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e-mail: subs@americanrecordguide.com
Reader Service: (513) 941-1116

Editor: Donald R Vroon
Editor, Music in Concert: Gil French
Art Director: Ray Hassard
Design & Layout: Lonnie Kunkel

SEGOVIA: *Guitar Pieces*

Agustin Maruri
EMEC 70—45 minutes

With the exception of 'Estudio sin Luz', I'm not aware of any of Segovia's own compositions that he recorded or performed in concert. He did agree to have a few of his works published in his lifetime, but clearly regarded his role as performer and apostle of the guitar to be more important than composer. Other works were preserved in the Segovia Archives (see my review of that collection in M/A 2014), and are now being released to the public.

Maruri performs 32 of the maestro's works on his 1962 Hermann Hauser II guitar. Yes, 32 pieces, on a CD that runs only 45 minutes. These are all miniatures, none more than 3 minutes and most a minute or less. Listening to them all is a rather frustrating experience, because Segovia clearly had a gift for attractive thematic material, but lacked the training—or time or inclination—to develop these gems into anything richer.

Still, there's a lot of attractive music here, and Maruri plays with real panache and a credible version of Segovia's style and sound. He's done some fascinating work, mostly in unusual historical corners, like the complete works of Narvaez on modern guitar (J/F 2014), and the 35 Sor minuets reviewed below, and his playing is always robust and imaginative.

Perhaps Segovia is no longer seen as quite the infallible divinity as he was a generation ago, but his contribution to the guitar is no less huge. Here's a good chance to hear yet another facet of his genius.

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SOR: 35 Minuets

Agustin Maruri, g
EMEC 69—65 minutes

I must say I wasn't looking forward to reviewing a collection of 35 minuets. I needn't have worried. Sor's level of creativity is enough to hold the interest. Haydn famously once said that he dreamed of one day writing a truly new minuet—though he realized that dream over and over, in symphonies, chamber music, and sonatas. While I won't compare Sor to Haydn, there is an impressive level of invention here. Some of these stand alone, others are part of larger compositions, like the Opus 22 and 25 sonatas. Most revelatory are the 12 published as Opus 11, with a delightful range of ideas.

Agustin Maruri brings his wide-ranging expressive abilities to the task. He is always fully committed and involved, with a perfect grasp of the style. His approach is strong and colorful, never crass. An unexpected pleasure.

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Spanish Album

Vinas, Arcas, Cano, Borrero, Soria

EMEC 42—63 minutes

Segovia compositions

EMEC 70—44 minutes

The Charm of Spain

Rosquellas, Ledesma, Paz, Rucker, Carnicer, Moreno, Garcia, Bonrostro, Gomis, Cepeda, Huertos, Oudrid

EMEC 34—57 minutes

Agustin Maruri, guitar

Agustin Maruri is based in Spain. He has had an active career, with 16 records to his credit and concerts on five continents over the past two decades; but this is my first encounter with him, though he has performed in the US. Two of these recordings are done under the auspices of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and use instruments from their collection. I am glad to know Mr Maruri. He is a fine player with a fluent technique and a wide range of stylistic abilities that serve him well in these recreations.

Experienced guitarists will know most of the composers on the *Spanish Album*. They are all Spaniards, part of the generation after Sor and Aguado, but before Tarrega. Like Coste and Mertz, their music is more overtly romantic than the First Golden Age composers—richer harmonically, with a bit more counterpoint and freedom of form. All the composers on this recording are nationalists, influenced by

Spanish folk music. Jose Vinas is the most cosmopolitan of the group, the best known and the most interesting. I especially enjoy the 'Fantasia-Capricho a Imitacion del Piano'; it's a lively work with an interesting structure and engaging themes. Luis Soria is a discovery for me; his work draws heavily on flamenco and is sometimes composed settings of flamenco genre, such as the 'Petenera' and the 'Malaguena con Variaciones'.

Maruri uses an instrument by Pedro Fuentes, made before 1858. He sounds like he is using modern strings rather than gut. He has the style of these works in his bones, and it's nice to have the music available in good performances. It's been overshadowed by transcriptions of Albeniz and Granados and the superior works of the early 20th Century by the likes of Moreno-Torroba and Turina, but for players and listeners who are tired of yet another performance of 'Asturias', these composers are worth exploring.

The recording of Segovia's compositions is fascinating. The Maestro didn't make any attempt to champion his compositions, aside from their appearance on an occasional recital. He was too busy with other concerns, such as championing his instrument—and without that advocacy, I would certainly not be writing this now. It's not an exaggeration to say that without Segovia, the guitar would lack not only recognition as a legitimate instrument, but also the bulk of its repertory.

Still, it's nice to hear what he had to say as a composer. All the works are miniatures, with none lasting even three minutes and many less than a minute. They all echo some of the targets of Segovia's relentless pursuit of living composers to write for the instrument—particularly Ponce and Torroba. And even in these brief works, there is sometimes a lack of assurance, as if he were aware of his limitations as a composer.

But the best reason to get this recording is Maruri's performance. He plays Segovia's 1962 Hauser II; and he makes a conscious—and effective—effort to imitate Segovia's sound and style. He's better than many who have imitated without understanding. The first notes I heard sounded eerily like the Maestro's old Decca recordings, even down to the distant (and slightly muddy) miking. It was both surprising and delightful.

On *The Charm of Spain* Maruri is joined by cellist Michael Kevin Jones, playing an instrument made by Jean Baptiste Vuillaume in 1850. Maruri plays a Rene Lacote made in 1825 in Paris. The recording is devoted entirely to songs, with Jones playing the vocal line.

I can't be particularly enthusiastic about this one. The playing is perfectly fine, but these are all parlor songs, written for amateurs. They range from somewhat charming to banal; the composers are mostly forgotten, and there seems little reason for this recording, unless you are interested in this particular niche.

Still, two of the three discs are real finds.

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