

NEW DIMENSIONS IN CLASSICAL GUITAR

Mesut Özgen

Turquoise Guitar Editions TGE 015
As a long-standing sceptic of the concert DVD (CGs passim), I realise I have come to represent a declining minority. In today's newspapers, we learn of a new service whereby the public can download feature-length movies to be viewed, believe it or not, on a mobile phone. Why on earth anyone would ever wish to do this utterly defeats me, but I have to concede that the marketing wonks operating in this field rarely get it wrong. Likewise the concert DVD, which has none of the unique immediacy of a genuine live performance and yet also lacks the functional flexibility of the various sound-only media. But folk must be buying them because they keep on coming.

Performing on a spacious platform before an audience that applauds but is never seen, US-based Mesut Özgen makes an impressive opening move with a quasi-baroque *Gigue* by Anthony Newman. From the first few bars onwards, a video monitor above the performer's head emits a swirling sequence of computer-generated geometric patterns. If you think this sounds suspiciously like listening to a guitar recital while looking at a screen saver, you wouldn't be far from the mark.

But let's not be too quick to condemn, for in terms of technical presentation this is the finest music DVD ever to have come my way at the time of writing. Even when played on an ancient laptop hooked up to prehistoric speakers, both the sound and the vision are of pristine quality. The graphics, which are at times quite appealing, never prove unduly intrusive, while a wide range of camera angles captures many fine details in this 90-minute innings from the highly capable Özgen. It comes as no surprise to see the long list acknowledging those who have contributed financially, for the whole operation must have cost a fortune.

Over the seven-item agenda, Özgen introduces a high octane array of guest musicians. First to appear is soprano Lauren Rasmussen, whose contribution to the Lorca-based *La Guitarra* by Robert Strizich includes the teasing of long, ethereal notes from the rims of wine glasses. It's a neat trick that adds significantly to the spectral atmosphere, but please may it not lead to a bumper harvest

of lesser compositions attempting the same.

After Robert Beaser's rather pretentious solo guitar setting of *Shenandoah*, Özgen is joined by Annette Bauer (recorder) for the substantial and subtly persuasive *Stars* by Anthony Gilbert. Inspired by the works of Escher, this is one occasion where the graphics feel truly relevant. Most memorable of all, however, is the epic and compelling *Surya* by Deepak Ram. Here, Özgen appears alongside the composer, who arrives on stage wielding one of those splendid Indian bamboo flutes known as a bansuri. As Ram reveals in his notes, the guitar part is through composed while the bansuri line is improvised around a central theme. This leads to a kaleidoscopic mix of cultures which presumably yields a different range of experiences with each performance.

Finally, Özgen plugs in his 'wired' classical guitar for a hefty 16 minutes of Benjamin Verdery's *Be Kind All The Time* for guitar, delay and various other appendages. Now I have to confess that Verdery's compositions rarely have much impact either way on my emotions, and I'm afraid this is no exception. But it has to be acknowledged that the sounds generated venture several steps beyond such comparable works as Nigel Westlake's *Hinchinbrook Riffs*. Here and elsewhere, the quietly authoritative Özgen comes over as being fully in control of the diverse and demanding brief he has set himself.

If this remarkable achievement represents the calibre of releases to come, the concert DVD might just have a future.

Paul Fowles

CLASSICAL
GUITAR
April 2008
www.classicalguitarmagazine.com