

Harrison

'Por Gitaro'

Suites – No 1; No 2. Serenade.
Suite for National Steel Guitar.
Ditone Set. In Honor of the
Divine Mr Handel

John Schneider *gtrs* with
Gene Sterling, Erin Barnes, TJ Troy *perc*
HMC American Gamelan / Bill Alves

Mode © MODE195 (79' • DDD)

Includes interview with Lou Harrison and
John Schneider

**Five guitar suites whose refined palettes
explore more than just intonation**



For Lou Harrison, the guitar was a problem. His belief that equal temperament represented the modern industrial world imposing totalitarian standardisation on "proper"

tunings meant the standard guitar was of little practical use to him. Enter Tom Stone, a San Francisco-based guitarist who visited Harrison in 1977 to demonstrate his newly invented instrument with removable fingerboards, opening the door on a highly refined palette of tunings.

Harrison's delighted response was a proposed cycle of five guitar suites, each suite exploring a different just intonation tuning system, with movements to be mixed-and-matched during performance to produce a rich smorgasbord of tunings. But Harrison's progress was stalled by other commissions, and it fell to guitarist John Schneider to complete the cycle by adapting earlier Harrison works.

The basic language of the suites evokes Bach, Handel and Scarlatti, filtered through Harrison's profound understanding of Javanese gamelan forms and other Eastern music. Whether through Harrison's inclination or Schneider's intervention, a mildly troubling Achilles heel

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emerges as insistent neo-Baroque gestures begin to feel interchangeable, more like archetypes of material than material per se. The formality of the music is curiously anachronistic, but Harrison's sincerity is obvious and always touching. John Schneider's sensitive playing is constantly alert to the nuances of his infinitesimally small degrees of tuning.

The disc also contains a revealing interview about Harrison's history with the guitar, and ends with a gorgeous homage to Handel. The perfect companion to Schneider's 2003 release on Bridge Records, "Just Guitars", that paired Harrison with Terry Riley and Harry Partch.

Philip Clark

Jason Vieaux: flexibility
and nuance in Bach



Guitar versions of Bach's
lute and cello suites
show the wisdom of the
transcription process

Bach

Suites – BWV995; BWV996; BWV997.

Prelude, Fugue and Allegro, BWV998

Jason Vieaux *gtr*

Azica © ACD71250 (70' • DDD)

Bach happily tweaked his music to suit the needs of eager instrumentalists, and players have followed suit ever since. Some of the arrangements may seem like sonic stretches (tubas playing the cello suites, for instance). Then again, what musician wouldn't want to be immersed in Bach's glorious creative world?

The situation for guitarists isn't nearly as extreme as it might be for colleagues. Since Bach wrote pieces specifically for lute, arranging them for the larger instrument isn't much of a challenge (though keys occasionally need to be transposed for purposes of player comfort). On his absorbing first disc devoted to Bach lute works, American guitarist Jason Vieaux shows the wisdom of the transcription process.

Not all of these scores were originally cast for lute. The Suite in G minor, BWV995, began life as the Fifth Cello Suite and later became the property of lutenists and others. Vieaux's ability to see the big architectural picture and to render the counterpoint with utmost clarity makes his account of this suite a special occasion. As in all

of the performances on this disc, the guitarist generally opts for stately tempi that allow lines to announce, emerge, depart and cross in crystalline fashion. Vieaux draws warm sonorities from the instrument, colouring with discreet use of vibrato and joining phrases as if they were in fact natural moments in a fascinating conversation.

No contrapuntal obstacle trips this agile, thoughtful guitarist. In the Suite in C minor, BWV997, each entry of the theme in the fugue has inevitable presence, and the subsequent interweaving of ideas benefits from Vieaux's flexibility and nuance. The Suite in E minor,

'Vieux's ability to render the counterpoint with utmost clarity makes his account of this suite a special occasion'

BWV996, is a celebration of sonorous courtliness in his hands, while the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E flat major, BWV998, rounds out an aristocratic initial volume that whets the appetite for the next.

Donald Rosenberg