



RECORDINGS

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ANONYMOUS, FERNANDO FERANDIERE (c1740–c1816), FEDERICO MORETTI (c1765–1838),
JUAN ANTONIO DE VARGAS Y GUZMÁN (*fl.* c1770)

DE GUSTO MUY DELICADO: EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SPANISH MUSIC FOR SIX-COURSE GUITAR

Thomas Schmitt, six-course guitar

La Mà de Guido LMG2108, 2011; one disc, 71 minutes

In recent years the record label La Mà de Guido has made several contributions to the recorded repertoire for guitar and other plucked strings, in the process exposing a number of new performers in the field. In spite of the low profile of some of these, most have provided fresh performances offering encouraging signs of renewal in the guitar repertoire. Thomas Schmitt's recording under the title 'De gusto muy delicado' (of very delicate taste) certainly belongs to this latter category.

The roles of musicologist and performer are undoubtedly difficult to combine at the highest level, and Schmitt's achievement in this regard is in itself commendable. The combination results here in a recording which has not only artistic, but also historical interest, making available to the public a repertoire which is little known today, but had a significant social impact during its time.

This is indeed a repertoire that has long languished in the no-man's-land between Spanish music for the five-course guitar (mainly by Gaspar Sanz, long since brought to contemporary attention by Joaquín Rodrigo, and Santiago de Murcia, revived in recent decades by early-music performers) and the rather later core repertoire of the six-string guitar (Sor, Aguado and their contemporaries, championed during the twentieth century by Andrés Segovia and others). Each of these has been recorded with much greater frequency than Federico Moretti (died 1838), Fernando Ferandiere (died c1816) or Juan Antonio de Vargas y Guzmán (*fl.* c1770). This does not mean that their music lacks interest, however, as Schmitt shows in this recording; in fact, the Sonata in G major, Op. 1 No. 3, by Ferandiere and the three single-movement 'sonatas' by Vargas y Guzman (from the 1776 edition of his *Explicación de la guitarra*) appear to be some of the most interesting pieces composed for that instrument during the eighteenth century.

Schmitt's performance helps to highlight the beauty of these and other works. The delicate and sweet colour of his sound is particularly suitable for cantabile movements, such as the first variation of the *Tema con 10 variaciones* by Ferandiere (track 23). He has a respectable right-hand technique and an excellent left-hand technique. The latter in particular allows him to show off in pieces such as the two movements of the Ferandiere sonata (tracks 10 and 11), the second of which has slurred triplets at high speed, and the first of the sonatas by Vargas y Guzmán (track 14), with its rapid slurred ornament at the beginning of the first theme, performed finely by Schmitt and taken up again in Sonata 2 (track 15). Also impressive are the fourth and ninth variations of the Ferandiere *variaciones* (tracks 26 and 31), the latter of which is entitled 'Difícil' by the composer, and the last variation, dedicated exclusively to the left hand ('Sin mano derecha'), making it very difficult to get a proper sound (track 32).

These are also highly controlled performances: Schmitt adopts speeds that allow him to manage his technique without taking excessive risks. This is apparently in large part what enables him to play so cleanly, an observation that is confirmed when one has the opportunity to hear him play live. On the other hand, perhaps this is also why one has the impression that the performance lacks, at times, a certain impetuosity. Granted, the disc is entitled 'Of very delicate taste', a term whose accuracy is supported both by historical documents and by the music chosen. But it is also true that some movements have a more spirited character which should surely be reflected in the performance, even to the point of emphasizing their contrast with other tracks. This applies, for instance, to variations 7 and 8 (tracks 8 and 9) of the *Tema con variaciones* by Moretti, the former with parallel thirds disrupted by sudden appoggiaturas, and



the latter with rapid arpeggios that could well inspire a more virtuosic performance. This is no less the case for the second of the Ferandiere *10 variaciones* (track 24), and also the third (track 25), which mimics the powerful style of so-called battle music ('Imitando Clarines y flautas' (imitating bugles and flutes), indicates the original source); even in strummed passages, this is not reflected in the performance.

As for the CD booklet, it offers a useful contextualization of the music recorded for the general listener, while also including much relevant information for scholars and performers. However, it also presents a major oversight: though clearly a slip, since Schmitt certainly knows one treatise from another, the substitution of the title *Instrucción de música sobre la guitarra española*, actually by Gaspar Sanz and published in 1674, for that of Ferandiere's 1799 *Arte de tocar la guitarra española por música* is a striking error.

Likewise, although five- and six-course guitars coexisted in the late eighteenth century, as Schmitt points out, I am not convinced I agree with him that they shared the same repertory. Or rather, it depends on what one means by that statement: with reference to genres in the broad sense this is certainly the case, but at the same time this very disc shows that even in the late eighteenth century the six-course guitar had already developed a language of its own, very different from that of its five-string predecessor (also known today as the baroque guitar). This is especially clear in the works by Moretti and Ferandiere, in which the bass is clearly outlined, unlike in the music of Sanz and Murcia, where it is frequently interrupted or subsumed by *campanelas* (Sanz's term for the performance of scale passages making maximum use of open strings, which thus continued to sound in the manner of 'little bells'). Incidentally, although Ferandiere's title draws attention to the presence of *campanelas* in the seventh of his *10 variaciones* (track 29), these have little to do with those used by Sanz and Murcia around 1700. Ferandiere uses alternating strings to perform dissonant chords and increase harmonic tension, whereas baroque guitarists used this technique to perform linear passages. This was in any case impossible on Ferandiere's guitar, which, having only one octave on the sixth course, lacked the octaveless sonority necessary to achieve this effect.

There are nevertheless, as one might anticipate, several reminiscences of the style of the first half of the eighteenth century in the works by Vargas y Guzmán, which might be interpreted as a link with the baroque guitar repertoire. Sonata 3 (track 16), for example, has similarities with baroque courantes and lacks any trace of sonata form, being perhaps, along with the *Marcha de Nápoles* (March of Naples; track 19), the most archaic movement on this recording, reflecting the stylistic norms of the earlier part of the composer's life (despite some uncertainty about his biography, Vargas y Guzmán was undoubtedly active before Ferandiere and Moretti).

The guitar music of eighteenth-century Spain is still in need of further work, in the fields of both musicology and performance. Thomas Schmitt's recording undoubtedly represents a significant contribution in this sense, allowing us to enjoy once more a beautiful but long-neglected, and even forgotten, repertory.

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JOHANN NEPOMUK HUMMEL (1778–1837)

HUMMEL AT THE OPERA

Madoka Inui, piano

Naxos 8.572736, 2011; one disc, 76 minutes

The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen the steady emergence of discs featuring compositions by Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778–1837): we now have access to seven of the eight extant solo piano concertos and to much of the chamber music, and anyone interested in Hummel's solo sonatas has an increasing variety of interpretations to explore. The dearth of scholarly editions persists, but we do now