



ZIGGY AND MILES JOHNSTON BROTHERS

WWW.ZIGGYANDMILES.COM

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Classical Guitar Duo

www.ziggyandmiles.com
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Ziggy +1 (646)-388-4829
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Biography

Short Bio (153 words):

Inspired by the worlds of classical and jazz music, Australian guitar brothers Ziggy and Miles seek to break down barriers between musical genres by highlighting the unique sonorities that each genre brings. Having been playing together since they were very young, they have a unique intimacy that allows them to shift synchronously between genres.

The brothers are considered two of Australia's finest young musicians having each been prizewinners in the country's most prestigious guitar and instrumental competitions. In July 2022, their duo received national recognition with an article in *The Age* (and associated press around the country), an interview on ABC Radio Melbourne, and a sold-out recital in the Melbourne Recital Centre's Primrose Potter Salon with a 4.5-star review. They are continuing their studies at The Juilliard School under Sharon Isbin as Artist Diploma candidates, becoming the first Australians, second guitarists, and first guitar duo in the program's history to be accepted.

Full bio (581 words):

Inspired by the worlds of classical and jazz music, Australian guitar brothers Ziggy and Miles seek to break down barriers between musical genres by highlighting the unique sonorities that each genre brings. Having been playing together since they were very young, they have a unique intimacy that allows them to shift synchronously between genres. Their repertoire mixes the standard classical guitar canon with music from Australia, Spain, Latin America, world music, and jazz-influenced works.

The brothers are considered two of Australia's finest young musicians as both soloists and a duo, with their presentation described in *Limelight Magazine* as "personable, relaxed and utterly winning". In July 2022, their duo received national recognition with an article in *The Age* (and associated press around the country), an interview on ABC Radio Melbourne, and a sold-out recital in the Melbourne Recital Centre's Primrose Potter Salon with a 4.5-star review. They are continuing their studies at The Juilliard School under Sharon Isbin as Artist Diploma candidates, becoming the first Australians, second guitarists, and first guitar duo in the program's history to be accepted.

With over 50 awards between them in guitar competitions and local music Eisteddfods across their home city of Melbourne, Ziggy and Miles proved their artistry as soloists and a duo from a young age. A selection of their accolades include: prize-winners in the Guitar Foundation of America International Ensemble Artists Competition; finalists in the Concert Artists Guild Victor Elmaleh Competition; and prize-winners in the Adelaide International Guitar Festival International Classical Guitar Competition. They have performed concerts across Australia and New Zealand, as well as in New York City, Aspen, and New Hampshire. They have been heard offstage at every kind of event from weddings to corporate function, art galleries, museum exhibition openings, fundraisers for major arts-based non-profit organisations, and federal political parties. Clients of the brothers have included Melbourne Museum, Melbourne Recital Centre, National Gallery of Victoria, and the Supreme Court of Victoria. While completing high school, Ziggy and Miles recorded and self-funded their first CD, *Recollections*, a tribute to the music that inspired them growing up. The CD was produced by Slava Grigoryan, one of Australia's finest musicians and the brothers' guitar hero with whom they had been learning only for a year at the time.

Ziggy and Miles are actively involved in community engagement and have a passion for connecting with audiences of all walks of life in and outside their performances. While undergraduate students, they were featured artists with the Melbourne Recital Centre's Music Always, Victorian Touring, and Regional Masterclasses touring initiatives. Through their involvement in these three initiatives, they

performed and presented masterclasses for communities across their home state of Victoria without access to live performances or high-quality music education. One highlight for the brothers was their two-week Music Always tour. The communities they performed for included aged care facilities, community centres, medical facilities, and psychiatric wards. Ziggy and Miles regard this as one of their most emotionally challenging yet rewarding experience as musicians to date.

During both their master's and Artist Diploma at The Juilliard School, the brothers have been studying under multiple Grammy Award winner, Sharon Isbin. To assist financing their studies they received distinguished awards from Australian Foundations, including the American Australia Association, Ian Potter Cultural Trust, and Phonographic Performance Company of Australia. Ziggy and Miles play guitars by Australian luthiers, Domenic Roscioli and Jim Redgate.

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Sample Program 2023-24

2-hour program with intermission

"The Expressive Harpsichord"

A program featuring arrangements of beloved classical works, reimagined on 2 guitars.

