

RECORDINGS

Cristiano Porqueddu. *Trascendentia*. Works by Angelo Gilardino. (These are the first four discs of a series of five to include all of the studies by Gilardino.) Available from www.trascendentia.com.

I really want to make this point immediately, even at the risk of sounding horribly portentous: though it is not quite finished, this a landmark in the history of recorded guitar music. It is truly hard to decide where to begin bestowing superlatives on the set. The *Douze Études* of Villa-Lobos are rightly considered landmarks of the guitar repertoire. Typically, the individual studies take no longer than four minutes to perform, and many are quite short. The complete set generally lasts less than half an hour. Imagine, then, that five times as many studies of equal quality were out there and hardly known in much of the guitar world, with the *shortest* (as performed in these discs) being two and a half minutes, and the longest being virtual tone poems over nine minutes in duration. This is what we have here.

Gilardino's title for the set of works, *Studi di virtuosità e di trascendenza*, invokes comparison with the similarly named piano works of Liszt. Gilardino's studies are fully worthy of the comparison, showing dazzling creative power and, of course, placing startling demands on the performer. It is not possible to describe in words the compositional inventiveness embodied in these studies. They must be heard to be believed!

This brings us to the guitarist in question, Cristiano Porqueddu. What he achieves is almost unbelievable and at times seems well-nigh superhuman. This is a world-class player delivering what is obviously a work of love in these daunting works.

The recorded sound of the set is flawless. On a few occasions (including Study No. 2) certain chords or octaves sound rather out of tune, the cause of which is impossible to determine. There is one serious complaint: CD notes are provided only in Italian. *For a recorded venture of this importance, multi-lingual notes are vital*. One wants to know as much as possible about what Gilardino was thinking, especially as the works make a wide range of literary and artistic allusions. The eventual plan is to issue these discs plus the last in a boxed set, with the notes presented multi-lingually. Let us hope the wait is not prolonged.

What do the studies sound like? Well, they are best sampled a few at a time, since many are dissonant, even aggressive—though always consummately musical—and need to be heard with some time to “recover.” That is not to say that Gilardino never writes beautiful works. Some are reflective and lyrical. As more artists rise to the occasion of programming them, I expect to see performer-created suites of contrasting pieces. As to the title studies, although the works stand as abstract pieces of art music, studying the scores reveal serious didactic purposes as well.

With 48 studies recorded on these four discs, the individual works are obviously too numerous to describe in detail. One characteristic which recurs is that Gilardino is a lover of very complicated textures, which would seem to require extra fingers if not extra hands! But without engaging in useless list-making, some of my favorite works include No. 10, *Ophélie*, a reference to the poem by Rimbaud; No. 19, *Jondo*, a tribute to Turina; the beautiful Nos. 26 and 27, *omaggi* to Italian composers Ildebrando Pizzetti and Giorgio Federico Ghedini, respectively; No. 29, a wondrous *passacaglia* in homage to Respighi; and No. 37, *La fleur sur l'eau*, a substantial work inspired by Monet at Giverny.

Your mission at this moment, or at least when you finish this issue of *Soundboard*, should be to go to the nearest computer, go to the *Trascendentia* (avoiding the fatal English cognate “trazzcendent”) web site and order these discs. If the euros are a bit tight at present, the third disc is a good starting point!

—Albert Kunze

SoloDuo [Lorenzo Micheli and Matteo Mela, guitars]. *Solaria*. Works by Piazzolla, Rodrigo, Gnáttali, and Castelnuovo-Tedesco. Pomegranate Music CD POM CD-1924, 2007.

Many of the great duos in history have been formed by artists related in some way, even if by marriage. SoloDuo prove a striking exception to this observation. Their album *Solaria* is one of the best duo recordings I have ever heard. The two players are seemingly equal in virtuosity and musicianship, but also play with that preternatural synchronization which only the finest duos ever achieve. In fact, if you were confronted