



Guitar

John Lehmann-Haupt *Songs of the Guitar*
JLH Records JLH 003

A GAINST QUACKS and snake-oil salesmen, we have trained physicians. Against musical frauds, shilling sonic garbage and noise, we possess talented and highly trained musicians. Why are they not heard more? Why do diligent, enormously practiced, and incredibly talented musicians get shoved aside, to be replaced by such blatantly easy, stupid, and ugly "Unmusic." We ought to term it the "Emperor's New Musick."

Quality musicians and real music are being drowned out by *Unmusic*, and I resent it. Don't you? I feel like some modern botanist traveling in an almost totally cut-down rain forest. (Here a rare species, there an undiscovered plant. Find them, catalogue them, save them quickly before they are lost!) But I have been lucky enough to stumble onto some rich treasures that might have gone unnoticed.

By accident, I heard John Lehmann-Haupt play a most unlikely place, an old, weather-blasted, post-and-beam dairy barn; I had been invited to a party at the once-working dairy farmhouse. The cows had long been magically transformed into various flavors of Jell-O or grades of wallets. Now new animals, a herd of Andean llamas paced outside in the fields. No possible explanation could clear up this bizarre setting. There Lehmann-Haupt was, up on the second floor surrounded by the wheels, rollers, and gears from the now defunct dairy. There I was wandering, near the barn, watching or traumatizing the llamas, which paced nervously. Then I heard from inside the barn, music soaring up to the beams, filling this massive building with Haydn, Bach, and Tarrega. I was stunned and listened with the delight only another guitarist could have, one who knows which passages are tough, which easy to play, and whether the result deserves praise. Then reality intruded, and I decided a review was in order.

Presented is an elegant classical guitar, one played with great technical skill. Mixed into the standard classical canon is some new repertoire including folk, ballad, modern, bossa nova, and jazz tunes, as well as the new items from Spanish guitar composers and their South American devotees or associates. The artist is John Lehmann-Haupt; his weapon of choice is a thin spruce-topped classical Rossner; and the songs selected are a tantalizing musical mix. Of variety, there is plenty.

Recording technique was simple. A frame of 2x4's was built so furniture-movers' quilts could be posi-

tioned around all four sides of the guitarist, as well as on the floor and ceiling. In this way reverberant sound is almost immediately damped or trapped. This provided the "dead room" sound Lehmann-Haupt wanted. Two microphones were used, both AKG omnis. One was aimed left at the guitar's treble strings, approximately two and one-half inches below them. The other was aimed down towards the bass strings at an angle to the sound board. A TASCAM DA-PI DAT was used to record the raw material. Mastering and editing were done with the least manipulation possible, with the intent to achieve a high quality and sweet sounding air on the resulting CD. Equalization was set to relieve the dry sound of the raw material and there is no compression or limiting. Lehmann-Haupt's idea was to utilize the least possible electronic massaging. From my listening on both high-end and non-descript systems, the quality is laudable. The sound is clean and tonal properties correct, the signature transparent and pure. The open richness of a fine guitar is heard, while Lehmann-Haupt's speed and virtuosity are amply demonstrated.

A few technical guitar definitions might come in handy here. A *glissando* is a slide from one note to another (either up or down) in which the passing notes will be distinguished slightly. *Portamento* essentially removes the sound of the middle notes, hence the carried ("porta") designation. You clearly hear the first and last notes. The master of this technique was Segovia, himself the master of guitar masters! *Legato* is the hammering-on or pulling-off of a string. *Pizzicato*, which you will plainly hear in the Haydn, is the damped string effect obtained with the heel of the hand."

In my conversation with the artist, he spoke of different kinds of difficulties in the pieces. Bach, for example, is difficult because the guitar's dynamic flow has to be expressed over the musical control and dynamics of the individual line. The linear is elemental in Bach and the excitement of the piece is perceived via the energy shaping and graduations of this line. Even what remains silent, or just softer, becomes part of this expression.

In Haydn, we no longer have this linear arc and the short burst of the line illustrates a different kind of difficulty, more to do with precision and control in these truncated lines. And in the "Sevilla" of Albeniz, there is the difficulty of acceleration and control over the entire fingerboard, a true virtuoso piece

John Lehmann-Haupt attended Marlboro College in Vermont and studied with the doyen of Bach choral teachers, Blance Moyses. With her, he learned formal music theory, harmony, composition. Private guitar instructors included Julio Prol, Oscar Ghiglia, and Angel Romero. He played from 1981 to 1993 at the Windows on the World in the World Trade Center and performed widely in the metropolitan New York City area.