Concerto in D minor, BWV 974

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)
(arr. Ziggy and Miles)

Adagio in G minor

Tomaso Albinoni
(1671-1751)
(arr. Presti/Lagoya)

Sonata in A, K.331

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)
(arr. SoloDuo)

Intermission

The Barber of Seville: Overture

Gioachino Rossini
(1792-1868)
(arr. Mauro Giuliani)

Valses Poeticos

Enrique Granados
(1867-1916)
(arr. Duo Gruber/Maklar)

Suite bergamasque

Prélude
Menuet
Clair de lune
Passepied

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)
(arr. Ziggy and Miles)

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Sample Program 2023-24

1-hour program without intermission

"Down Under"

A program featuring music by Australian composers.

Trin Warren Tam-boore

(commissioned by Ziggy and Miles)

Ken Murray

(b.1968)

Natural Satellite

- i. The Gravitational influence of a Titan
- ii. The moons of Jupiter
- iii. Triton Captured
- iv. Within the Rings of Saturn
- v. Earth's Moon

Steward Greenbaum

(b.1966)

Three Duets

The Mantis and the Moon
Lament
Alchemy

Phillip Houghton

(1954-2017)

Distance

Leonard Grigoryan

(b.1985)

Songs from the Forest

Nigel Westlake

(b.1958)

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Sample Program 2023-24

2-hour program with intermission

"Blurred Lines"

A program of modern works that bend the boundaries between genres and reflects the guitars prevalence across many different genres of contemporary music.

Jongo

Paulo Bellinati
(b.1950)

Tonadilla

- i. Allegretto ma non troppo
- ii. Minueto pomposo
- iii. Allegro vivace

Joaquín Rodrigo
(1901-1999)

Evening Dance

Andrew York
(b.1958)

Notice the Ripples

(commissioned by Ziggy and Miles)

Shelbie Rassler
(b.1997)

Songs from the Forest

Nigel Westlake
(b.1958)

Intermission

Tango Suite

- i. Deciso

Astor Piazzolla
(1921-1992)

Trin Warren Tam-boore

(commissioned by Ziggy and Miles)

Ken Murray
(b.1968)

Medley by The Beatles

Lennon/McCartney
(1960-1970)
(arr. Leo Brouwer)

Distance

Leonard Grigoryan
(b.1985)

Suite Retratos

- i. Pixinguinha (Choro)
- ii. Ernesto Nazareth (Valse)
- iii. Anacleto de Medeiros (Schottisch)
- iv. Chiquinha Gonzaga (Corta Jaca)

Radamés Gnattali
(1906-1988)

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Quotes and Press Reviews

“Their presentation – music interspersed with spoken commentary and self-conscious attempts at a few jokes – is personable, relaxed and utterly winning. I hope that when they return to Australia in two years or so – and return they must! They will be offered national tours and featured festival and orchestral engagements.”

– **Vincent Plush, Limelight Magazine**

“How exciting and stimulating was this passionate and refined recital by guitarists Ziggy & Miles Johnston as they continue to forge a strong, enduring and brilliant career ... Tonight’s sell-out concert was testimony to the high regard and respect for the admirable skills and advanced musicianship of this charismatic partnership.” – **Julie McErlain, Classic Melbourne**

“Their refined, creative artistry and exceptional virtuosity is a joy and inspiration to experience.” – **Classical guitar virtuoso, Sharon Isbin.**

“Their performances are enlivened, musically informed, vigorous, heartfelt, and always wonderfully communicative with their audiences. This duo clearly loves to undertake unusual and fascinating repertoire. They devote themselves to learning it thoroughly and sharing it with everyone in the most generous and musically expressive ways.”

– **Carol Wincenc**

“The Ziggy and Miles Johnston Duo’s performances are notable for their unified ensemble and colorful interpretations. Their rhythmic incisiveness and dramatic flair made for a most lively and enjoyable listening experience. Bravi!” – **Mark Delpiora**

“Extremely high quality and permits the listener to hear clearly how talented these brothers are, and what enormous potential they have for a future in music.”

– **Broadway World, Adelaide**

“A high degree of musicianship and technical ability – qualities the Johnston duo possesses in abundance ... Played with such dexterity, spirit and colour, it was certainly entertaining – as a smiling audience confirmed.” – **Heather Leviston, Classic Melbourne**

Practice makes perfect for Aussie brothers

Nick Miller

There's that old joke about a tourist in New York who asks a passerby how to get to Carnegie Hall, one of the world's most prestigious classical music venues.

"Practise, practise, practise," the local quips.

But if they were really in the know, rather than just a wiseguy, they'd have added that an artist diploma from the city's Juilliard School – the pre-eminent performing arts school, whose alumni have won more than 100 Grammys, 62 Tonys and 16 Pulitzers – couldn't hurt.

And now two Australian brothers are about to make history in that course: they are the second guitarists, and the first guitar duo, to be accepted into a scholarship program that takes on only a handful of the world's best young musicians each year, and rigorously trains them to become even better.

