

Music

Amernet quartet puts on evocative concert of Jewish classical music

By **Grace Jean** November 24, 2015

For nearly a decade, Pro Musica Hebraica has championed Jewish classical music by presenting concerts filled with forgotten gems. On Monday evening at the Kennedy Center Terrace Theater, its first foray into Sephardic musical traditions proved timely and celebratory, with the Amernet String Quartet and two guest artists transporting listeners to medieval Spain.

Because Spanish Jews preserved their culture through oral traditions, Sephardic music was rarely written down but rather passed between generations through singing. Composer Alberto Hemsí sought to capture the songs he heard in his travels, ultimately publishing 10 volumes of melodies.

Inspired by Hemsí's efforts, composer Ljova (Lev Zhurbin) — commissioned by Pro Musica Hebraica — arranged "Blanca Nina," a suite of traditional songs and ballads. For this world premiere, mezzo-soprano Rachel Calloway sang with haunting presence while Amernet played an equal partner in depicting a young woman's life in Sephardic Spain.

Calloway showed her operatic prowess in two selections from Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's 1966 song cycle "Divan of Moses-Ibn-Ezra," Op. 207. Steven Cohen's new setting of the work also featured Amernet with guitarist Adam Levin.

Later, echoes of flamenco and castanets could be heard in Castelnuovo-Tedesco's Quintet for Guitar and String Quartet, Op. 143, where Amernet achieved an easy balance with Levin, whose timbre permeated the group even at his quietest moments.

In Levin's hands, Carlos Cruz de Castro's "Secuencia Sefardita" for solo guitar unfolded in a visceral, imaginative way. He plucked, strummed and slapped the strings from neck to soundboard in a dizzying exploration of sound.

Jean is a freelance writer.



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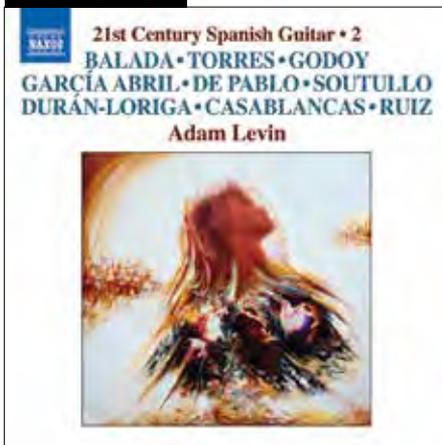


MURIEL ANDERSON

BEYOND CLASSICAL GUITAR

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21st Century Spanish Guitar 2

Adam Levin
Naxos

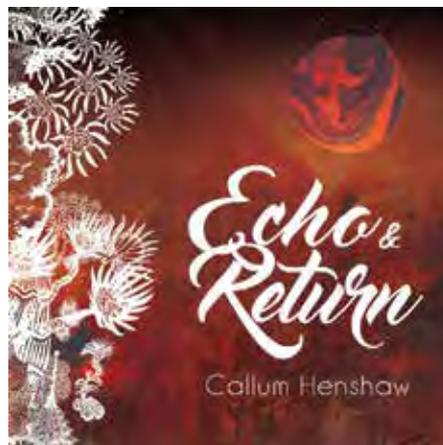
Second offering continues great work

Resplendent in a slip-case displaying a painting by Leo D'Lázaro commissioned by the performer, this enterprising release forms part of what will be a series of four discs. The first was reviewed in *CG* July 2013, so no one can accuse Levin or his record company of rushing them out. All the works here were composed within the past decade, and all except *Dos Cantares* by Antón García Abril, are claimed as premieres. This said, none of the composers could be described as being at the start of their careers, the youngest being Eduardo Soutullo and Juan Manuel Ruiz (both b. 1968). The oldest is Luis De Pablo (b. 1930), who is one of three octogenarians on the program.

Despite being subtitled *Abstractions of Granados*, the opening *Caprichos No. 11* by Leonardo Balada can be a little spiky at times, the quick-fire repeated note figures in the final movement providing an impressive showcase for Levin's considerable technical prowess. In contrast, the sumptuous soundscapes of *Interiores* by Jesús Torres offer a wider canvas for Levin's expressive powers. In the program as a whole, the language is occasionally challenging but never indigestible. *Elegía Otoñal* by Marc López Godoy even contains moments that take us back to the world of Segovia, as does the wonderfully retro offering by Antón García Abril. Only in the epic valedictory *Orión* by Juan Manuel Ruiz could the term "heavyweight" be applied.

A landmark recording by an outstanding practitioner.

—PF



Echo & Return

Callum Henshaw
callumhenshaw.com

Australian's packed disc is top-notch from start to finish

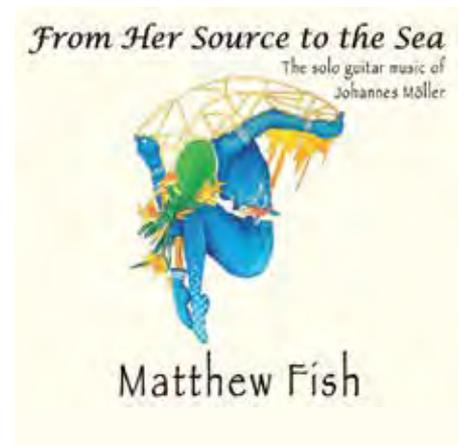
A project spanning three years and "interrupted" by a serious injury (which, coincidentally, he describes on page 66) *Echo & Return* has running through it conceptual strands of "theme and variations", "absence and return", the memories of which are both nostalgic and full of hope.

Australia has a penchant for producing world-class guitarists, and Callum Henshaw appears to show no sign of bucking that trend. His command of the instrument is immediately apparent with the opening *Valses Poéticos* by Granados. His athletic approach is fluid and relaxed without losing focus on the music's demands.

Le Départ by Napoleon Coste (1805–1883) is a slice of mid-19th century narrative depicting the final episode of the Crimean War—although there are no "battle" special effects (à la Barrios) here.

The disc is positively crammed, with 70 minutes of music: After the 16 minutes of Granados, there is Manuel Ponce's monumental *Variations sur la 'Folia de España' et Fugue* (at 25:48). I, like its dedicatee, Andrés Segovia, have great affection for it and Henshaw treats each variation with great care, producing a significant amount of coloration and dynamic shading. *From Kakadu* by Peter Sculthorpe (1929–2014), one of Australia's premier composers, follows, and the most "modern" piece, *Bleed-through, for guitar and laptop (!)* by Samuel Smith (b. 1985) conclude the proceedings; the latter being stylistically far-removed and not out of place as a soundtrack to a good horror movie.

—TP



From Her Source to the Sea: The Solo Guitar Music of Johannes Möller

Matthew Fish
Soundset

Sterling interpretations of Swedish composer's unique works

When I first came across Swedish guitarist Johannes Möller's music, it was obvious that he was a truly individual writer whose music looked and sounded like no one else's. His emotional compositions involve many complex arpeggiated patterns, usually with open strings interwoven with a very high tessitura, and an ethereal quality that is both very hard to read on the music, but wonderful to listen to when played by a master, as here in this recording by San Francisco guitarist Matthew Fish.

Typical of Möller's work is *Song to the Mother*, which has a nearly arrhythmic folk-like melody that almost sounds Celtic. Harmonics fly in and out, and together with bended notes and the arpeggio patterns, all make for a compellingly beautiful opening that truly sounds like nothing else you have ever heard.

A Star in the Sky, a Universe Within is another outstanding track on the album; among other unusual techniques, it requires the player to continue a rising tremolo pattern off the fingerboard, and to keep moving upwards. It sounds gimmicky, but really works. A selection from Möller's *24 Preludes* prove to be more compact but just as musically convincing, but it is more likely that you will return again and again to the longer works. Wonderfully played by Fish, and expertly recorded, this disc of Möller's music is a constant joy, at once unusual, unique, and always satisfying.

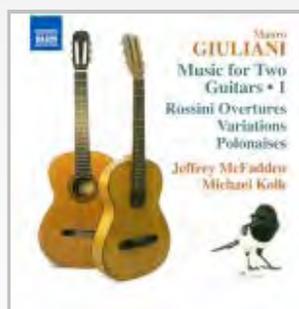
—CD



Early, Classical and Beyond

Strings Attached - February 2017

Written by Terry Robbins Category: [Early, Classical and Beyond](#) Published: 24 January 2017



Canadian guitarists **Jeffrey McFadden** and **Michael Kolk** are the performers on **Volume 1 of Music for Two Guitars** by **Mauro Giuliani**, a new CD featuring *Rossini Overtures, Variations and Polonaises* (Naxos 8.572445).

Michael Kolk has been the subject of several glowing reviews in this column and is usually heard in duo performances with fellow guitarist Drew Henderson, but here he is joined by the outstanding McFadden, with whom Kolk studied at the University of

Toronto. It's a terrific pairing, with both performers displaying clean, technically outstanding playing with equally impressive musicality and sensitivity.

Giuliani (1781-1829) was one of the greatest guitar virtuoso performers and composers. When he returned to Italy from Vienna in 1819 he became an associate of Rossini and transcribed four of the opera composer's overtures for two guitars in the early 1820s. All four – *La gazza ladra*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *La Cenerentola* and *L'assedio di Corinto* – are included here. As the jewel case blurb notes, they abound in lyrical melodic lines, fast arpeggios, subtle colours and technical virtuosity. The equally demanding *Gran variazioni concertanti, Op.35* and the *Variazioni concertanti, Op.130* are handled with deceptive ease, and the *Tre Polonesi concertanti, Op.137* round off an immensely satisfying program.

The recorded ambience is quite lovely, hardly a surprise given that the recording was made at St. John Chrysostom Church in Newmarket with the always reliable Naxos production team of Norbert Kraft – himself a top guitarist – and Bonnie Silver. It’s a CD that meets every hope and expectation you might have when you open it – and that’s saying something!

The same Newmarket church is the setting for another outstanding Kraft and Silver guitar recording, **Volume 2** of what is turning out to be a ground-breaking four-volume series of **21st Century Spanish Guitar** music played by the American guitarist **Adam Levin** (Naxos 8.573409).



In 2008 Levin was able to use several scholarships, including one from the Program for Cultural Cooperation Fellowship from Spain’s Cultural Ministry, to start a three-year residency in Madrid to research and perform contemporary Spanish guitar repertoire. The project resulted in a major collaboration with four generations of Spanish composers who created 30 new works commissioned by and dedicated to Levin. The recording project to document these pieces began in 2012, with Volume 1 of the series released in May 2013 to rave reviews.

