

EMEC, E-100/101, LUYA THE NARVAEZ COMPLETE WORKS

Luya de Narvaez is one of a small number of composers who wrote for the vihuela da mano, the Spanish Renaissance lute. His works for that instrument were published in 1538 with the title *Los Seis Libros del Delphin de Musica de Cifra para Taner Vihuela* (The Six Books of the Dolphin, Music in Tablature for Playing on the Vihuela). The index lists only a few recordings of this music, including a complete set on vihuela by Hopkinson Smith (N/D 1989), now long deleted but still available used.

The first two books contain 14 Fantasias; then we have arrangements of vocal works, mainly by Josquin, but also Gombert and Richefort. Then there are several sets of variations, some on sacred, some on popular songs. Finally, there is a set of nine songs, romances, and villancicos, where mezzo Marta Infante sings. Her voice is lovely and clear, if not especially memorable. Maruri favors a muscular approach with a nice range of color and dynamics and an expressive rubato. He holds the interest—no mean feat with this much music by a single composer, if an inventive one.

This set is different because it is played on guitar, not vihuela, but that need not disqualify it. Frankly, just as I prefer Bach on piano, I prefer vihuela works on the guitar, as long as the performance is committed and expressive. Maruri is both. I'm not sure why he made this choice—it is unusual to see a complete works recording on a modern instrument (perhaps he just doesn't play vihuela). But he is concerned with historical recreation. In May/June 2010 I reviewed three of his discs, and another in July/August 2010, where he used historical instruments (though modern strings). Many of his more than two dozen recordings explore roads less traveled, with obscure composers, especially from the 19th Century. In the 40-page booklet of wonderfully enlightening notes about Renaissance Spain and her music, there is not a word about the performers.

I found the whole thing delightful. My only complaint is the packaging. We have two discs (Smith fit everything on one), just six minutes over the normal capacity of one, selling at full (or slightly discounted) price. I can live with that, but who approved packaging it in a sleeve that's twice the height of a regular jewel box? That makes it impossible to store in most collections. © 2014 American Record Guide