

the only way to listen to what we still call 'classical' music.

Colin Cooper

DAVID CASWELL

The Sussex Barn, West Dean
14 August 2006

It is a typically South American style to announce your pieces before you play them. Juan Falú carried the principle to extremes when I heard him play, treating the front rows to an intimate and informal conversation that escaped people at the back. Marco Pereira was another, failing (or so it seemed to me) to carry much beyond Row C. When I say that I was in Row L on that occasion, my unhappiness will be understood. David Caswell did not make this mistake (as I believe it to be in a concert hall), his playing all that was necessary in terms of volume and clarity. Deputising at short notice for Karen Schaupp, he had no printed programme and was really without any alternative but to announce the items. It was perhaps unwise to try to tune his guitar at the same time, and he took some time to settle in. All was well in the end, however, and once he had got into his impressive stride he proceeded to entertain his appreciative audience with an extensive repertoire of — mainly lively — South American music. Old favourite followed old favourite, the titles already half-forgotten in the absence of a printed programme but the melodies engraved in the memory and always good to be reminded of. The cheers at the end were well deserved.

Colin Cooper

THE AQUARELLE GUITAR QUARTET

West Dean, West Sussex,
16 August, 2006

This young guitar quartet, all graduates of the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, took to the stage looking like characters from Quentin Tarantino movie *Reservoir Dogs* in their crisp dark suits and squeaky new leather shoes—and left their audience flattened and spattered by their musicality and technical dexterity. Okay, so the audience was humming afterward, too.

The quartet opened with Gioachino Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri*, demonstrating their meticulous attention to dynamics

and impeccable, fleet-fingered unison. The full programme featured works by Rossini, Villa-Lobos, Paulo Bellinati, Andrew York, Phillip Houghton and Ryuichi Sakamoto, in addition to new, younger composers David Fennessy, Clarice Assad and a harp piece by Catriona McKay adapted for the guitar. Each quartet member showcased their considerable arranging skills on a number of the pieces: Richard Saffill wrote the arrangement for the spirited Rossini, excerpted from the composer's comic opera; James Jervis arranged Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Brincadeira (A Joke)* from his *String Quartet No.1*; Michael Baker adapted the gently flowing *The Swan*, written by Scottish harp player Catriona McKay; and Vasilis Bessas created a lovely arrangement of Sakamoto's theme music from the film, *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*.

Composer David Fennessy showed an offbeat sense of humor with his love-it-or-leave-it collection of pieces entitled *Gultharsis, Bread and Butter, Romanza* (a cleverly warped interpretation of the classic piece by Anonymous) and *Repetitive Strain*. Bellinati's *A Furiosa* featured a spritely and memorable jazzy motif while Clarice Assad's breezy wit was on full display with the quartet's world premiere of her piece *Bluezilian*, which included squiggles of blues, jazz and scat riffs woven in with one guitar diabolically transformed into sounding like an upright bass without the guitarist ever having to leave his seat.

The audience had also clearly enjoyed McKay's *The Swan*, inspired by a sailboat race and evocative of fresh breezes, swells and foamy wake of boats slicing through wind and water. Phillip Houghton's *Opals* can be described as a scintillating set that utilizes harmonics and string bending for an aural recreation of the gem's colors and light-catching effect. The quartet closed their set with Andrew York's *Quiccan*, aptly described by one (overheard) audience member as music that conveys 'that relentless form of California sunshine and cheer.' The only suggestion the group might consider is reining in the number of pieces filled with aggressive fretboard runs because it inadvertently lent to an overall sameness throughout the programme.

Given every guitar quartet patterning themselves after LAGQ by assuming a similarly snappy abbreviation, AGQ stands on their own as brilliant and promising.

Julia Crowe

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