

CRITIQUES - Publications

ANTHOLOGIE

For solo guitar by Claude Gagnon

Les Productions D'OZ DZ 1630 108pp.

Over the years, this Canadian guitarist/composer has had many of his compositions published by D'OZ and Doberman-Yppan. This anthology contains 59 of his titles all of which, I presume, have been published either separately or in smaller groups previously. From a didactic point of view they are excellent pieces covering lots of techniques up and down the fingerboard. There are some brilliant ideas scattered throughout this book and it would be a dull student indeed who didn't get pleasure from the majority of these pieces. The music is aimed at around the Grade 3-5 level, is wonderfully clear to read and the book is spiral bound which enables it to open, and stay open. I will most certainly be using this with many a student to brighten their practice time.

Recommended.

Steve Marsh

SEPIA

For guitar and string quartet by Claude Gagnon (arr. Gilles Ouellet)

Les Productions D'OZ DZ 1627 12pp plus parts

Although just 91 bars long, this piece proceeds at a leisurely pace and lasts nearly five minutes. Beginning with the strings alone, the guitar then enters for a solo passage that imitates the opening. In many respects it reminds me of a well-structured and measured Giuliani or Carulli piece, in A minor and set in first position, with the obligatory modulation to the dominant. When the strings return, the guitar first shadows the viola and then the second violin, perhaps lulling the guitarist into a false sense of security. The music slowly increases in complexity – never difficult, but countermelody, weaving over the violin, which is reprising the main theme. Following the easy opening, it's disappointing that there is no fingering here, where opposition changes happen every bar. A gliss extends from fret 3 to fret 17 of the 4th string and must be done very quickly – young fingers may catch fire – but there is no confirmation that this is the correct interpretation. Following on are some complex arpeggios – not difficult per se, but tough for someone who felt the opening was the right standard for them. The opening theme and orchestration return to close off the piece. The piece doesn't purport to be flamboyant, and in many respects, the little burst of complexity in the middle gives the whole piece a sort of "Junior concerto" feel. Many guitarists who are still quite "green" in their abilities will welcome this insight into a different side of guitar playing – enjoying sustain and volume that the guitar alone cannot summon up. The lack of fingering is a little disappointing, precisely because it is the less skilled player who most benefits from trying the fingering of an expert. The start and end of the piece are probably Grade 3, but the centre is perhaps Grade 5-6, not that it is technically difficult but because a maturity and self-reliance is needed to sit there and play a different rhythm to all those around you. If you have played solos from Mr Gagnon, you already know that the music is nicely constructed.

Derek Hasted

PAYSAGE ROUMAIN

For solo guitar by Claude Gagnon

Les Productions D'OZ DZ 1858

This piece does precisely what it says on the tin. After a brief, slow and sombre opening (containing some appealing chords) the main body of the composition kicks in and faithfully reproduces the imagery of Romanian country dance. This is an exciting and highly (albeit short-lived) section with a multitude of slurred passages and a couple of strummed phrases, one of which brings the work to an exciting climax. Having just complained in another review (of music from the same publishers), about a work having too much length, this piece is the opposite; it is a pity that this didn't go on for a bit longer. A very enjoyable, diminutive work suitable for the intermediate player.

Steve Marsh

FREDONNEMENTS – Cinecittà

DZ 794 - 32 p., Niveau 3-4

Classical Guitar Magazine (Angleterre)

CINECITTÀ is a lengthy piece with 220 bars of music, but it is not too complex and players working for Grade 8 would find this quite playable. The music starts in 2/2 time at a spirited pace with some punchy staccato and a jaunty style - definitely modern but definitely musical. The piece is long enough to give Mr Gagnon time to weave in new themes, and a waltz-like centre movement in a new key makes for a pleasing contrast. The reprise is nicely embellished with a lively rhythm and a little percussion.

*Derek Hasted***FREDONNEMENTS – Danse des Muses callipyges**

DZ 795 - 32 p., Niveau 3-4

*Classical Guitar Magazine (Angleterre)**DANSE DES MUSES CALLIPYGES*

Is much more energetic with a 3,3,2 rasgueado in 8/8 time presaging a lively theme that is both Canarios-like yet modern. As the mood builds there is a dramatic and rhythmic section. The music moves on as if to reprise the opening section, but the rhythm is no longer 8/8 but rather a demanding mix of 8/8, 4/4, 9/8, 6/8 and 6/4, so cool heads are needed! The whole piece is repeated, so that this is also a long movement and fully capable of holding its own as a stand-alone piece. The part scores are laid out to minimize page turns. An interesting suite for the advanced intermediate quartet.

