

All Over the Map - Music for Solo Guitar and Solo Viola

Steven Allen Gordon, Guitarist and Violist

Album Notes

1. Electric Bach: Prelude in D Major (electric guitar) J.S. Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) composed six suites for solo cello between 1717 and 1723. The *Prelude to Suite No. 1 in G Major for Solo Cello* BWV 1007 is familiar to listeners of all genres. Bach expresses an important aspect of his deeply spiritual approach to life and music through the harmonious and balanced nature of this Prelude. Bach often transcribed his music for different instruments. In that spirit I chose to play the Prelude on electric guitar in D Major, dialed in with a clean, ringing tone. This performance hopefully will shed new light on an extraordinary and immediately accessible piece.

2. Prelude No. 1 in E Minor (classical guitar) Heitor Villa-Lobos

Born in Rio de Janeiro, Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) is a national hero of Brazil, and for good reason. His prodigious musical output is characterized by a highly individual and original synthesis of Brazilian vernacular musical language and European art music tradition. A guitarist himself, Villa-Lobos wrote a number of important pieces for his instrument. Many are considered essential works in any guitarist's repertory. Best known are the *Five Preludes*, composed in Paris in 1940. The *Prelude No. 1 in E Minor* almost sounds like an ensemble piece composed for one instrument. It begins with a beautifully expressive melody, played on the bass strings, accompanied by chords played on the higher strings. One can imagine a cello playing the melody and a guitar playing the chords. The opening section is reprised after a highly contrasting middle section. This piece takes the listener on a brief, deeply felt journey.

3 - 8. Suite in D Minor for Solo Viola (Originally for Cello) J.S. Bach

Prelude

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Menuette 1 and 2

Gigue

In the early summer of 1720, Bach returned from Carlsbad to Cöthen to find that his wife, Maria Barbara, not only had died but had already been buried. The exact date is unknown, but it is entirely possible that the *Suite in D Minor for Solo Cello*, BWV 1008, was one of the first pieces Bach composed after learning of this tragedy. The plaintive and searching Prelude and equally serious ensuing movements suggest an emotional response to a sad and tragic event. Whatever the circumstances, the emotional depth of the suite is undeniable. Indeed, I chose to only slightly ornament the repeated sections in order to maintain a serious and thoughtful mood throughout each movement. Although each movement is an intrinsic part of a larger whole, they stand on their own as individual pieces that demonstrate Bach's unique genius and depth.

9. Breaking Point Laurence Juber (steel-string acoustic guitar)

Guitarist, arranger and composer Laurence Juber is one of the finest finger-style guitarists performing today. I chose *Breaking Point* from his album *Guitarist* to provide a welcome and vivid contrast to the pieces that precede and follow it on this album. It is an extremely well-written folk-rock tune played on the steel-string acoustic guitar.

10. Prelude No. 4 in E Minor (classical guitar) Heitor Villa-Lobos

Some say, although without substantiation, that the opening of *Prelude No. 4* is based on an Amazon melody. Whatever its origin, it is haunting and reflective. I know of no melody like it. It is contrasted with an energetic and kinetic middle section which brings the listener into an active, almost harried state of mind. The opening then is reprised twice. Before the second reprise, which is exactly like the opening, the tune is played using colorful harmonics. As a result, we get the opportunity to hear a unique and unexpected perspective on the rest of the piece.

11. Ballad for Viola and Piano Ralph Vaughn Williams

Similar to Villa-Lobos vis-a-vis Brazil, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) is considered a paradigmatic musical representative of England. Vaughan Williams sought to speak directly to the heart of the listener by using melody and its structure as a starting point for the architecture of a work. In the *Ballad for Viola and Piano* the narrative flow is dictated by the lovely tune and its extensions, which contrast with a distinctive folk-like middle section. The Ballad slowly restates remnants and versions of the opening idea and culminates in a beautiful, deeply felt climax. The piece closes with a brief, soft, meditative coda.

12. Capricho Árabe (classical guitar) Francisco Tárrega

Tárrega (1852-1909) is the godfather of the classical guitar. He concertized throughout Europe during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and into the first decade of the twentieth century to critical acclaim.

In so doing he established the guitar as a prominent concert instrument. Some of his many transcriptions and a number of his original compositions form part of the core of every guitarist's repertory. The *Capricho Árabe*, with its beautiful Spanish-Romantic lyricism and evocative primary theme made it an irresistible piece to include on this album. Here is my humble perspective of this gorgeous piece.

13. Prelude in D Major (classical guitar) J.S. Bach

This rendition is played on the classical guitar, as it is most often heard. I find the contrast in tone between the electric guitar version and this one illuminating and simply fun to compare.

14. "Vivo, Con Molto Preciso" Concerto for Viola, Movement Two William Walton

Sir William Walton (1902-1983) stands together with Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten as one of the most important English composers of the Twentieth Century. His *Concerto for Viola* is among the most difficult and oft-studied solo compositions for the viola. When played as a duo, such as we've done in this performance, one is drawn to the intricate, often startling harmonies, as well as the perpetual motion and fascinating interaction between soloist and accompaniment. Indeed, it makes an excellent setpiece.

15. Blues Intro Joe Pass (electric guitar)

Joe Pass (1929-1994) is one of the greatest Jazz guitarists of all time. His skill and musical instincts were extraordinary. *Blues Intro* gives a hint of his prowess. Published in *Joe Pass on Guitar*, a method book published in 1996, *Blues Intro* is a superb example of Pass's approach to Jazz Chord/Melody playing, replete with examples of his unique, harmonically rich approach to jazz composition and improvisation.