The instrument played here was built in Rochester by Heinz Rossner. Coincidentally a new German spruce top was put on in 1971 by a luthier named Lehmann (no relation); this, says John, improved the sound greatly.

In general, Lehmann-Haupt's vibrato is restrained and not overly theatrical. This recording is rich in many small artistic effects and offers a textured playing audiophiles should love. The clarity of the recording will be immediately evident; you can even faintly pick out finger noise on the strings.

"Ashokan Farewell" was written for PBS's Civil War special and sounds like it might have originally come right out of the Child's Ballads compendium of

English folk songs. You'll think that you've heard this melody somewhere before. The hint of a seemingly "olde" subject played with radiant grace really does evoke those "ancient" days of the 1860s. Note the arrangement of the bass to contrast with the melodic line in the treble.

Haydn's "Minuet and Trio" follows immediately, a hint of how far afield we're going to wander. This showcases Lehmann-Haupt's speed, fingering technique, and touch. Listen for the contrast between soft and loud, as the dynamic range blooms everywhere. Here a soft harmonic, there a smooth glissando sliding from loud attack to infinitesimally quiet. Haydn's minuet rhythm is clearly one for dancing; the delicate muted-string line, dampened with the heel of the hand (*pizzicato*), has a percussive effect which enhances the rhythm of dance. There is wonderful movement across the full range of the strings, as well as multiple tricks up and down the fingerboard. Lehmann-Haupt demonstrates a proficiency on the fingerboard that can only come from hours and hours of practice toward achieving dexterous mechanical control.

"The Water is Wide" starts as a simple song played in a minor key, but then transitions into a beautiful modern version with the AABA pattern any steel-stringed folkie would recognize. But nary a folkie would be able to keep up to the bass variations in the B section, the slides and glissando, and the clear unpretentious and tasty harmonic end.

Bach's "Prelude from Cello Suite III" falls back to the ancient beginnings of modern music, and is a perfect piece to hear Lehmann-Haupt's fluid and sure fingering and the rich tonality he gets from constant work. This is not an easy piece but he covers the finger board with sure dexterity. His playing is far removed from the mechanical and soulless style of certain so-called "elite" music schools. Lehmann-Haupt delivers an agile and personal performance controlling not only speed but dynamics, concentrating *pianissimos* to break out with beautiful *fortes*. Again, this is a difficult piece to play

correctly as all the dynamic flow is concentrated in the line. In the hands of another guitarist, it could be just a bland student exercise, but here it is brilliant. Attention to detail radiates the proper feeling throughout, though the linear difficulties are formidable in Bach.

"Black is the Color of My True Love's Hair" lasts just over a minute, but Lehmann-Haupt's treatment is ethereal. Starting from a burst of straight chords, Lehmann-Haupt constructs a gorgeous base. Brevity pushes these evocative chordings to stand out in relief, as if a classic piece were just beginning. One can only wish for a longer version in the future, a new version including all of Lehmann-Haupt's potential development.

"Manha De Carnaval" is an infectious piece of Latin rhythm from a great movie, "The Black Orpheus." The movie tells the story of Orpheus and Eurydice in 1950's Brazil through the eyes of impoverished peasants preparing for Carnival. The music will be much more effective if you have recently seen the film. The rhythm pulls and tugs you along as if you become part of Carnival yourself. The seemingly simple piece of music becomes much more, with a clean

Quite aside from being truly pleasant, this CD shows a virtuoso at work.

tempo "*bossa nova*" established and then used for a theme-and-variation form.

"Granada" is a true standard in the classical guitar repertoire. This and the following piece, "Sevilla," also by Albeniz, were immortalized by Segovia, who transformed the guitar for all time into a serious concert instrument period in part with these pieces. All serious modern classic guitarists are Segovia disciples or derivatives; opinions to the contrary are either delusional or wildly ignorant. Albeniz was a Spanish composer and pianist who, according to historians, heard his friend, Tarrega, playing a transcription of one of his piano pieces. Albeniz is said to have told Tarrega he thought the piece sounded better on the guitar. The familiar sound of Spanish music thus developed with the pen of Albeniz, who wrote many now well-known pieces named after cities, towns, and regions in Spanish. Included here are a pair, "Granada" and "Sevilla."

