

JoAnn Falletta

# American Record Guide

## Stars of the Guitar

**PONCE:** *Concierto del Sur*; **BROUWER:** *Concierto Elegiaco*; **RODRIGO:** *Fantasia para un Gentilhombre*; *Concierto de Aranjuez*; **SIERRA:** *Folias*;

**VILLA-LOBOS:** *Concerto*; **CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO:** *Concerto 1*  
Benjamin Beirs, Petrit Ceku, Marcin Dylla, Chad Ibison, Ekachai Jearakul, Celik Refik, Marko Topchii, g; Buffalo Philharmonic/ JoAnn Falletta  
Beau Fleuve 94982 [2CD] 144 minutes

By Ken Keaton  
September/October

This collection is not only a great way to get recordings of all the major 20th Century guitar concertos, but also to get a sense of the state-of-the-art in the guitar world. As I've often stated in these pages, that is remarkable. And that world owes considerable gratitude to the figures behind this document. JoAnn Falletta has been music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic since 1998. She, and the orchestra, are among the nation's best - I've reviewed them in Florida a couple of times, and the performances were overwhelming.

Falletta began her musical life as a guitarist; and, with Joanne Castellani and Michael Andriaccio (the Castellani-Andriaccio Duo) has set up an annual guitar competition, specifically for concertos. The winners are among the finest of their generation, and that is high praise indeed. Here we have their winning performances with Falletta and the BPO.

Not all were first place winners, but each is fine enough to be first place, even if that year's competition was so intense that they were outdone. It's not clear from the header who plays what, so I'll include the list, along with the year and their place:

Ponce: Marcin Dylla (1st 2004)  
Brouwer: Chad Ibison (3rd 2014)  
Rodrigo Fant: Ekachai Jearakul (2nd 2014)  
Rodrigo Aranjuez: Petrit Ceku (2nd 2012)  
Sierra: Celik Refik Kaya (1st 2012)  
Villa-Lobos: Marko Topchii (1st 2014)

Cast-Tedesco: Benjamin Beirs (3rd 2008)

With one exception, each of these performances is as fine as any you can hear, and better than most. The orchestra is terrific, and Falletta's conducting a perfect match for each soloist. Each player has his own voice, but each voice is beautiful, tasteful, inventive— and, needless to say, virtuosic. They are young—two, Ibison and Kaya, were at the time doctoral students under Adam Holzman at UT Austin—but their musicianship is mature.

The sole weak link is the Aranjuez. I reviewed Ceku's debut release on Naxos (J/F 2009), and it was really fine. For whatever reason, his performance just doesn't have the consistency of sound, the clarity that the work needs. To be sure, the competition is stronger in this work than in any other; and there are loads of inferior Aranjuezes out there. But listen to Miguel Trapaga's performance, reviewed in this issue, for a stronger, more consistently beautiful reading.

But if you're a guitar lover, you already have a fine Aranjuez. This release covers the Big Five, with an excellent Brouwer *Elegiaco* - as of 2007 he had 11 guitar concertos in his catalog, but this is the best known. You also get a delightful piece, Roberto Sierra's *Folias*, a fantasy on the popular theme, rather less thorny than Sierra's usual language, brilliantly played by Kaya. Add a good price and you've got quite a prize.

