

from the cleanness and precision of the playing.

*Amazing Grace* is played in a jazzy setting by a Japanese trombonist and arranger that balances departure from and loyalty to the familiar melody. One phrase is entirely flutter-tongued, for example. It opens on alto flute, then it sounds like there must be a quick change to concert flute about a minute in, and the setting stays on that instrument until the end.

Ihara is a fine flute player with wonderful tone and technique, but her tendency to hold notes without vibrato becomes objectionable in the *Damase*. Her collaborators are so good they nearly outshine her.

GORMAN

### **Le Cavalier Bleu**

Mihi Kim, fl; Bertrand Giraud, p  
Anima 1307—63 minutes

Sonatinas by Darius Milhaud and Walter Gieseking; sonatas by Gabriel Pierne and Otar Taktakishvili. The last one is a Georgian composer who died in 1989 and has become known in the flute community for his piece in C major written in the 1960s when so many composers were doing anything but this.

"Epic" is the word I'll use to describe the performance of the Gieseking *Sonatine* that opens the program. These are world-class players. Exquisite shaping. I never knew about Mihi Kim before, but I'll long treasure hearing her velvety sound and her unbelievable pianissimo range. She really is something special to the flute, in the same class as Denis Bouriakov, Magnus Bage, and Emmanuel Pahud. I don't like some of the places she's chosen to breathe, and could imagine more effective approaches to the music now and then; but what she's given us is very satisfying, and, most important, brings out the depth and beauty that's here. Regular readers might already recognize the name of Bertrand Giraud, whose playing is just as fine, all enthusiasm and rapture.

After about 20 years of acquaintance with the Taktakishvili Sonata, I've recently decided that the key to rendering its slow movement is to take a very slow pace, allowing time for everything to settle and unfold rather than emphasizing the movement in the lines, which makes it sound more like a New-Age ballad. I'm pleased to report, then, that this is the slowest performance I've heard. At one point where most players adopt a faster tempo, these two keep it the same, and the music really gets under your skin that way—it *penetrates* rather than merely striking the surface. The involvement this brings from the listener can take a person to tears.

Now, I've talked about emotional travels. So who is the blue rider, or where is the horse? The blue horse is on the cover, in case you were wondering where it is, or how it fits into the program. A detail of a famous painting is cropped so close it's hard to make out what it is. The cover image is part of three horses. The attribution on the back cover is to Franz Marc (1880-1916), and an internet search established that the source of the detail is *The Small Blue Horses* from 1911, now in a museum in Stuttgart. An earlier horse painting by Kandinsky gave the group The Blue Rider its name (in French, *Le Cavalier Bleu*); Marc was a member, too. Since there's no German expressionism on the program, nice try. Marc did spend a couple years of his short life in France.

GORMAN

### **Stele**

**BROUWER:** *Decameron Negro; Hika*; **RODRIGO:** *Invocacion & Danza*; **DOMENICONI:** *Koyunbaba*; **SCULTHORPE:** *From Kakadu*; **HOUGHTON:** *Stele*  
Jacob Cordover, g  
77 minutes (800-BUYMYCD)

### **Songs from the Forest**

**EDWARDS:** *Djanaba; Emily's Song*; **WESTLAKE:** *Songs from the Forest*; **LENNON & MCCARTNEY:** *She's Leaving Home; The Fool on the Hill; Penny Lane*; **HOUGHTON:** *3 Duets; Broлга*; **GRANADOS:** *Intermezzo*; **SPANISH Dance 2 FALLA:** *Spanish Dance*; **SCARLATTI:** *3 Sonatas*; **PETIT:** *Toccata*  
Australian Guitar Duo  
64 minutes (800-BUYMYCD)

I reviewed Mr Cordover's first release on the Cala label (J/F 2014). It was a truly fine performance, technically impressive, tastefully expressive, and imaginatively varied. These two releases are earlier, independently produced recordings, available from CD Baby. The solo disc is from 2004, the duo from 2012, and both are as impressive as the Cala release.

It takes some courage to release a debut recording with Brouwer's *El Decameron Negro*, Domeniconi's *Koyunbaba*, and Rodrigo's *Invocacion y Danza*. These works are not only virtuosic showpieces, but popular pieces that have been recorded widely, so the competition is intense. But Cordover is up to it. His performances can stand comparison with the best. His Rodrigo may not have the wild abandon of Xuefei Yang's (M/J 2011), but it is still quite fine. In addition, he presents Brouwer's *Hika*, in *Memoriam Toru Takemitsu*, a mysterious, impressionist work. He conveys its mystery beautifully.

Two works by fellow Australians round out the program. Peter Sculthorpe has written only a few pieces for guitar, but his *From Kakadu* is a beautiful, serene, four-movement neo-classic-

cal work. Phillip Houghton is himself a guitarist, and his *Stele*, also in four movements, is more demanding than the Sculthorpe, but still more concerned with expression than display. The recording is nearly a decade old, but even then Cordover displayed the highest levels of musicianship. It is a treasure to hear.