*Derek Hasted***FREDONNEMENTS – Lachrimae**

DZ 796 - 16 p., Niveau 3-4

Classical Guitar Magazine (Angleterre)

This is the third in a series of pieces under the collective title Fredonnements. Whether there is any connection with the "Hums" of a famous bear I know not! We are given no indications of expression at the start of the score, only a metronome marking. However the music speaks for itself; on looking at the opening melody it can only be described as languid, having the most lovely shape and form. In the first section guitars 2, 3 and 4 support and point this languid melody with block chords, but this is done so simply and beautifully. The piece begins to move forward with the individual parts being given their freedom for a few bars. Now pedal notes in two of the voices bring the music to a *Più mosso e movido*. Here the mood becomes more strident moving towards a pause which brings us back to *Tempo I* and a return to the opening melody. A three-bar *poco allarg.* brings us to the end of what is a most satisfying and lovely piece.

*John Arran***FREDONNEMENTS – The Menlove Avenue Dreamer**

DZ 797 - 36 p., Niveau 3-4

*Classical Guitar Magazine (Angleterre)**THE MENLOVE AVENUE DREAMER*

Is the fourth in a set of pieces for a quartet of guitars (all published separately) and coming under the main title of Fredonnements. This final movement of the set has a curious title which I assume to be a reference to John Lennon who once lived in Menlove Avenue.

It opens with a widely spaced chord based on whole tones spread over the four players. The whole tone scale was widely used by Debussy and other French composers particularly and definitely conveys the dreaminess of the title in spite of it developing into an insistent rhythmic idea shortly after. Then a rather oriental first guitar melody continues the theme over repeated chords elsewhere before high pitched shriek like sounds on guitar two leads to the players 3 and 4 having to shout the word "Shoot!" over a climactic staccato idea in guitars 1 and 2. This obvious reference to Lennon's murder leads to a moment of hiatus before everything dies down uneasily on a semi-tonal crunch. Then a *Più lento* idea over a pizzicato bass and sustained chords in guitars 2 and 3 heralds in an emotive melody which subsequently returns to *Tempo*

I where an agitated repeated chord accompaniment is surrounded by high and low tremolando single note lines. Then an ad lib. solo section on guitar 1 leads to a slightly latin rhythm over which an arpeggiated melody holds sway. Ideas are constantly changing now and continues right to the coda where everything dies away on an E minor chord.

This is an interesting piece, dramatic and a little unusual in one or two areas that would benefit any relatively advanced quartet.

Chris Dumigan

FRÉQUENCE PÉKINOISE

For pipa, guitar and violin DZ 484 - 7 pages plus parts

Classical Guitar Magazine (Angleterre)

As usual with this publisher, both score and parts are printed in an exemplary way. Claude Gagnon is a guitar teacher in Quebec performing in various ensembles, a fact, which shows in his writing for the instrument in this piece. The writing is fluent, using exactly the right register to allow the guitar to speak with an equal voice in the company of the panpipes and violin. The work is full of delightful sonorities and is a joy to play (apart from the last section where the guitar sustains a not too easy left-hand stretch), each instrument has a melodic solo but it is in the ensemble sections that the music really takes flight.

Highly recommended.

John Arran

CONCERTO EN RÉ MAJEUR RV93

A. Vivaldi DZ 229 - 12 pages + parts, Niveau 3

Classical Guitar

This arrangement of the D major lute concerto by Vivaldi has much to recommend it. It comes in the form of score plus two individual parts and there is only one awkward page turn between the two main sections of the first movement. Inevitably, guitar I has all the interest of the solo part and guitar 2 the arrangement of the string accompaniment and continuo realisation. The latter part is simple and fits well under the fingers. The first and third movements work very well indeed. It is only in the beautiful Largo that you really miss the sustained sound of the original string accompaniment underlying the solo line. In this movement the repeats are written out with what I presume is Gagnon's ornamentation and elaboration of the melodic line added the second time round. This is tasteful and varied, with only one or two moments when perhaps one might have left a phrase alone. Both parts and score are mercifully free of all but the barest of fingerings and have very little in the way of articulation markings. I rather like that. as it leaves the player a clean slate to find their own style of playing the music and to solve their own technical difficulties. Given that the music is relatively simple, there should not be too many difficulties too solve and this arrangement would make a useful and delightful addition to any duo's programme.

