



Stars of the Guitar

By Al Lunze
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“JoAnn Falletta is one of America’s finest conductors”

JoAnn Falletta is one of America’s finest conductors. She has headed the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra since 1998. Most important for us, she began her musical life as a guitarist. This has led to her development of a guitar concerto competition along with Artistic Directors Joanne Castellani and Michael Andriaccio and Western New York Public Broadcasting. It is a fabulous achievement. This two-disc anthology contains a decades’ worth of highlights of the competition and, not incidentally, constitute a kind of one stop shopping for great guitar concerti. In her notes to the release, Falletta says of the artists: “Their talent is astonishing, the drama of the evening is palpable, and the passion and excitement of the audiences reflect the thrill of these great performances.” Nicely stated. Of course these are live performances so there are a (very) few moments of imperfection, a few instances of audience noise, and including very enthusiastic applause (!) at the end of each work. It would be an exaggeration to say that any one of the recordings rises to the top of

recorded versions of the work, but as you can expect they are all very fine indeed, and in every case, there are far inferior studio performances which have been released. There is a lot of music here, and I do not propose to go through each work. But it must be said that the Buffalo orchestra under Falletta is exceedingly fine at all times. Almost certainly they have more experience of playing guitar concerti than the next ten orchestras on the planet combined! I will mention what were for me

a few highlights: Marcin Dylla’s final movement of the Ponce *Concierto del Sur*; Ekachai Jearakul’s astonishing virtuosity in the Rodrigo *Fantasia*; Roberto Sierra’s wonderful *Folias* played with gorgeous fluidity by Celik Refik Kaya; and Marko Topchii’s lovely traversal of the Villa-Lobos *Concerto*. Recorded sound is vivid and clear throughout. Album notes contain information about the performers, but not the works. This set is well worth acquiring. It is available from the orchestra’s website: bpo.org. Log on!

