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Three Early Guitar Concertos • The Guitar in Iran • Joaquín Turina & the Guitar



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TOLGAHAN ÇOĞULU

Interviewed by Jerfi Aji

JA: You have designed a guitar that you call an "adjustable microtonal guitar." Could you please describe which factors distinguish your guitar from the standard classical guitar?

TC: On the adjustable microtonal guitar's fretboard, there are channels under each string. I have 150 fretlets (little frets) that can be inserted into or removed from these channels. These fretlets can also be moved along the fretboard as you wish. I should say that the channel idea belongs to the German luthier Walter Vogt. In 1985, Vogt invented a guitar with a fretboard he called the "fine-tunable precision fretboard," on which all the frets are movable for limited distances via the channels under the strings. As the name reveals, Vogt's goal was to solve the intonation problems of stable-fretted guitars, and he reached his goal by finding a remarkable solution. I've never had the chance to play a Vogt guitar or analyze its complex mechanism. When I saw the photos of the guitar on the web site of luthier Hervé Chouard, who has been making Vogt guitars after Walter Vogt, I realized that the channel idea was the most logical solution to play microtones on a guitar, if a complete freedom of movement is provided for the fretlets. Besides, the fretlets had to be inserted into or removed from the fretboard practically. Thanks to the financial support from Istanbul Technical University and luthier Ekrem Özkarpaz, I have a fretboard and fretlets that have all the related properties I need.

JA: Why do you need a guitar with movable frets?

TC: I live in Istanbul, Turkey, which is located between the two continents, Europe and Asia. Musicians here have the chance to be trained in either the classical Western music tradition or *maqam*-based Ottoman/Turkish art music and Asia Minor folk music. After playing the guitar for some years and improving your technical skills, one starts to feel an urge to play or arrange the *maqam*-based music of the geography you live in. The *maqams* have microtones which can be played in a very limited way with the stable-fretted classical guitar. This was my initial reason to design a guitar with movable frets. Other reasons gradually accumulated throughout the years as I started to become interested in contemporary microtonal music and classical Western music repertoire based on tunings other than the equal

temperament system such as Pythagorean, just-intonation, mean-tone, and well-temperament. The fact that the equal temperament violates nature, the just intonation consists of pure intervals, the pure major third is fourteen cents lower than the equal tempered major third, shook my perspective of classical Western music.

JA: You mentioned that the microtones can be played with the standard classical guitar in a limited way. How can these microtones be achieved?

TC: To date, I came across five ways to achieve microtones with the stable-fretted guitar in the classical guitar repertoire. One is by bending the strings with the left-hand fingers. When you bend a string, the pitch gets higher, as with a fretless instrument. Another way is to tune an open string for a specific microtone you want. In this way, all the frets on that string will have specific microtones. A string's tuning can also be changed during the performance. The performer plucks the string and then turns the related tuning peg and thus achieves microtones. The third way is to use an apparatus to achieve a microtone. Electric guitar slides, pencils or even pestles are touched gently on a string, thus allowing microtones when *glissandi* are made. The left-hand fingers can also fulfill this function by touching softly on a string. The fourth method is similar to the horizontal vibrato technique. By moving the pressed left-hand finger to the left or right without releasing the pressure, one can achieve microtones. The last method that I've encountered is the vibration of the left part of the pressed fret. One of the left hand fingers presses on a fret and then, the right hand plucks the string from the left side of the fret that was pressed. In this technique, the left part of the fret is vibrated and some microtones can be achieved. Playing the strings on the tuning peg is also included in this method. These five methods will provide microtones, but these are not practical solutions.

JA: Guitarists such as John Schneider have been playing microtonal music with specially designed guitars. How did these guitarists come up with a solution?

TC: When guitarists realize that they can achieve microtones in a limited way on a regular guitar, it is a natural

consequence that they resort to new guitar designs. In my opinion, John Schneider is a very important figure in the history of the contemporary guitar. Schneider's book *The Contemporary Guitar*, his article "Just Guitar," and his interview that was published in *Soundboard* had great influence on me. Schneider has been playing a guitar with interchangeable fretboards which were invented by Tom Stone in the early 1970s. He has many fretboards with the nailed adjusted fretlets. Lily Afshar has also been using additional nailed fretlets on her stable-fretted guitar's fretboard. One other solution is the Vogt guitar that I've already mentioned. I learned from John Schneider that he and Wim Hoogewerf played microtonal music with the Vogt guitar on which the channels are completely open the full length of the string. Another option is the fretless guitar which was invented in 1976 by Turkish guitarist Erkan Oğur, in order to play *maqam*-based music. I think the classical fretless guitar is a great instrument, but it sounds very different than a fretted classical guitar. It is like a new stringed instrument, somewhere between guitar and *oud*. Also it is very difficult to play chords on a fretless guitar.

JA: Now you have a guitar with movable frets. Have you already started exploring the possibilities of your new guitar?

