

American Record Guide

independent critics reviewing classical recordings and music in concert

Bucarest and Banff Festivals

Simon Rattle's NY Trifecta

Reich and Glass at 80

Critics' Choice 2016

Index to 2016 Reviews

Over 450 reviews

US \$7.99
January/February 2017



appoints, and I can't name a better performance of the Piazzolla. Don't miss this because the guitar currently enjoys an embarrassment of riches.

KEATON

Lute Pieces

Bernard Hofstötter
Querstand 1606—62 minutes

The program opens and closes with magnificent chaconnes by Silvius Leopold Weiss (1687-1750) and David Kellner (1670-1748). When thinking about Baroque chaconnes, I find it useful to remember that French theatrical works usually concluded with massive chaconne movements. The variation structure allowed dancers to develop their virtuosic gestures; and when played by instrumentalists, it allowed them to show off their technical innovations.

The chaconnes flank two works by JS Bach—the second cello suite and the chorale prelude 'Ich Ruf zu Dir, Herr Jesu Christ' from *Orgelbüchlein*, both transcribed by Bernhard Hofstötter. There is also a Sonata in G by Weiss consisting of a suite of French dances. Hofstötter's playing is very sensitive. His arrangements sound like authentic lute pieces, the way he trims the music to the characteristics of the instrument.

LOEWEN

Toryanse

OURKOUZOUNOV: *Toryanse Tales*; RAK: *Kaygorod*; *Balalaika*; DOMENICONI: *A Step to Paradise*; *Toccata in Blue*; MORAITIS: *Sketches 1+9*; DROZD: *Adagio*; PIAZZOLLA: *Suite Troileana*; ASSAD: *Fantasia Carioca*

Dimitris Kontronakis, g
Soundset 1077—67 minutes

Fascinating performance! This is a collection of works that is exotic even by the standards of the international guitar. It opens with Atanas Ourkouzounov's 'Toryanse Tales,' based on a Japanese legend that involves the first seven years of a child's life, and a children's song that is often played at street crossings. The composer manages to evoke Japan without clichés, and several interesting effects are demanded. Kontronakis is fully up to the challenges.

Stepan Rak is Czech, but his works here evoke Russia—'Kaygorod' is a morose waltz with an appropriately Russian sounding melody, and *Balalaika* is a 9-minute *tour de force* that demands, among other things, a rapid tremolo with the last finger of the right hand—the one finger guitarists don't normally

use. Again, Kontronakis plays with admirable conviction and control, with electrifying results.

Both the Domeniconi works have considerable jazz influence—a slow, intense ballad, and a virtuosic toccata. Greek composer Thanassis Moraitis wrote his *Sketches* for Kontronakis in 2010, and both evoke traditional Greek music, dances for the bouzouki. And not everything is so exotic—Polish composer Gerard Drozd evokes Bach in his moving 'Adagio.'

Nearly everything by Astor Piazzolla is a transcription—he played his own music for his ensemble, and the instrumentation varied. This transcription of *Suite Troileana* is from his tribute to his longtime musical partner, bandoneonist Anibal Troilo. The recital ends with Serio Assad's virtuosic 'Fantasia Carioca,' his tribute to the citizens of Rio de Janeiro. This piece is occurring more and more often in guitar recitals, most recently in Pavel Kukhta's recital (N/D 2016). That was a fine performance, but Kontronakis is every bit as fine.

I've often reflected that, after a wildly turbulent first 70 years of the last century, nothing new has emerged since about 1970—minimalism was the latest new -ism to arise. At that point, after the extremes of Darmstadt and aleatory, anything was possible. Composers since then have taken an eclectic approach, using whatever fit their particular vision from the infinity of possibilities. One thing that has not been fully explored is some sort of synthesis with the other classical traditions of the planet. This recording, and Matthew Fish's release of the works of Johannes Moeller, reviewed in this issue, might be the start of that new direction. Whether that is true or not, this is a stimulating and thoroughly enjoyable release.

KEATON

Meng Su, Guitar

WILLIAMS: *Avenir's Theme*; *Rounds*; CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO: *Sonata*; TARREGA: *Waltz*; *Rosita*; BACH: *Suite in E*; WALTON: *5 Bagatelles*

Tonar 60701—63 minutes

A recording like this makes me want to gather Florestan, Eusebuis, and Master Raro, and just say "Hats off, gentlemen, a genius." Anyone who follows my reviews knows that I am excited about the level of artistry of many emerging guitarists. Surely, I get plenty of discs not ready for the national stage and even decline to review many that would just get a panning. But nearly every issue I find someone who really