

Ida

HOMAGE TO IDA PRESTI
EDEN STELL GUITAR DUO

DEUX-ELLES: This album celebrates the legendary guitarist and composer, Ida Presti, on the 100th anniversary of her birth. Can you tell us something about her, and what her work means to you as a guitar duo?

CHRIS: Well, it was her vision that made it possible to be a serious guitar duo in the first place. If Andrés Segovia was the one who brought solo guitar music from the private salon into the concert hall, it was definitely the Presti Lagoya duo that elevated guitar duo music to the same status a generation later. They were very much the duo from that era, using the guitar's unique ability to characterise music through the use of colour.

D-E: Are they the first major guitar duo?

MARK: They were the first professional duo, i.e. they brought their sound world together, they created repertoire, and they created transcriptions. They had an enormous game plan for changing the way that a guitar duo is perceived.

CHRIS: Yes, they invested in the art form of the guitar duo, and without any doubt they were the first to do that.

D-E: So where is Alexandre Lagoya in all of this?

MARK: We would never want to understate the enormous contribution that Alexander Lagoya made to the duo, but it is fair to say that Presti was already a superstar by the time she met Lagoya, and could easily have kept investing in her own solo career. The idea of a guitar duo was something that really interested her.

D-E: The disc opens with a piece by Ida Presti herself, *Etude fantastique*. What's the story here?

MARK: Presti was an incredibly gifted musician, and it follows that in her aim to create repertoire for the duo she would also develop her skills as a composer. I think that's demonstrated here. Her music is not modernistic - it's in a much lighter style - however it is still a far-reaching composition. ▶



CHRIS: You can tell she understands the ensemble of a duo completely because of the way it's constructed. There is no primo and secondo. It's very much an integrated duo piece with a lot of rhythmical energy. You can hear her influences from the French tradition, mixing impressionistic writing with playful energy. *Etude fantastique* is a real microcosm and you can hear elements of Jolivet and Petit - both composers who also wrote for the duo.

D-E: Was Jolivet's *Serenade* written for them?

MARK: Yes, and now you're talking about something on a much weightier and more serious level. This shows Presti and Lagoya really trying to push forward the boundaries of the duo repertoire. It's an incredible piece. In fact, I think it's even steps ahead of anything written for solo guitar at that time.

D-E: Did Jolivet mostly write for the guitar?

CHRIS: No, Jolivet's output is incredibly broad - in fact, he is not known for his guitar writing but

more for his piano and chamber music repertoire. He crafts his music with a very distinctive voice, and like a lot of composers from that era, they liked to group together. Jolivet co-founded the group *La jeune France*, which included Messiaen, Lesur (who features on this recording) and Baidrier. They talked about the philosophy of their compositions, their style, and how they could progress their art.

D-E: Amazing. What is the *Serenade* like to play?

CHRIS: Jolivet is someone who would have taken a lot of time to study and understand the instrument he's writing for. It allows the player to use the guitar's full colour palette. The opening movement is a good example of this, with its dark chords and languid solo writing. The second movement emphasises the more percussive elements of the guitar, with its driving rhythmical chords. In the third movement, there is a return to the use of expansive chords over haunting melodic phrases. The writing is almost harp-like in places, making full use of the French impressionistic ▶

style. The final movement is humorous with touches of jazz. It finally works itself up into a frenzy of driving chords that are the backdrop for dramatic orchestral-style writing.

D-E: It's amazing that he didn't write more things for guitar.

MARK: Jolivet composed two other solo guitar works. His output is very far ranging including over ten concertos, ballets, operas as well as substantial number of chamber and keyboard works. Jolivet is a brilliant composer and it's a shame he didn't write a concerto for the guitar.

D-E: What about Daniel Lesur?

MARK: Lesur combines a modernistic approach with a very romantic style, using big cello-like phrases and sweeping arpeggios. Lesur was an organist, but the writing is actually very different to what you might expect from the organ. He was someone who was very much invested in other instruments. It's a very distinctive little piece of music.

CHRIS: Absolutely, and it took a bit more time to to gel because there are lots of different elements to the piece. It has many different moods in a very short space of time. The duo tremolo writing at the end gives the most amazing power to the phrases. The piece is very rich, but also succinct: he doesn't extend his ideas beyond what he needs to.

