

but Akers's treatment is more convincing than those I have heard. The year after this CD, Paolo Amico released an album comprising all of Giuliani's surviving works, so that those not recorded here by Akers are finally available on disc. Though Amico's recordings are fluent and credible, he uses a modern instrument and technique, so the historicity of Akers's recording is lost.

The previous recording of Pratten's *Malbrook* deserves mention: It was released in 2012 by Ulrich Wedemeier, who pursues Pratten's nineteenth-century sound to the extent of performing on a guitar she owned and following her advice to tune the instrument a tone lower for a sweeter sound.

This disc remains the only recording available of Paulian's variations—and there still remains one that Akers omitted, the *Tema di Rode*. That piece is on the whole faithful to Pierre Rode's *Air varié*, op. 10, for violin, a piece Catalani was famous for performing in concert, indicating that the rest of Paulian's opus 1 may be an accurate document of Catalani's performances. I find myself disappointed that Akers also omitted one of the Giuliani Preludes (no. 5, which has some resemblance in its arpeggio pattern to Villa-Lobos's first etude), but space considerations surely made some choices unavoidable, and the piece can be heard elsewhere.

Akers's notes contextualize the music appropriately but will not satisfy the curiosity of the most inquisitive listeners. His focus is on the music, and we are grateful that he has engaged this historically underrepresented yet interesting and worthwhile repertoire. It is to be hoped that he will apply himself again to the work of these composers in the future, and inspire other guitarists to do the same. Meanwhile, *Le donne e la chitarra* makes for satisfying and unusual listening, and helps fill in some important missing colors in our portrait of the nineteenth-century guitar.

—ELLWOOD COLAHAN

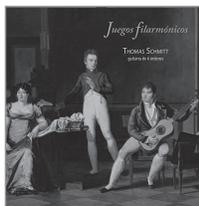
## CD Review

### *Juegos flarmónicos.*

Thomas Schmitt, six-course guitar.

Lindoro NL 3044, 2019. 1 CD.

Dice games designed around the idea of constructing musical compositions from the chance combination of prefabricated elements are some of the most curious artifacts of late eighteenth-century music. Leonard Ratner has written on these, as has Stephen Hedges, who identifies nineteen such games published between 1757 and 1812, including two attributed to Wolfgang Mozart and one each to Joseph Haydn and C.P.E. Bach. He links the popularity of these games to the enlightenment craze for rational explanations of all things, as well as to the essentially uncomplicated nature of early post-Baroque music.



The German guitarist-musicologist Thomas Schmitt has located two Spanish contributions to this genre (both unknown to Hedges in 1978), by the guitarist-composers José Avellana and Antonio Nava. The Nava publication lends its name to this album, and the last track on the recording is a waltz constructed according to Nava's game rules. The piece thus produced is interesting as a cultural artifact, and exemplifies to an extreme degree Hedges's observation about the simplicity of the style. But it is unsatisfying as a work of art, and Schmitt's choice to title his album after it is quite curious. Musical dice games were made possible only by stylistic conventions that generated a steady alternation between tonic and dominant harmonies, with no departure from the pattern, no large-scale architecture, no irregularity of phase structure or harmonic rhythm, and strong cadences at uniform intervals that could be used to stitch the various segments together. Schmitt calls the waltz thus created an example of "an easily reproducible product." The fact that composition in this style could be reduced to a kind of manufacturing process speaks of an ultimately trivial approach to music. Fortunately, other pieces on this album of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Spanish works demonstrate in great measure the creativity that could be exercised with a more intentional approach to composition, even within the stylistic constraints of the time.

The album is anchored by two fully developed three-movement sonatas, one at the beginning by Isidro Laporta, and another toward the end of the program by Antonio Abreu. Between these are two linked variation sets on the same theme, by Manuel Ferau and Laporta respectively, which are in turn separated by a trio of one-movement sonatas by Juan Antonio de Vargas y Guzmán. With a dramatic and expressive minuet by José Avellana and the waltz randomly constructed from Nava's game to finish the recording, the listener journeys through a compelling series of musical experiences in a well-paced and intentional sequence.

Laporta's Sonata at the beginning is straightforward in construction but has interesting features that emphasize thematic corroboration. The first movement contains a diversity of material, but the opening theme is stated again at the dominant at the beginning of the development, after the repeat of the first section. This might strike our modern ears as strange—almost like Haydn's monothematic form, but with the second statement of the theme on the "wrong" side of the double bar. In fact, it was a cliché of the time: at one point in the late eighteenth century, it was even normative. This serves to remind us of the great variety of approaches the form was capable of before it became a textbook paradigm. (As Charles Rosen has said, "Such freedom came easily when there was no such thing as 'sonata form.'") The next movement, a lyrical *Afectuoso* in

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binary form, does not have the tonal structure of a sonata, but does recapitulate the opening theme halfway through the second section to provide a sense of return. In the closing Rondó, in addition to the expected repetition of the opening theme, the material from the first episode returns halfway through the second episode, lending an extra degree of internal coherence. All of these structural features are made more obvious by Schmitt's generosity in playing all notated repeats, a practice he discusses in his notes to the recording.