"It's kind of the ultimate educational opportunity," says Ziggy Johnston, 26, the taller – and older by two years – of the pair. Adds Miles: "we can really focus on finding our unique voice as artists."

They're currently back in Melbourne, where they grew up, for a few months before they head back to New York to start the two-year course. They've been living there for a few years doing master's degrees, as soloists, at Juilliard.



Guitar virtuosos Miles and Ziggy (right) Johnston.

After graduating the master's they applied for the artist diploma but only made it to the waitlist, so they spent a year freelancing, "experiencing New York and, because of COVID, having to fight our way through to do anything", says Ziggy. But they learnt a lot more in that year about what they wanted to do: to showcase Australian music, for example (Paul Grabowsky, himself a Juilliard

alumnus, gave them a few tips on their second application).

They asked if they could study as a duo and were told "in theory, yeah", says Miles. The artist diploma program has had two before: piano and violin duos, but both were exceptions that required bureaucratic workarounds in the demanding application process.

For the new course they'll be studying under Sharon Isbin, known

as her generation's pre-eminent classical guitarist, who has several Grammy Awards on the shelf and has, indeed, played Carnegie Hall.

She'll be working with them to create rare new arrangements of works by Bach for two guitars, which they can publish and add to their repertoire.

"There are a lot of composition staff and students at Juilliard and they are all the best in their fields in

the world," says Miles. "So we've been commissioning our fellow students to write pieces for us, and also some of the staff, and we're working on creating repertoire that only we can do."

They'll also be able to take other courses around the school, including drama classes, to make their performances more interactive and engaging. Robin Williams was a Juilliard graduate, points out Ziggy, and on stage "we tell jokes ... well, we try and tell jokes".

The pair were constantly inspired and challenged in their years to date at Juilliard, based at the Lincoln Center, home to the New York City Ballet, Metropolitan Opera, NY Philharmonic and other leading arts companies.

It encouraged collaboration: they put together a performance of *Clair de Lune* with two dancers.

And it encouraged hard work. "There were a few times in my first year, before COVID happened, when I was thinking 'man, why am I practising? I've been practising my arse off for two weeks,'" says Miles. "Then I went and saw one of the drama performances and I was like 'yep, all right, time to practise again'."

"Seeing other artists do their thing at such a high level, it's so inspiring and made me [think] 'all right, let's get back to work.'"

Turns out that wiseguy was right, after all.

This article was featured in The Age and all partnered newspapers nation wide:

- The Sydney Morning Herald
- Brisbane Times
- WAtoday

Johnston Brothers – Australian Rhapsody (Melbourne Recital Centre)



by Vincent Plush on 16 July, 2022

Just over a decade ago a canny entrepreneur hit upon the idea of joining pairs of brothers. The Tawadros brothers (Joseph on oud and James on percussion) were paired with the Grigoryan duo-guitarists, Slava and Leonard. So was born “The Band of Brothers”. Now, there is another pair of brothers to add to that band.

Ziggy and Miles Johnston are Melbourne lads, 26 and 24 years old, and already at the outset of a stellar career as duo-guitarists. Presently based in New York, they have returned briefly to their hometown where they gave a single hour-long and **sold-out performance** in the Primrose Potter Salon of the Melbourne Recital Centre.

The brothers have recently completed Masters degrees at the Juilliard School, studying with Sharon Isbin, widely regarded as the pre-eminent guitarist-teacher in North America today.

A confession. Due to a scheduling mix-up, I had to experience the first half of the concert in the foyer. But I was able to see and hear the two pieces on the monitor screen: Rodrigo’s three-movement *Tonadilla* (1911) and the eight short movements, which make up the *Valses Poéticos* (1886-1894) by Granados.

The Johnstons had entitled their recital *Australian Rhapsody* and I was glad to have experienced their performances of the three Australian pieces in the Salon itself. The brothers say that the *Three Duets* by the late composer-guitarist Phillip Houghton (1954-2017) was one of the first guitar duos they fell in love with and they have been playing it in concerts ever since. (It also features on their first self-released CD album, recorded in Melbourne in 2014.) They certainly delivered the three short character pieces with affection and assurance.

Those same features characterised Leonard Grigoryan’s piece *Distance*, virtually a compendium of contemporary guitar techniques, slides and percussion, and a mix of classical and jazz styles, all in a mere five minutes! This was a piece the brothers say they listened to constantly as children and

teenagers, and illustrates how Leonard and Slava Grigoryan have been their “largest inspiration and musical heroes”.

