

# RECORDINGS

## DUOS HITHER AND YON

☛ The Akerman-Teixeira Duo (Mary Akerman and Robert Teixeira, guitars). *Music for Two Guitars*. Works by Rossini, Brahms, Albéniz, D. Scarlatti, Lončar, Ourkouzounov, Bonfá, and Morel. Clear Note, no number, 2010.

☛ Australian Guitar Duo (Jacob Cordover and Rupert Boyd, guitars). *Songs from the Forest*. Works by Edwards, Westlake, Lennon/McCartney/Brouwer, Houghton, Granados, Falla, D. Scarlatti, and Petit. No label or number, 2012.

Here we have two very fine duo recordings from the South, including very far south! Mary Akerman is well-known and admired in GFA circles and has found a wonderful duo partner in Robert Teixeira. They both have refined and—what is equally important—well-matched sounds, with flawless technique, demonstrated in a demanding program. It opens with the overture to Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. Surprisingly, the transcription dates from 1821, five years after the opera's premiere: there must have been some very accomplished players around to make such publications viable. Akerman-Teixeira do it very well. Only a wider dynamic range (it is Rossini after all, the king of *crescendi*) would make their fine performance more delectable. Brahms is one of my favorite composers, so it is a pleasure to have some on guitar when played as well as this. The *Theme and Variations* serves as the second movement of the *Sextet*, op. 18, and has a sound almost reminiscent of a Baroque *chaconne*. This duo version does not, of course have the wonderful dark sonorities of the string version, but stands very well as a re-conceived guitar work. I enjoyed it very much. Miguel Llobet's transcriptions of Albéniz' *Tango* (not the famous D major) and *Castilla* follow, played charmingly. A pair of fine Scarlatti transcriptions lead to Miroslav Lončar's *Who is Eve?* This eclectic work, though a brief five minutes in length, makes me want to hear more from this Croatian-born guitarist-composer. Though many different styles are addressed, the work as a whole "hangs together" very well. Using a mixed meter popular in his native Bulgaria's music, Atanas Ourkouzounov's *Horo* is a lot of fun. But if you

decide to dance to it, watch out for the 4+3+4 rhythm. Very tricky! Luiz Bonfá's greatest hits, *Manhã de Carnaval* and *Samba de Orfeu*, are a delight to hear. I especially enjoyed the percussion-driven groove they establish a few minutes into the latter song. When extra parts are added to perfectly satisfactory guitar solos, the results are usually dismal. This most assuredly is not the case with Jorge Morel's *Danza brasileira*. This quite different work by Morel provides new textures and melodic ideas which complement the materials in the solo version marvelously. Mary Akerman's notes are exemplary, and recording and production are first rate.

And from the southern hemisphere comes the Australian Guitar Duo, with two very fine players in Jacob Cordover and Rupert Boyd. They have benefitted from the tutelage of Timothy Kain, who partnered John Williams in a fine duo CD, some of the contents of which also appear here. They are technical masters who also possess beautiful tone at all volume levels, and a wonderfully refined collective musical sense. Music of their native country naturally figures prominently in this disc and, given the richness of Australian music (and not just for guitar), this is a blessing. Fine works by Ross Edwards open and close the disc, *Djanaba* and *Emily's Song*. The former is interesting in rhythm and texture and the latter, as one would expect, is gentle and lovely. Nigel Westlake's *Songs from the Forest* lends its name to the disc. It is a very fine piece and sounds just as good here as in the recording by Williams and Kain. Leo Brouwer has written several works based on the Lennon-McCartney songbook, and these duos formed the core material of his *From Yesterday to Penny Lane* for guitar and orchestra. They are delightful. *Three Duets* by Phillip Houghton follow. The first, *The Mantis and the Moon*, lent its name to the Williams/Kain disc. As one might guess, it is a mysterious-sounding and evocative piece. The *Lament* is gorgeous, a plaintive tribute to a friend of the composer who had died. The notes to the disc quote the composer concerning the last duet, *Alchemy*: "I 'heard' a vision in which I saw sparks of gold and threads of light coming out of the guitars ..." Indeed. Well, it works for me. The Spanish repertoire is not overlooked. There are fine performance of Granados and Falla, the former including *Danza española No. 2: Oriental*. This work was on my very first guitar album, performed by

Presti and Lagoya. I am happy to report the Australians also do it beautifully, with a really magical use of tone color. They include a flawless Scarlatti set distinguished by preternaturally clean and rhythmically precise ornaments. Very impressive. Houghton's *Brolga* musically suggests the doings of a large Australian stork! Anything influenced, as the composer states, by the music of Looney Tunes cartoons, gets my emphatic vote. It is always nice to hear the Pierre Petit *Toccata* when played as well as it is here. The (northern hemisphere) recording is by the infallible John Taylor and the booklet notes by Boyd are very good.