D-E: Yes, it's almost Toccata-like in a way, isn't it?

CHRIS: It is, absolutely. It also reminds me of Poulenc, who keeps the listener engaged with fast changing direction.

MARK: Something to also touch on is that both Jolivet and Lesur were influenced by electronic music of that period: the ondes Martenot was an early electric keyboard which Messiaen famously used in his *Turangalila* Symphony, and both guitar duo works have haunting melodic lines which are very reminiscent of that sound world. One of Jolivet's earliest concertos is for the ondes Martenot and orchestra. ▶

D-E: Castelnuovo-Tedesco strikes me as the opposite: a guitarist's composer.

MARK: Yes, Castelnuovo-Tedesco was already a prolific composer of guitar music, mainly due to his collaboration with Segovia. His 24 Preludes and Fugues, dedicated to the Presti and Lagoya guitar duo, are one of the most substantial bodies of work written by the composer for the guitar.

CHRIS: The prelude and fugue on our album is actually separate from the set of 24. We felt it was particularly poignant, as it is an elegy dedicated to the memory of Ida Presti after her untimely death.

D-E: You both obviously have been massively influenced by Presti and Lagoya, but you're also continuing lineage of the guitar duo, commissioning pieces and pushing the boundaries and expanding repertoire. What can you tell me about your arrangement of the Bach concerto? Bach's piece is an arrangement itself, isn't it?

CHRIS: Yes, this piece started life as an oboe concerto by Alessandro Marcello (1673-1747), and Bach arranged it for solo keyboard. Presti and Lagoya actually arranged this piece directly from Marcello's version, for two guitars with orchestra. I wanted to take another look and play the whole work on the two guitars. I made my arrangement from the Bach keyboard version and used the key of B minor. In this recording I use the 7th string tuned to a low B, so an octave below the second fret.

D-E: Yes, it gives you a bit more compass, doesn't it?

CHRIS: It does, and with Mark being able to play with such a singing tone at the high end of the instrument, it really gives you that expansive sound that you might get in the string orchestra version.

MARK: One thing that enormously influenced us was their arrangement of the Handel Chaconne (HWV 435), which is an astonishing harpsichord work. It's just beautiful. ▶

They have also arranged music by Scarlatti and Soler, really tapping into the music of that period.

D-E: The final piece on the disc is completely your own, because it was written for you by Johannes Möller.

MARK: Yes, we had met Johannes in Germany when he was a teenager and a super talented player. He was already starting to write things for himself, and we could see that he already had a unique approach to writing music. Straightaway Chris and I thought, we have to ask him now for a piece. When we looked at the score for the first time we were amazed, and I must admit that we both said “we’re too old for this,” as it was the most expansive piece we have ever embarked upon.

D-E: Yes indeed - it sounds amazing, but it also sounds like it would be an ordeal to learn.

MARK: It was! There are so many polyrhythms in it, making it very complex to fit together while keeping its improvised feel.

CHRIS: And I think it sits very nicely on this recording because Ida Presti and Alexandre Lagoya pushed the boundaries themselves. If you look at the Jolivet Serenade, not many players of that time would have attempted to play that kind of repertoire. When Buds Are Breaking, even by today’s standards, would require a substantial investment of any duo’s time. We premiered this piece at the Uppsala Guitar Festival, and for us it carried on the tradition started by Presti and Lagoya of exploring the possibilities of the art of the guitar duo.

D-E: It finishes the recording really beautifully - starting with Presti’s work, moving through the influences she has brought into the duo repertoire, and finishing with your own contributions to the guitar duo repertoire. It’s a wonderful tribute. ■



Karine Boye (1900-1941)

"...WHEN BUDS ARE BREAKING"