Abigad James

CONCERTO EN RÉ MAJEUR Opus 3

No 9, A. Vivaldi DZ 211 - 12 pages, Niveau 3

Soundboard

Vivaldi's original Concerto was written for violin, strings and continuo, and this fine arrangement is presented by Claude Gagnon with violin fingering done by Marc Gagnon. It is a typical three-movement Vivaldi concerto: Allegro, Larghetto, Allegro. This edition presents a very nice and clear score, plus separate parts for both instruments. The guitar in this arranged version has a full accompanying role, with lots of chords played mostly simultaneously, and some basses. Given that the piece is in D major, which very well suits the guitar, the entire concerto is far from being difficult, even for much less advanced guitar players, and gives the real opportunity for well-done chamber cooperation with the main instrument, the violin. It is obvious that the present arrangement was made by skilled musicians, and Claude Gagnon's chamber-playing experience is evident. Knowing that the sound combination of violin and guitar gives one of the most delightful chamber results, not much more is needed to be said about this nice title.

Uros Dojcinovic

DÉJÀ VU

DZ 193 - 19 pages

Les Cahiers de la guitare et de la musique (France) no 73 2000

Pour cycle 1, voici quatorze pièces aux climats typés, souvent exotiques; Marrakech, Bonsai, Chanson slave, Kift, Bagdad... Toute la panoplie des premiers outils du guitariste y est: écartement 1-4, sixtes, mélodies au pouce, ostinato, liaisons, accords enjambés, rythmes divers... Ces petites pages rafraîchissantes sont souvent inspirées, comme les beaux Farewell, Mélancolique ou Remembrance, et l'impression à la fois musicale et ludique de ce recueil le rend très attachant.

Dominique Marie

LA FORÊT ENCHANTÉE

DZ 192 - 28 pages

Les Cahiers de la guitare et de la musique (France) no 73 2000

De la même veine, mais pour plus avancés, voici douze pièces de deux pages chacune, ce qui laisse plus de temps pour développer. L'inspiration poétique de Claude Gagnon est renforcée par la mise en page de l'éditeur, où une feuille d'arbre vient ponctuer la musique. Nains, lutins et farfadets ne sont pas des personnages tristes et l'humour et la cocasserie ne sont pas absents. Mais la volonté coloriste de l'auteur nous emporte aussi dans d'autres climats, plus mélancoliques (Triste gnome) où fées et nymphes chantent d'une manière fraîche, avec une guitare au naturel qui sonne. Pour cycle 2.

Dominique Marie

LA FORÊT ENCHANTÉE - pour guitare solo

DZ 192 - 28 pages

Classical Guitar Magazine (Angleterre) février 2000

Over the past few years, this publishing company has produced some admirable publications; they are well presented with clean and easy-to-read printing and usually contain very good student material. This edition under review is no exception.

Claude Gagnon presently teaches guitar at the Sainte-Foy College, Quebec and has written for guitar trio, duo and cello & guitar. La Foret Enchantee is a collection of twelve interesting, entertaining and educational guitar solos. Ranging from around grade three with the enigmatic Chanson de fee through to around grade five with the jubilant Fete chez les lutins, this book has quite a number of contrasting pieces. Apres la pluie is a slow, impressionistic work with shades of Milan Tesar appearing in one or two places and Pour une Nymphe en Allee is a beautifully lyrical song with a melancholy air. Compare these to the bass heavy, rhythmic Picnic of the Pigs and the very enjoyable tribute to the most influential pop group in musical history Four Beatles in a Strawberry Field, with infuriatingly small snippets of the melodies and harmonies from a few Beatles songs.

The rest of the compositions are really as enjoyable and contain quite a number of practical and useful considerations for the student to get to grips with. Rather than insert a blank page to avoid an awkward page turn, this publisher printed a nice photo of a group of trees where the blank page would have been. Rather a nice thought that.

Steve Marsh

Kamendja - pour 2 guitares

DZ 110 - 33 pages (scores and parts)

Classical Guitar Magazine (Angleterre) novembre 1998

A composer who, according to the preface, once wrote a piece for guitar and cello entitled Hello Cello clearly, needs to be treated with some caution, but I'm pleased to report that Kamendja is a powerful and imaginative concert work in three movements. The title, it seems, refers to a bowed instrument from north west Africa, and the musical content is every inch the aggressive, tribal stuff we were all secretly hoping it would be.