Composers included here are Leonardo Balada (b.1933), Jesús Torres (b.1965), Marc López Godoy (b.1967), Antón García Abril (b.1933), Luis De Pablo (b.1930), Eduardo Soutullo (b.1968), Jacobo Durán-Loriga (b.1958), Benet Casablanca (b.1933) and Juan Manuel Ruiz (b.1968); the works cover the period 2010-2014, so clearly the collaboration continues to bear fruit beyond the term of the residency. All but one of the pieces are world premiere recordings.

Despite Levin’s warning that this is “not your father’s guitar music” and that the musical language of Spain has evolved since the days of the master guitar composers these are all clearly works that are intrinsically Spanish, with a wide range of sonorities, techniques and effects that never forget their roots. It’s a fascinating look at a country’s musical culture that knows its heritage and looks to the future with supreme confidence.

Needless to say, Levin is superb throughout the CD, and is captured with ideal sound quality. We can certainly look forward to Volumes 3 and 4 with great anticipation.



James Ehnes leads his quartet partners Amy Schwartz Moretti, Richard Yongjae O’Neill and Robert deMaine on a beautiful new CD by the **Ehnes Quartet** of two works that share the theme of death, and the fear of death (**Onyx 4163**).

Schubert’s String Quartet No.14 in D Minor “Death and the Maiden” D810 was written in 1824, four years before the composer’s death, but at a time when Schubert was already seriously ill and experiencing failure, poverty and great misery in his life. **Jean**



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Adam Levin Presents Varied Spanish Guitar Program at (le) Poisson Rouge

by Robert Leeper



If Spain isn't on your list of places to go in the near future, then you don't have to look much farther than classical guitarist [Adam Levin](#) for a survey of the past hundred years of Spanish music. The guitarist's New York City solo debut Monday night at [\(le\) Poisson Rouge](#) celebrated the launch of his first Naxos recording, *21st Century Spanish Guitar, Vol. 1.*, the first of four volumes documenting Levin's major collaboration with 30 of the new century's Spanish masters. Levin's seeks to forge a connection between traditional guitar repertoire of Eugène Ysaÿe and Joaquín Turina, and new works written especially for him by Spanish composers Ricardo Llorca, Eduardo Morales-Caso, and Octavio Vazquez.

Levin looked to the past in his performance of *Handeliana*, composer Ricardo Llorca's variations on Handel's aria "Va godendo" from the opera *Xerxes*. The theme was treated with a slight bounce as the melody was playfully spun about. Levin enchanted the audience with the stunning set of variations, which surprisingly left rhythm to be a much stronger indicator of the theme than melody, ultimately culminating in a kind of manic waltz.

Joaquin Turina's *Fandanguillo* was given a lively reading, as Levin excels when presenting music in true Spanish folk style—and he truly inserted all the necessary fire and passion of Spain into this rendition. As the fierce *rasgueados* (a particular style of strumming) flowed forth, one could hardly help imagining a dancer on a cobbled Spanish street.

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The highlight of the show was Eduardo Morales-Caso's *La Fragua de Vulcano*. Translated as "Apollo in the Forge of the Vulcan," the work is based on a 1630 oil painting by Diego Rivera depicting the moment when the god Apollo visits the human Vulcan in his forge to tell him that his wife, Venus, is having an affair with Mars, the god of war. The tension of this moment is well depicted in the Morales-Caso's aural rendition, with the musical emphasis centered on the dark, Phrygian nature of the Spanish folk sound, resulting in a modal feel that featured an insistent drone in the bass.

The program finished with a Levin commission, Octavio Vasquez's vast six-movement suite, *Nostos*. The title refers to a "homecoming," and, as Levin pointed out, it acts as a culmination of the performance—with Levin taking the audience on an odyssey, both in story and technical challenge. Of particular interest was the third movement, which couldn't have been more than two minutes, but was bewitching in that time and left the audience caught in a gripping silence.

The classical guitar is lucky to have a champion like Levin. His enthusiasm for the music and culture he has chosen is unbridled, and Monday night's performance shows that he has the talent to match.

Robert Leeper on September 11, 2013 in [Classical](#) | [Permalink](#)

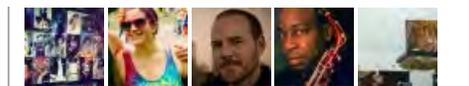
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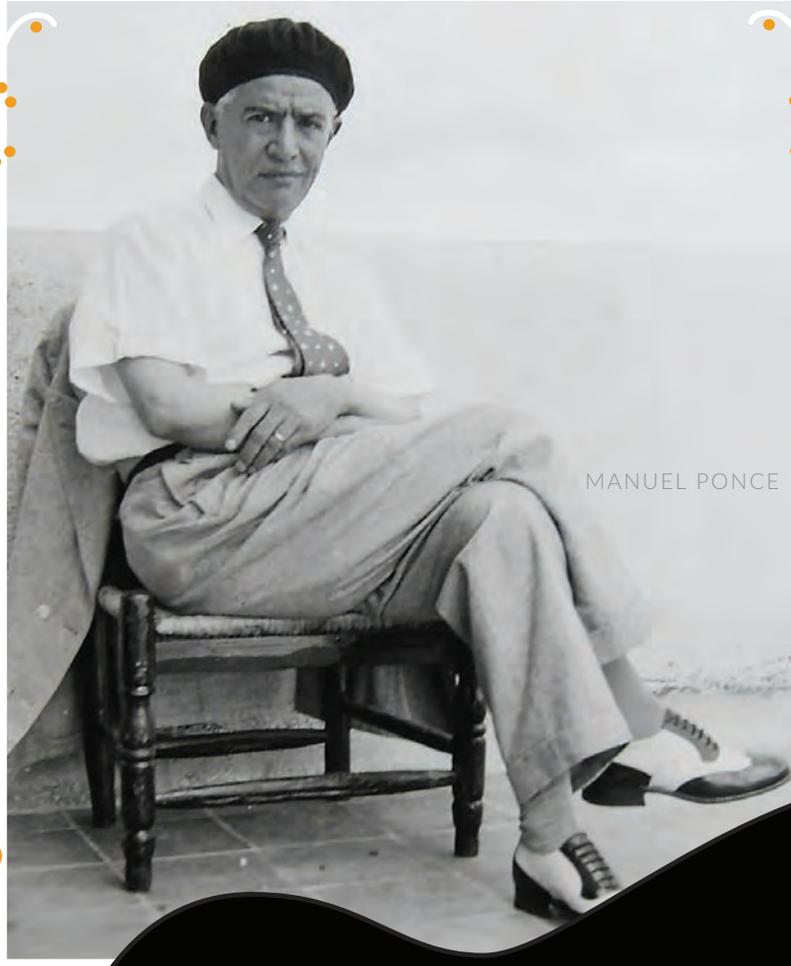
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Vol. 43 No. 1 March 2017

Soundboard

THE JOURNAL OF THE GUITAR FOUNDATION OF AMERICA



MANUEL PONCE

Mexico and the Guitar

Levin, Adam. *21st Century Spanish Guitar* •
2. Works by Balada, Torres, Godoy, García
Abril, De Pablo, Soutullo, Durán-Loriga,
Casablanacas, and Ruiz. Naxos 8.573409,
2016.



This is the second in an already indispensable series of recordings by Adam Levin. In a series of what will be four discs, Levin is (almost single-handedly) filling the compositional space left largely vacant since the death of Rodrigo. It is already an astonishing achievement.

The program begins most auspiciously with the magnificent *Caprichos No. 11 (Abstractions of Granados)* by Leonardo Balada. Much about the work can be inferred from the title. Each of the five pieces includes suggestions of one of the earlier composer's *Danzas Españolas*. Since the original works are themselves wonderful, and Balada's invention is of the highest order, this work should quickly become a new modern classic. And while it would seem unlikely, this compositional quality is maintained in the fascinating *Interiores* by Jesús Torres, which, while using a slightly more extended technical vocabulary, is beautifully soulful. And the quality goes on with Marc López Godoy's *Elegía otoñal* and Anton García Abril's *Dos cantares*. Works by Luis de Pablo, Eduardo Soutullo, Eduardo Durán-Loriga, and Benet Casablanacas are more abstract melodically and harmonically, often being gestural compared to the more conventional earlier work in the program and expanding still further the technical vocabulary. They are fine works but less appealing to the faint of heart. Concluding the disc in this vein is Juan Manuel Ruiz's powerful and enthralling *Orión*, a fitting conclusion to a most impressive disc.

Levin is an utterly brilliant player, whose ability to assimilate such a wealth of music is inspiring. But I do have one complaint. Since he is working on *Spanish* music, he should really improve his execution of rasgueado technique; his strumming is often disorganized and poorly defined rhythmically. In a few instances this is quite distracting, and the works would unquestionably sound better—different even—if the rasgueados were less chaotic. (We should all work on this technique; not only is it a near-constant presence in Spanish music, it is fantastic for development of the right hand. End of sermon.) Recorded sound, by Norbert Kraft and Bonnie Silver, is flawless, and notes by the player are comprehensive and occasionally funny! Get this one.

– Al Kunze

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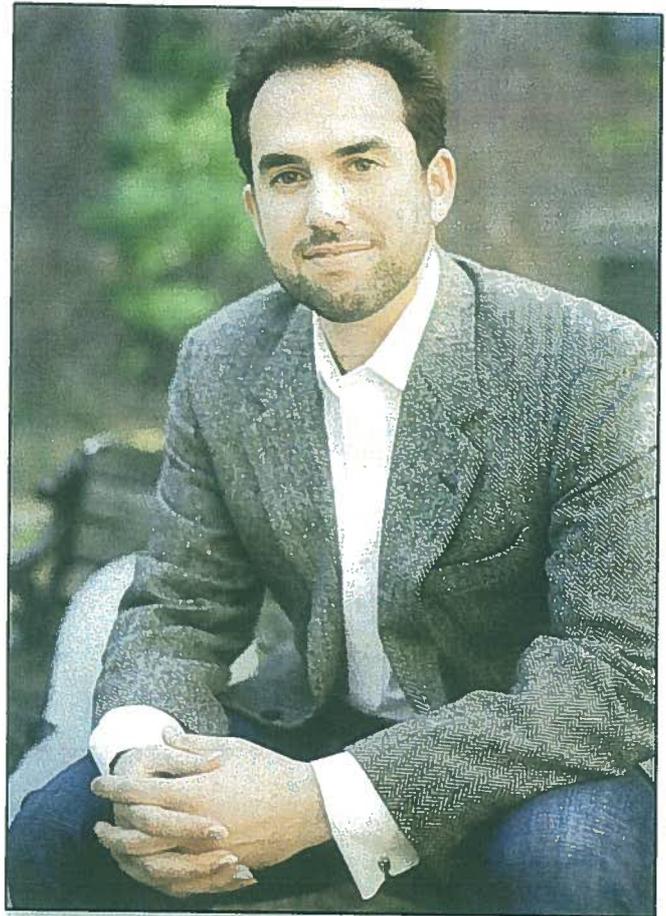
ADAM LEVIN

American guitarist and NAXOS recording artist Adam Levin discusses his recent career highlights

Interviewed By GUY TRAVISS

YOUR INTRODUCTION to the guitar was marked by a very solid work ethic. How did you come to play the instrument and what drove you to work at it so much?

