

ELIZABETH C. D. BROWN

in Solo Performance

March 25, 2000

Seattle Mennonite Church

"Music of Spain and the Americas"

On March 25, the Seattle Classic Guitar Society presented Elizabeth Brown in concert at the Seattle Mennonite Church. Brown's program, "Music of Spain and the Americas", gave Seattle music aficionados not only the rare chance to hear her in solo performance, but also to experience first-hand the evolution of the guitar from the Baroque to the present day. Brown's playlist ranged from the works of Sanz (b. 1640) through Brouwer (b. 1939), giving her an opportunity to showcase her versatility and varied interpretation. For those of us who know of Brown's talents primarily through her work with "early music" ensembles, it was a treat—for some, a wonderful surprise—to hear her play the works of contemporary composers with equal authority.

Brown began her program with pieces played on a copy of an instrument from the mid-1600s. The most significant difference between this guitar and those of a modern design, she explained, is in the tuning. The baroque guitar consists of 9 strings, 5 courses which are all in pairs except for the top string, which is single. The instrument has a reitertuning, meaning that the strings aren't tuned from lowest to highest. It doesn't have the low "E" of a modern guitar, and the "A" is actually an octave higher. This makes the 4th course "D" the lowest string, which means the baroque loses almost an octave compared to modern guitars. This also means that three of the strings—G, A and B—are only a step apart. This particular tuning allows one to play a scale-like passage with every other note on a different string (or even every third note!) so that the notes overlap. This special technique was used extensively by baroque guitar composers and is nearly impossible to replicate on a modern guitar. The most dramatic effect of this, Brown pointed out, is to make the music sound "lighter" than that which we are used to hearing. *Continued on page 4*

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Lighter, yes—and, to my ear, a little thinner, yet startlingly intimate and sweet. Brown opened with Sanz's *Folia*, *Espanoletas* and *Canarios*. I especially appreciated hearing *Canarios* this classic is so familiar to me that it was easy to hear—to feel—the different sensibility the baroque guitar brought to the music. Its sweetness changed the piece dramatically, making it very light on its feet, very delicate, and clear as stream water over pebbles. Brown closed the "baroque" portion of her recital with de Murcia's *Cumbees*, his lovely and plaintive *Minuet* and the energetic *Fandango*.

Switching to her modern guitar (a LoPrinzi, in Humphrey's "Millennium" design), Brown played the Sor classic, *Les Folies d'Espagne*, *Variees, et un Menuet*; Llobet's *El Testament d'Amelia*, and Tárrega's *Capricho Árabe*. Llobet's piece was performed especially beautifully; the way she voiced the dialogue between the harmonics and the bass really brought out the longing in this music. And her *Arabe* was very lyrical and romantic. (Brown said she loves this piece, and it showed.)

The second half of her program began with Ponce's *Theme, Varie et Finale*, followed by Lauro's *Three Venezuelan Waltzes (El Negrito, La Gatica, and Valse Venezolano no. 2)*. Although she told the audience, earlier, that she particularly loved Tarrega's idiomatic compositions, I thought her interpretation of Lauro's involvement was especially present in her performance of these Brazilian

masterpieces.

The audience's response to her closing pieces, *Fuga no. 1* and *Danza del Altiplano* by Leo Brouwer, brought her back for an encore, *Prelude XXIV* by Manuel Ponce -- a lovely resolution to a most enjoyable solo recital.

Ever since I first saw Brown perform with Le Nuovo Musiche at Bitters last year, she has been one of my favorite performers. Her personal involvement with the music is very apparent: this woman *enjoys* her music and her audience can't help but be swept along with her.

---reviewed by Lorraine Day