

erstwhile student of Eliot Fisk, hence the almost nostalgic revival of *Sequenza XI*. Elsewhere, Cicilia offers a daunting yet ultimately engaging range of textures, in which the rumbling *ostinato* at the start of Florian Magnus Maier's splendidly-titled *Crystal Vermin* (for amplified classical guitar) proves particularly memorable. Maier also leaves a favourable impression in the *Tocatta* (for amplified classical guitar with delay), the use of electronics against a relatively conventional musical backdrop emerging as a refreshingly listener-friendly combination. Throughout the proceedings, Cicilia emerges as a master of his instrument who undoubtedly could have fielded a standard Bach/Sor/Albéniz agenda had he wished to do so. There was a time when dodgy guitarists would hide their incompetence behind a camouflage of impenetrable new repertoire, and I do have a specific individual in mind when I say this. But those days are mercifully long gone, with a new generation of dedicated specialists such as Diangelo Cicilia flying the flag.

An uncompromising release that does credit to all concerned, with one obvious exception.

Paul Fowles

BLACK VENUS - NEW MUSIC FOR GUITAR VOL. 1

GILES SWAYNE: *Solo op.42*. ERROL-LYN WALLEN: *Three Ships*. HOWARD SKEMPTON: *Five Preludes*. TERRY RILEY: *Barabas*. LEO BROUWER: *Paisaje Cubano con Tristeza*. TORU TAKEMITSU: *Equinox*. PHILIP CASHIAN: *Talvi; Black Venus*. GORDON McPHERSON: *Study in Moto Perpetuo (Brevity Can Save the Nation)*.

Tom Kerstens

BGS Records BGS113

This release of *New Music for Guitar Volume 1* of contemporary solo classical guitar music, featuring six premiere recordings, seems to have been released *after* its companion recording, *Volume 2* (reviewed early in 2005), even though the music on *Black Venus* was recorded a good year or so beforehand, and several items in the sleeve notes bear this out; for instance, it has been re-written that Tom Kerstens has now commissioned over 50 new works for guitar as opposed to the 40 as quoted previously. Strange that this should happen as *Volume 1* is musically superior to *Volume 2* and one would

have thought that the release in the 'correct' order may have whetted the appetite for the second instalment.

The idea of choosing a particular track as the title for a CD suggests that that particular piece is to be singled out as something rather special in comparison to the rest of the programme. Good as it is, Philip Cashian's composition *Black Venus*, a set of four short dances, is no better (or worse) than the rest of the programme. Indeed it would be difficult to single out any one piece as being the pinnacle of this set as without exception the music throughout is of a very high standard. The choice of Cashian's composition though has given the sleeve designer the opportunity to come up with some striking and eye-catching imagery, perhaps more than choosing such titles as *Solo, op.42* or *Study in Moto Perpetuo* would have done.

Leo Brouwer's poignant, exquisite composition *Paisaje Cubano con Tristeza* here gets its first recorded outing. Strangely enough there are some discrepancies from this recorded performance and the published edition. In bar 8 there is a harmonic omitted (subsequently putting the bar into 5/8) and several notes throughout the score come in fractionally earlier than written where they follow a quaver rest. Perhaps the performance is taken from a different edition from the Les Editions Doberman-Yppan. However, Tom Kerstens' plays this work with great feeling and the optional cadenza he has written for this piece is of epic proportions and stylistically appropriate.

Kerstens' playing throughout this programme is superb, he seems totally comfortable with the contemporary style of composition and puts in a thoroughly convincing performance of music, which at times, can be intellectually difficult. For lovers of contemporary guitar music this is a feast.

Steve Marsh

APPASSIONATA

MACCOMBIE: *Tango Amoroso*. BENNETT: *Strange Dreams; Food for Fish*. BELLINATI: *Baião de Gude; Maracatu da Pipa*. SAVAGE: *Storm in a Teacup*. VERDERY: *Start Now; Let Go; Now You See It, Now You Don't, Now You Do*. RYAN: *Cabaret*.

Appassionata

BGS 111 CD

Comprising Rebecca Baulch, Amanda Cook and Hayley Savage, this London-based guitar trio will

forever be associated with the splendid *Charlie's Angels* silhouette that adorns both the inner and outer packaging of this 2005 recording. With the exception of *Baião de Gude* which, in its various guises, dates back to before 1989, all the compositions and arrangements are of recent provenance and are, at the time of writing, unique to *Appassionata*. But if you suspect this means a disagreeable 59 minutes of that ephemeral brand of new music that gets briefly presented to an unreceptive public before being quietly dropped, then worry not, for the programme on offer is one of the most unthreatening agendas you're likely to find this side of the mainstream repertoire. On the other hand, there's no lack of substance, especially in the extended single-movement offering from Hayley Savage, where the textural possibilities offered by three guitars are explored with impressive depth and detail. Likewise the two works by Ned Bennett, both of which offer a gentle yet searching soundscape after a relatively lightweight appetiser in Bruce MacCombie's *Tango Amoroso*. The real hit, however, has to be Paulo Bellinati's *Maracatu da Pipa*, commissioned for *Appassionata* in 2004. Running its course in a compact eight minutes, this gentle and hypnotic slice of acoustic Latin imagery even succeeded in calming my nerves during a titanic struggle against the useless telephone system at Manchester's otherwise exemplary *Royal Exchange Theatre*. Incidentally, the composer's notes reveal that the *Pipa* in the title refers to a child's kite, which inevitably made me feel a bit of a twit after searching in vain for musical depictions of the similarly-named Chinese lute derivative.

Performance is of the highest order, with all three parts clearly discernible in even the densest passages. Most impressive of all is the richness of tone, which was also a feature when I saw this ensemble perform live in September 2004. The canvas is further widened with a guest appearance by Nik Ammar, who plays the dholak (a South Asian double-headed drum, it would seem) in Benjamin Verdery's *Start Now*. This, like all three Verdery selections, is an arrangement by Amanda Cook drawn from the composer's own settings for guitar orchestra.

A persuasive and accessible programme superbly presented.

Paul Fowles