

Interview with: Modern Guitar Ensemble: Johannes Tonio Kreuzsch – New ideas for classical guitar (I)

Fernando Bartolomé for MGE



I have a special feeling with Johannes Tonio Kreuzsch. He is an accomplished guitar player but has different features that make him stand out the crowd. He has an absolute original way of playing the guitar and a personal way of understanding music. You only have to listen to the Villalobos preludes for make an idea of what I'm trying to say. Also he has a very active work as a composer and he has several works in the area of chamber music with guitar and he has collaborated with musicians like Markus Stockhausen or TulioPéramo. Johannes gently talks for MGE .

What was it that introduced you to music and, secondly, what made you finally devote your life to music?

I come from a musical family. My mother is a classical pianist, my brother Cornelius Claudio Kreuzsch is a well known Jazz pianist, my wife is a violinists and my sister a visual artist. So music and art was always around also in my childhood. My mother accompanied herself with the guitar singing her own children songs to us. So that was my first meeting with the guitar. I played quite a lot of different instruments like the piano, the clarinet and saxophone before I became serious with the guitar. When I first heard somebody playing the music of Bach on the guitar, I was totally electrified and began to really seriously start with the classical guitar.

What I love about the guitar and what attracted me from the beginning is its deep and modest sound, its warm and healing vibrations and its wonderful colours!

The great guitarist and poet Atahualpa Yupanqui puts it in better words: "The guitar is the only instrument when pressed upon one's heart can express the landscapes of music and being human".

How was the collaboration with Markus Stockhausen?

It was very inspiring to work with Markus. My brother Cornelius brought the two of us together and he also produced the CD. I recently collaborated and recorded with quite a few great artists like Andy York or Badi Assad. Working

with such artists open up my mind an give me new musical impulses and ideas!

What did you learn from him? Do you know something about his "Intuitive music and more"?

His idea, that everybody should find his own voice in music through improvising is really great. It is a pity, that Improvisation is not a part of everyone standard musical training. I wish it would be like that! I think improvising is helpful to everybody. Everybody is able to! I'm not speaking about knowing all about improvising and being able to play along with everybody. Just sit down and take your instrument and try to find a simple melody. Try to find a melody, which you really like and which you explored by yourself... To just do that can be a real treasure!

To improvise opens up the mind also for the interpretation of other composers thoughts. While performing, we have always to create out of the moment - no matter, whether we improvise or whether we interpret. To train our ability to improvise will have an important impact on the personal playing!

The trumpet and guitar duo is not usual for the obvious differences between them. Does it work for you due to the type of compositions you did for Panta Rhei?

I think that the guitar fits great with the trumpet. The guitar is a very versatile instrument, which works with a lot of combinations. Next to the common chamber music combinations with violin, voice or flute, I have also played with

instruments like piano or organ – and also in these cases it works!



Can you tell us about the pieces in which you play the prepared guitar? What experiments have you done?

On the Panta Rhei disc I play next to my classical guitar also a twelve string acoustic guitar and a steel string acoustic guitar. I use on every piece different tunings and also preparations on the guitar. I have a solo program with my own music in which I experience even more with all kinds of preparations. I use for example pen, rubber or other metal between the strings, so the guitar sounds sometimes like a different instrument - for example like an African Cora, an Indian Sitar or an Indonesian Gamelan.

Music of Panta Rhei is like a stream of songs that is slowly changing but always the same. There is a general link that, although the music changes, makes the atmosphere generated is always present. What is improvised on the CD and what is it composed? How was the recording?

The basis of the recording is improvisation. After the first takes were done, we started to work on each composition and recorded additional tracks. But we didn't write anything down. Through the productional process, the improvisations, more and more, became compositions.

You have recorded a CD dedicated to Cuban composer Tulio Peramo. One of the works

included is the piece in three movements Tres imágenes cubanas. What can you tell us about it?

Since we first met in 1994 at the Havana Guitar Festival, Tulio Peramo has written various guitar works for me, e.g. compositions for solo guitar, works for guitar and chamber music and concertos for guitar and orchestra. My CD Portraits of Cuba, with guitar music by Tulio Peramo, released in 2000, has turned out to be a great success. The works dedicated to me include the Quintet Tres Imágenes Cubanas, which I first performed at a chamber music series in Munich and later the orchestral version at the guitar festival in Havana on the invitation of Leo Brouwer in 1998. But he also wrote other great chamber music works for me. I premiered the song cycle Aires de la Tierra with the mezzo-soprano Nan-Maró Babakhanian in 1999 in New York's Carnegie Recital Hall. At my Concert Series Ottobrunner Konzerte and the International Guitar Festival Hersbruck, the suite Piezas para violin y guitarra was premiered by me and my wife, the violinist Doris Kreusch-Orsan. When I was invited by the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and Cardiff University, I premiered the Cinco Preludios his latest solo work for guitar, which he dedicated to me in Cardiff in 2006. This cycle can be heard on my latest disc Hommage à Heitor Villa-Lobos.



Tres Imágenes Cubanas is indeed the first piece Tulio Peramo wrote for me. After I had heard some of his music I asked Tulio to write a piece for me. I came up with the idea that he should write for guitar and string quartet, because I loved the way how he composed for string players. A second idea evoked, when I asked him to write like Piazzolla in his *l'Histoire du*

Tango, a little “history“of Cuban music, combining all the different elements and styles of Cuban music. Tres Imágenes Cubanas was born and with this piece our musical work began. Tulio is a great expert in the Cuban history and tradition. So all of his pieces breath in a way a true Cuban spirit. The way how we both approached our collaboration was always a process, which was connected with the two of us. We were always connected during the origin of the pieces. I made suggestions like basic programmatic or structural ideas and he was always opened for my suggestions. Even after finishing the music, he was opened for changes and suggestions. For me it is always important to be with the composer during the process of the origin.

Recently, we can find good works for the string quartet and guitar ensemble, may be

the case of Peramo, Karmon or Roberto Sierra, but they are few. Maybe it is because the difficulties it has to assemble. Why do you think the composers don't write more for this ensemble?

I think the combination of the guitar with string quartet is absolutely great and can be really challenging for composers. In my opinion composers would surely write more for this combination if guitarists would ask them and be willing to play more with this chamber music combination. [Continue soon...]