

whom Sergio Assad's *Suite Brasileira* is the most beautiful and moving (forgive me, Shade of Villa-Lobos). Its three movements, based on traditional forms, are simply exquisite—alternating intense rhythmic energy with melting lyricism—and magnificently performed. The two Villa-Lobos works were originally for piano (the *Suite Floral* was arranged by Mr Callahan and the Alki Trio) and work well in this transcription. Mauricio Carrilho's clumsily titled *Moarcirsantosiana* are part of a set of 15 works in tribute to the Brazilian popular composer Moarcir Santos. Most were written for winds, but two were for guitar trio, one even written for the Alki. The obligatory Piazzolla work is *Fuga y Miserio*, which pairs an exciting fugue with a more melancholy, if rather brief, closing.

The Alki Trio plays wonderfully here—excellent ensemble, a broad range of color and dynamics, and a tight rhythm, essential in these works. I look forward to hearing more from them.

KEATON

Classical Guitar Favorites

PAGANINI: *Caprice 9; Sonata*; **MENDELSSOHN:** *6 Songs Without Words*; **SCHUBERT:** *6 Lieder*; **VIVALDI:** *2 Concertos, 2 Trio Sonatas*; **BACH:** *Concerto in D minor*; **SOR:** *2 Minuets; 8 Etudes*; **AGUADO:** *Minuet; Andante; 6 Etudes*; **TARREGA:** *14 pieces*
Norbert Kraft, Gerald Garcia, g; Camerata Cassovia/ Peter Breiner

Naxos 503260 [3CD] 212 minutes

This is a Naxos repackaging of three releases from the early 90s. They are still available separately, which is a good thing, because the quality is variable.

First the good: Norbert Kraft's lovely collection of student works for guitar by Sor, Aguado, and Tarrega (553007—69 minutes). Kraft usually presents some of the real powerhouse works of the repertory—the Britten *Nocturnal*, the Castelnuovo-Tedesco *Sonata*—so I was curious how he would handle these miniatures. Beautifully, as it turns out. Everything is tastefully proportioned, beautifully phrased, lovingly presented. Sometimes players will try to imbue these works with greater depth than they possess, to discover hidden secrets and profundities. They're not there. Kraft has just the right balance, nothing overdone. It is wonderful to have these works available for students to hear in fine performances. I reviewed another repackaging from Naxos in the last issue, of the Boccherini quintets. As with that release, no effort was made to update the notes, so there is no mention that Kraft, a few years after this was recorded, became the director of Naxos's guitar releases, and has

American Record Guide

been responsible for many excellent recordings of talented artists.

The releases from Mr Garcia don't hold up. With one exception, they are simply dull, routine, sometimes even clumsy. The baroque disc (550274—75 minutes) is particularly boring—repeated passages are just repeated, the same way, without any attempt to discover new ways to express the music. His tone is dull, his rhythmic and dynamic energy lackluster. The best thing is the Bach D-minor Harpsichord Concerto, but it had the bad luck to show up for review the same issue as Xuefei Yang's magnificent performance of the work (see BACH), which completely outclasses his.

Most of the same problems plague the romantic disc (550296—68 minutes). The Mendelssohn pieces are *Songs Without Words*, after all, and they should *sing!* There is simply no sense of vocal phrasing. The Paganini *Grand Sonata* is one of the clunkiest I've heard.

The exception to all this is the Schubert *Lieder* arranged by Mertz. For whatever reason, Garcia's playing is really lovely here. It's rather understated and a bit monochromatic, but it is lovingly, vocally, phrased, and I quite enjoyed all six. At Naxos prices, it would be worth acquiring for the Schubert alone.

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Klassik Musikfest Muhlviertel

REGONDI: *Introduction & Capriccio*; **PAGANINI:** *Cantabile*; **FALLA:** *Spanish Folk Suite*; **BOCCHERINI:** *Fandango Quintet*
Alberto Mesirca, g; Winfried Rademacher, Rafael Kasprian, v; Manfred Plessi, va; Martin Rummel, vc
Paladino 14—49 minutes

This is clearly a recording of a public performance, as the excessive applause included at the end of each piece reminds us. And without that, the already brief timing would be even less. Still, these performances are filled with the sort of energy, spontaneity, and invention that is too often absent from studio recordings.

Giulio Regondi is an odd composer—he was a child prodigy, apparently the product of an abusive father; and once he came of age, he turned his attentions away from guitar and to a type of accordion. He was a remarkable virtuoso and had a distinct lyric gift. His works often begin with really lovely themes, but as he develops—well, all those rapid passages have to go somewhere, and he tends to overload his works with virtuosic effects. The *Introduzione e Capriccio* is no different. Mesirca has all the technique needed for this work, and his performance is a fine as one can expect.