The title is a fragment from a poem by the Swedish poet Karin Boye, with the opening words: "Yes, of course it hurts when buds are breaking. Why else would the springtime falter?" She continues: "Hurts for that which grows, and that which bars." It is like a painful contradiction; one force is pushing forward and one is holding back. Yet, beyond the contradiction, they live in consort for the inevitable, constantly changing experience of time. This composition uses melodies and rhythms created in a synthesis of Eastern and Western musics. As in ancient classical Chinese music, there is no fixed tone centre. Rather, each group of notes, varying from even a single note, forms a unique musical destination, forming a new pivot to spring off from. The guitars interchange in complementing soundscapes, becoming more and more accepting towards each other. The poem continues with another beautiful metaphor: "Yes, it is hard when drops are falling / Trembling with fear, and heavy hanging." In the second part, the two guitars are the most alienated from each other. The first guitar plays a slow howling melody with a damped but resonant pizzicato. The second

guitar retunes and adds a capo on the second fret, now to play only harmonics. Despite this, the two instruments still make way to merge briefly with each other through fast slurs melded with fast arpeggiated harmonics. In the third part, the guitars are playing almost the same melodic notes, one with natural harmonics and one with regular fretted notes. This means that, despite playing the same notes, the two guitars are now in different tuning systems, since the harmonic notes relate according to their own laws. In the third stanza of the poem, she writes: "Forget that they were frightened by the new". The final section starts with quiet arpeggios with gradually introduced rhythmical sublayers. Here, the journey is the end and the end is a beginning. This final section is woven like a basket made of melted glass, with each guitar in its own rhythmical layer, independent yet coexisting at a deeper level of rhythmical subdivisions. "The tree's buds break as in rejoicing" is depicted here, combined with the last line of Karin Boye's poem: "Resting in that trust that creates the world". ■

Johannes Möller

EDEN STELL

Likened to a “miraculous single guitarist blessed with an impossibly wonderful technique and an exceptionally delicate touch” by The Observer, the Eden Stell Guitar Duo have performed at venues and music festivals around the world, including Germany, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Armenia, Romania, Turkey, USA, Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and Australia, as well as numerous radio and TV appearances on ITV, BBC, and European and North American networks.

Mark Eden and Chris Stell have performed concertos with the Prague Chamber Orchestra, International Philharmonic and Philharmonic Baden-Baden. In 2019 they were invited to give a special performance of Joaquín Rodrigo’s *Concierto Madrigal* in the Stadttheater Aschaffenburg in the presence of Cecilia Rodrigo.

Their international recitals include appearances at the Iserlohn guitar symposium, Guitar Foundation of America Omni Foundation Concert Series in San Francisco and the Alla Grande Festival in

Canada. They have also performed at prestigious venues such as the Beethovenhalle in Bonn, Stuttgart Liederhalle, the Sage in Gateshead, Uppsala Kongress Hall in Sweden, 92nd Street Y in New York as well as the Purcell Room, Wigmore Hall and Kings Place in London.

The duo were the first guitarists since Julian Bream to be Editor’s Choice in Gramophone magazine with their “landmark recording” of works by Stephen Dodgson and in 2017 the duo released the first complete recording on two guitars of *Cançons i Danses* by Federico Mompou arranged by Mark Eden.

The duo have always championed new commissions and are dedicatees of new works by internationally acclaimed composers including Adam Gorb, Dusan Bogdanovic, Gary Ryan and Johannes Möller.

After a collaboration over many years the English composer Stephen Dodgson dedicated a *Concierto* for two guitars to the duo who gave its ▶

first performance in the Duke's Hall at the Royal Academy of Music in 2013.

Mark and Chris are founding members of the VIDA Guitar Quartet who have rapidly become

one of the world's most celebrated classical guitar ensembles with concerts throughout Europe, USA and China.

The duo are D'Addario strings endorsed artists. ■



IDA PRESTI (1924-1967)

1. *Étude fantasque* 7:06

ANDRÉ JOLIVET (1905-1974)

Sérénade pour deux guitares

2. *Preludio e canzon* 2:59

3. *Allegro trepidante* 3:09

4. *Andante melinconico* 3:10

5. *Con allegria* 2:35

DANIEL LESUR (1908-2002)

6. *Élégie* 4:57

MARIO CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO (1895-1968)

Fuga elegiaca - To the memory of Ida Presti

7. *Preludio* 1:45

8. *Fuga* 2:58

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

*Concerto in D Minor (BWV 974) after
Alessandro Marcello arr. Chris Stell*

9. *Andante e spiccato* 3:08

10. *Adagio* 4:30

11. *Presto* 3:15

JOHANNES MÖLLER (1981-)

12. *"...when buds are breaking"* 14:27

Total playing time: 54:02