Abreu's *Sonata de guitarra* later in the program is in a broadly similar sonata–adagio–rondo format, but the construction is more conventional. One interesting quality that this sonata possesses is a certain rhetorical ambiguity in the first part of the first movement. Even after repeated listenings I found myself thinking he had come to the end of the exposition only to find that he had, in fact, more to say. Whether this means the composer is rambling, or rather that we are experiencing an unfolding of time in the uniquely eighteenth-century manner Schmitt discusses in a kind of coda of his own to his program notes, each listener must perhaps determine for themselves.

The two sets of variations by Laporta and Gerau on the album come from the same Madrid manuscript and share the same theme, an intriguing enough relationship by itself to make them worth bringing to light. They are not profound pieces, but they are graceful and inventive. There is a variety of approach evident in both sets: they take no liberties and follow the harmonic structure of the theme faithfully, but the very sameness allows us to focus on subtle differences of construction. Some variations are thematically unified, permeated throughout by the same motive (Ferau's fifth variation and Laporta's seventh); some are made up of so many diverse motives they appear to be cobbled together out of discarded bits of others (Ferau's third variation and Laporta's fourth); some recall the head-motive of the opening material later on, after a contrasting statement of some kind (Ferau's sixth variation and Laporta's second). One variation in each set is cast entirely in natural harmonics; a device later used by Fernando Sor in his study op. 29 no. 21, as well as for the trio of the *Marche* that closes his first set of *Pièces de société*, op. 33.

Schmitt does not let his scholarly and exacting approach prevent him from exercising an appropriate degree of creative agency on these variations. He has composed an original introduction to the theme (a different introduction for each set), and a short coda to conclude the Laporta set. His contribution is consciously based on the practice of Giuliani and does not stand out as in any way incongruous to the music it embellishes. Further, Schmitt has incorporated a bass part, included separately on the manuscript source, into his solo version. In fact, he does

the same with the Laporta Sonata discussed earlier, which also had the bass notated separately for duet performance (an interesting detail, implying that the pieces as originally composed were intended for dilettantes of limited technical ability).

The three pieces by Juan Antonio de Vargas y Guzmán that stand between the two related variation sets are brief—none achieves three minutes in length—but are for me the center of gravity on which the entire recording turns. Vargas y Guzmán's sonatas (known both from a Spanish manuscript source and a Mexican print edition) have been compared to those of Soler for the keyboard, and certainly share some of the earlier composer's succinctness. Their continuity, achieved by repeatedly elided cadences, harkens back somewhat to Baroque style. As Scarlatti's one-movement sonatas are typically paired, those of Vargas y Guzmán are organized in fast-slow-fast groups of three. Schmitt has recorded another set of three on an earlier recording. Here he offers us Sonatas 7, 8, and 9. Their unpretentious proportions conceal a variety and interest that is the opposite of the Nava *Vals* at the end of the recording. Sonata 7 moves from idea to idea and from mood to mood with the restlessness of C.P.E. Bach. Sonata 8 has an extreme simplicity of texture that belies its emotive content; here I could have wished for Schmitt to take a more rubato approach. (At least, it would be interesting to hear the piece again but with a more dramatic interpretation.) Sonata 9 recalls Scarlatti the most, in its headlong forward rush and its tightness of construction. These three little pieces stand out from the rest of the program for their seriousness and expressive ambition.

The booklet that accompanies the CD includes notes in both Spanish and English (curiously, not in German). Reading Schmitt's essay on the works is an outstanding companion to listening to him play them. His essay, well researched and well organized, encompasses the elitism of musical literacy in eighteenth-century Spain and grounds his presentation of the music in social awareness by analyzing the musical economics of its time. It also includes enough entertaining details to make it enjoyable, such as a certain diarist's observation that Sor was accomplished with mathematics, but "a scatterbrain and a fop."

After discussing the pieces themselves, Schmitt's notes close with an extended meditation on the difference between the Baroque and Enlightenment ideas about time. Although this last may not be the most compelling part of the essay, Schmitt's central point about time—that observing repeats allows us to experience the music as it was meant to be experienced by its listeners, at the risk of making it sound long-winded in our own accelerated age—is well taken.