The opening Rencontre, in which the two guitars start by hammering out a syncopated theme one octave apart, sounds pretty much like a declaration of war on any third party who happens to be around, and it is only in the central Séduction that any kind of civilised dialogue is allowed to

develop. In the final Célébration, triumphant chord strums in 10/8 lead to an impressive display of percussive effects, all of which are fully explained in the preface. Not the most sophisticated work ever published, but an honest and enthusiastic piece of writing which I confidently predict will be as much fun to hear as it is to play.

Paul Fowles

SONATE Opus 1 No 11, G.F. Handel

DZ 78 - 8 pages + parties séparées, Niveau 3

Soundboard

This Handel sonate is a pleasant addition to guitar literature and a great piece for college ensembles. It is typical baroque fare, with the violin taking the lead and the guitar and cello acting as continuo parts. Occasionally the guitar does get some interesting secondary melodic material, but the cello plays a simple bass line throughout. Even so, the work is at the intermediate level for all performers.

There are four movements: a slow first movement, and allegro in binary form as a second movement, a gentle siciliana third movement, and a quick allegro in binary form in 6/8 for the close. The guitar part was originally a figured bass accompaniment. It has been realized, I assume, by Gagnon. He has written an interesting guitar part, which will make the work a pleasure to play. The publication is nicely presented. The page turns come between movements, and the piece is easy to read.

Overall, this is an enjoyable addition to the guitar repertoire. Teachers and performers who enjoy good baroque music and ensemble playing will want to add this piece to their music libraries.

Garth Baxter

DOUZE PRÉLUDES EN FORME D'ÉTUDES

DO 171 1994 - 23 pages

Soundboard (GFA USA) Spring 1996

This set of Preludes/Etudes by Canadian guitarist/composer Claude Gagnon offers a dozen charming pieces in a quasi-impressionistic style. The «etude» side of the equation covers campanella fingerings, slurs, arpeggios, harmonics, left-hand fingerindependence, melodies against pedal points or ostinato figures and metric shifts, and the technical points are integrated ingeniously with the musical concepts.

The music itself is both ingratiating and satisfying, and any student will enjoy working out the technical challenges within such a pleasant framework.

The difficulty level lies in the intermediate range, and these could easily be used as an alternative to Brouwer's «Simple Etudes». Like the Brouwer pieces, these would stand quite well in performance. I like these very much, and I recommend them with enthusiasm.

David Grimes

DOUZE PRÉLUDES EN FORME D'ÉTUDES

DO 171 - 23 pages

Les Cahiers de la guitare (France) 3^e trimestre 1995

Voici de bonnes études en tout cas techniquement profitables, car l'intérêt musical en est moins évident - pourtant quelques trouvailles bienvenues dans la première, laissaient présager mieux du reste. Ces oeuvres emploient beaucoup d'arpèges et de campanellas qui peuvent aider à la découverte de l'instrument. Quelques autres sont en accords ou en style de mélodies accompagnés, mais l'ensemble reste cependant souvent répétitif.

Dominique Marie

HELLO CELLO

DO 172 - 7 pages + violoncelle en partie séparée, 3 pages

Les Cahiers de la guitare (France) 4^e trimestre 1995

Cette œuvre dynamique et rapide est d'une seule coulée. Le violoncelle y est traité constamment mélodiquement. La guitare y assure plutôt l'accompagnement, mais à certains moments se charge également de la mélodie; il y a donc dialogue entre les deux instruments. L'œuvre ressemble un peu à une sorte de danse ancienne, mais qui n'a pas peur de se pimenter très vite de recherches rythmiques et de dissonances très modernes. Elle est intéressante pour cet assemblage inusité.

Dominique Marie

CHANSONS ET DANSES POPULAIRES

DO 22 - 28 pages, niveau 2

Soundboard

Ce livre contient 20 petites pièces inspirées par des chansons et des danses folkloriques, pour la plupart du Québec et de la France. On y trouve également quelques compositions originales de Claude Gagnon. Les mélodies attrayantes sont pour la plupart arrangées pour le jeu à 2 voix et elles constituent du matériel très utile pour les étudiants de 2^e et 3^e année. Une collection très plaisante de petites pièces chaudement recommandée pour tous ceux qui aiment les belles mélodies.

John Duarte