I came to the guitar through my dad. He started playing violin at a young age and then with the onset of Beatle-mania, he threw away his violin and picked up the guitar, which was way 'cooler,' and has played ever since. He played blues, jazz, bluegrass and even classical. His inspirations were Andres Segovia, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, and Joe Pass. I remember listening to these greats with him and all of his commentaries on why they were so special. After suggesting that my sister and I start playing classical guitar, my dad returned to classical guitar as well, and over the years has played some of the most important pieces in the solo repertoire. I have fond memories growing up practising the works of the great Spanish masters, including Albéniz, Granados, Turina and De Falla, while my father sat across from me on the couch in the living room at 5:30 in the morning with his copy of the *Wall Street Journal* in hand, often blurting out comments from behind his newspaper. I could also hear my sister next door in the study playing through the Segovia scales and Sor studies. In middle school while most of my friends were still sleeping, my mornings were periods of time travel back to the old world, catching glimpses of a culture and spirit quite different from my own. I have to be honest. It was a struggle to find the energy or desire to practice, but my Dad was determined to instill the discipline necessary to reach mastery. I remember hearing my dad stomp down the hallway and opening the door to wake me up, and me complaining and whining about getting up so early, but I almost never won the battles. There were two arguments he had: one, there was sports, homework, social life and tiredness after school. His second rationale for getting us up early to practice was that farmers had to get up to milk the cows at the crack of dawn, so I had to get up to practice, and then I would get my glass of milk. I hated it back then, but laugh at it now! While it was a very tenuous relationship with the guitar growing up, I feel so fortunate that I had a father who was so interested in educating his children, imbuing a good work ethic in us, and passing along something that has been part of his entire life. And, it had a long-term impact on my desire to succeed in the music profession and my own maniacal work ethic. When I go home to give concerts in the Chicago-area as a professional guitarist today, my dad still sits on the couch with me as I practice, however I don't hear any commentary now, only the occasional, 'that's not right, play it a little slower.'



Adam Levin.

Becoming a NAXOS recording artist puts your recording work into a particular context since you are being featured alongside other guitarists on that label. Did this have an effect on how you wanted to design this disc?

The NAXOS label's mission of cataloguing new repertoire and distributing it worldwide complemented my ambitions of getting new music into the ears of the masses. Over the years, many of my guitar colleagues have recorded important new music, inspiring me to map a Naxos recording that included a new body of serious guitar repertoire. With an eye for novelty and departure from the conventional, in 2008 I embarked on an adventure to discover the living Spanish composers of the last four generations who have made significant musical contributions to the evolution of Spanish composition. My project grew from a blueprinted Fulbright Scholarship proposal to the petition of 30 new virtuosos works for solo guitar. The project went far beyond my expectations and I needed an important platform to carry the weight of the project. Subsequently, I proposed a four volume recording project with NAXOS, and now I'm releasing the first

volume, *21st Century Spanish Guitar*, in May 2013. Three more volumes will follow.

Spanish contemporary repertoire seems largely to have occupied your time in recent years. Why were you drawn to this particular area? What sequence of events led to the project that resulted?

I was on the jury of a major international competition in Colorado and I heard almost 50 guitarists perform and the only Spanish composers performed by the contestants were Rodrigo, Granados, Turina, and Ascencio. Like myself, these guitarists stuck closely to the great Spanish masters of the 19th and 20th centuries. For years, I had been curious as to what came next. Did Spain stop producing great music? What's going on here? As a student, I learned Spanish music, but out of context, and far away from its origins and inspiration. The same went for the acquisition of the Spanish language. I had always learned the minimum in order to score the A in Spanish class, but nothing more. My interest in finally mastering a second language, getting in touch with the homeland where the 'Spanish sound' originated, and answering my curiosity about the direction of 20th and 21st century composition led to my application to become a candidate for the Fulbright Scholarship. Something that always interested me was sharing music and specifically the guitar in uncharted territories and to audiences unfamiliar with classical music. The work I had completed in the states as a music activist could be continued on a larger scale as a Fulbright Scholar, sharing music from America with people from different cultures around Europe and then upon my return share new music from Spain with American audiences. My Fulbright experience provided me with that opportunity. My original proposal was to study and perform 20th and 21st century Spanish guitar repertoire already written. The first two years in Spain I was enrolled at the Real Conservatorio Superior de Música in Madrid and studied with Spanish guitar virtuoso, Gabriel Estarellas. Maestro Estarellas was largely responsible for introducing me to the seminal works and composers of the last 80 years, including works by the generation of 1930: Anton García Abril, Xavier Montsalvatge, Leonardo Balada, Cristobal Halffter, Tomas Marco, and Luis de Pablo among others. So far in his career, Estarellas has premiered over 300 new works for the guitar. This was a huge inspiration for me, so much that it changed the course of my Fulbright project. It felt like an appropriate time in my career to begin to contribute to my field just as my mentors, Eliot Fisk, Oscar Ghiglia and then Gabriel Estarellas, had done. I embarked on a new

voyage to find the most interesting composers of the last four generations and petition them to write new works for me. This was a fun venture because I got to wine and dine with many of the most important figures in the compositional world and many of them became close friends of mine and always extend their homes to me when I visit Spain. I spent a lot of time attending concerts and listening to music. Let's just say my iTunes bill got a bit out of hand. My friendship with two composers eventually led to two commercially released recordings, one called *Music from Out of Time*, and the other, *Fuego de la luna: Levin Plays Morales-Caso*. I wanted to commission works that represented the full diversity and spectrum of Spanish composition. During my second year in Spain, I received a fellowship called the Program for Cultural Cooperation, in which I researched Spanish composers who had immigrated to the United States. I chose three composers in particular: Leonardo Balada, Ricardo Llorca and Octavio Vazquez. In engaging these composers in conversation about their careers, they all wrote me fantastic works for solo guitar. The project spun out of control really and one composition led to the next. Then my project became, in my mind, a natural extension of a body of the 30 short works that Colien Honegger commissioned in 1998 by contemporary Spanish composers and published in a single volume called *Album de Colien*.

During my third year in Spain as a Kate Neal Kinley Fellow, I spent a large part of the year performing many of the new works around Spain and Europe and commissioning more works for my project. When I returned to the United States in the summer of 2011, I wanted to find a home for these works, so I wrote to many of the large record labels in the United States and NAXOS was thrilled to house my project across four volumes. I have already completed the first volume and the second volume is underway. There will also be a seven-volume companion publication with all the works that I commissioned. They will be published with *Brotans and Mercadal Editions, Barcelona*. This project represents four generations of male and female Spanish composers and ranges from neo-baroque music to fractal compositions. The subsequent recordings are going to get a bit crazy!

How do you think Spanish musical language has evolved? Does it still contain traces of the nationalist aesthetic used to great extent by Albéniz et al.?

I discovered that Spanish composition had changed course once again and had entered, in my estimation, another renaissance. Whereas the epicentre

“I learned Spanish music, but out of context, and far way from its origins and inspiration. The same went for the acquisition of the Spanish language. I had always learned the minimum in order to score the A in Spanish class, but nothing more.”



Duo Sonidos with William Knuth.

for many of the Spanish composers during the 19th and early 20th centuries was France, the Spanish contemporary masters of today are finding inspiration on a more global level and across centuries. Spanish composition is rich, varied and extremely cosmopolitan these days, a spectrum that spans neo-baroque and nationalist aesthetics to mind-blowing fractal compositions. While there are still vestiges of the Spanish nationalism 'sound' in today's Spanish music, the scope has broadened and diversified. Between 1930 and the present day, Spain has undergone impressive social, cultural and political change, from Franco's oppressive leadership and Spain's isolation, to democracy, increased immigration and capitalism. With this came a wealth of ideas, cultural exchange, innovation and global integration. I went to Spain expecting to see a homogenised, nationalist culture, but left with an entirely different image of Spain, one that is very regionalised, culturally diverse and progressive. These works also represent four generations of composition, which is another way of tracking the evolution of composition in the past 80 years.

Projects such as this generally spark new ventures. What might you be interested in exploring next?

There are two projects that I want to pursue in the near future. The first is exploring American music, the other exploring my Jewish heritage. I remember giving a recital in Spain and performing Spanish music and the organisers commenting not only on how well the music was performed but how it would be intriguing for the audience to hear music from my own culture and heritage. So, I went back the next year and gave them just that, and they loved it. I would like to record an album representing American composers.

I am currently organising a programme that includes works by Jewish composers and non-Jewish composers who were inspired by Judaism. This programme will include works by the Jewish composers Ernst Bloch, Arnold Schoenberg, George Gershwin, and Robert Beaser, among others, and non-Jewish composers, Maurice Ravel and Lorenzo Palomo. This project will demonstrate the richness and variety of the works by

Jewish composers and how its culture and traditions inspired non-Jewish composers.

One line of questioning that is popular with readers of this magazine is how players make a career in the arts in the 21st century. What does the guitar player of today need to do to make things happen?

I believe that one must have a comprehensive approach to making it in music. The ingredients to success can seem nebulous and intangible, so it requires passion and discipline to define the chemistry necessary to boost a career in the performing arts. Many people ask me, what do you do all day? Many people have jobs with a fixed infrastructure to work within and a regimen to follow. Musicians have to organise our lives like the rest of the world and create a fixed schedule. We have to give ourselves boundaries or else laziness ensues. I know this because I get lazy when I don't have specific daily goals. I have learned to adapt to a daily ritual that keeps me on track.