Music of this period, occupying what has been called a no-man's-land between the high Baroque style and the

later Viennese Classical style, deserves to be better known and understood, and Schmitt has done us all a service by bringing its jewels to light. After his 1996 recording focusing on the Baroque guitar music of Gerau, Sanz, Murcia, and Santa Cruz (*Gitarrenmusik des Barock: Spanien*, Musicaphon 56819), Schmitt recorded two albums of Spanish works for the six-double-course guitar, with *De gusto muy delicado* (La Mà da Guido LMG2108) in 2011 and *Spanish Music for 6-Course Guitar around 1800* (Centaur CRC3277) in 2012. His 2016 recording *Nouvelles étrennes de guitare* (La Mà da Guido LMG2139) focused on late music for the five-course guitar, establishing that that instrument overlapped and co-existed to a significant extent with its six-course cousin. With 2019's *Juegos filarmónicos* (Lindoro NL-3044), Schmitt returns to some of the composers on his 2011 and 2012 recordings and introduces others from the same milieu. If some aficionados of the guitar have imagined that Spanish guitar music in the era after Sanz somehow began with Sor and ended with Aguado, Schmitt has done as much as anyone to show us otherwise.

Schmitt's instrument, with its six double courses, is the guitar most rarely encountered today. He acquits himself well, using a flesh right-hand technique instead of nails but achieving a precision of tone just the same. Schmitt plays with taste and judgment but is too much of the scholar to allow his personality as a performer to come before a faithful presentation. At its best, this musical style achieves a transcendent naturalness and simplicity. Schmitt is aware of this and often accomplishes it, though sometimes a rubato sneaks in that might be more appropriate either in earlier or in later music. As welcome as his presentation of this little-known repertoire is, we will not be able to say we understand this music until it has been played and interpreted in many different hands. There is room for more recorded versions of these works as they seek a place in the culture of the guitar. Let's hope that this interesting recording will tempt more hands to take it up.

—ELLWOOD COLAHAN

## CD Review

### *Leo Brouwer: Guitar Sonatas.*

Ricardo Gallén. IBS 142019, 2019. 2 CDs.

Leo Brouwer's 1990 Sonata for guitar has been a staple on concert and competition programs for some years now. But we are going to have to get used to seeing the designation "No. 1" next to it: Brouwer explains that at the time, it indeed "was meant to be the only one," but in the early 2010s, he found himself drawn back to the genre and produced an explosion of equally brilliant sonatas dedicated to various guitarists. Of these, *Sonata del caminante* (No. 2), for Odair Assad, and



*Sonata del Decamerón negro* (No. 3), for Costas Cotsiolis, are starting to become well known. The present recording by Spanish guitarist Ricardo Gallén, dedicatee of *Sonata del pensador* (No. 4), is the first compilation of all Brouwer's sonatas by a single performer. In addition, Gallén has arranged Brouwer's *Sonata de los misterios*, originally for archlute, in a version for the guitar that has the composer's imprimatur as *Sonata de los enigmas* (No. 6).

Gallén is eminently qualified to be the first to bring us all the Brouwer sonatas in a single package. His technique and tone leave nothing to be desired in dispatching these formidable works. Furthermore, both the meditative liner notes to the recording and the subtitle of the sonata dedicated to him attest that Gallén has the requisite intellectual depth and breadth to successfully interpret Brouwer. As the composer comments, "the protagonists of these pieces of mine are at the same time masters of solitude, of inquiry, of the search that begins by nourishing itself in silence on the entire history of culture. If there is anyone who fully responds to these parameters, it is Ricardo Gallén."

Brouwer advocates a Renaissance-man aesthetic which eschews the banality of "little pieces [piecécitas] ... that invade authentic genres," and his sonatas display an eclectic breadth of musical inspiration, alluding to sources from Beethoven to Tárrega to Milán to Afro-Cuban folk styles, along with a generous sprinkling of self-quotation. The tone of these quotations is often parodic or sardonic, as if the composer takes neither himself nor the classical pantheon too seriously. Out of this array of material, Brouwer forges an idiosyncratic style, balancing playful and mercurial freedom of tone and texture with systematic, deliberate development of motivic cells.

Before reviewing the highlights of the collection, it would be worthwhile to dwell on the very first measure of the first sonata. The work begins with an accented natural harmonic G sharp (colorful and slightly "mistuned," since it is the fifth partial of the low E string), followed closely by a rapid gesture which (as it develops in subsequent measures) seamlessly blends arpeggio and slur techniques into a fluid whole. This gesture lands on a fretted G natural, one semitone below the harmonic, creating a sharp dissonance which draws the listener in. Yet, thanks to the differing sonic envelopes of fretted notes and harmonics, the G natural fades quickly away, while the G sharp rings on, gradually erasing the dissonance. In many ways, this gesture is a microcosm of Brouwer's genius: his intimate knowledge of the instrument's sonic qualities allows him to create multilayered textures balancing diverse timbres and articulations. The overlapping of natural notes and harmonics, and of arpeggios and slurs, are two of his favorite devices throughout the cycle.