The last scheduled work on the program was also quite well known to the many guitar aficionados in the audience. Nigel Westlake’s *Songs from the Forest* (1994) was commissioned by Canberra-based guitarist and teacher Tim Kain, and first performed by Kain and John Williams. For several years, Westlake was a member of Williams’ cross-over ensemble Attacca, and he has revised the work for diverse combinations of guitars and percussion. The Johnstons coaxed and teased many colours from their instruments; like the Houghton duets, it exploits the contemporary vocabulary of the guitar to the hilt.

However, it was the encore piece that perhaps left the most lasting impression. There have been countless arrangements of Debussy’s immortal piano piece *Clair de Lune* and this arrangement by the brothers themselves built on existing arrangements by other guitarists, with some input from the eminent Juilliard pianist Jerome Lowenthal. The Johnstons’ arrangement was transfixingly beautiful. I did not miss the resonance of the piano, nor could I quibble with some unfamiliar phrasing. I hope it will become a staple of their performing repertoire and will appear on their next CD.

In two weeks, the brothers will return to New York to continue their studies at Juilliard. They are only the second guitarists and the first guitar duo in the School’s history to be accepted into its prestigious Artist Diploma program.

In performance, the brothers sit facing each other, almost drawing the music from one another, breathing as one, completely focussed and at one with each other’s playing. Like other commentators, I admired their ensemble playing and the subtle shifts from angular articulation to smooth legato dialogues. There are no extraneous foot-tappings or facial grimaces to distract their concentration, nor that of the audience which remained transfixed throughout. Their presentation – music interspersed with spoken commentary and self-conscious attempts at a few jokes – is personable, relaxed and utterly winning.

I hope that when they return to Australia in two years or so – and return they must! They will be offered national tours and featured festival and orchestral engagements. That band of brothers now has a younger generation, one with as much promise and virtuosity as the older siblings.

Vincent Plush reviewed “Australian Rhapsody”, presented by Melbourne Recital Centre and the Johnston Brothers, at the MRC Primrose Potter Salon on July 14, 2022.



As part of the Melbourne Recital Centre's Local Heroes series in the Primrose Potter Salon, guitar duo Ziggy and Miles Johnston presented a selection of popular "Classical Masterpieces" in some exciting arrangements tailored to showcase the virtuosity of both the artists and their instruments.

Who would have thought that an orchestral piece such as Rossini's Overture to *The Barber of Seville* could be brought to life so convincingly by merely two guitars? Italian guitarist, cellist, singer and composer, Mauro Giuliani, the leading guitar virtuoso of the early 19th century, was ideally placed to arrange the opera composer's Overture for maximum effect; in fact, this piece was only one of the many Rossini themes Giuliani arranged for guitar, a practice similar to Liszt's piano arrangements of several Verdi operas. Both composers also assumed a high degree of musicianship and technical ability – qualities the Johnston duo possesses in abundance. Nowadays, there might not be the same motivation of popularising the originals and making them more widely known, but hearing works in a new format brings a refreshing insight into certain aspects of the music. Even though the orchestral version might be playing in the mind's ear, a shift of focus gave new emphasis to various elements. Played with such dexterity, spirit and colour, it was certainly entertaining – as a smiling audience confirmed.

As the winner of the 2018 Classical Guitar Competition in the biennial Adelaide International Guitar Festival, Miles Johnson was presented with a valuable Jim Redgate guitar. A renowned Australian Luthier, Redgate crafts guitars that are visually beautiful and produce a remarkable range of colour. The latter really came to the fore in an arrangement of Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 11 by Lorenzo Micheli and Matteo Mela, a renowned guitar duo who perform around the world as SoloDuo. Years of experience has enabled them to discover the optimum way of transcribing music in a way that works in terms of good taste and playability – notwithstanding the many challenges, of course. The third movement Alla Turca is one of the most popular pieces in the piano repertoire and the Johnston brothers treated its catchy tune with the buoyant fluency and attention to light and shade exhibited by the nimblest pianistic fingers.

Another Micheli and Mela arrangement concluded the set program. Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14 in C sharp minor, or *Moonlight Sonata* as it is popularly known, took tonal colour to a whole new level. It is debatable whether all the subtleties of the Redgate guitar in the hands of Miles Johnston can be fully captured in a recording; it is a very special experience to hear a classical guitar played live with such eloquence. The *Adagio sostenuto* first movement was taken at a moderate pace with considered shaping of the phrases and expressive detail. The final *Presto agitato* was a thrilling display of skill and coordination as running passages were seamlessly shared between the two guitars. Without being unduly laborious, careful tuning was maintained throughout the concert, but playing a superior, super-responsive instrument meant that Miles always had to be alert to matching dynamics. It would have been so easy to dominate the overall sound even though Ziggy produced a captivating mellow sound appropriate to his part.

