

## Review: Alturas Duo

By [Jeanne Claire van Ryzin](#) | Wednesday, October 22, 2008, 11:16 AM

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Austin Chamber Music Center's annual free Hispanic Heritage Month Concert proved to be a jewel Friday Night at Mexic-Arte Museum. The Alturas Duo delighted and enchanted with a program that artfully combined the traditional Andean music that's the Duo's speciality, modern compositions by Chilean composers and also some refreshing new arrangements of Baroque selections as well as an impressive new composition.

The natural affability of violist Carlos Boltes and guitarist Scott Hill set a friendly and spirited tone to the concert, presented in one gallery of Mexic-Arte Museum. The pair did what audiences expect today in an intimate and informal chamber music setting: engage with brief and lively explanations and stories about their repertoire, their journey as musicians, the Andean charangos Boltes plays in addition to the viola.

Of course, their expressive virtuosity also resulted in sparkling concert.

With a flourish Boltes and Hill set the tone with a lively Andean folk songs. Then, flexing their artistic range, the duo presented Hill's arrangement of Telemann's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra that re-imagined for viola and guitar. Not only did the Hill's arrangement breath fresh air into Telemann's sometimes busy Baroque stylings, it also made a salient musicological point: there's much in common between Andean folk music as it's known today and the Baroque influences brought by the European conquerors of the Americas.

"Suite Atacama" proved a highlight of the evening. A thoughtful arrangement of pieces by modern Chilean composers artfully arranged to be a four-movement musical homage to the Chile's stark and starkly beautiful Atacama Desert. An achingly beautiful prelude led to a festive song then to a sorrowful lament and finally softly joyful ending. Boltes switched deftly between viola and various charangos (small Andean guitars). "Suite Atacama" was an trenchant and moving musical journey through the desert.

"No mas muertes" was the concert's undeniable centerpiece. Commissioned by the Alturas Duo, the piece for viola, guitar and narrator by composer David MacBride took the bestseller "The Devil's Highway", Luis Alberto Urrea account of the Mexican immigrants who died in the Arizona desert as the tried to cross the border. MacBride was on hand to introduce the piece and play the part of the narrator. MacBride's music made for a very impressionistic soundscape of a harrowing and tragic journey through the desert, with the tonal tension building and getting increasingly more angular. If the spoken narration resorted to the most gruesome passages from Urrea's account, it only overshadowed whatever more nuanced expression the music conveyed.

Taken as whole, though, Alturas Duo's concert made for an intimate and spirited little tour-de-force — full of resonant moments and many charms.