

from being vintage and illustrate how the leading Madrid professor of the guitar approached interpretation.

The recordings of the Catalan guitarist, Rosita Rodes (1906-1975), suggest a virtuosic technique, but the late 1920s audio quality is not easy on the ear. In contrast Simon Ramirez's disc, 'perhaps the very first classical guitar recording ever made, arguably sometime between 1897 and 1901', gains attention for one reason only - that it is the first ever rendering of *Romance de Amor!*

The listener has much to attend to here. This is a treasury of historical achievements and tolerance and patience are necessary for a just evaluation of the material offered. The past is indeed a foreign country where the language spoken is quite different from the accents and vocabulary we are now accustomed to. But it is only through this kind of absorption in the guitar's early 20th century legacy that we can begin to appreciate where the classical guitar stands now and the immensity of the journey which has brought us to the present remarkable levels of attainment.

Gramam Wade

GUITALIAN QUARTET -

Contemporary Italian Music for Guitar Quartet

CARMELO NICOTRA: *Absinthium*. MAURO SCHI-AVONE: *Quartetto No. 5*. NICOLA JAPPELI: *Katastroph Polka*. GIOVANNI SOLLIMA: *Bestiario di Leonardo*. PAOLO ARCA: *Valzer per Quattro*. BRUNO MADERNA: *Serenata per un Satellite*.

Guitalian Quartet: Guido Fichtner, Claudio Marcotulli, Maurizio Norrito, Stefano Palamidessi.

Bridge Records 9401

Formed in 2006 by award-winning soloists the Guitalian Quartet is dedicated to performing contemporary works, specifically for four guitars, by Italian composers. A while back, the prospect of listening to an entire CD of 'contemporary' guitar music would have had the potential to be a rather scary prospect. The likes of Luigi Nono and Luciano Berio composed uncompromising works that had little regard for the uninitiated. Here Bruno Maderna (1920-1973), whose piece was composed and performed in 1969, 'when the European satellite ESRO I (Boreas) was launched,' is given the valedictory position in the programme, yet his aleatorically structured piece, for a free group of instrumentalists, (this is the 'premiere' recording of the guitar quartet version), demands perhaps the most concentration from the listener; with the highly fragmented, stuttering rhythms and apparent deconstruction, it is a piece that swells and shines with flashes of brilliance, a composition relying on the performers' musical convictions and technical sensibilities.

Back to the beginning and the rest of the music is as accessible and refreshing as I've heard. The dream-like *Absinthium*, a paean to the decadent wormwood root, main ingredient in Absinthe - the hallucinogenic tittle favoured by many a 19th-century artist. The visionary twists and turns of mood set the tone for a great musical journey.

Quartetto No.5, by Mauro Schiavone has an appealing, flowing rhythmic surge, where simple minimalistic reiterations bloom with kaleidoscopic transformations. By this stage I was happily ensconced in the Guitalian experience.

Then *Katastroph Polka*, where you are tickled with an absurdist, macabre dance, surely designed to put a healthy smile on the face of the listener.

I found the *Bestiario di Leonardo* one of the most beguiling pieces, not least for its inspiration from the whimsical verses about fictitious animals by

Leonardo da Vinci, using an attractive battery of approachable styles.

And just before the Maderna, we get Paolo Arca's *Valzer per Quattro*, which harks back in nostalgic form to the European waltz; with echoes of Nino Rota, who composed music for the films of Fellini and Visconti.

A recording of riches, performed with great wit and intensity by an exciting ensemble. Highly recommended.

Tim Panting

NEW MUSIC WITH GUITAR, VOL. 8

DAVID STAROBIN: *Variations on a Theme by Carl Nielsen*. PAUL LANSKY: *Partita*. POUL RUDERS: *Six pages*. GEORGE CRUMB: *The Ghosts of Alhambra*.

David Starobin, guitar. **Mari Yoshinaga**, percussion. **Patrick Mason**, baritone. **David Druckman**, percussion.

Bridge Records 9404

After the first couple of listens to David Starobin's set of *Variations on a theme by Carl Nielsen*, I sought out the theme (via the ubiquitous research tool that is YouTube), which is a song for voice and piano *Sang bag Ploven* (Song behind the Plow) Op.10. Starobin gives the attractive theme a hymnal tempo and the variations that follow grow in length and complexity; its majestic conclusion bringing together just over 10 minutes of refined musicianship.

David Starobin and Becky Starobin have tirelessly sought new pieces for guitar from composers for many years and have 'created' a burgeoning repertoire that is astounding in its breadth and diversity. Here, with Paul Lansky (b.1944, New York City) we have his substantial (18:25) *Partita* for guitar and percussion. The delicate battery of vibraphone, glockenspiel, temple blocks and bongos is an essential unit in the work and provides a formidable array of sounds from the hands of Mari Yoshinaga. Starobin has long championed the combination of performing solo guitar with percussion and with the sophistication of modern amplification the subtleties of the acoustic guitar can now compete with a huge range of dynamics.

Poul Ruders (b.1949, Ringsted, Denmark), the second Dane on this recording has written many works for the guitar in as many combinations, perhaps the most well-known being the *Paganini Variations* (Guitar Concerto No.2). The *Six Pages* are part of an on-going thread of miniatures each composed using a single sheet of manuscript. This being recourse for the composer's preoccupation with gargantuan scores over the last ten years, which require 100s of pages. Dedicated to friends these pieces certainly show a writer who understands the guitar and how so effective it can be in these stark but perfectly formed statements.

It is perhaps with George Crumb (b.1929, Charleston, West Virginia) that David Starobin has forged the greatest collaborative friendship over the last 45 years. Crumb's music defies easy categorisation, as do most of the composers that make up Starobin's repertoire and *Ghosts of the Alhambra* sees a return to the poetry of Federico Garcia Lorca (Poema del Canto Jondo) 'after a twenty-three year hiatus'. The strident baritone of Patrick Mason is a beautiful and versatile instrument and soars and whispers in equal measure. The percussion and amplified guitar 'accompaniment' to the voice provide a haunting backdrop with Crumb's typically colourful and precise musical details.

New Music for Guitar Vol.8 is a thought-provoking release bringing a refreshing batch of contemporary music into the repertoire. Highly recommended.

Tim Panting