

**STEIN-ERIK OLSEN AND EGIL HAUGLAND
INTERVIEWED BY GRAHAM WADE**

GW: This recording presents a very varied repertoire from the post-romanticism of Rodrigo, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, and Pierre Petit to the slightly more abrasive musical language of Jolivet. I presume you based your choice of repertoire on the close relationship of the selected works to the Presti-Lagoya Duo whose career you do indeed honour with this recording.

SEO; The fifties and sixties were very interesting periods in the development of the classical guitar. In England Julian Bream realized that the guitar required a fresh repertoire and commissioned many works for solo guitar, mainly from British composers.

In France, Presti and Lagoya commissioned works for guitar duo. The repertoire for guitar duo was not extensive when they started out in 1952. Consequently they had to transcribe music from other instruments and commission new work by contemporary composers.

In 2009 I recorded the complete music for two guitars by Ida Presti (*Les Compositions d'Ida Presti pour deux Guitares, Simax PSC 1289*) and became intrigued by the period. Consequently I wanted to delve deeper into the repertoire for two guitars commissioned by Presti and Lagoya.

GW: Did you ever hear the Presti-Lagoya Duo in concert?

SEO: Unfortunately neither of us ever had the opportunity to attend one of their concerts. But I first heard their recordings in 1972, and later that year I met Alexandre Lagoya and heard one of his recitals at the Academie Internationale d'Été, in Nice.

GW: Could you comment on the music of Petit, Rodrigo and Castelnuovo-Tedesco from the performer's viewpoint? How you do rate these works technically as well as musically in the history of the guitar duo?

EH: These works are all masterpieces, certainly some of the best music composed for the guitar duo. They contain many possibilities when it comes to interpretation. The works were all written within six years by composers with very individual styles and musical vocabularies. Technically they are challenging, covering many aspects of technique.

The new element in these works (compared with any earlier guitar duos), is that they were written for two guitarists with advanced technical abilities. Thus you find two equally difficult parts loaded with musical information. In addition all these pieces have beautiful slow movements or slow episodes as in the composition by Petit.

GW: Jolivet's music is more difficult for the average classical guitarist in terms of its progressive modernity. What would you say to those who dislike atonal music?

SEO: If I met somebody unaccustomed to atonal music, I would say it is important to be open minded and give yourself a chance to experience something new. I became interested in contemporary music when I met modern composers and learned more about how they work and write music. I have had several students who at first claimed they were not interested in contemporary music but ended up commissioning new pieces and working intensively with composers.

GW: I understand you play quite often from the original manuscripts of various works as opposed to the officially published work. What are the advantages and, indeed, disadvantages of doing this?

SEO: When I started playing the guitar I never questioned any edition. Over the years I have come to understand that many published editions are not absolutely trustworthy. I think it is always interesting to see what the composer actually wrote in the first instance. If there are any disadvantages it must be that you never know if the changes made for the published version were accepted by the composer. However, it is still important to use common sense and treat all music with respect.

GW: On a broader front, how do you feel about the role of the guitar duo on the contemporary classical guitar scene? Do you find that it is often more popular among audiences than solo recitals?

SEO: It hard to give an unambiguous answer, I suppose the size of an audience depends on the duo or the soloist. It is difficult to say a solo recital is more popular than a duo recital or vice versa. One would think that famous artists always attract large audiences.

There are many aspects with duos in a concert. It is interesting, for example, to observe how various musicians communicate. Some duos use a lot of body language when they play - they have a kind of physical presence exciting to observe Other duos do not move and do not look at each other at all and still play perfectly together.

GW: Do you find the recording studio more stressful than giving recitals?

SEO: When playing a concert you only have one chance to communicate your message. In a recording session you can repeat phrases as many times you like until you are satisfied. A challenge in the recording studio is of course to maintain the necessary level of intensity, creativity and concentration that the player experiences in a recital.

Our producer, Simon Kiln, once told us that he recommended musicians to rehearse in a special way for a recording because it is a totally different situation from a concert. Initially when we started preparation for a recording we rehearsed all pieces as if we were getting ready for a live concert. But when we divided all the pieces into logical musical sections, and practiced them in shorter units, recording became a very natural process. This way of working gives you the opportunity not only to dig deeper into details but corresponds better to the actual situation of the recording session and, we hope, helps us to achieve the finest performance of each work that we can produce.

GW: Could you tell us something about your duo's approach, musical philosophy, and concert activities?

EH: As a duo we have developed a musical strategy. We have a lot of experience playing in different settings in addition to the duo. All this work and experience we put into our duo playing.

A fundamental aspect in our way of playing is the joy of making music and emphasising musical intuition, creativity and fantasy. We allow certain differences in our musical dialogue by allowing different articulation and sonorities as a part of the artistic expression. We first played together in the mid-eighties. The first gig was actually a TV

appearance. Since then we have not been working regularly as a duo, but have been involved in many projects together.

As a duo we have recorded contemporary Norwegian music for two guitars and performed as a guitar trio together with Njål Vindenes. The trio has been involved in contemporary theatre performances at the Bergen International festival, at the National Theatre and on the contemporary scene Black Box, both in Oslo. In addition the trio has recorded *Seonveh*, a piece dedicated to the trio by the Norwegian composer, Ketil Hvoslef (Simax PSC 1339).

GW: Your guitars blend beautifully together yet I understand they are in fact by different luthiers.

EH: I am also a luthier and have made several guitars with José and Liam Romanillos during their summer courses in Siquenza in Spain. My instruments are constructed using spruce in the soundboard and based on principles following the great Spanish maker, Antonio Torres. Stein-Erik is playing a guitar made by the French maker Daniel Friederich with a soundboard of western red cedar.

We tried out various combinations of guitars for this recording. Eventually we acquired two vintage José Ramírez guitars, a 1967 model (used for Tedesco's *Sonatina Canonica*), and another made in 1970. Both are cedar top guitars with laminated ribs (as with the Friederich guitar). Obviously Ramírez and Friedrich guitars are different in various structural elements, the former having a longer scale-length and a slightly deeper body, as well as another type of fan-strutting inside the soundboard.

But we soon realized that our playing style and ideas concerning sound and timbre benefited immensely from a combination of Friederich and Ramirez.