

Italian guitarist enchants with lyrical show

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A great composer from Germany once said that the guitar was an orchestra in miniature. His praise was no exaggeration, because the exoticness exhibited by this captivating instrument is exceptional. With all its limitations -- its pitch range, sound intensity and resonance -- the guitar is in demand for presenting a mesmerizing performance on stage. The praise for the classical guitar came from Ludwig van Beethoven. Although he never composed musical pieces for guitar, his laudatory remark indicates that the guitar is no trivial instrument, and is not to be taken lightly. Alessio Nebiolo, an Italian guitarist, revealed the magic of the classical guitar in a solo recital as part of the Italian Cultural Institute's *The Guitar Maestros* program. The rain-soaked evening of April 26 in no way dampened the enthusiasm of classical guitar buffs who had arrived to the event at Erasmus Huis, South Jakarta. The concert proved the guitar's recognition and appreciation within the capital's classical music scene to a full house. Appearing in a black suit and bow tie, Nebiolo opened his performance with a fine Renaissance piece by Spanish composer Gaspar Sanz, the *Suite Española*, from which he played seven movements. The harmony of guitar compositions typical of the period, dominated by melody and bass, was rendered almost without fault. Nebiolo carried its joyful and lively tone, as well as a firm bass, through the end, perfectly rendering the timbre ornamentation. The guitarist appeared, however, to be adjusting to the Erasmus stage, with hasty shifts between movements that made the transitions barely noticeable, and short notes that were mostly rushed with indistinct breaks. Performing two days earlier in Bandung, Nebiolo did not play according to the published program, replacing a Benjamin Britten piece with Paganini's *Grand Sonata*. A bit calmer, this latter piece seemed to represent a typically Italian mood. Starting with a lyrical and sweet melody, it transformed into cheerful and jubilant music. Sadly, the sound Nebiolo produced was so mild that the audience had to be attentive to its high pitch in order to grasp its mild, soothing effect. Auditorily, this piece seemed more suited to the violin than the guitar -- which is not surprising because Paganini was a leading violinist of his time. Back in Jakarta, Nebiolo performed the creation of Brazilian Heitor Villa-Lobos, who had long resided in France. Villa-Lobos was an intelligent and revolutionary composer, and of his 12 etudes, Nebiolo played etudes No.7 and No.11. In composing these pieces, Villa-Lobos was more obsessed by the movement of his hands and fingers instead of creating conventionally -- that is, musically. His works are often marked by hand or finger shifts without heeding the principle of harmony. But rather than random tinkling, Villa-Lobos' pieces are interesting to follow, simply owing to his use of other shades of musical expression. Nebiolo presented a near-perfect performance of the etudes, interpreting *Etude No.7* into nuances of extreme tension and bewilderment, while *Etude No.11* flowed and fell in a natural fashion -- exactly as Villa-Lobos himself had said: "My music is like a waterfall." After the intermission, J.J. Froberger's *Tombeau sur le most de mousicus* and Dusan Bogdanovic's *Jazz Sonata* were the next compositions worthy of attention. In spite of the less familiar works, the audience remained enraptured. Bogdanovic's piece, a modern creation, offered a lot of surprises. The sound of strings atop the guitar, foot stamping and high tones beyond the normal pitch were rare features of this 1982 piece, and not to be missed. Bogdanovic, who hailed from Yugoslavia, was also known as a jazz and ethnic, besides classical, guitarist. The very popular opus by Isaac Albeniz, *Asturias*, was Nebiolo's encore that evening. Originally a piano piece in G minor, it was later transcribed into a guitar composition in E minor by Francisco Tarrega. Nebiolo began very gently in a moderate tempo, which climbed gradually. The audience seemed to be emotionally suspended as they listened to his musical rendition, which was unlike most guitarists' adrenaline-charged performances. But this difference by no means lessened the audience's rousing ovation in appreciation for Nebiolo's performance. Certainly, many audience members must have gone home with a meaningful impression as conveyed by his enchanting classical guitar performance -- or, as Beethoven put it, an orchestra in miniature.