals and universities throughout the country, such as the Guitar Foundation of America Convention and Competition, St. Louis Classical Guitar Society Great Artist Series, Utah Classical Guitar Society, Seattle Classic Guitar Society, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Guitar Sarasota, Texas A&M International Guitar Symposium, Florida State University Guitar Festival, and many other venues. Kithara Duo appeared as soloists with New Texas Symphony Orchestra in the world premiere performance of Olga’s original work *Étoiles Par Grand Vent*, which she orchestrated for guitar duo with symphony orchestra. The ensemble enjoys outreach presentations, and has been hailed as “great communicators to both children and adults” (*St. Louis Classical Guitar*).

To learn more about the duo, please visit kitharaduo.com and follow us on Instagram @kitharaduo and on facebook.com/kitharaduo.

**Kithara Duo Press and Reviews:**

This is state-of-the-art duo playing. If you haven’t discovered them, you should.

**American Record Guide**

Their work is outstanding. They have a beautiful sound, a wide range of tone, a subtle and broad control of dynamics, perfect ensemble, and a subtle and expressive phrasing. This is some of the finest guitar duo work I’ve heard since the Assads, and I look forward to hearing more from this pair.

**American Record Guide**

A delightfully diverse program of music…shared with an admirably seamless level of musicality and technique.

**Sarasota Herald-Tribune**

The duo impressed with touching musicality, elegant presentation, and seamless coordination.

**Fort Worth Star-Telegram**

These two put their heart and soul into all they do! Great players, and most importantly, great communicators to both children and adults. You’ll be happy you chose them for your series, master class and outreach events!
**William Ash, St. Louis Classical Guitar**

Kithara Duo performed on the highest artistic level, entertaining and inspiring all.

**Robert Phillips, D.M.A.**

**Guitar Instructor, Harrison School for the Arts**

**Fernand Vera:**

Born in Houston, TX to a French mother and an Ecuadorian father, **Fernand Vera** is an active performer, educator, author, composer/arranger, producer, and electronic musician. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music from the University of St. Thomas in Houston and Masters of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from the University of North Texas.

Since 2012, Fernand has directed the thriving Guitar Studies program at Collin College in Plano, TX. He is the Artistic Director of the annual Collin College Guitar Festival, held each spring semester. As an educator and author, Fernand has written several guitar method books: *The Beginning Guitar Method, Vol. 1*, now in its sixth edition (co-written with Olga Amelkina-Vera), *The Beginning Guitar Method, Vol. 2* for continuing guitar students, and *Guitar Fitness: Technical Studies for the Advancing Guitarist*. These publications are used as guitar studies curriculum at Collin College for class guitar and applied lessons. In addition, he continuously contributes to the guitar ensemble repertoire through his numerous compositions, arrangements, and transcriptions.

Equally comfortable on stage and in the recording studio, Fernand was the producer and recording engineer for Kithara Duo’s critically acclaimed debut CD, *Beings* (Soundset Recordings, 2011) and the group’s second release, *Lingua Franca*(2015)*.*Fernand wasalso a producer for *Ka Ao* (2022),the new album of Olga Amelkina-Vera’s original guitar works for Frameworks Records.

In 2020, Fernand reinvented himself as an electronic musician and producer, and released a debut album of original electronic music, titled *Dappled Shade*, under the stage name *Monsieur Glize*.  Since then, *Monsieur Glize* released eight singles; one of them, *Voyages* (2022) was featured as Song of the Day on Austin’s KUTX 98.9 in June 2022. He continues to release new singles regularly. His music is available on iTunes, Spotify, and all other online platforms. You can follow Monsieur Glize on Instagram @monsieurglize.

**Olga Amelkina-Vera:**

Works of Belarusian-American composer and guitarist **Olga Amelkina-Vera** have been called “the discovery of the evening” (Sarasota Herald-Tribune), “brilliant” (The Royal Gazette), “incandescent” and “hypnotic” (Fort Worth Star Telegram). Olga holds a Bachelor of Arts degree *Summa Cum Laude* from the University of St. Thomas in Houston, a Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees in guitar performance from the University of North Texas, and a Master of Music degree in composition from Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

Her SMU thesis composition, *Submerged Worlds* for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano and

percussion, won the 2017-2018 American Prize in the student instrumental chamber music division. Her comic micro-opera *All That Glitters* won third prize in the theater/film/opera/dance division of the same competition. Olga was chosen by SMU Meadows as the Irving Symphony Orchestra student composer-in-residence for the 2016-2017 season. Her solo guitar work *The Heaven’s Hundred* won third prize in the 2018-2019 American Prize competition in the instrumental chamber music division.

Olga won first prize in the 2013 Japan Guitar Ensemble Composition Competition for her quartet

*Cattywampus Rompus (Texas Tarantella)* and was interviewed by *Gendai Guitar* during her trip to Tokyo.

She was the first prize winner of the Austin Classical Guitar Society Composition Competition in 2009 and

2012 for her guitar quartets *Ninochka* and *Nebulae*. Many of her compositions are published by *Productions d’Oz*, including two works selected for the Frank Koonce Series. Olga’s guitar works are regularly performed and recorded by David Russell, Matt Palmer, Rene Izquierdo, Adam Holzman, Thibaut Garcia, Xavier Jara, Weimar Guitar Quartet, Canadian Guitar Quartet, Kacherski-Morita Duo, Clarinet Meets Guitar, Quattro Palos Guitar Quartet, Kithara Duo, and many other professional and student ensembles and soloists. She enjoys a regular schedule of commissions for new works.