This leads to my next point, one must have an entrepreneurial spirit and think outside the box, innovate, and pioneer the future of their field. If one is going to repeat what has already been done, then one must discover new possibilities and attempt to offer a fresh perspective. In my mind, new music is the next frontier. I see it like investing in the stock market. You research a stock, follow it over time and then make a call whether to buy it or not. You purchase a stock because you believe it will have a return on investment. I think the same is true for new music, you're investing in a new composition that you believe will take its place in the standard repertoire and lead to future performances and recordings. I think it's a smart investment.

One must be a jack-of-all-trades. The idea that one will win competitions and automatically have a career is deceptive. I think competitions are among many things one can do to build their portfolio. Competitions are great for refining technique, building confidence and making friends in the international guitar community, however, they are places where guitar playing can occasionally become homogenised. In addition to being a solo performer, one must explore the richness that the chamber music world has to offer. Chamber music offers a wonderful opportunity to escape the guitar bubble and enter the general classical music world. Performing with other musicians gives guitarists the opportunity to perform music by composers who didn't write for guitar. It is a gateway into different music circles and thus broadens our horizons and gives us more opportunities to perform.

Refining one's message is critical in creating a career. Playing is not merely enough. Communicating and dialoguing about music and one's intentions and ambitions is paramount in crafting an image and brand for oneself. Certainly those terms are not what any of us want to hear: branding, image, and marketing, but it's the reality of the musical environment we live in today, and we all must craft our personal voice. My long time

mentor and teacher, Eliot Fisk, was inspirational in helping me define a niche and become an advocate for the guitar and the music I perform.

Establishing a catalogue of recordings is one component of building a legacy. From self-produced albums to established record labels, recordings are an ongoing means of communicating with your audience and one never knows which piece(s) for which he/she will become the reference.

There is no one method to creating a successful career. I am still figuring it out myself, but I do know that taking a multi-faceted approach has had success so far. Constantly re-evaluating ones conception of music, applying discipline, having a strong work ethic and yes, some luck, and you're good to go!

Duo Sonidos is central to your activities as a musician. Why have you placed so much career emphasis on this particular ensemble?

Duo Sonidos is my primary chamber music partnership with violinist William Knuth. We have been playing as a duo for almost seven years now, after meeting in graduate school at New England Conservatory in Boston. Will had just returned from Vienna, Austria where he completed two years as a Fulbright Scholar. I had just completed my undergraduate programme at Northwestern University outside of Chicago. Will was looking for something different than the traditional quartet experience and I was looking to gain access to the string world. Our introduction to the violin and guitar literature came through works by De Falla, Paganini, Piazzolla and contemporary Israeli composer Jan Freidlin. With encouragement from Eliot Fisk, Nicholas Kitchen, Paul Biss, and Lucy Chapman, we finally decided to go professional. This collaboration has elevated the guitar out of the guitar world and into the larger string and chamber music world. At the same time, it demonstrates the violin in its various capacities. We have made great strides to establish ourselves as a long-term, adventurous chamber music partnership. This has been accomplished in part through new commissions, outstanding critical response to our debut recording from *BBC Music Magazine*, *American Record Guide*, *Classical Guitar Magazine*, and *Farfare* as well as a growing international performance schedule. We are successfully advancing our mission, generating exciting invitations from major concert series around the country. Although many serious chamber music series around the United States can have rather conservative programming, only including trios, quartets and the occasional solo pianist, we have persuaded many important presenters that we are an exciting and pioneering group whose image and programming of new works mixed in with fresh settings of masterworks will appeal to the public and subscription members. We are harnessing both the popular and classic images of each

"One work we enjoy performing is Bach's B-minor Partita for solo violin or guitar, however, not in its usual format as a solo work!"

instrument to garner interest in our combination. When programming a concert, we feature works that really demonstrate the collaborative nature of the instruments, in which both the guitar and violin perform together on equal footing. At the same time, we select certain works that showcase the virtuosity of each performer. Good examples are the *Mountain Songs* by Robert Beaser, which demands great technical facility on the guitar, or Fritz Kreisler's showpieces for violin.

At the moment we are touring with a Baroque-Folk programme. The first half explores works originally for violin and continuo, such as Handel's *Sonata No.4 in D Major*, which is absolutely sublime, Corelli's famous *Sonata No.12 'La Follia'*, which uses a Portuguese dance motif ingeniously in a theme and variations, and Fritz Kreisler's *Variations on a Theme by Corelli*, which Kreisler presented as if it were a work by Corelli. Only later did Kreisler reveal that it was indeed a work by himself. The realisation of the figured bass was a challenge but a great exercise for me. As our concert schedule has become more hectic, we have enlisted a wonderful composer and guitarist, Allen Krantz, to transcribe works that I don't have time to transcribe myself. One work we enjoy performing is Bach's B-minor Partita for solo violin or guitar, however, not in its usual

format as a solo work! Each movement in this suite is followed by a *double* variation, so we superimpose one movement over the other and play them at the same time. It works amazingly well, which is not surprising since the *doubles* are embellishments of the previous movement. We were a bit tentative at first presenting such a well-known work in such an unconventional way, but once we performed it, we were convinced it was worthwhile! We think Bach would have enjoyed it this way as well.

We also perform works that draw from different folk traditions around the world, including Cuba, Spain and the United States, by composers Eduardo Morales-Caso, Xavier Montsalvatge and Robert Beaser. Our next recording project, which we hope to release early next year, will include works inspired primarily by folk music from around the world: Hungary, Spain, Poland, Cuba, and America. Through innovative transcriptions, our intent is to present a fresh perspective of fine chamber music of the last century written for voice and piano, or violin and piano, as well as to advance our mission to expand the repertoire for violin and guitar duos through new works. This project will include works by Lukas Foss, Karol Szymanowski, Béla Bartók, David del Puerto, and Xavier Montsalvatge.

The programme reflects our sense of pride in our individual heritages. William is of Polish descent, and I am of Jewish descent. We chose chamber works for this album that draw inspiration from

these two vibrant cultures. First are three transcriptions from the violin and piano catalogue of Karol Szymanowski: *The Dawn and Wild Dance* (jointly composed with Polish violinist Paul Kochanski) and Szymanowski's own adaptation of *Kurpian Song*, all which reference traditional Polish music and folklore. Lukas Foss' *Three American Pieces* is a profound work that captures the essence of America through its virtuosity, expansiveness and lyrical character. While this work draws from our common American background, the work also represents American music from the hand of a Jewish composer that William has personally worked with in the past.

We are especially delighted with our recent adaptation of Xavier Montsalvatge's masterpiece, *Cinco Canciones Negras*, originally for mezzo-soprano and piano, based on the evocative lyricism of music from Cuba and the West Indies. The songs posed a great challenge and opportunity as we worked to capture the essence of the vocal and piano parts idiomatically on the guitar and violin. Just as Manuel De Falla's *Siete Canciones Populares Españolas* became a staple for just about every combination of instrumentalists, we anticipate a bright future for this transcription in chamber music circles.

You are also involved in a number of projects to do with music and community. How did you become involved in these things and what value do you think they have?

Music activism is part of my broader music entrepreneurial vision and a core portion of my career plan. For centuries classical music has been exclusive, expensive and distant from the masses. It has been typically available to the wealthy elite and only those who could afford to provide their children with a music education. As the political, cultural and social landscape of the world has changed in the 20th and 21st centuries, globalisation has expanded worldwide networks and brought people from different backgrounds together. The Internet has radically transformed the exchange of information and ideas and informed people of different cultures and traditions. As a musician, I believe it is my responsibility to contribute in breaking down the cultural, social, and economic barriers barring people from access to a music education. It has given me the opportunity to broaden my humanitarian scope by introducing classical music to the lives of people who have either been cut off from the cultural mainstream owing to crisis, unforeseen misfortune or have been denied access to it owing to economic or educational constraints. The guitar is an instrument with which many people in America share some affinity and affection, though not enough have had exposure to classical guitar. People who would rarely think of attending a recital of string players or an orchestra concert are charmed by the guitar and curious to hear almost any style of music being



Adam Levin.

played on it. It is, in other words, an ideal 'gateway instrument' into the world of Bach, Albéniz, and Walton.

My classroom performances have allowed students to listen and respond to a form of music they may have never encountered before, and that may have inspired a student to pursue a creative pursuit outside the classroom. The therapeutic effect of music in the treatment of mental illness and for a variety of physical ailments is well documented and has been an essential adjunct to hospital programmes since its formal introduction as a health-care discipline at the University of Michigan some 60 years ago. Music produces a range of palliative and enduring health and cognitive learning effects; it provides a basis for social effect; it provides a basis for social relatedness between others in disconnected or alienated groups, and it provides a voice for the heart, a medium of emotional expression, exchange and mastery.

My mission, stated plainly, is to take the guitar into uncharted territories: new music, novel pedagogical methodologies, broader community exposure and participation. As a Boston Albert Schweitzer Fellow, I designed and implemented a multidimensional outreach programme, encompassing healthcare, education and community welfare. In Madrid as a Fulbright Scholar, I collaborated with the US Embassy in creating educational programmes offering broad exposure to world music for students at bilingual schools. Music outreach has allowed me to become a community leader while offering members of the community a glimpse of an art form that has brought peace, unity and integrity to my family and to my life.

Whenever I mentor young people about a career in music (which I am still figuring out myself!), I emphasise the word dynamic. Performance outreach is a unique opportunity to cultivate your artistic message, gain performance experience, contribute to the community, educate the next generation of young learners and build future music audiences. Coupled with a broader performance and teaching career, we begin to develop a concept for the 21st century musician.

CLASSICAL

GUITAR

July 2013

CD Reviews

21ST CENTURY SPANISH MUSIC 1

MORALES-CASO: *La Fragua de Vulcano*. BROTONS: *Dues Noves Suggestions Op.121*. DEL PUERTO: *Viento de Primavera*. CRUZ DE CASTRO: *Secuencia Sefardita*. LLORCA: *Handeliana*. BALADA: *Caprichos No.8: "Abstractions of Albéniz"*. VAZQUEZ: *Suite: "Nostos"*.

Adam Levin

Naxos 8.573024 CD

A Spanish agenda from which the 'usual suspects' are absent is a rarity indeed. OK, Albéniz provides the raw material for the Balada, but we're still a long way from the comfort zone. Incidentally, please don't join me in initially confusing the Balada on the present disc with the work reviewed in CG Aug 2012 (p.48). That was *Caprichos No.5: "Homage to Isaac Albéniz"* for cello and chamber orchestra.

