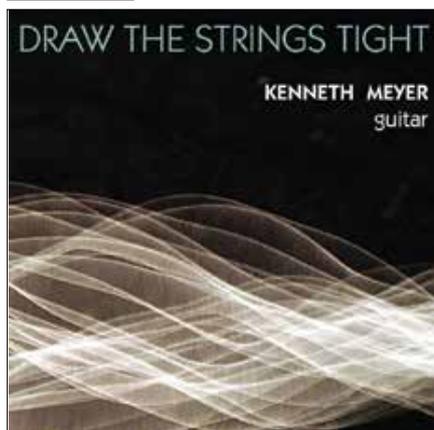


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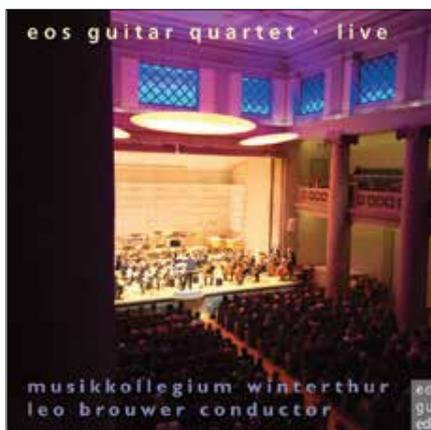
Draw the Strings Tight

Kenneth Meyer
Innova Recordings

Modern works are seductive

Though much so-called “modern” guitar music frankly leaves me cold, I still find many pieces that don’t conform to traditional approaches to melody, harmony, rhythm, and structure, but which still compel and beguile me. This album by Kenneth Meyer is in that category of decidedly modern but seductive works; five of them are premieres.

My absorption into Meyers’ world came courtesy of an extended piece on the album called *Roses Don’t Need Perfume*, by Kevin Ernste. It’s a brilliantly evocative blend of harmonics, electronically manipulated tones from the guitar strings and body worthy of Pink Floyd, rhythmic pulses, and even brief spoken-word. Hans Werner Henze is the one composer on here I recognized: His *Drei Tentos* offers three fragmentary miniatures I found quite stimulating and, ultimately, moving. The title piece, by Edie Hill, took me a little longer to get into because it so all over the map, opening with jerky rhythms and slap-pulling of strings before settling into a steadier, almost sinister vibe, and also including some atmospheric brushing, a hypnotic section called “Waves Are Coming In,” and a concluding movement that is overtaken at points by darkly Spanish intimations. Jesse Jones’ *Ricordanza*, traverses several moods and intriguing musical textures, and the concluding five-part suite by Nicholas Scherzinger, *Offering of the Five Senses*, is another kaleidoscopic journey, each movement a distinct entity, with moments of consonance and dissonance, concluding in a spiritually nourishing four-minute harmonics meditation. Recommended for folks looking for something different. —Blair Jackson



Eos Guitar Quartet: Live

EOS Guitar Quartet, Musikkollegium
Winterthur (Leo Brouwer, conductor)
Eos Guitar Edition

Swiss quartet, orchestra shine on Gismonti and Towner

Guitars and orchestras do mix, and here to reinforce that statement is a brilliant example of strings, bowed and plucked, emanating from the heart of Switzerland by that country’s “oldest” orchestra (formed 1875) and the relatively newer (but celebrating 25 years of performing) Eos Guitar Quartet, whose members are Julio Azcano (replacing original member Martin Pirktl in 2013), Marcel Ege, David Sautter, and Michael Winkler.

It is a sumptuous menu. With Leo Brouwer as guest conductor, we have the stunning *Gismontiana*, Brouwer’s arrangements of six of Egberto Gismonti’s most distinctive pieces: *Frevo*, *Água e Vinho*, *Baião Malandro*, *A Fala da Paixão*, *Cadenza*, and *Loro*. The eight hands of the quartet swirl among the maelstrom of the orchestra—often manic, then playful and suddenly plaintively lyrical; Gismonti’s distinctive music, defying easy categorization, is consistently joyous.

A world premiere delights—a piece dedicated to the Eos Guitar Quartet titled *Confluence*, by Ralph Towner, a record-label mate of Gismonti’s, who helped to shape the distinctive sound of Manfred Eicher’s ECM records from the company’s earliest days. The three movements—“Waltz,” “Slow,” and “Allegro”—make for a substantial work at just under 20 minutes. Towner’s idiomatic sound world is explored here in dark hues of musical mystery. Always accessible but not “easy,” Towner never fails to take the ear and mind on a captivating journey.

Recommended!

—TP



Kaiser Schmidt Guitar Duo

AureaVox

Duo deftly balances virtuosity and musicality

This first album from German guitarists Jessica Kaiser and Jakob Schmidt contains just four large pieces—two originally written for guitar and two arranged for the instrument. Granados’ *Valses Poeticos* appears in its full ten-movement form, with the opening “Vivace Molto” sounding like a true *vivace* for once; and with all the harmonies included (not often achieved in other performances). Indeed, the sheer beauty of the arrangement is one of the first things that strikes you. (I assume the performers are responsible for the arrangement, though no one is credited.) Moreover, the performance is so superb you can almost forget that this is not a work originally written for guitar—always a good sign—and its power and fluidity make it that much easier to appreciate the work’s structure as a complete piece.

Piazzolla’s three-movement *Tango Suite* is next; it’s one of the composer’s few original guitar works. Though Piazzolla was not a guitarist himself, this stunning work belies that fact. Indeed, there is a perfect balance between technical virtuosity and complete musicality throughout its 15 minutes.

Faure’s six-movement *Dolly Suite* takes me back to my childhood with the opening “Berceuse,” though I thought this version was a tad fast. However, the remaining movements are both sumptuous and effortless. Again, the arrangement is stunning. The duo close on a high note with Dušan Bogdanovic’s *Sonata Fantasia*, a real tour de force of modern writing.

These two are both wonderful performers and the playing throughout is outstanding. —CD