As an encore, the pair played Julian Bream's arrangement of Boccherini's Introduction and Fandango, blending music often associated with classical guitar with the "Classical Masterpieces" theme. Again, years of playing as a duo, supported by their mentors Slava and Leonard Grigoryan, resulted in a superb display of skill and shared musical intention much appreciated by an enthusiastic audience.

Heather Leviston reviewed "Classical Masterpieces", presented by Melbourne Recital Centre and Ziggy & Miles Johnston, at the MRC Primrose Potter Salon on July 9, 2019.

The Brothers Johnston: Australian Guitar Duo

PIPER STARNES
Festival Focus Writer

On Wednesday, August 18 at 2:30 pm, Australian guitar duo Ziggy and Miles Johnston perform in the free Spotlight Guitar Recital at Harris Concert Hall. Both are in Aspen this summer studying at the Aspen Music Festival and School.

Considered to be among Australia's finest young concert artists, brothers Ziggy, 25, and Miles, 23, have been performing together since they were young children. Growing up on the classic rock and roll of Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, and the Beatles, it was only a matter of time before they picked up the guitar. Their parents, a sound technician dad and music-loving mother, encouraged them to take classical guitar lessons to build their technique and appreciation for the instrument.

Starting small with local concerts in Melbourne, the pair quickly gained attention, eventually performing at national and international venues. "We're experienced in organizing all of our performances because we haven't had the luxury of having a manager. In Australia, pretty much every performance (except two), we've had to organize ourselves, which was a great learning experience," Miles said.

With greater success comes greater responsibility and higher expectations. This led the Johnstons to attend Monash University in Australia and later the Juilliard School in New York, where they completed their master's degrees in June. Due to the pandemic, all but seven months of their Juilliard experience were conducted remotely. Studying under multiple Grammy-winner Sharon Isbin, founding director of the school's guitar department, each week they emailed her practice recordings, to which Isbin would respond with detailed, producer-style score markings and feedback.

As Isbin is also the AMFS's classical guitar director of over 30 years, the Johnstons are excited to continue learning from her this summer, and especially to have an in-person class experience again. Ziggy explains, "Sharon holds her lessons as big master classes, so every guitarist watches everyone's lesson. You learn more that way from watching different people play. Being around the environment with the guitarists and Sharon in this way is going to be very exciting."

Not only is this the Johnstons' first summer in Aspen, but also their first summer at all in two years. Because the seasons are reversed in the Northern and Southern hemispheres, traveling back and forth between New York and Melbourne during the year meant enduring what they say felt like, "a perpetual winter."

As with most siblings, it can be hard at times to get along, but fortunately for the Johnston brothers, they are more supportive of than competitive with each other. "We always try to do what's best for the music, and sometimes we have different views on what that is, so we've worked over time to do that in the healthiest possible manner. Even if we have heated discussions, it's never personal, it's always for the music," Ziggy said.



Australian classical guitarists and AMFS students Ziggy and Miles Johnston perform at a free Spotlight Guitar Recital on Wednesday, August 18.

As they move into the next stage of their careers, Ziggy and Miles look forward to creating long-term performance opportunities for themselves in New York and abroad. Miles concludes, "We're very passionate about playing as soloists and as a duo, and we want to be known as people who can do both. Having that sense of individuality and togetherness makes us stronger."

Last Bell & Brick Winter Concert



Ziggy and Miles Johnston are the featured artists in the Belknap Mill's Bell & Brick Winter Concert Series on Thursday, March 24, 7-8 p.m., on the third floor. For ticket information, visit belknapmill.org or call 603-524-8813. (Courtesy photo)

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Ziggy and Miles Johnston at the Belknap Mill on March 24

LACONIA — Ziggy and Miles Johnston are the last featured artists in the Belknap Mill's Bell & Brick Winter Concert Series, Thursday, March 24 from 7-8 p.m. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. on the Mill's third floor. To ensure a high-quality music experience the Mill will be partnering with John McCarthur of NH Music Collective. Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased online or at the door.

For more ticket information or other Belknap Mill programming visit: www.belknapmill.org or call

603-524-8813.

Although Ziggy and Miles (the Johnston Brothers Classical Guitar Duo) each started learning classical guitar at the ages of 5 and 4½ respectively, they grew up listening to rock and country music and dreaming of becoming rock stars. It wasn't until the age of 15 that they each found their love of classical guitar through the instrument's intimacy and colors, and eventually forged a career performing across Australia.