As becomes clear from his notes, in which he invites us to 'prepare for a wild ride', Adam Levin has put heart and soul into assembling this programme and is passionate about his findings. Rather mischievously, he opens with arguably the most uncompromising item on the menu. *La Fragua de Vulcano* by Eduardo Morales-Caso (b.1969) draws its inspiration from the Velázquez painting in which Apollo informs Vulcan, who just happens to be forging weapons of war, that his wife (Venus) has succumbed to the soldierly charms of Mars. Small wonder things get rather heated.

But it's not all about deities knocking lumps out of each other. Salvador Brotons, who was composer in residence at Nürtingen 2010 (CG Jan 2011), weighs in with a concise and amiable diptych that's billed as a sequel to the earlier and similarly accessible *Dos Suggestions Op.23* (1979).

By this time, we're in no doubt that Adam Levin is a stylish and highly skilled player who's equally at home with the challenging, the lyrical and the playful. Having dug deep into the first category with the Morales-Castro and the Balada, he has ample opportunity to explore the other two in the delightful six-movement valedictory offering by Octavio Vazquez, a work positively brimming with seductive melodies and infectious humour. Most exhilarating of all is the central *Gigue*, a textbook example of a rollicking fun piece that must be an absolute stinker to play with the required velocity.

It's a pity there wasn't space to examine the other items, for each is well worth discovering, as is this ground-breaking release *in toto*.

Paul Fowles

"Classical Guitar Hawaii"—Ian O'Sullivan | "An American Guitarist in Spain!"—Adam Levin | "Out of Africa . . . : Interview with Denis Azabagic"—Alan Thomas

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Music of Place

Ian O'Sullivan—pictured above in Hawaii.

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Music of Place Spain

An American Guitarist in Spain: Taking a Passion, an Idea, and a Spirit for Innovation to the Concert Stage

by Adam Levin

Growing up in a small suburb of Chicago, where rock and roll, blues, and jazz were the basic music pedigree, Spanish guitar music seemed an unlikely match for a wide-eyed, ten-year-old Eric Clapton wannabe who dreamt of one day making it big. Truth be told, my Spanish musical palate was developed on a bribe. “Learn Andrés Segovia’s *20 Studies for the Guitar: by Fernando Sor*,” my father (and first guitar teacher) offered, “and I’ll buy you the electric guitar you’ve been begging for.” It turned out to be a good deal for both of us.

I slugged my way through all twenty studies, became hooked, and no longer cared about getting an electric guitar. Without realizing it, my father had implanted a basic familiarity with Spanish music into the highly impressionable imagination of a novice classical guitarist. This understanding would later become the sonic lens through which I would view the essence and evolution of the Spanish repertoire. I imagine that many guitarists remember the point at which their imaginations were ignited by the evocative “classic” Spanish sound. In my mind, vivid imagery of flamenco dancers and the caves where they performed grew to fantastic proportions. But there is a danger that in pursuit of the mysterious “Spanish sound,” one can produce instead, as I did, a mosaic of superficially organized ideas that lack authenticity. There is so much more to Spanish music than the visions of bullfighters, the Alhambra Palace, and the Andalusian desert. I would come to discover that a creative musical revolution is occurring in modern-day Spain. Participating in this revolution would change my conception of the Spanish sound forever.

In the early days of my journey toward this realization, I recall lessons in which my teachers, including my father, Anne Waller, Mark Maxwell, Shinobu Sato, Paul Henry, Oscar Ghiglia, Eliot Fisk, and Gabriel Estarellas, distilled into me the salient features of Spanish music by illuminating the imagery that so captured me, explaining compositions’ historical contexts, and examining the evolution of a composers’ musical language. I was a curious student, who earnestly listened to my teachers’ wisdom, so that I could capture the evocative essence of that country’s music. But I discovered that there was only so far I could be educated without witnessing the real thing for myself. I’d lived my whole life in the United States, far from the spiritual homeland of this music, so it was essential for me to explore a culture different from my own, to exchange ideas, to cultivate new relationships, to bridge gaps, and to enrich myself with the knowledge and experiences that are instrumental in crafting original interpretations of Spanish music. I knew I absolutely had to go study in Spain.



Above: Adam Levin.

Before I left, though, it was important to consider the formation of my perception of the Spanish sound. Who developed its foundation, and how did my concept of this music, however limited, arise? I, like most classical guitarists, consider Francisco Tárrega, Manuel de Falla, Enrique Granados, Isaac Albéniz, Federico Mompou, Joaquín Turina, Federico Moreno Tórroba, Vicente Ascencio, and Joaquín Rodrigo archetypal figures of Spanish composition. Tárrega was in fact the only guitarist among these composers, and he wrote a vast catalog of guitar music that was both idiomatic for the instrument and diverse in language, style, and theme. De Falla unfortunately only composed a single yet magical work for the guitar, *Pour le tombeau de Claude Debussy*. However, many guitarists have creatively adapted his other masterworks, including *El amor brujo*, *El sombrero de tres picos*, and *Siete canciones populares Españolas*. While Granados and Albéniz never wrote for guitar, their music was inarguably inspired by the instrument’s spirit, technical gestures and, of course, its association with flamenco music.

With the advent of the recording age, the Spanish sound reached the world stage thanks in large part to the ingenuity of Andrés Segovia, the father of modern classical guitar. Followed by a long line of his illustrious pupils, he masterfully transcribed works by Granados, Albéniz, and many more. His recordings, performances, and transcriptions brought the Spanish sound to the world stage. Segovia was a gift to the musical world, elevating the instrument’s reputation through his newly commissioned works from bastions of Spanish composition, such as Joaquín Turina, Federico Moreno Tórroba, Federico Mompou, and Joaquín Rodrigo. Rodrigo’s *Fantasia para un gentilhombre*, which was dedicated to Andres Segovia and which premiered in 1958, is but one example of Segovia’s major contributions to the guitar repertoire.

The Segovia era could be described as a golden age for the Spanish sound; his recordings of these composers are the reasons so many of us embrace this music. While composers from the Renaissance (Luis de Milán, Alonso Mudarra), Baroque (Gaspar Sanz, Santiago de Murcia), and Classical (Antonio Soler, Fernando Sor) eras produced an extensive catalogue of works for the early predecessors of the modern guitar and lute, it was the composers from 1850 to 1930 whose music encompassed the essence of modern Spanish culture, art, and history. Although they sometimes worked abroad in France to develop their compositional languages, they strongly encouraged one another to focus on representing Spanish folklore, culture, and tradition in their music. To my surprise, this practice has continued evolving in new and exciting ways in the twenty-first century.

A vision of Spanish music was forming in my mind, based on these beloved composers and historic recordings. These composers effectively imprinted on me a unified and nationalistic spirit, not to mention a romanticized view of Spanish identity. Learning and performing their music yielded a powerful, yet limited view of what it means to be Spanish and produce a Spanish sound. Prior to my residency in Spain, I imagined a nation with one homogenous identity, a passionate, free, and liberal-minded people, a country of one spoken and musical language, one terrain (arid Andalusian desert in my mind), a flamenco-infused culture, bull-fighting, bold and abstract visual art, and, of course, the Alhambra palace. While these are all striking features of Spain, I discovered during my time there that these perspectives did not fully reflect the modern ethos of the country's culture.

So how did this disconnect between the reality of Spanish culture and the fantasy I'd developed perpetuate itself? As other nations around the globe were developing a contemporary musical language, Spain's contribution and influence became stifled, partly due to the policies of the isolationist dictator Francisco Franco, who in many ways prevented Spanish cross-fertilization with Europe and the West. This effort by Franco systematically created a schism between pre- and post-Franco cultural sensibilities, obstructed the easy transmigration of Spanish musical motifs, and effectively halted the integration of contemporary Spanish composition into world music. As I delved more heavily into the history and context of Spanish music, I wondered, naturally, what's next?

It was with humility, a yearning to understand the Spanish musical imprint, and a generous grant from the Fulbright Program that I traveled in 2008 from the New World back to the old in search of the evolutionary line, the genetic core, that connected luminaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with their successors in the twenty-first century. How do the legacies of Albéniz, Granados, de Falla, Turina, Rodrigo, and others live on in new Spanish music?

It was not until my pilgrimage to Madrid in 2008 that I discovered Spain was in the midst of another musical revolution. Although this was not immediately obvious in the creation of new guitar literature, I found a creative transformation in the composition of new music for other solo instruments and chamber works

by a great number of gifted Spanish composers. My mission was to discover the composers who would ultimately become the voice of Spanish composition, and who would close the arc, so to speak, connecting the masters of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the maverick audiences and performers of present day.

I set out with but a handful of recorded works and published scores, most prominently *El violín del siglo XXI, Compositores Españoles* ("The 21st Century Violin, Spanish Composers"), a collection of recent solo Spanish compositions performed by virtuoso violinist Manuel Guillén, and a beautiful, but thinly distributed collection of thirty short manuscripts for solo guitar, *Album de Colien*. It was the beginning of a collaborative journey tracking down and imploring a cadre of promising composers, thirty of whom shared my vision and enthusiastically contributed virtuoso works of varied and contrasting style and musical content for solo classical guitar.

My Fulbright scholarship proposal initially entailed the study and performance of twentieth-century works already written for the classical and flamenco guitar. However, my project shifted direction and began to focus on the creation of new works for the guitar repertoire, which extended my residency in Spain by two years. The support of the extensive networks of the Fulbright program, the Program for Cultural Cooperation, and finally, the Kate Neal Kinley Fellowship, enabled me to realize my personal Spanish quest on an unexpectedly grand scale. With almost three-dozen composers responding to my inquiries, it felt at moments a little out of control! I was in the unique position to harness the guitar's distinctive relationship with Spain as a means for making new music accessible to audiences around the globe.

My project, *21st Century Spanish Guitar*, became the core of my research abroad, and it is now the title of a four-volume encyclopedic series that I have been invited to record on the NAXOS label, cataloging the thirty new works I commissioned. *21st Century Spanish Guitar, Vol. 1* [NAXOS 8.573024, released in May 2013] presents a diverse portrait of contemporary Spanish music by four generations of living Spanish composers. The first generation represents composers born in the 1930s, the second generation from the 1950s, the third generation from the late 1960s, and the current generation of composers from 1975 onward. I plan to represent composers from each generation across all four of my recordings. Volume one of my series includes works by Eduardo Morales-Caso, Salvador Brotons, David del Puerto, Carlos Cruz de Castro, Ricardo Llorca, Leonardo Balada and Octavio Vazquez. Volume two will be released in early 2015.