*TC: First, I started to arrange maqam-based Asia Minor (Anatolian) folk music for the adjustable microtonal guitar. The Anatolian necked-lute bağlama (also known as saz) is a very common instrument in Anatolian folk music and it generally has seventeen frets per octave. I adjusted my fretboard accordingly, and I was excited when I found some chords using the microtones of the folk melodies' maqam. The microtones are essential elements for the melody. When you omit the microtones, the folk melody sounds like a Gregorian chant, and therefore the arrangements for classical guitar may not be so original. My guitarist friend Cem Güneç arranged a piece, which is one of the earliest examples of Ottoman art music by the composer Abdülkadir Meragi. For that piece I adjusted my "B"s fifteen cents lower and "F"s ten cents lower. My composer friend Onur Türkmen wrote a piece called *Merhamet* (Compassion). It modulates to many different maqams and therefore I had to adjust many frets lower and higher accordingly. I*

have also had the opportunity to meet William Allaudin Mathieu, who taught my own music theory teacher, Michael Ellison. Mathieu is a great composer and has a very important book called *Harmonic Experience: Tonal Harmony from its Natural Origins to its Modern Expression*. He was interested in the adjustable microtonal guitar and composed a piece called *Lattice İşi*, which is written in five-limit just intonation and employs twenty-eight different pitches within the octave. All the frets had to be adjusted on the fretboard, and I must admit I really got confused with that one! These were the first four pieces that I've played and recorded. If I don't go crazy with the complex maps on the fretboard, I hope I will continue exploring microtonal music repertoire on the adjustable microtonal guitar for the rest of my life.

(Continued on page 101)



Tolgahan Çoğulu with his microtonal guitar.

sometimes in canonical imitation). There are four pages of study notes, written in German and English.

The pieces are in a variety of genres, ranging from easy Spanish-inspired (*El torero*, *Las muchachas*, *Adios*) to boogie-woogie, blues, and folk. There's one piece for "prepared guitars" titled *Welcome to Jamaica*, which asks that two toothpicks be woven into the strings at the bridge to give a steel-drum effect. It actually works rather well!

There is not an accompanying CD for this book, but instead the composer's personal website is referenced, which offers each part separately or played together. When I checked this site, the German section worked fine, but the parallel English URL did not.

—David Norton

(TOLGAHAN ÇOĞULU, continued from page 81)

Tolgahan Çoğulu was born in Ankara, Turkey in 1978. He studied with Soner Egesel and Bekir Küçükay at Istanbul Technical University's Center for Advanced Studies in Music. He has attended classical guitar festivals at Lambesc, Esztergom, Iserlohn, and the Westphalian Guitar Spring, and studied with many guitarists. He has given lecture recitals in Portugal (Aveiro University), Canada (York University), and the U.S. (the University of Memphis and the Hawaii Conference on Arts and Humanities), and many recitals with the chamber ensembles he founded (the classical guitar duo "Duoist," the Istanbul Flute-Guitar Duo, and the guitar-violin "Duo Aqua"). At present, he is working as a research assistant at Istanbul Technical University and writing his Ph.D. thesis. His email address is www.tolgahancoğlu.com.

RECORDINGS

THE COMPOSER'S ART (PART OF AN OCCASIONAL SERIES)

Fogel, Martin. *Equinox*. Works composed or arranged by Takemitsu. Monmon Music MMM 1002, 2008.

Lee, Andrew McKenna (with assisting artists). *Gravity and Air*. Works by Bach and the artist. New Amsterdam Records, NWAM 013, ca. 2009.

Artists Around the World Perform Stephen Funk Pearson. Works by Pearson. KYRA Music, no number, 2009. Performers include Duetto Giocondo [mandolin and guitar]; Salzburger Gitarrenquartett; OPUS 2 [marimba and guitar]; Paul Gregory, guitar, and others.

Red Cedar Trio (Jan Boland, flute, David Miller, viola, and John Dowdall, guitar). *Fireflies [:] Chamber Music by Andrew Earle Simpson*. Fleur de Son Classics FDS 57985, 2009.

SoloDuo (Matteo Mela and Lorenzo Micheli, guitars). *Recital*. Works by Rebay [duo and solo]. Stradivarius STR 33859 (Guitar Collection, vol. 20), no date.

The music of Takemitsu is probably never destined for wide

popularity. While beautifully crafted, with a kind of crystalline beauty, it can sound cerebral and even ascetic. But it certainly finds an excellent proponent in Swedish guitarist Martin Fogel. His disc is billed as the complete solo music of Takemitsu, and also includes his thirteen (twelve in 1977 and one more in 1983) arrangements of popular songs. The disc presents the composer's work in chronological order, although the twelve song arrangements represent a departure from Takemitsu's native musical language. *Folios*, thus, begins the program and shows an already-mature guitaristic hand. It is to be hoped that most people know the piece, which has an abstract but attractive musical language which pulls the listener through the work. It is an elegy, most famous for its quotation of the "Passion Chorale" (perhaps familiar as "O Sacred Head Now Wounded") from the Bach *St. Matthew Passion*. I will state here, so I don't have to keep doing so, that Fogel is flawless technically and musically in this and the whole disc. I have heard no one play any of these works better. In fact my only regret is that he did not do a double CD with the concerted and chamber works. Maybe a follow-up? *All in Twilight*, written for Julian Bream, is an exquisite set of four evocative miniatures inspired by a painting by Swiss artist Paul Klee. The third movement has particularly interesting musical textures, and the last has a lighter, almost "pop" sensibility. The last works, *Equinox* and *In the Woods* bring the disc to a beautiful, peaceful, and almost spiritual conclusion. As far as the popular