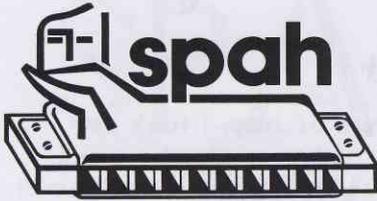


Harmonica



Happenings

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Rocky Mountain Harmonica Magic

SPAH 2006 Harmonica Convention
Denver, Colorado ~ August 15-19



You Won't Believe Your Ears!!!

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CD Review

Willi Berger: "Music From Spain and South America"

Reviewed by John Savas

Classical music, by its very nature, is not everybody's cup of tea which tends to decrease the population of listeners. When the featured instrument on a CD is harmonica, the number of listeners is further diminished. Add the label classical to harmonica and we end up with a fairly select audience. Musical likes and dislikes of course, are a very subjective and personal. Although I enjoy all kinds of music, classical music is my cup of tea.

Thought of as a folk instrument and exploited by vaudevillian antics, the harmonica remains, in the minds of many, the campfire folk instrument that almost anyone can just pick up and play in a short time. Yet, with these humble beginnings the introduction of the chromatic model has inspired a few musicians to treat it with the respect of a "serious" musical instrument and develop virtuosos techniques.

The chromatic is a relative newcomer as a serious musical instrument when compared to other orchestral or concerto instruments which have been developed and improved over several centuries. Students of these traditional instruments have the advantage of learning how to play from an established methodology taught by talented teachers at a music conservatory. This of course is not true of the harmonica.

There is much music written for other instruments such as the flute, recorder, violin, keyboard, single and double reed woodwinds, horns etc. Very little music has been written specifically for the chromatic consequently drawing musicians to the local music library. Their search has led to some wonderful classics performed

on the harmonica. John Sebastian, Larry Adler, Cham-Ber Huang, Tommy Reilley, Blackie Schackner, Robert Bonfiglio. Douglas Tate, Jia-Yi - He, are just a few of the players that led (or are leading) the parade. Willi Burger is one of those dedicated classical chromatic players. It is a pleasure to be able to put him in the same rank as the above artists. In this CD he has taken on the music of Spain and of South America and put his stamp on it, "loud and clear."

Spanish people are proud of their musical heritage which comes from folk music and dance. Their music is both nationalistic and regionalistic and can often be identified by geographic areas of the country. Guitars, mandolins, drums, castanets and tambourines come to mind when I think of music from Andalusia, the southern most part of Spain. The famous composers Manuel De Falla and Isaac Albeniz came from this area.

Maestro Burger starts his program with six songs written by Manuel de Falla:

1. "El pano maruno": This is a nice melody that is like a musical conversation between the smooth harmonica playing of Mr. Burger and the piano accompanist, Marcello Parolini.

2. "Nana" is slow and is played with the rich tone and beautiful vibrato that you will hear from Mr. Burger throughout the rest of the CD. Great phrasing and a very Spanish sound.

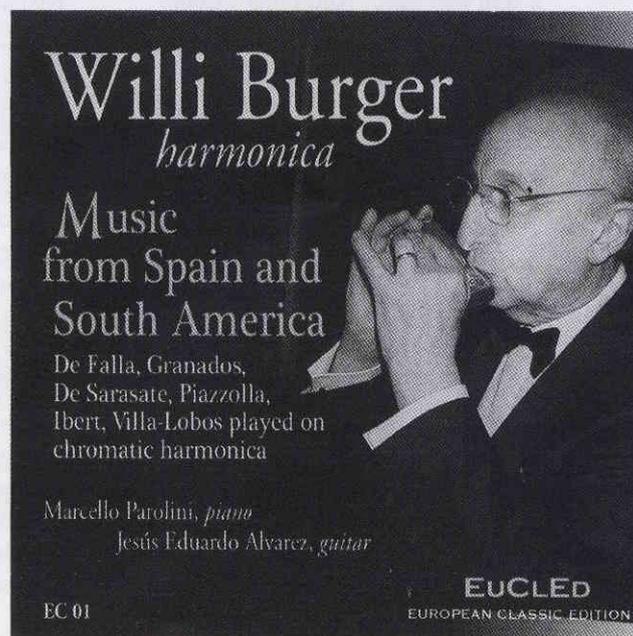
3. "Cancion" is a melody probably familiar to many harmonica players. It was recorded by Adler, Huang, Jia-Yi He, Bonfiglio and probably others as well. This is a great number for the listener to hear expert playing of octaves and double stops on the chromatic.