The first recording opens with *La Fragua de vulcano*, composed in 2009 by Eduardo Morales-Caso. It is based on a painting by the baroque Spanish artist Diego de Velázquez, and it ingeniously demonstrates the full capacity of the guitar's technique by depicting Apollo, the mythical god of sun and poetry, delivering the news to Vulcan that Vulcan's wife Venus is having an affair with Mars, the god of war. *Dues noves suggestions, Op. 121* ("Two New Suggestions") by Catalan composer Salvador Brotons was inspired by his first guitar work, *Dues suggestions, Op. 23*. Think of it as a sequel. *Viento de primavera* is a

An American Guitarist in Spain: ... (continued)

trptych written by David del Puerto; based on del Puerto's concerto *Cefiro* for guitar and chamber ensemble. The concerto evokes the feel of a gentle spring wind softly caressing the newly emergent fields and announcing the arrival of mild weather and the waning of winter's harshness. *Secuencia sefardita* by Carlos Cruz de Castro creatively incorporates the Sephardic melody from *La rosa enflorace* ("The Rose Blooms"), and presents it in many permutations. Ricardo Llorca's theme and variation, *Handeliana*, is based on the arietta "Va godendo" from George Frideric Handel's Italian opera, *Xerxes*. Llorca uniquely re-examines classical structures and presents an unconventional perspective on contemporary classical music. Celebrating the centennial of Isaac Albéniz, Leonardo Balada composed a virtuosic piece for this collection, *Caprichos No. 8: Abstractions of Albéniz*, based on themes by Albéniz. Balada selected five works by Albéniz, including *Sevilla* and *Cádiz* from *Suite Española, Op. 47*, and *Triana* (a neighborhood in Sevilla), *Evocación* (reminiscence of the past) and the popular Spanish children's song *La Tarara* (cleverly woven into *El corpus en Sevilla*) from the *Iberia Suite*. In five short abstractions, he freely improvises upon Albéniz's aggregation of folklore, flamenco, popular music, rhythms, and melodies recast in his own compositional language. The title of the final piece on this album, *Nostos* Octavio Vazquez, translates to "homecoming" in Greek, representing the final stage of a journey. In my case, it harkens to a journey that began with a voyage to Spain and culminated in the cataloging of thirty new Spanish works for solo guitar.

These new musical compositions are a microcosm of the complexity, richness, and variety that exists within art, culture, language, and the various Spanish geographical regions, and facilitate an examination of Spain that accurately represents the numerous facets of this nation. There are seventeen politically organized regions in Spain, many of which have their own language or dialect, together creating salient features in music, education, and even culinary traditions. For example, Catalonia is the Northeast region of Spain that was prohibited to speak their language, Catalan, during the Franco regime, and since then has not only reintegrated their language into the education system, but defined themselves as Catalan, not Spanish. The revival of the Catalan identity has been a focal point in the development of a school of composition from which many renowned Spanish composers have emerged in the twenty-first century.

Forging new artistic relationships with composers is an eye-opening experience that includes studying their works, enlightening correspondences, personal meetings, and conversations. It's a glance into their creative minds and the process of formulating structures, motifs, gestures, technical obstacles, and subsequently composing a new work. One of the major hurdles for many composers—and likewise for guitarists—is realizing a piece that is idiomatic, or playable, on the guitar. The time the performer spends revising the piece in collaboration with the composer can be monumental. Yet it can be a rewarding process, to which any guitarist who has commissioned new

works can attest. The truly gratifying moments of collaboration with a composer occur during the realization of the interpretation of their piece.

When beginning to study a new work, I always listen to and examine other pieces by that composer. This exercise provides the context for me to accurately interpret the composer's intent. Inevitably, the first rehearsal with the composer also generates major interpretational shifts and symbiotically changes the way in which both the composer and performer conceive of the world premiere performance. Observing the piece's evolution, from its receipt to its analysis and study, to achieving a working version of the composition, to molding the interpretation during the first rehearsal, can be truly a transformative experience.

After working so closely with a new score for hours in the practice room, it is often a Herculean task to step back and remove the magnifying glass and examine the whole arc of the piece objectively. My goal is to integrate the composer's commentary and highlight the imaginative qualities of the new creation. One challenge facing performers who work with composers is remaining flexible and open-minded, despite the great investment of time having already formulated a personalized concept of the piece. We usually have a singular opportunity to work directly with the composer and internalize elements of their personality, spirit, musical aesthetic, and perspectives, which are all creatively incorporated into the new piece. This invaluable experience gives us the awe-inspiring opportunity to reformulate our understanding of the work and respectfully project the composer's intentions.

The Cuban-Spanish composer Eduardo Morales-Caso once told me during a recording session, "*Tienes que tocar como si tuviera sangre en las venas*," or, in English, "You have to play like you have blood in your veins." I now consciously perform music expressively, pumping blood into every note and breathing life into the interpretation. For me, Morales-Caso's adage has provoked discerning moments of catharsis, compelling me to explore music more profoundly and to re-examine my role as the medium between composers and audiences.

This project is an ambitious yet deeply personal step towards answering my own questions about the development of Spanish guitar music in the twenty-first century, while at the same time contributing to its advancement. The works included in this project explore the diversity of Spanish repertoire written for the guitar since 2008. The spectrum of musical voices compiled is vast, which further argues for a Spain that has changed course once again. Not only are Spanish composers revisiting their nationalistic past, but they are pursuing new and unique compositional styles with eagerness and dedication. They have written monumental works for the guitar, advancing both the musical and technical possibilities of the instrument.

It is my hope that this project begins the process of bridging the gap between music of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spanish composers and the musical revolution of twenty-first century Spain. It's a rich, new landscape infused with popular and modern musical motifs, tonalities, and novel rhythmic devices.

Now that I have returned home from Spain, it is my wish that all thirty works from this project may become known not only through my frequent performances, a seven-volume publication, and a four volume encyclopedic series on the NAXOS label, but that they take their place in the guitar repertoire. Will the tradition continue as it did for those artists who came before—artists who have done their part in cultivating a serious body of guitar music suitable for the world's concert stages? An investment in the creation and performance of new guitar music will certainly have an enduring value far beyond our lifetime, and perpetuate the evolution of not only Spanish composition and the guitar, but our grasp of the context in which these works were conceived.



Adam Levin has performed extensively throughout the United States, Europe, and South America and received numerous top prizes, including the Fulbright Scholarship, a Program for Cultural Cooperation Fellowship from Spain's Cultural Ministry, and the Kate Neal Kinley Memorial Fellowship to research and perform contemporary Spanish guitar repertoire in Madrid. While studying and performing in Spain from 2008 to 2011, Levin commissioned thirty solo guitar works from four generations of contemporary Spanish composers. With violinist William Knuth, he formed the ensemble Duo Sonidos, and subsequently won first prize in the 2010 Luys Milan International Chamber Music Competition in Valencia.

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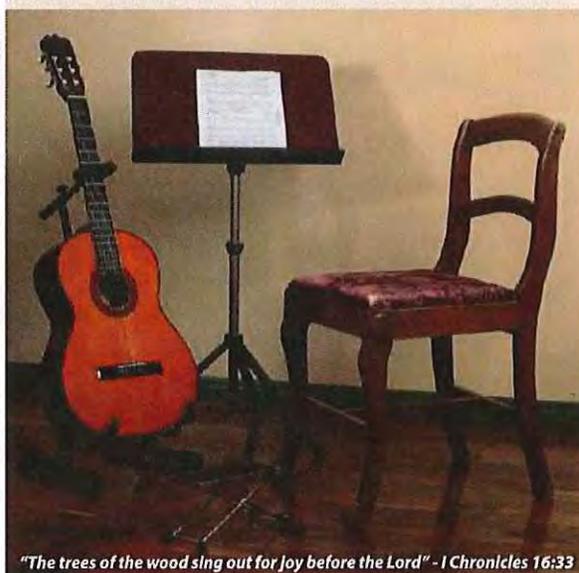
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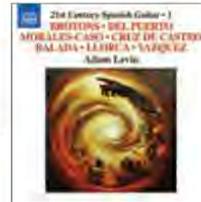
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CD REVIEWS

Levin, Adam. *Twenty First Century Spanish Guitar • 1.*

Works by Morales-Caso, Brotons, del Puerto, Cruz de Castro, Llorca, Balada, and Vazquez. Naxos 8.573024, 2013.



This is the first in a planned series of four discs by Adam Levin highlighting new “Spanish Masters.” On the basis of this first disc, it seems like a laudable project. The “oldest” work in the program was written in 2009, with the most recent dating from 2011. (Even Mr. Levin needs a bit of time to practice after all!) Most of the recordings are world premieres. These are resolutely modern works, for the most part not even conservative, but always allowing a serious listener a path into the sound world of the of the composers. These composers seem to have escaped the previous generation’s mandate to mystify if not annoy listeners. Mr. Levin, who collaborated with the writers to bring us these works, has an amazing track record in eliciting fine music. The disc opens with one of the most modern sounding works, the often-violent sounding *La Fragua del Vulcano*, roughly “Vulcan’s Forge.” The violent nature of the music is inspired by a painting by Velasquez concerning a bit of marital infidelity by Venus, aka Mrs. Vulcan. Vulcan is not pleased, and Morales-Caso’s music depicts that well. The next works are more genial. Salvador Brotons’ very satisfying *Dues Noves Suggestions* consists of a moody “Siciliana” and a wonderfully neurotic sounding “Brasilera.” Following the Brotons are equally fine works by David del Puerto, Carlos Cruz de Castro, and Ricardo Llorca. The disc closes with two substantial works by Leonard Balada and Octavio Vazquez. The former composer, originally from Barcelona but a longtime resident of Pittsburgh, contributes the fascinating *Caprichos No.8: Abstractions of Albéniz*. Balada has written a lot of music for guitar, but the brief “abstractions” (based on well-known piano works) form a gorgeous and well-constructed set. Ending the program is the *Suite: Nostos*. The title is from a Greek term for homecoming, and the five mostly short movements are, by turns, melodic, dramatic, and nostalgic, and sometimes astonishingly virtuosic. Recorded sound throughout is, of course perfect, and flawlessly captures the range of Levin’s playing from considerable violence to extreme delicacy. Excellent notes by the performer. It is refreshing to encounter an entire album of new works which are not in any way backward-looking, yet don’t sound as if they were composed with the aid of a spreadsheet. I look forward eagerly to the next installment in this important series. – Al Kunze

21st Century Spanish Guitar 2

BALADA: *Caprichos 11: Abstractions of Granados*; **TORRES:** *Interiores*; **GODOY:** *Elegia Otonal*; **GARCIA ABRIL:** *2 Cantares*; **PABLO:** *Turris Eburnea*; **SOUTULLO:** *I've Got You Under my String*; **DURAN-LORCA:** *Upon 21*; **CASABLANCAS:** *3 Pieces*; **RUIZ:** *Orion*

Adam Levin, g
Naxos 573409—71 minutes

Adam Levin's *21st Century Spanish Guitar* project continues with Volume 2, which is as exciting and fascinating as his first release in this series (S/O 2013). I know he is currently recording Volume 3, and I hope that won't take as long to be released.

