

**ALEPH GITARRENQUARTETT**

GEORG FREIDRICH HAAS: *Quartet for 4 guitars*.  
 BEAT FURRER: *Fragmentos de un Libro Futuro*.  
 MANUEL HIDALGO: *Kampftanz*. HELMUT OEHRING:  
*Mich.Stille*. MARKUS HECHTLE: *Linie mit Schraffur*.

**Aleph Gitarrenquartett**

NEOS 11208

Bernd Kunzig's lengthy sleeve notes provide extensive background to the composer's works in this album of avant-garde music for guitar quartet. These notes are certainly worth reading through *before* playing the disc as they provide an interesting insight into what the composers are attempting to portray in this, at times, very difficult music. Two other guest musicians take part in the programme, the soprano Petra Hoffmann in the Furrer compositions and clarinetist Ernesto Molinari in the Hechtle one.

All the works date from 2000 to 2007 and incorporate many of the usual suspects of guitar technique employed in this genre of composition: ultra violent plucking, rapid rasqueados, rapid note clusters, dynamic extremes and the like.

A read-through of the liner notes are a *must* before hearing the opening piece by Georg Friedrich Haas as otherwise one could quite rightly conclude that here are four guitarists who have immense intonation problems; however due to the composer's tuning instructions where the third and second strings are tuned, respectively, a little more than a semitone lower and a little more than a semitone higher than the norm, the music is *intended* to sound like this. Strange, that after a while - and this is a long piece - the ear gets used to this 'out-of-tuneness' and one can settle down and get immersed in the music without too much discomfort.

The work by Oehring is scored for guitar quartet and pre-recorded performance CD, a recording which features a female breathless and coughing and where for part of the performance the players play with plastic bags covering their right hands. Sounds silly? Well that's the thought I had until I actually listened to the result and I have to admit that the end product is mesmerizing.

This is a programme of many and varied contrasts from pieces with drive and energy through to moments of extreme serenity but all with a flavour of the unpredictable. The Aleph Gitarrenquartett are on top form throughout and seem to excel in this type of music and are to be congratulated in extending the boundaries of the avant-garde style for guitar.

This is a well-recorded disc with a fascinating, imaginative programme of music, which should be of huge interest to those with a liking for the contemporary repertoire.

Steve Marsh

**BRITISH GUITAR MUSIC**

DOWLAND: *Preludium*. BRITTEN: *Nocturnal after John Dowland Op.70*. BERKELEY: *Four Pieces for Guitar*. FRIPP: *Fracture*. WHETTAM: *Serenade for Cello and Guitar (WW45/5); Guitar Partita (WW57)*. MAXWELL DAVIES: *Farewell to Stromness*.

**Alberto Mesirca with Martin Rummel (cello)**

Paladino Music PMR027 CD

Given the current high quota of live and recorded accounts of the *Nocturnal*, it's tempting to assume it was always thus. But speaking as one who was alive, albeit still in short trousers, at the time of the piece's inception, my own recollections are that non-Bream outings remained relatively infrequent for up to two decades. My first live encounter was an informal performance by an RNCM student at the *Manchester Guitar Circle* in the late 70s. By then, Timothy Walker's recording on *L'Oiseau-Lyre* was available or about to become so. But I'm struggling

to name others released at that time, even though it was now approaching 15 years since both the premiere and the publication of the score. What I'm getting around to is the hypothesis that the *Nocturnal* was tacitly perceived as hallowed Bream turf, and that this situation is still reflected in the number of much later recordings that apparently do little more than attempt to replicate what Bream achieved at Wardour Chapel in September 1966.

So *bravo* to Alberto Mesirca for fielding a *Nocturnal* that, while respectful to all that has gone before, shows no fear of originality. Initially keeping the cards close to his chest, Mesirca steers an established course in the opening variation, marked *Musingly*. But never have I witnessed the ensuing *Very Agitated* unfold with such explosive energy. Likewise the *Uneasy* fourth variation, in which those wide single-string trills are despatched with a rapidity that raises the technical question of whether or not Mesirca really is articulating them with the left hand only. But it's not all flashes and firecrackers, the slower passages being delivered with dignity and restraint, culminating in a slower than average statement of that noble Dowland theme. Utterly compelling from beginning to end.

Elsewhere, Mesirca serves a brace of what are billed as premieres by Graham Whettam (1927-2007), Martin Rummel making his appearance in the *Serenade for Cello and Guitar*. Both this and the *Guitar Partita* are hefty but by no means inaccessible undertakings, the space I've devoted to the *Nocturnal* denying me the pleasure of further elaboration. But I couldn't sign off without welcoming the three-minute excerpt from *Fracture*, which started life as the epic final track on the 1974 *King Crimson* album *Starless and Bible Black*.

If I drop off my perch tomorrow, will someone please see to it that my *Crimson* vinyl goes to Alberto Mesirca?

Paul Fowles

**ITALIAN VIRTUOSI OF THE CHITARRONE**

**Jakob Lindberg (chitarrone)**

BIS-CD-1899

Of the various species of big lute, the chitarrone is perhaps the most visually striking of all. This is admirably displayed in the cover shot of Lindberg brandishing his 15-course chitarrone built in 1979 by Michael Lowe, the neck and second headstock stretching skywards far beyond the reach of any human arm. What I didn't know until reading Lindberg's notes to the present release was that the chitarrone apparently emerged from a series of meetings of Florentine intellectuals that took place in the palace of Count Giovanni de' Bardi during the late 16th century. Although conceived primarily as an accompanying instrument, most specifically for what would become the *stile recitativo*, the chitarrone also acquired a solo repertoire that, although well-documented, nowadays enjoys only occasional outings both live and on disc.

Fielding some 27 titles in all, Lindberg draws on the legacies of three pioneering exponents of whom Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger (c.1580-1651) and Alessandro Piccinini (1566-c.1638) are obvious candidates. The third man, Bellerofonte Castaldi (1581-1649), is presented as a colourful figure who, despite an acknowledged Kapsberger influence, was equally inclined to plough his own furrow, as Lindberg illustrates in citing the title of *Arpeggiato a mio modo*. But does the rich and rotund voice of the chitarrone have sufficient expressive range to hold the listener's attention for a spacious 74'10"?

Well, it has to be conceded that we're not always dealing with the most arresting works of the era, but