Lehmann-Haupt's playing is light and fast, requiring those modulations which recall the essence of Spanish music. The seemingly effortless shifts, as well as the bass to treble harmonics, and the *legato* precision are really quite difficult. Here, as in "Sevilla," there is no chance to hide any fumbling; delicate and quick touch reveals hours and hours of technical practice. These are true virtuoso performances. There are no *rasgueados* and loud histrionics, things which appear difficult and never fail to capture the public emotionally, are, in fact, rather facile and can easily hide weak skills and lack of virtuosity. Instead, listen here for not only for the speed in changes, but beautiful arpeggiation.

"Sevilla" is another rigorous masterwork by Albeniz. Full chords oppose the treble melodic line which is then brought to the mid-ranges. There are delicate repetitions and fast finger attacks. Sound effects build up through the piece- the middle section is liquid like as he moves incredibly fast; in this section, too, one is pulled into this luxurious piece. Bass percussive techniques achieved with damping, the rapidity of the scalar attacks, and the haunting final harmonic are impressive.

"Round Midnight" and "The Man I Love," an unusual composite, has a beautiful introductory lead, in which I thought I heard some diminished and minor chords, a strange beginning. The lead modulates into the melodic line of "Round Midnight" with which Lehmann-Haupt then toys a bit and then finally teases out a beautiful theme-and-variation. He makes the guitar sing solo. Beautiful *glissandos* throughout, with jazz chording and legatos connect to "The Man I Love." With a series of four full chords, he drops right into the melody, embellishing it right up to the end. Some sustains here, audiophiles will love as the cleanness of the track. Once again you can hear the finger movement on the strings.

"Prelude Number One" is from Villa-Lobos, another Brazilian composer for the guitar, one of the highest rank, whose pieces for orchestra are both masterful and engaging. Opening this "Prelude" is a melancholy *glissando* with the engagement of the treble as full chords. The melody is kept in the bass and mid-range in opposition. Aggressive full-step modulations go up and down in opposition, climbing and falling alternately with force. Listen for the haunting full harmonic which drops down the scale and then furiously ascends. There are Flamenco-like accents in the piece with much repetition of thematic material. My way of counting hears the beginning A section used three times at the start with the harmonic descent repeated twice. The B section repeats four times using half-step modulations and Flamenco-like effects. In this transitional section, listen for rapid fingerings ending with a series of harmonics. This returns to the initial *glissando*. The final A section again repeats a full three times towards the ending. The variations in each repeat keep the melodic line pushing forward. The little half-step modulations and harmonic

decents accumulate in the final release to a simple major, gorgeous. Again, there is nowhere to hide.

"Maria" is the aria of "West Side Story." Lehmann-Haupt's transcription is neither syrupy nor saccharine, and grasps the haunting effects originally intended, even if you've heard this tune a million times before. Cleanly played without overdoing vibrato, Lehmann-Haupt captures the essence of the tune's true feeling and basic appeal. The bass lines provide a rich tonal quality. The single ending harmonic after a full chord is splendid.

"Capricho Arabe" from Tarrega begins with a soft harmonic and intricate set of finger runs repeated twice. Scorching fingers are preparatory to the introduction of an elegant theme with its alternating bass line complimented in the treble by liquid-like playing. You will hear this motif throughout. Lots of effects in this section. Listen for the subtlety of playing; what the guitar can do in the hands of a real musician-trained, talented, and practiced. There is modulation to a new section and melody with controlled development. The repeated bass motif then returns, modulates, and finally gallops upwards with a huge scalar run from the bass to meet the upper register. Masterful! More developmental material works within the theme and really does sound like something from the Magreb (North Africa) through Spanish ears. The melancholy beginning with all its speed and precision returns, and the resolve to a major is a beautiful finish.

In all tracks here Lehmann-Haupt's playing elegantly, without dodging, out front and exposed; there's no hiding behind a herd of instruments and electronics. To hear some of this CD before purchase go to CDBaby.com/JLH where there are five sample cuts. *Songs of the Guitar* can also be bought through Amazon.com.