

**Kotronakis, Dimitris.** *Toryanse. Works by Ourkouzounov, Rak, Domeniconi, Drozd, Piazzolla, and Assad.* Soundset Recordings SR1077, 2016.

Kotronakis is a spectacular player, and here he has assembled an eclectic program that always holds the listener's interest. He, a Greek, begins with a Bulgarian's take on a Japanese song: *Toryanse Tales* by Atanas Ourkouzounov, which lends its name to the album. Eclecticism indeed. We don't hear the music of Stěpán Rak as often as we should, and his genius with various tremolos informs the works included, including, not surprisingly, *Balalaika*, which sounds frightfully difficult. Beautifully selected works of Domeniconi, Moraitis, Drozd (a beautiful *Adagio*), and Piazzolla culminate in Sérgio Assad's masterful *Fantasia Carioca*, all played quite wonderfully. Good sound and notes, though the latter are presented in a hideous font, which I hope never to see again. Eww!

**Montella, Nicola.** *Sonata. Works by Paganini, Llobet, Coste, Ginastera, and Scarlatti.* DotGuitar G 1503, ca. 2017.

The debut album of Italian guitarist Nicola Montella is an auspicious one. With an enviable pedigree including many fine teachers, Montella delivers a diversified program of works, many actually called "sonata." His playing is virtuosic when needed—which is *often*, considering the number of very challenging works—but always beautiful and musically well-judged. With beautiful sound and presentation, including very good notes by Frédéric Zigante, Montella is off to an impressive start. Bravo!

**Montréal Guitare Trio (Glenn Lévesque and Sébastien Dufour, guitars, Marc Morin, acoustic bass and guitar).** *Danzas. Works by di Meola, Barrios, de Lucía, Falla, and Haden.* Analekta AN 2 8791, 2016.

An abysmal album. It begins with Al di Meola's *Mediterranean Sundance*, the iconic work from the trio performances of its composer with Paco de Lucía and John McLaughlin. Get real: if you program this, you need to be ready to shred *and* do it cleanly. They can't. Then things get worse. Taking Barrios' *Catedral* and adding parts to make it a trio is a miserable idea in conception and terrible in realization. Save this kind of thing for jamming with friends after a few glasses of wine, but make sure no one is recording. A number of works by Manuel de Falla are included, which include possibly the worst performance of "Nana" from the *Siete canciones populares españolas* I have ever experienced. And the liner notes are poor: it will surprise fans of Ramón Montoya and Sabicas, to name just two, to find out that Paco de Lucía was a pioneer of solo flamenco guitar. Stay away!

**Smits, Raphaella.** *Guitar Recital. Works by Ponce, Barrios, and Mompou.* Soundset Recordings SR 1084, c.2017.

Sometimes when I don't have a specific plan on how to use a practice session, I do something that is really quite gratifying: playing pieces, fast or slow, as if they were really meant to be slow, glacially slow. Sometimes I think that Smits does this in recordings. As an example, the Sarabande of the Ponce "Weiss" *Suite* in A minor comes in at a world record (I made that up) of 7:21. But as in this case, when you take a slow piece and make it slower, well, it veers towards total stasis. Smits doesn't play slowly because she can't play fast; the Gigue of the same suite moves along at a very nice clip. It's a particular aesthetic, and one that clearly appeals to Smits' many admirers. (For no discernible reason, the lovely Gavotte of the suite is omitted.) In the Ponce and other works Smits makes use of her eight strings sometimes to lower basses, which generally sounds good, if unexpected. The Mompou *Suite Compostelana* aligns very well with Smits' interpretive predilections, and she delivers a masterful performance (again with some lowered octaves). Beautifully recorded.

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