

## Obsession CD Review

by Mike Telin

### OBSESSION

KRYSTIN OMARA | CLASSICAL GUITAR



LA MAZA KROUSE CUONG SOR BARRIOS

On her debut solo album, *Obsession* (Blue Point Studios Label), young classical guitarist Krystin O'Mara firmly establishes herself as "someone to watch." Her performances of works by Regino Sainz de la Maza, Ian Krouse, Viet Cuong, Fernando Sor and Augustin Barrios Mangore are truly impressive.

O'Mara, a Strongsville native, describes *Obsession* as a "concept album that explores the darker side of the classical guitar repertoire, based on the self-indulgent, often unspoken idea that sometimes it is just fun to be sad." But listeners need not worry, O'Mara's performances are anything but self-indulgent: she possesses wonderful technique as well as keen musical sensibilities, and her auspicious choices of repertoire easily hold your attention.

Opening with an energetic performance of Spanish guitarist and composer Sainz de la Maza's *Zapateado*, O'Mara beautifully captures the work's title, which comes from the Spanish word *zapatear*, meaning to hit with one's shoe.

Sor's *Fantasia Elegiaque, Op. 59* is a rather gloomy work that underscores the composer's involvement with choral music especially during the first movement, *Andante Largo*. O'Mara brings out the movement's vocal qualities with distinction. Although Chopin's *Funeral March in B-flat minor* had yet to be published, the musical similarities between the Chopin and Sor's second movement *Marche Funebre* are uncanny.

*Obsession*, by Viet Cuong (1990) is a gem. Cuong and O'Mara met while both were studying at the Peabody Conservatory. The work was written for and dedicated to O'Mara, who premiered it at Princeton University in 2013. In the informative liner notes the composer writes, "An obsession is much more than a fixation. Though it may be fixated on a single subject, an obsession is a remarkably complex, nuanced story with a number of emotional entrapments..."

O'Mara rips into the opening section of the ten and a half minute, through-composed work with gusto. The tranquil section that follows points up the guitar's idiomatic qualities and gradually transitions into a wonderfully wild, cadenza-like section complete with Bartók pizzicatos. O'Mara brilliantly negotiates some brutal technical passages. *Obsession's* musical narrative fades quietly into the distance in a minimalist fashion, bringing everything to a calm conclusion.

*Julia Florida*, by Paraguayan classical guitar virtuoso Augustin Barrios Mangore, is a delightful barcarole. O'Mara perfectly captures the magic of enjoying a glass of prosecco on a midnight gondola ride in Venice.

The highlight of the recording is O'Mara interpretation of Los Angeles-based composer Ian Krouse's *Trois Tableaux D'Andersen*. Using a combination of classical and flamenco guitar techniques, Krouse musically brings three of Hans Christensen Andersen's fairytales to life. Given that many characters in Andersen's tales experience the unpleasant sides of life, his work is a fitting choice for a recording dedicated to the darker side of the guitar repertoire.

*Le Rossignol* (The Nightingale) is full of pentatonic chords and floating scale passages that capture Andersen's sorrowful tale of the emperor and the songbird. O'Mara delivers a sensitive and well-paced performance.

In *La Petite Fille aux Allumettes* (The Little Match Girl), one of Andersen's most tragic tales, one cannot help but feel sorrow at the death of the poor girl. Ian Krouse's music imaginatively tells the story in just over four minutes. O'Mara's performance is alluring.

*Le Souliers Rouge* (The Red Shoes) is a grim tale about a young girl named Karen, who became so obsessed with her red shoes that when she tried and failed to remove them, she was forced to have her feet cut off. Again, O'Mara's innate ability to bring these dramatic tales — and more importantly Krouse's music — to life is truly impressive.

The CD's sound quality is excellent thanks to the audio engineering, editing and production by Timothy O'Mara. As I previously mentioned, the liner notes are informative and well written. However, what's up these days with the eight-point type? I guess that's why I keep a magnifying glass on hand.

The CD can be purchased on Kristin O'Mara's [website](#) or through CD Baby. It is also available for digital download through iTunes.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 7, 2014.*