The project was inspired by his own curiosity—we've all seen the great explosion of guitar music from the 20th Century—masterworks by Moreno Torroba, Turina, Rodrigo, Mompou. Who are the 21st Century equivalents? So, with the support of the Fulbright Foundation, he began to contact composers who had written for guitar, or who were interested in doing so, to discover a new repertory. He also had the support of the Naxos corporation, which has agreed to release four volumes in the project—the guitar world is deeply grateful for the fruits of that project.

Leonardo Balada continues his *Caprichos* series with a set of what he calls "Abstractions"—this time of Granados (Albeniz was his source for the first set). Each of the five pieces includes recognizable snippets of *Spanish Dances*, and identifying the sources is only part of the fun.

Jesus Torres's 'Interiores' is another world entirely—deep and dramatic, with wide contrasts of dynamics and color. Levin describes the work as a soliloquy, and it does feel rather like watching a skilled actor in the most intimate and revealing section of a great play.

Marc Lopez Godoy is Balada's student. His three-movement *Elegia Otonal* (Autumn Elegy) is a beautiful and moving depiction of images of Fall, from a sparrow's flight to a gentle rain. I have praised the work of Anton Garcia Abril in these pages (S/O 2015). His two cantares are worthy of a man whose address when inducted to the Royal Academy of Arts was titled "In Defense of Melody". Luis de Pablo (b. 1930) uses his 'Turris Eburnea' (Ivory Tower) as something of an exploration of the life of the mind—he is himself a scholar of the highest standards.

Eduardo Soutoulo is of a newer generation, born in 1968. His four-movement *I've Got You Under My String* was written for Levin. It's

a puckish work, a bit reminiscent of Brouwer—fun to listen to, and fun to play. Also with an English title (presumably for the same reason), Jacobo Duran-Loriga's *Upon 21* is a set of three Baroque dances: courante, chaconne, and gigue. But beyond form, none of these works attempts a neo-Baroque style, though the set is charming. Benet Casablanca takes his inspiration from the Second Viennese School. I can't tell if his 3 Pieces are strictly serial or just atonal—not that this matters a great deal—yet he manages still to sound guitaristic.

The last work is the biggest and most ambitious, Juan Manuel Ruiz's *Orion*. It's a storm, and a violent one—and I'm from Florida, so I know storms. And it contains just about any sound guitar can make—rasgueados, golpe, tambura, harmonics, pizzicato, percussive effects. At first hearing I was a bit put off, but by the end, and after a few more hearings, Levin revealed the architecture so clearly that I began to think of this as my favorite piece. But it's not possible to pick a favorite here. Nearly every piece is attractive, and each has an excellent chance of entering the repertory.

And we have to thank Adam Levin for this. Every piece except the Abril was dedicated to him, and he gave the world premieres. And his performance cannot be faulted—huge dynamic and timbral range, deeply moving phrasing, committed virtuosity. He can be wildly dramatic, but never overplays. It's hard to imagine these performances being improved on, but that's just what I (and he) would love to see as this wonderful music gets discovered.

KEATON

Rovshan Mamedkuliev

WALTON: *5 Bagatelles*; **RODRIGO:** *Junto al Generalife; En los Trigales*; **BACH:** *Chaconne*; **WILLIAMS:** *Rounds*; **KOSHKIN:** *Sonata 2*
Naxos 573669—64 minutes

This is my second review of Azeri guitarist Rovshan Mamedkuliev. His earlier Naxos release (S/O 2013) was a result of winning the 2012 GFA competition. This one is for the 2015 Michele Pittaluga Competition in Italy. Can't keep a good man down.

This release is just as fine as the other, which was very fine indeed. The Walton has been recorded so often that it's not really possible to pick a top choice, but among those (most recently, Meng Su's wonderful performance in J/F 2017) Mamedkuliev stands proudly. He also gives a fine reading of John Williams's (the film composer, not the gui-



RECORDING OF THE MONTH

21st Century Spanish Guitar - Volume I

Eduardo MORALES-CASO (b.1969)

La Fragua de Vulcano (2009) [6:28]

Salvador BROTONS (b.1959)

Dues Noves Suggestions, Op. 121 (2011) [6:48]

David DEL PUERTO (b.1964)

Viento de Primavera (2009) [6:41]

Carlos CRUZ DE CASTRO (b.1941)

Sequencia Sefardita (2010) [6:36]

Ricardo LLORCA (b.1962)

Handeliana (2011) [6:59]

Leonardo BALADA (b.1933)

Caprichos No. 8: Abstractions of Albéniz (2010) [11:23]

Octavio VAZQUEZ (b.1972)

Suite: Nostos (2009) [16:57]

Adam Levin (guitar)

rec. 16-19 September, 2012, St. John Chrysostom Church, Newmarket, Ontario, Canada

NAXOS 8.573024 [62:22]

Adam Levin put his Fulbright Scholarship to good use. The young American guitarist traveled to Spain and checked in on that country's latest guitar compositions; this is the first of a series dedicated to the music he found or commissioned while there.

There's a gratifying amount of diversity on display here. From Leonardo Balada, a more abstract voice of an older generation who grew up trained in avant-garde techniques, to Ricardo Llorca's *Handeliana*, an overt tribute to the past, the pieces suggest that the Spanish guitar scene is as varied, exciting, and as full of activity as it ever was. The one piece not being premiered here, Eduardo Morales-Caso's *La Fragua de Vulcano* (Vulcan's Forge), lives up to its title, and Levin made up for his not being first to the punch by commissioning the cover painting of the same title.

Conductor Salvador Brotons, who's appeared on Naxos several times, here turns composer, offering an especially fun Brasileira. David del Puerto's triptych of natural scenes, *Viento de Primavera*, ends with a scintillating rapid-motion dance. Carlos Cruz de Castro employs all sorts of exotic, mesmeric effects in a tribute to the Sephardic musical traditions of medieval Spain and its religious melting pot; this is a piece well worth noting and promoting.

It's also a great contrast with the work that follows, *Handeliana*, Ricardo Llorca's loving homage in the form of variations on a theme from *Xerxes*. Balada also ostensibly offers a look back to the past, *Abstractions of Albéniz*, with reflections of original pieces by that celebrated composer. Take the title "abstract" seriously, and don't expect something that sounds at all like Albéniz; much like similar works in which Balada has "abstracted" the likes of Chopin, the originals are seen through a glass, darkly.

Everything I like about this recital comes together in the final work, Octavio Vazquez' suite *Nostos*. The title is Greek for "homecoming", and the suite is suggested by the composer as a kind of odyssey. Levin notes, in a personable and enthusiastic booklet essay that makes me very happy every time I read it, that it's odyssean in its technical challenges, too. This piece is advanced in language, full and "lush" (Levin's word) in harmonies, and appealing in every way. There's variety, more than one catchy tune, and enough substance that this feels like a truly important addition to the guitar repertoire. I'd go to any concert where it's on the program.

Actually, these are all important contributions to the repertoire, for which we have Levin to thank. He's clearly overjoyed to be playing them: you see it in his words in the booklet, and hear it on every track. These composers could not have asked for a better, more thoughtful and dedicated guitarist to premiere their works. If I'm especially excited about Vazquez' *Nostos*, it's as the crowning jewel of a superb CD produced by Norbert Kraft and Bonnie Silver to the high standards almost every Naxos guitar CD sets.

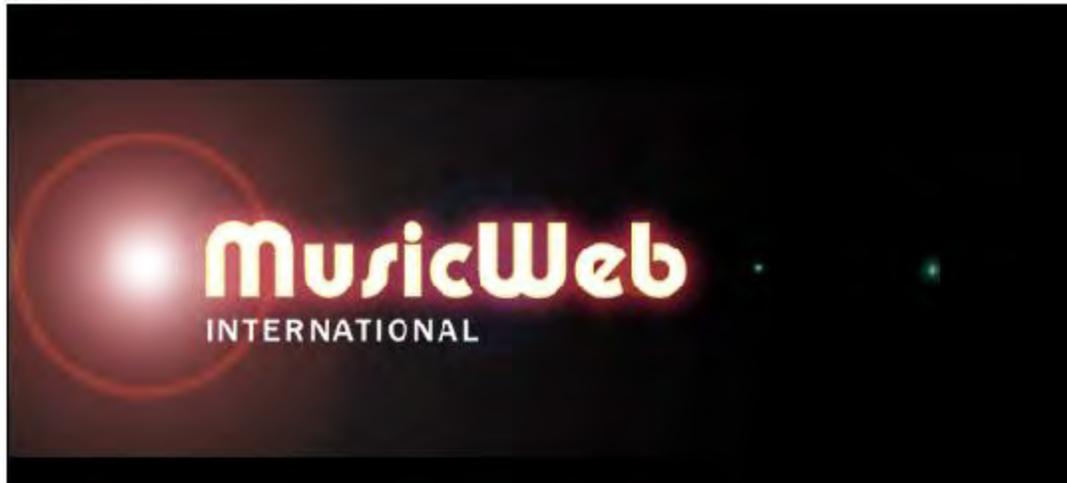
There are three more volumes to come. If they're as good as this, they'll form one of the most exciting guitar series of the century so far.

Brian Reinhart

A trip to Spain resulted in the commission of some exciting new guitar repertoire any fan of the instrument should hear.

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MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL Recordings Of The Year 2013

Brian Reinhart



21st Century Spanish Guitar Volume I Adam Levin (guitar) rec. 2012 **NAXOS 8.573024**

I can't contain my excitement about this series. Thirty-odd newly-commissioned guitar works could rejuvenate the entire Spanish guitar tradition, or it could produce a lot of crummy music. Adam Levin's first volume contains no crummy music, a lot that delights, and outstanding playing. History in the making?

