

Daniel Ahlert & Birgit Schwab

„Nowhere left to go – Music for Mandolin and Guitar“

(Antes/Bella Musica)

Duo Ahlert & Schwab have existed since 1992 and are one of the most committed ensembles combining mandolin and guitar. As the original repertoire is rather small, co-operation with composers is a big part of their work. Consistently, the two musicians present the fruits of this really successful interaction here. Music by six composers, mostly asked for by and written for the duo, is being presented. And the repertoire turns out to be quite diverse. E.g. the „Variationen ueber ein eigenes Thema op. 92“ by German composer Thomas Schmidt-Kowalski (*1949) sounds really old-fashioned in its Romantic language, while „Sphinx“ by Juergen Meyer-Metzenthin (*1955), the other German composer, is a lot more up-to-date, but then also more abstract. In both cases the interpreters convince and prove their ability to get into the most different styles. In the three opening pieces by French composer Claude Engel (*1946), especially in the vivacious „Danse Bulgare“ and the medieval-ish „Minstrels“, both players impress with virtuosity, witty playing and rhythmical fire. Not less successful is the presentation of „Erg“, a piece by American composer Jeffrey Harrington (*1955), which congenially combines Arabic and Western elements. It was written under the weight of the terror attack on 11th September 2001, and the composer really achieves an amalgamation of cultures. And exactly this is what Ahlert and Schwab convey to the listener with an impressive richness of colours and sounds and fine dynamic shades. The almost jazzy-poppy title piece, basically a written out (multitrack-) improvisation by Canadian composer Chris Rupert (*1955), actually sounds like one – which is indeed meant in the interpreters' praise here. And finally in the last piece, the „Suite Mediteran op. 77“ by Bulgarian composer Ivan Shekov (*1942), one can for once really revel in Southern sweetness – and why not?

Altogether, this is a really delightful CD with brand-new and interestingly performed plucked music, presented by a competent duo. You should get yourself this one!