Next, he is joined by violinist Rademacher for a lovely performance of Paganini's *Cantabile*. This is Paganini the melodist, with-

235

out the excesses that mar Regondi's music (and, to be fair, often Paganini's).

Falla's *Suite Popular Espanol* is an arrangement of his *Siete Canciones Populares Espanolas*, less the 'Seguidilla Murciana'. The notes credit Rummel with the arrangement, though I presume that only means the adaptation for cello, since the guitar part is clearly the Pujol transcription. Regardless, the performance is superb—it crackles with energy when needed and melts with lyricism in the more delicate passages. It's every bit as fine as the performance by Sonidas (M/J 2012), and I prefer the cello to Sonidas's violin.

Boccherini's Fandango Quintet is the most popular of his eight guitar quintets (because it's the most interesting), and Mesirca and friends give it an excellent performance. The players are more energized, and Mesirca better balanced, than Tokos and the Danubius Quartet (also M/J 2012). I still prefer Pepe Romero and the ASMF, but this is nearly in that class.

I called Mesirca's recording of Scarlatti sonatas "particularly wonderful" (S/O 2011). I can say much the same of this one.

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Grandeur of the Baroque

BACH: *Tocatta; 4 Sinfonias*; **HANDEL:** *Suite 7*; **COUPERIN:** *Ordre 26 (excerpts)*; **WEISS:** *Sonata 14*

David Russell, g
Telarc 33223—66 minutes

This is some of the most glorious baroque playing I've ever heard. That it comes from Russell is no surprise—he's been one of the guitar's greatest artists for several decades and shows no sign of flagging.

Back in 1984, I played in one of his master classes at the Toronto Festival. At that festival, American guitarists discovered a German player, Hubert Kappel, brought in to replace Costas Cotsiolis. He astonished us all with his performance and transcription of Bach's sixth partita for harpsichord. Russell opens with the toccata from that transcription, a wildly complex bit of counterpoint and harmonic invention, in an even more beautiful performance than Kappel's. He has developed an especially expressive fingering with some beautiful harp-like effects by setting passages on separate strings.

The remaining works are in Russell's own transcription, and the four sinfonias are amazing—delicate three-part counterpoint, imbued with special lyricism in what could easily have been didactic pedantry.

Both the Handel and the Weiss end with passacaglias that are popular played on their own, so it's nice to hear them in the context of the whole work. It's also nice to hear subtle

differences between the two composers. Handel had already started to assimilate an English lyricism even shortly after he relocated to London, while Weiss's more distinct Germanic character shines through. And the four excerpts form Couperin's 26th suite are just as carefully French in phrasing and tone.

One of the consistent delights of this recording is Russell's crisp and precise ornamentation. It sparkles like inlaid jewelry—mostly executed in cross-string fingering. These performances are all more beautiful than all others.

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Adios mi Amor: Duets

Guerrerro, Victoria, Valderrabano, Josquin, Morales, Mudarra, Gombert, Dalza, Narvaez, Lopez, Mendoza, Morlaye
Jesus Sanchez, Manuel Minguillon Nieto, vihuelas
Brilliant 94302—64 minutes

I had never encountered a large body of music for two vihuelas, and the notes explain why. Only Enriquez de Valdarrabano published any works for the combination. We do have considerable evidence that music was performed by two vihuelas. Sanchez and Nieto follow the practices of improvisation and adaptation that were used in the era.

The *vihuela de mano* is the Spanish counterpart of the lute—it shares the same tuning as the Renaissance lute, but the body is smaller, shaped more like the modern guitar, with a flat back. *De mano* refers to it being plucked by the hand. The *vihuela de arco* was bowed—the ancestor of the *viola da gamba*. Both versions, and the gamba, were fretted and tuned in fourths.

This sound world is a delicate one. The vihuela is even softer than the lute, with a smaller range of colors. But in that range are delicacies and beauties for people willing to listen on an intimate level.

The program is balanced and varied. Along with traditional works by vihuelist composers like Narvaez and Mudarra are arrangements and improvisations based on the greatest composers of the era—Josquin, Victoria, Gombert. It was nice to hear Josquin's 'Mille Regretz' just before Narvaez's elaboration of that chanson, better known as 'Cancion del Emperador'. The performance of Victoria's *O Magnum Mysterium* brought back memories of singing that motet in high school choir. There are works by that most prolific of composers, Anonymous, along with works from barely-known figures (a fantasia attributed to someone named Lopez, about whom nothing else is known).

Delitiae Musicae play with a convincing mastery. Their improvisations are completely idiomatic, their technical command sure, and

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