Most recently, Olga collaborated with the Grammy Award-winning classical guitarist David Russell and composed a new solo guitar work *Western Vista*, premiered by David at the University of Texas at Dallas on March 3, 2022 and recorded by him as a YouTube video.

Olga is in high demand as a performer, educator, conductor, and composer, frequently getting invitations to perform solo and with her chamber ensemble Kithara Duo, speak about her compositions, and conduct guitar orchestras throughout the country. Recent engagements include conducting the National Association for Music Education All-National Honors Guitar Ensemble and the Florida Music Educators All-State Guitar Ensemble, presenting her music at the Desert Song Festival in Tucson AZ, adjudicating the Marlowe International Guitar Competition in Washington, D.C., performing and teaching with Kithara Duo during the Utah Classical Guitar Society residency, and performing with Kithara Duo and New Texas Symphony Orchestra for the NTSO 2021-2022 season finale in a commissioned orchestral arrangement of Olga’s work *Étoiles Par Grand Vent*.

Olga is represented by the L.A.-based *Frameworks Records* label, and is excited about the recent release of *Ka Ao: Works for Guitar*, an album exclusively featuring her recent guitar compositions performed by a star roster of artists, available on all online and streaming platforms. Follow her on Instagram @olgaamelkinavera and on facebook.com/olgaamelkinaveracomposer.

**Press and Reviews of Olga’s Compositions:**

On *The Heaven’s Hundred*:

Brilliantly weaving together the sounds of Cossack rural and religious tradition with those of anger, civil disturbance, people’s desperation and the destruction of innocence, this Chaconne-sized piece releases encroaching patterns of chaos which proceed to overwhelm its own underlying structures.

This is a grim metaphor for the plight of the Ukraine.

I also think that what we heard here is the birth of a new major work, important in its way as Picasso’s *Guernica.*

***The Royal Gazette***

Olga Amelkina-Vera, brillante guitariste et compositrice belarusse installée aux Etats-Unis depuis 20 ans, nous offre une ample composition, dont le thème initial, tonal, relève d’une écriture traditionnelle. Les variations qu’il suscite, virtuoses à souhait, font appel aux techniques les plus démonstratives, en plus des ressources naturelles de l’instrument.

***Classiquenews.com***

On *Pulsar*:

Olga Amelkina-Vera composed an amazing piece for the students at Harrison which challenged and excited them equally. Her expert coaching of the ensembles, the insightful thoughts that she shared with our student composers, and her conducting at the concert made for a phenomenal residency.

***Robert Phillips, D.M.A., Guitar Instructor, Harrison School for the Arts***

On *Submerged Worlds*:

In four movements and lasting nearly half an hour, *Submerged Worlds* is a very serious, sophisticated work creating a sound-world of its own. Its length alone shows how well the composer is able to develop and grow her material…Time and time again, the composer shows that beautiful moments need not be fancy or superfluous. One such sublime, highly expressive place occurs in movement 1 (from rehearsal letter B to C). Whenever extended techniques are used, such as in movements 2 and 3, it is always to serve the musical function. Very impressive.

***Helena Michelson, composer, judge for The American Prize***

On *Ode to Thalassa*:

I cannot thank you enough for the amazing piece your delivered both by writing as well as bringing it to life in the premiere performance. *Ode to Thalassa* is a magical work of great power and it shows that by writing it, you poured your utmost creativity into conveying the message of the subject. This piece uses lyricism and drama in an original and vivid way that mesmerizes the players and the listeners and captures their full attention and focuses it on the message of the piece. Various symbolisms of the piece are masterfully portrayed in each section of the piece and they reach directly for the listener’s heart. *Ode to Thalassa* is a piece that leaves a lasting impression on the audience. Olga, you brought the best out of my students in those two days and for you, they rose far beyond their musical comfort zone as the music transformed them to another level altogether. The whole experience was amazing, almost unbelievable.

***Dr. Miroslav Lončar, Park View High School***

On *Emily’s Garden*:

The composer sets these much-loved poems with a sense of lightness and fun. This audible twinkle in the compositional “ear,” and the many changes of meter remind me of the spirit of Barber’s *Hermit Songs*…These art songs…are exquisite and charming settings of lovely verses by “the poet at Amherst.”

***Anne Harley, Scripps College, judge for The American Prize***

*Several works by Olga Amelkina-Vera fill out the disc, and they are a pleasure to hear…Her writing is often pleasantly exotic, perhaps inspired by her Belarussian heritage. Other duos would do well to take note.*

***Soundboard***

*The real discovery of the evening were three original compositions by Olga Amelkina-Vera, who gently stretched the expectations sharing her delightful musical imagination.*

***Sarasota Herald-Tribune***

*Of two recent compositions by Amelkina-Vera, subtle effects defined the three character pieces in “Beings:” the low, menacing huff of the mysterious Minotaur; the harp-like strums of incandescent Sylphs; the hypnotic patterns unraveling across Salamander.*

***Fort Worth Star-Telegram***