

Super Fidelity

By John Sunier

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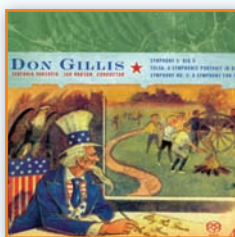


Brazil|Los Angeles Guitar Quartet|Telarc Multichannel SACD-60686

The Los Angeles Guitar Quartet has been exploring a wide variety of music for nearly 30 years. This new album explores the cultural melting pot of music that is Brazil. The quartet admitted one of its most prominent guitar influences was Brazil, but that they had avoided recording Brazilian music, feeling that other great composers and arrangers who were Brazilian were doing it better. Brazilian jazz vocalist Luciana Souza talked them into it, encouraging the LAGQ to just follow their instincts in performing it. They brought in a percussionist for *A Furiosa*, by their friend Paulo Bellinati, and also performed *Carlo's Dance* by the same guitarist-composer, together with flautist Katisse Buckingham. All 15 tracks are a delight, and the very specific placement of the four guitarists across the front of the soundstage adds much interest to the music, so if you're a two-channel diehard, you're missing out!

Fantaisie Triomphale|French Symphonic Organ Works|Chandos Multichannel SACD CHSA 5048

It was Franck and others of the French Organ School who expanded the capabilities of the instrument and also created a new style of composition—the organ symphony. The combination of the new French concert grand organs with a symphony orchestra made for an impressive panoply of sound—a far cry from the modest little concertos of Mozart and Handel. They literally pulled out all the stops, and this disc samples some of the exciting repertoire. All were written for the combination of pipe organ and orchestra except the opening Gigout work and all abound in the unique showy French style of triumphant music, the expression in sound of the concept of “La Gloire.” There's lots of brass, thrilling climaxes of sound, and a strong spatial element. Recorded in Liverpool Cathedral—which has a giant organ of the French School—the six or seven second reverberation results in a rather rumbling organ sound that even the five-channel pickup seems to have some trouble reproducing.



Don Gillis|Symphony X; Tulsa, Symphony No. 3|Sinfonia Varsovia/Ian Hobson|Albany SACD TROY933

Gillis, who died in 1978, was quite a character—a cowboy-country Neil Simon of the concert hall. He represented Middle America and played up nostalgia and patriotism in his music. Tulsa was one of his first big hits—thought to be the first time a major financial institution commissioned an orchestral work. The composer's early Symphony for Free Men was a serious attempt to imply American ideals through music. The 1968 Symphony X is a tribute to Dallas, with three bouncy, pop-concertish movements portraying “All American City,” “Conventioneer,” and “Cotton Bowl” — plus an elegiac fourth movement—“Requiem for a Hero”—that references the assassination of JFK. For this release, the original stereo master has been processed by the Zarex HD Studio to derive a 5.1 surround sound signal. The left and right front channels still retain the main part of the signal: I had to raise the surround level to achieve a pleasing ambience in multichannel playback after which it sounded quite convincing.



Stone Rose|Ola Gjeilo, piano|2L Multichannel SACD 2L48

This is a contemplative and melodic collection of mostly piano solos by Norwegian pianist Ola Gjeilo, who has performed around the world and is especially taken with New York City, as shown by the titles of several of the tracks here. On this CD he's enlisted the aid of guest artists Tom Barber (flugelhorn), David Coucheron (violin), and Johannes Martens (cello). The recording was made in a church in Oslo and the piano tone is very natural, as is the placement of the various guest performers. Tom Barber's solo on *North Country II* is striking and a fine demo of the advantages of well-recorded surround sound even for a simple ensemble such as this. In his notes the pianist mentions that both Keith Jarrett and Glenn Gould have been uppermost as influences. Sorry, but I couldn't hear the slightest connection with either one, but that doesn't detract from a well-performed and recorded album of classically influenced new age music.

The Invitation|Music for Saxophone Quartet|Tetraphonics Sax Quartet|Cybele Records Multichannel SACD 261001

As with most sax quartets, Germany's Tetraphonics play many diverse genres of music. On this disc they play works by Philip Glass (Concerto for Saxophone Quartet), Frank Reinshagen (The Invitation), Barbara Thompson (Saxophone Quartet No. 2), Zdenek Lukas (Rondo for Four Saxophones), and a transcription of a Bach Fugue. Glass' minimalist patterns work beautifully in this setting and especially with the spatial enhancement of surround sound playback. Thompson is a British saxophonist and composer who collaborated with Andrew Lloyd Webber on his musicals. The last movement has the other three players switching to soprano sax for an effect similar to female voices. The sounds that issue from the spatially separated soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone saxes are captured with great transparency and presence by Cybele's 5.1 channel SACD surround.



Pepe Romero, guitar|Flamenco|with Chano Lobato, Maria Magdalena, Paco Romero|First Impressions K2HD LIM022

This amazing disc is the first complete album I have heard that uses FIM's K2HD process. Previously I'd heard only a sampler, reviewed last column (Sept.). FIM's Winston Ma advised me that I erred in calling the K2HD discs “a variety of xrcd.” He says they're not. Whatever, the K2HD process is not a gimmick—it overshadows the improvements of most xrcds. Ma also said that in his opinion, this disc is “the best flamenco recording on the planet.” I would tend to agree. Pepe Romero is a member of the famed Romeros—The Royal Family of the Guitar. Paco provides the explosive zapateado sounds. Audiophiles will go nuts over the sounds on this disc, which is possibly the ultimate audio demo. The rich sound of Romero's guitar is matched by the sharp percussive sounds of the castanets, but the greatest excitement is generated by the super-explosive sounds of the dancers' zapateado. The presence and immediacy must be heard to be believed. Wow!