4. "Polo" is what Spanish music is all about... "fire!" The articulation, phrasing, cadences, grace notes that hint of Spain's Moorish past. They're all there. It is a short number, but choice.

Asturias is a province situated in the center of Spain.

5. "Asturiana" takes its title directly from the province. The piano starts with a melody line that has an almost Debussy quality to it. This is another slow piece that shows off Maestro Burger's exquisite tone and phrasing. His single note articulation is strong and precise, and his long notes trail off in a beautiful vibrato.

6. "Jota" is the sixth song which is a dance from the northern province of Aragon. It is fast moving and has really great interplay between the harmonica and piano.



CD Review

7. "Spanish Dance" by Granados: A haunting melody. Use of double stops, precise articulation, rapid trills, beautifully phrased passages, and in perfect sync with an outstanding piano accompanist, Mr. Parolini.

8. "Romanza Andalusia" by Sarasate: Very pleasant listening. Precise use of double stops, lots of trills. The high notes in the top register of the chromatic are beautifully voiced. This is a haunting melody that I haven't been able to get out of my mind since I first heard it.

9. "Faruca" (Danze du meunier) Dance of the miller from "The Three Cornered Hat", de Falla. This song is a slow starter, but stick with it if you are interested in recording technology. The contrast between the softly played harmonica notes and the rapid, percussive chords of the piano are faithfully captured on track. Neither instrument overpowers the other which speaks highly for the technicians doing the recording.

10. "Ritual Fire Dance", de Falla: Great Music and a wonderful performance. Sit back and enjoy. It has everything. The piano accompaniment is excellent.

The following compositions were written by the prolific Argentinean composer, Astor Piazzolo:

11. "Ave Maria": Nice melody beautifully performed.

12. "Oblivion", Piazzolla: Nice melody---modern chords, great tonal quality and single note articulation, smooth octave jumps.

At this point, Jesus Eduardo Alvarez accompanies Maestro Burgers on the classical acoustic guitar. Unlike the piano it is not a very loud instrument. This makes it a suitable accompanying instrument for the equally soft sound-

ing, harmonica. There is no doubt that Maestros Burger and Alvarez are communicating musically. It's a beautiful combination of instruments played by two masters.

13. "Cafe 1930" by Astor Piazzolla: Mr. Alvarez quickly establishes his virtuosity on the guitar. He is a very talented and sensitive musician. The combination of guitar and harmonica blend very well together.

14. "Entr'acte" by Jacques Ibert: This number opens up with a fast theme of runs and grace notes played on the chromatic with strong rhythm support from the guitar. A second, but similar theme is introduced, then a short solo bridge by the guitarist moves the music into a slow pace. The harmonica comes in with sharply articulated single notes then reverts to the first theme of fast grace notes and trills and then with the guitar, the music comes to an abrupt end.

15. Aria from "Bachianas Brasileiras" n. 5, by Hector Villa-Lobos. Very good performance. This too has been done quite often by other

chromatic musicians. The guitar and chromatic are very well suited for this music.

16. "Carmen Fantasy", Marcello Parolini, piano. Last but not least. Lots of fun listening to the various melodies and themes from Bizet's Opera, ³Carmen². My children learned these melodies on ³Sesame Street². This is fun music. Sit back and enjoy.

I think that Maestro Burger has captured the feel and spirit of these beautiful Spanish melodies. He has complete control of his harmonica. He slides from one octave to another effortlessly adding octave notes and double stops along the way. Grace notes and quick runs and staccato notes are crisp and clear. His notes are very smooth across the whole range of the instrument, including of course, the fourth octave high notes. His dynamics and phrasing keep the music interesting and his use of vibrato are used to full effect drawing the listener in. There is a very good interplay between the harmonica and the accompanists. Both pianist and guitarist played superbly and were a pleasure to hear.

Harmonica Happenings Deadlines for each issue

Those wishing to submit articles, photos, ads, etc. to *Harmonica Happenings* should have those items to the editor by the dates listed below in order to have the items appear in the specified issue.

Spring issue March 15th

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Submit items to:

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