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A SPARKLING NEW CARNIVAL OF THE ANIMALS • MIDORI AND MARISS JANSONS REVITALISE THE BRUCH AND MENDELSSOHN VIOLIN CONCERTOS • A SECOND DISC FROM VIOLINIST SERGEY KHACHATRYAN • RICHARD HICCOX TRIUMPHS IN BEETHOVEN AND VAUGHAN WILLIAMS • SHOSTAKOVICH AND SHCHEDRIN CONCERTOS FROM MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN • PIERRE-LAURENT AIMARD AND NIKOLAUS HARNONCOURT'S WINNING DVOŘÁK



A welcome journey beyond the Spanish borders with a master guitarist



David Leisner's journey through guitar repertoire has taken him far beyond the Spanish terrain. Here he ventures into Central European works of the first half of the 19th century, exploring music

by two composers who were partial to the instrument. Johann Kaspar Mertz (1806-56) not only wrote superbly for guitar but also evidently played it supremely well. Franz Schubert may not have done either, but the six songs Leisner performs suggest that this composer had a splendid idea of the guitar's intimate capabilities.

Hearing Schubert songs without the texts could have the effect of transforming masterpieces into shallow sonic vessels. No problem. Mertz's arrangements (with editorial touches by Leisner for clarity of voicing and harmony) are deft, balancing what formerly were vocal lines with the accompaniment in a subtle and colourful manner. Even a beloved piece like *Ständchen* loses none of its melancholic beauty in this slightly altered version. Leisner, in any case, is a musician whose sense of line is so expressive that Schubert's phrases are eloquently shaped.

In Leisner's hands, Mertz emerges as a significant musical figure whose ardent and buoyant romanticism suits the guitar beautifully. There are felicities throughout his Op 13 collection *Bardenklänge*, of which Leisner offers five selections, while three other works (*Elegy* and *Le Romantique*, both without opus numbers, and *Hungarian Fantasy*, Op 65, No 1) also are prime examples of Mertz's mastery in the realm of character pieces. Leisner's elegant and invigorating performances should provide a wake-up call for guitarists who want to take their repertoires in new directions – and for listeners eager for a vacation from music of the Iberian peninsula.

Donald Rosenberg

D SCARLATTI

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Keyboard Sonatas – in G, Kk14; in E minor, Kk15; in F sharp minor, Kk25; in B minor, Kk87; in D, Kk177; in D, Kk178; in A, Kk182; in A, Kk208; in A, Kk209; in F minor, Kk238; in F minor, Kk239; in B minor, Kk376; in B minor, Kk408; in G, Kk431; in D, Kk443; in D, Kk492; in D, Kk512; in C, Kk513 (all arr Fisk)

Eliot Fisk *gtr*

VGo Recordings © VG1003 (67 minutes: DDD)

An exciting guitarist willing to let himself go makes this a dazzling Scarlatti recital



A few months back, VGo Recordings released a superb recital of Scarlatti sonatas by Patrice Mathews (US, 6/03), an up-and-coming harpsichordist with a dazzling technique and real theatrical flair. Here it offers another all-Scarlatti programme, this time featuring the well-known guitarist Eliot Fisk.

Like Mathews, Fisk is willing to throw caution to the winds if that's what the music's character demands. He charges through the manic machinations of the Sonata in D, Kk492, for example, with near-reckless abandon. Of course, these sonatas were composed with a keyboard in mind,

and while Fisk's arrangements are as effective as Segovia's, one must assume that they require even more virtuosity than the originals. Perhaps that explains why the playing is not always entirely clean. But how exciting it is. Indeed, though these are studio recordings, one gets the feeling that they are performances in the true sense of the word, and this impression is reinforced by the sound quality, which suggests a small, airy concert hall.

Even the slower, more introspective sonatas seem to have been recorded in the heat of the moment. The meditative melancholy of the Sonata in B minor, Kk87, for instance, seems freshly improvised, though Fisk's *rubato* is not particularly extravagant. I was even more taken by his way with the marvellously inventive Sonata in C, Kk513. Fisk manages to tie its three sections together so that there is a feeling of organic growth from the tentative, whispered opening *Pastorale moderato* to the exuberant final *presto*. It's so surely and compellingly paced that I was happy to overlook a few small technical fumbles near the end. No, this is not 'perfect' playing. It is, however, intelligent and imaginative, and conveys a sense of occasion that rarely comes through so strongly on disc – particularly in such intimate repertory.