—Al Kunze

**Arie Duo (Anita Farkas, flute, and Juan Carlos Arancibia, guitar). *Café*. Works by Piazzolla, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Legnani, and M. D. Pujol. Classic Clips CLCL 119, 2011.**

There are some fine things on this disc by the Arie Duo, consisting of Anita Farkas, flute, and Juan Carlos Arancibia, guitar, so let's get right to the good parts. The Legnani *Du-etto Concertante*, Op. 23, is a tremendous virtuoso showcase (Thomas Kirchhoff's notes mention "Breakneck scales and dizzying arpeggios...") and the two players deliver these things and more in an often exciting performance. Máximo Diego Pujol's *Suite Buenos Aires* is a fine, Piazzolla-inspired work. The Arie players—with reservations as noted below—do it justice in a committed performance. Its last movement, which is, I believe, "Microcentro" (misspelled in the booklet), is very exciting and elicits some of the very best playing from the duo. The big problem which plagues them throughout the disc is Farkas' unsure intonation: she is often a shade under the desired pitch. There are even times when you can't quite tell which of two notes she is attempting. This should have been addressed, given the quality of talent and production involved in this album. The flat notes don't occur predominantly in any one register, rather are scattered freely, though perhaps a bit more in soft passages. Very unfortunate. As to the opening works I confess to being very disappointed. Piazzolla's *Histoire du tango* is a fabulous piece, which I have heard played well by many different combinations of instruments. The present performers do not do it justice, *beginning on the very fourth note* which is treated as a sort of fall-off or portamento to the fifth note (E to D#). Trust me: it is a very bad idea. Perhaps the players have a score different from mine, which does not justify this execution at all. This is but symptomatic of a generally ill-conceived interpretation lacking both rhythmic intensity and sensuous languor. Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Sonatina*, Op. 205, fares rather better, and here there is much less competi-

tion. This is the composer in his most Italianate style, though written in his years in California. It is not a major work, but certainly a pleasant piece to hear. [Unsolicited advice to liner note writers: Farkas is noted as having won second prize at a flute competition in which first place was not awarded. A rather dicey accolade. Next time try "... was a prize winner ..."] This advice given at no charge!

—Al Kunze

**Classico terzetto italiano (Francesco Biraghi, guitar; Ubaldo Rosso, flute; Carlo De Martini, violin). *Ferdinando Carulli: Trios for Flute, Violin and Guitar*. Works by Carulli. Ducale CDL 043, 2011.**

What a pleasant surprise to hear a truly professional caliber trio of chamber musicians playing this little-known repertoire of Ferdinando Carulli (1770-1841) on period instruments! One of the most prolific composers of the era, Carulli seems to have done everything right to flourish as an instrumentalist in the early Romantic environment, dominated as it was by so much operatic fanfare. Wisely, he moved permanently from Naples to Paris in 1808, shortly after Giuliani had established himself in Vienna. Not only did Carulli ride the coat-tails of Rossini in Paris (1824-29), with much success as a transcriber, but he also seems to have truly understood how to *develop* themes in the movements he composed in sonata-allegro form.

The first impression one gets from this recording is a sense of lightness and transparency in the instrumentation, probably just what Carulli wanted. Ensemble playing is flawless, the musicians clearly together when it comes to *ritardandi* and dynamics. There is, of course, a difference in volume between an early nineteenth century guitar and even a period wood flute or violin with gut strings. This recording could not compensate for the imbalance, nor did it try to. I was able to bring out the guitar's sound a bit more by boosting the bass, but it's not necessary to do this to hear everything clearly.

Carulli's transcription of Rossini's Overture to *The Barber of Seville* opens the program, played with wit and the kind of lightness and transparency that orchestras just can't provide. The *Trios*, Op. 9, No. 1, and Op. 12, being Carulli's original works, show to good effect his flair for the *bella conversazione* of chamber music. He often deliberately plays the melody instruments against each other in dialogue fashion, while the guitar mumbles along with its harmonic, harmonious accompaniments. The "Allegro" in Op. 12 is a good example of fully realized sonata-allegro form. The *Fantaisie sur la chansonnette vénitienne* "O Pescator dell'Onda," Op. 123, is surprising in that the folk tune seems to fall into six-measure phrases instead of