21st Century Spanish

MORALES-CASO: *La Fruga de Vulcano*; **BROTONS:** *2 Noves Suggestions*; **CRUZ DE CASTRO:** *Secuencia Sefardita*; **LLORCA:** *Handeliana*; **BALADA:** *Capricho 8: Abstractions of Albeniz*; **VAZQUEZ:** *Suite: Nostos*; **DEL PUERTO:** *Viento de Primavera*

Adam Levin, g

Naxos 573024—62 minutes

Mr Levin, with the support of the Fulbright Foundation, has embarked on an ambitious project: to explore recent music for guitar by Spanish composers. And by recent, I mean seriously recent—the oldest music here dates from 2009. If the rest of the music maintains this quality, this will, indeed, be a wild ride. Four volumes are projected, with 30 new works.

Eduardo Morales-Caso named *La Fruga de Vulcano* (The Forge of Vulcan) from a Velazquez painting. Apollo appears to Vulcan at his forge to tell him that his wife, Venus, is sleeping with the God Mars. This is the most non-tonal work here, yet it reflects powerfully the rage and pain that Vulcan felt. Salvador Brotons is a Catalan composer, and his music is more conservative, but just as moving. *Dues Noves Suggestions* (his first work for guitar was called Two Suggestions) is in a classic slow-fast balance, opening with a siciliano rhythm and a contemplative mood, moving to a raucous folk dance. Just as idiomatic is David Del Puerto's *Viento de Primavera* (Spring Winds), a distinct sense of the gentle winds of a quiet Spring day

September/October 2013

woven from gentle arpeggios and sprightly scalar passages in its three movements.

The next three pieces are all based on pre-existing music. Carlos Cruz de Castro's *Secuencia Sefardita* spins variations from a medieval Sephardic song, 'La Rose Enflorece' (The Rose Blooms). He makes no attempt at an archaic sound, but gives the music a clear modern voice. An interesting tapping effect produces the guitar equivalent of multiphonics, with both halves of the string vibrating on either side of the fretting finger. Ricardo Llorca's *Handeliana* is also a set of variations, in this case on the aria 'Va Godendo' from *Serse*. No matter how many Bartok pizzicatos the composer throws at us, the sheer joy of Handel's melody is never lost.

Leonardo Balada's *Capricho 8: Abstractions of Albeniz* is a set of five pieces reacting to works of Albeniz: 'Sevilla', 'Cadiz', 'La Tarara', and two from *Iberia*, 'Evocacion' and 'Triana'. The original works are not so much quoted as hinted at, and Baladas produces some fascinating ideas, as though the works were somehow great-grandsons of the composer.

Otavio Vazquez's *Nostos* is a set of six miniatures representing the end of a journey—a concept that Levin applies to the culmination of his project. The music is the most conventional here and also the most beautiful. It is mostly quiet and contemplative, as one tends to do after any significant journey. Of all the music here, this made the strongest impression.

Adam Levin's playing is superb—no technical difficulties, lovely tone, wide range of dynamics and articulation. Of the seven works here, five are world premieres, so there's not much to compare, but I can't imagine them played with more conviction, expression, and sheer joy. And at the Naxos price!

KEATON

Soundboard Magazine Review:

Adam Levin's *In the Beginning* begins, to coin a phrase, with an astonishing transcription of part of Eugène Ysaÿe's *Sonata No.2* for solo violin. Inspired by the "Prelude" of the *Third Violin Partita* (aka *Fourth Lute Suite*). It is a wild and woolly ride combining transmogrified Bach with other bits including the *Dies Irae*. Weird but good, and it certainly grabs your attention, which is held by powerful performances of the actual Bach "Prelude" and Walton's *Five Bagatelles*. Playing three of its movements, Levin goes on to provide evidence that Castelnuovo-Tedesco's guitar parts for *Platero y yo* can sound good on their own. Partnering with violinist William Knuth, Levin gives us the world premiere recording of Jan Freidlin's *Kafka Sonata*. It is a fine work with interesting melodies, rhythms, and textures, by turns reflective and virtuosic. I am glad to have encountered it. And having listened to it a few times, I still have not turned into a large insect, thank goodness. The disc concludes with the *Fandanguillo* and *Sevillanas* by Turina. The latter is actually quite a hard work to make coherent, but Levin succeeds very well, with a wonderfully intense build-up leading to the recapitulation of the opening *rasqueado* section. Levin is an exciting and powerful player who takes chances. This leads to a (very) few glitches and moments when the guitar is a bit overwhelmed, but I would much rather hear a player go for broke (or at least honorable poverty) than always play things safe.

The recording was engineered and produced by Massachusetts' Vince Go, who seems to be another one of our really fine guitar recording providers. The liner notes by the artist include some triumphs of verbal opacity: the Ysaÿe has "moments of dark, demonic bipolar decay and the ordered, harmonious genetic mappings inherent in Bach's contrapuntal experiment." Yikes! I hope this won't be on the test....

-Al Kunze

Soundboard Magazine, Vol. XXXVI, No.1



In the Beginning: Eugène YSAÏE (1858-1931) Prelude from Sonata No.2 in A Minor for solo violin (arr. Adam Levin) [2:15] J. S. BACH (1685-1750) Prelude in E Minor from BWV 1006a [3:31]; William WALTON (1902-1983) Five Bagatelles [13:46]; Jan FREIDLIN (b.1944) Kafka Sonata for Guitar and Violin* [15:08]; Mario CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO (1895-1968) Platero y Yo, Op.190 -Golondrinas [4:22], Los Gitanos [3:39], Platero En El Cielo De Moguer [4:33]; Joaquín TURINA (1882-1949) Fandanguillo [4:25], Sevilliana-Fantasia [5:46].
Adam Levin (guitar); William Knuth (violin)*
rec. no details provided.
ADAM LEVIN RECORDS ALR1001 [58:23]

The classical guitar is a relative newcomer to the concert stages of the world. Even in its country of origin, formal academic training for the instrument was only initiated in 1935 with the appointment of Regino Sainz de la Maza as Professor of Guitar at the Madrid Conservatorium. Prior to this, students were taught by their fathers, relatives or virtuosi who established their own discrete schools of tuition.

Andrés Segovia worked tirelessly to have the guitar introduced into institutions of formal musical training throughout the world, realizing that without that support, the guitar was destined to remain in relative obscurity as a concert instrument. Regrettably, not everything that academia conferred on the guitar was to its ultimate betterment; much of what we hear today while technically sound, is musically barren and devoid of the style and panache that characterized its early virtuosi.

Adam Levin is a young guitarist from Chicago, USA. Prior to pursuing formal academic training in the instrument, at age seven Levin commenced guitar studies with his father. He subsequently completed a B.A. and B.M. at the Northwestern University of Evanston, Illinois, and an M.A. at the New England Conservatorium of Music in Boston. His principal teachers include Elliot Fisk, Oscar Ghiglia and Gabriel Estarellas. Levin is currently on the staff of the Amadeus Escuela De Música in Madrid.

The review disc is Levin's inaugural recording. The artist describes it as: 'the first in a planned series of recordings celebrating new and modern virtuosi works for the classical guitar alongside contemporary interpretations of established repertoire.' It also appears on his own label: Adam Levin Records.

The programme ranges from J. S. Bach to the world-premiere recording of Jan Freidlin's, Kafka Sonata for Violin and Guitar. Levin is joined by violinist William Knuth with whom he regularly performs as the Duo Sonidos, based in Boston and Madrid. Freidlin was born in Russia and educated in composition and theory at the Odessa State Music Academy under Prof. A. Kogan.

He is a pianist, musicologist and prolific composer with three symphonies, a ballet, several concertos, a lot of chamber music, and the music for seven movies and twenty-six theatrical shows to his credit. Freidlin migrated to Israel in 1990. When asked about the Kafka Sonata, he reflected on his sense of familiarity with Franz Kafka and the artist Vincent van Gough - seemingly distant personalities committed to different disciplines, but whose fragile and broken worlds were connected by a common aspiration to perfection.

Adam Levin is also a champion of commissioning new works for the guitar. Composers cooperating with him in expansion of the guitar's repertory include, among others: Jan Freidlin (Israel, b.1944); Mario Gosálvez-Blanco (Spain, b.1965); Eduardo Morales-Caso (Cuba-Spain, b. 1969); Carlos Perón Cano (Spain b. 1976) and David del Puerto (Spain b.1964). Currently, as many as ten new commissions from such composers will find their way into the repertory of Adam Levin and ultimately to the guitar's repertory at large, depending on what they have to offer.

The programme chosen by Levin is interesting, entertaining and allows him to demonstrate a prodigious technique but not at the expense of the music. Whether it is the music of Bach, Walton or Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Levin exhibits musicianship that defies classifying him as aligned with any one composer or period. While his Turina sounds very Spanish - and that cannot be said about a number of other guitarists who record this music - it is uncommon to hear the Bagatelles by Walton played better than on this occasion.

May we attribute the style of Levin, at least in part, to the fact that, as with earlier Spanish masters he received initial tutelage from his father? In true Spanish style, the great Jose Luis Gonzalez Julia (1932-98) received his initial training from his father, a capable and accomplished player. This was followed by tutelage from such luminaries as Salvador Garcia, Regino Sainz de la Maza, and Segovia. His academic studies were completed at the Valencia Conservatorium under the inimitable Professor of Guitar, Raphael Balaguer. One may also conjecture that such highly individual styles of playing may be a product of this type of training?

On the matter of Levin's style of playing it is difficult to empathize with the comments of his past teacher Oscar Ghiglia who described Levin as: 'reminding him of a young Eliot Fisk.' In possession of both older and more recent recordings by this guitarist, I fail to hear any similarities; it is more a matter of the student excelling the teacher.

While not mentioned in the liner-notes, the instrument played on this occasion by Adam Levin was made by the American luthier Stephan Connor from Cape Cod. Those familiar with the classical guitar will note from the accompanying photographs that this instrument does not have the traditional rosewood back and sides. While some luthiers employ maple for this role, on this occasion Connor used cypress, a wood more commonly associated with flamenco guitars. Levin describes this unusual combination as: 'providing the beefiness of a cypress top, but the clarity and punctuality of a cypress flamenco guitar.' The internal bracing is in the shape of a Star of David and while a permutation of lattice bracing, it does not exhibit the 'nasal' sound, typical of so many lattice-braced instruments. It also has a portal sound hole on the top side near the neck-junction that is claimed to make the sound louder. Certainly the overall sound is distinctive and, as personal preference plays such a large role, individual opinions will vary. What can be said,

confidentially, is that the combination of instrument, player capability and recording technique, produces a sonically delightful result.

Adam Levin has an excellent website, and for those who seek more information about this fine young guitarist it comes well recommended.

Zane Turner

A refreshingly individual style, and an interesting, well-played programme