Andrew Farach-Colton

SEQUITUR

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'Concertos'

Carter Double Concerto^{cd}

Meltzer Virginal^c

Musgrave Lamenting With Ariadne^b

Rakowski Locking Horns^a

^aDaniel Grabois *bn* ^bDaniel Panner *va*

^cSara Laimon *hpd* ^dSteven Beck *pf*

Sequitur / Paul Hostetter

Albany Records © TROY607 (77 minutes: DDD)

Would Sequitur's lively blend of music and theatrics transfer to record? Definitely!



Since its founding in 1996, the chamber music ensemble Sequitur has carved a distinct niche for itself in New York by focusing on multi-disciplinary works and contemporary concert pieces with a touch or two of theatricality. It is not, in other words, the kind of group one thinks of as a natural for recording sessions.

As if to prove their mettle immediately, the ensemble have built their first recorded programme around the formidable Double Concerto of Elliott Carter. Not that Carter's music doesn't have an inner theatricality of its own. Individual musical lines, as Virgil Thomson once noted, take on the trappings of a script, with players reacting to each other less like musicians and more like actors in a play. Physicality and the use of space is also a prime concern, even in a recording, and the musicians of Sequitur (and producer Judith Sherman) manage to unfold the piece not as a thicket of musical thoughts but as a true narrative.

The three pieces that come before, if neither as ambitious nor as accomplished as Carter's, nonetheless make up an impressive programme. David Rakowski's *Locking Horns* involves a horn player in the chamber orchestra challenging the soloist for primacy. Thea Musgrave's viola concerto *Lamenting With Ariadne* goes one notch better, incorporating an actual scenario involving violinist Daniel Panner representing the abandoned lover of the title.

A trumpet signals the arrival of Dionysus, who shakes things up a bit before the music settles back into serenity.

With his solo harpsichord front and centre, Sequitur artistic director Harold Meltzer's *Virginal* evokes quite another epoch. Harpsichordist Sara Laimon, Sequitur's founding managing director, finds common ground with the guitar and harp right away, but soon breaks off from her plucked-string brethren and moves in various configurations through the rest of the ensemble. Meltzer wields a wide range of influences, from highly ornamented 17th-century British keyboard music to quasi-minimalist ostinatos, with such style and grace that it's hard to decide whether his music or his ensemble deserves greater commendation.

Ken Smith

BAROQUE LUTE DUETS

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Baron Suite in B flat Corigniani Concerto

in B flat Falckenhagen Duetto in F

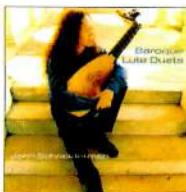
Hagen Duetto in C minor

Lauffensteiner Sonata in A

John Schneiderman *ltes*

VGo Recordings © VG1008 (58 minutes: DDD)

Engaging double-tracked playing makes a strong case for obscure if winning duets



John Schneiderman has found a most sympathetic partner for his recording of lute duets: John Schneiderman. The fact that technology has made this possible doesn't necessarily guarantee tip-top

performances. But, happily, these two musicians-in-one are lutenists of vigorous and nimble accomplishment. What they could never accomplish onstage (unless Schneiderman goes daffy and plays duets with a recording), they manage very persuasively here. Knowing every ornamental and flexible move your collaborator is going to make does have its advantages.

The appeal of Schneiderman's new recording transcends performance trickery. Lutenists aside, all those who have heard of any of the composers represented here should now raise hands. Thought so. Schneiderman has combed the archives to come up with a programme of obscure, if winning, Baroque duets that place the lute in a multiplicity of stylistic and expressive situations. Most of the music sounds familiar in the friendliest and least plagiaristic sort of way. The ghosts of Bach, sons and friends certainly hover over the pieces. But let's not be too hard on these composers, who never rose to immortality despite their luxurious monikers. Works by Joachim Bernhard Hagen (1720-87), Corigniani (whose first name and dates apparently are unknown), Adam Falckenhagen (1697-1754), Ernst Gottlieb Baron (1696-1760), and Wolff Jacob Lauffensteiner (1676-1754) are now preserved for eternity, thanks to Schneiderman (and, lest we forget, Schneiderman).

The lutenist plays all of this music with a fine mix of rhythmic buoyancy and purposeful restraint. If Schneiderman ever comes across a colleague who can duplicate his artistic personality so convincingly, the other Schneiderman had better watch out.

One quibble: the gaps between movements in each piece are so long that they might prompt the unwary listener to think that the next work has begun.

Donald Rosenberg