

Arizona Daily Star

'String Theory': quantum leap of cello, guitar

By Cathalena Burch | February 12, 2010 | Photo by Wess Gray

What would Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee" sound like interspersed with the Dick Dale version of "Misirlou," performed by a guitar and cello?

Like a sleekly glittering scatter of sonic delight straddling the divide of pop and classical music in a way that seems so natural you wonder why someone had never thought of it before.

A little less obvious relationship is the "mashing," as guitarist Brad Richter and cellist Viktor Uzur call their new musical fascination, of Stevie Wonder's legendary "Superstition" with Kool and the Gang's funk fest "Jungle Boogie" and Spanish composer Albeniz's "Leyenda."



The Richter Uzur Duo's genre-bending new CD "String Theory: Music from Albeniz to Zeppelin for Cello and Guitar" casts those songs in a new and refreshing light.

"We both had a latent fantasy to be rock musicians, so we're sneaking it in," explains Richter, who has lived in Tucson since the late 1990s and tours the world with his classical guitar.

Richter and Uzur have been making music together since 2005, when Richter was commissioned to compose a concert-length chamber piece for Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, where Uzur is a cello professor. "Navigating Lake Bonneville" prominently featured cello and guitar, which led the two to form a musical bond.

The pair have been performing and composing together for the past two years and on Saturday will perform their first-ever Tucson recital.

"I think sonically (guitar and cello) work really well together because they have a similar range but a completely different attack," Richter, a 40-year-old father of two, explained. His guitar takes on the plucky percussion lines while Uzur's cello delivers the long melodic lines, he added.

The two weren't planning to record "String Theory." They were just toying around with "some nice common threads between the music ... just arranging and writing music in the order that it occurred to us. But it naturally fit together."

"I think those first two pieces, the Zeppelin and the Bartók, we were kind of finding our voice and experimenting with those," said Richter, who runs the not-for-profit Lead Guitar, which establishes guitar programs in schools around the country for at-risk youths.

"As each new piece came in, I feel like we are starting to develop our own voice and style, especially when it comes to writing. We spend so much time on those arrangements I think there is a level of complexity to it that often takes the pop motifs to a classical level."