

**An interesting recent CD: *Sones Medievales, Musicantes, Dulcimer Songs*
DCM 2107**

One of life's innocent pleasures is discovering that what first appears to be a programme of unfamiliar fare contains an old favourite. So it was with this 2017 release by a highly accomplished four-piece team of medieval specialists, in which *Danza Inglesa* turns out to be none other than the tune we knew back in 1973 as *Estampie* from the first Gryphon album. The old and new versions field similar choices of tempo and both end with a celebratory *accelerando*. However, Gryphon added to the mix with fleeting quotes from *Over the Rainbow* and *Chattanooga Choo Choo*, not to mention the *Fry's Turkish Delight* advert and the guitar riff from *Politician* by Cream. Unsurprisingly, Musicantes insert none of the above, thus laying to rest a mischievously anachronistic slice of what most would forgive as youthful exuberance (it seems the oldest of Gryphon's hugely talented personnel was 22 at the time).

As for the impressive armoury of instruments Musicantes use, this is summarised alongside the track listing with a succinct statement that the line-up comprises Xurxo Ordóñez (wind), Milena Fuentes (bowed strings), Jaime del Amo (director and plucked strings) and Wafir Shaikheldin (percussion). The bad news is that this and all other information is in Spanish only, although musicantes.net carries an abridged but illuminating English translation of what was originally eight pages of notes. Essentially, what's on offer is a 16 track agenda split into groups of short selections from France, Spain, Great Britain and Italy. The opening *Douce Dame Jolie*, attributed to Guillaume de Machaut (c.1300-1377), will ring an immediate bell with guitar teachers across the country, having recently been included, in a basic but rewarding form, on the menu for ABRSM Grade One. Cited in the notes as an example of 'monodic style', the Musicantes take on this and other pieces maintains the listener's interest by throwing the ball around between instruments when material is repeated.

Although the role of Jaime del Amo's various lute-related instruments tends to be accompanimental, there are places where his focused and assured playing comes to the fore. Particularly noteworthy is the improvisatory opening to *Quen Os Pecadores* from the Spanish section of the programme, in which he goes it alone supported only by spectral bell-like sounds between phrases. A moment of contemplation in an agenda that's predominantly spirited and upbeat.

Finally, a well-deserved credit for what's billed as a 'bonus track' following the catchy and valedictory *Ecco La Primavera* that concludes the Italian offerings. As followers of other fields of music will ruefully confirm, such addenda often turn out to be either poorly recorded live footage or inferior studio takes that were previously unreleased and with good reason. Not so on this occasion when, after a longer-than-usual pause, the players are joined by singer Pilar Dieste for a sparkling vocal version of that same *Ecco La Primavera*.

A worthy encore to an uplifting performance that provided a welcome escape from the gloom of lockdown.

Free sample on Soundcloud

<https://soundcloud.com/musicantes/sets/sones-medievales>