Cordover also performs with Rupert Boyd in the Australian Guitar Duo (note: there is another group on CD Baby, also called the Australian Guitar Duo—the perils of picking an unimaginative name for your ensemble). This release combines traditional duo repertory with works by Australian composers, including Houghton, Ross Edwards, and Nigel Westlake. All the Aussies's works are tonal and quite inventive. In particular, Westlake's *Songs from the Forest* is a real delight. Beautiful music, with interesting asymmetrical rhythms, harmonics, and percussive effects—it's easy to see why they picked this title for the entire release.

The more common works have been done over and over, but rarely this well. Falla's dance from *La Vida Breve* is very fast, but not so much as to parody itself—just wild excitement. The three Scarlatti sonatas are on fire—this is playing on the level of the Assads' old recording on Nonesuch. And I haven't heard Pierre Petit's *Toccata* since Presti and Lagoya's old LP performance (available on a six-disc set from French Decca, *L'Art de Alexandre Lagoya*). This performance has all the sparkle and wit of P&L's classic performance, and that is high praise indeed.

Mr Cordover resides in Barcelona, but the duo is still active, though less so than the year this disc was released. But solo or duo, he is a first-rate artist.

KEATON

### Cinema Verismo

**ALBENIZ:** *Asturias*; **BACH:** *Sheep May Safely Graze*; *Air*; *Prelude from Cello Suite 1*; **GRANADOS:** *Spanish Dance 5*; **ALBINONI:** *Adagio*; **MYERS:** *Cavatina*; **VANGELIS:** *Chariots of Fire*; **MASCAGNI:** *Intermezzo from Cavalleria*; **ROTA:** *Godfather's Waltz*; **IGLESIAS:** *Volverino*; **BERNSTEIN:** *Somewhere*; *Tonight*; **MORRICONE:** *Gabriel's Oboe*; *The Good, the Bad, & the Ugly*

Max Grgic, g

Marquis 81447—61 minutes

The Temple of Apollo in Delphi was said to have an inscription over its entrance: "Everything In Moderation". If the followers of Dionysus ever sobered up long enough to build a temple, it might have had an inscription, "Nothing In Moderation". It is in the latter temple that Mr Grgic clearly worships.

The program is devoted to film music—transcriptions of material from films and standard repertory that has appeared in films.

Thus we get Albeniz's 'Asturias', from Woody Allen's *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, and Granados's 'Spanish Dance 5', from Pedro Almadovar's *Kika*. The Albeniz is one of the fastest I've ever heard, but that's not necessarily praise. And the Granados sounds like it is performed by a wild animal. There's no elegance, no finesse. The Bach and the Albinoni get romanticized and range from slightly annoying to unlistenable. The Intermezzo from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* is pretty, but doesn't really belong on solo guitar.

Much the same could be said of most of the arrangements for guitar of movie themes. The 'Godfather Waltz' starts out well enough, but a harsh passage of *rasgueado* destroys the mood. The pieces from *West Side Story* are beautiful, because the songs themselves are so beautiful; but the guitar arrangement leaves one longing for the original. Morricone's 'Gabriel's Oboe' works quite well, but Grgic's performance of 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly' seems stuck on the last adjective. He's got loads of technique, but I find this too uncontrolled and self-indulgent to recommend.

KEATON

### The Orient Express

**KHACHATURIAN:** *Gayaneh excerpts*; **DVORAK:** *Serenade excerpts*; **ACHRON:** *Hebraic Melody*; **VARDAPET:** *Armenian Folk Dances*; **LISZT:** *Hungarian Rhapsody 2*; **SHOSTAKOVICH:** *Jazz Suite 1*; **OURKOUZOUNOV:** *Divertimento*; **CASUCCI:** *Schone Gigolo, Armer Gigolo*

Take 4 Guitar Quartet

Ars Musici 233800—70 minutes

I've reviewed this Belgian-German quartet twice before (J/A 2010 & J/F 2013). Both reviews were enthusiastic, and this is as well. The Take Four Guitar Quartet—Pia Grees, Johan Fostier, Matthias Klager, and Luc Vander Borgh—performs music from Eastern Europe, all new to me in guitar form. And they perform with invention, color, wit, and warmth.

The program is wonderfully imaginative. The excerpts from *Gayaneh* include the Sabre Dance, performed with appropriate abandon. The Dvorak is treasurable! I've loved the music since I first heard it, and never imagined it could be done on guitar, but it works beautifully when played with such warmth. Josph Achron's 'Hebraic Melody' and Komitas Vardapet's dances are delightfully exotic, and Bulgarian composer Atanas Ourkouzounov's *Divertimento* sparkles with the irregular Baltic rhythms that are his mark. Only Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody 2* doesn't quite make it. The opening *lassan* needs more weight than the four guitars can generate, and the *friska* chal-