

**CD Review—*Dance*,
Jason Vieaux and the Escher Quartet**

by Mike Telin



There are few recordings that provide as much listening pleasure as guitarist Jason Vieaux's and the Escher Quartet's *Dance*. Released by Azica Records, the album is an hour-long feast for the ears that is full of pristine beauty and energetic swagger.

Vieaux and the Escher (Adam Barnett-Hart and Aaron Boyd, violins, Pierre Lapointe, viola, and Brook Speltz, cello) kick things off with Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Guitar Quintet*, Op. 143. The ensemble's rich blend in the "Allegro, vivo e schietto" is unwavering as their spirited playing highlights the composer's long musical lines.

The piece takes on a contemporary Spanish flair in the "Andante mesto." The charming, quiet ending is a mere whisper.

The quintet plays from a single mind in the "Scherzo." Slight fluctuation of tempos and abundant spirit add panache to the march. Vieaux's robust, spiraling downward passages are thrilling and the ensemble's tossing off of the ending chords makes you chuckle. The driving unison theme of the "Finale" gives way to a virtuosic solo by Vieaux supported by hefty string pizzicatos. After some raucous ricochets, and a brief visit by an habañera, the players speed their way into the fast-actioned coda.

The ensemble's grooving rendition of Aaron Jay Kernis' *100 Greatest Dance Hits* makes it the highlight of the album. In his composer notes, Kernis writes: "I borrowed the title from those old K-Tel advertisements on late night TV for 100 Greatest Motown Hits or 100 Greatest Soul Hits." Each movement embraces, or pokes fun at a different musical genre:

“Introduction to the Dance Party” — The short percussive intro gets you on your feet from the start. This one minute and fifty seconds of music is worth the price of the recording. Put it on loop and get those feet moving.

“Salsa Pasada” — Sultry playing by Vieaux passed on to Speltz leads to some technical ensemble sections that will wow you. The sudden shifts in mood are seamless all leading up to the final *cha-cha cha*.

“MOR Easy Listening Slow Dance Ballad” — It’s a night on the beach that you’ll remember for the rest of your life. Let your inner Harlequin Romance author come out and write your own story as you listen. Vieaux and the Escher provide all the inspiration needed.

“Dance Party on the Disco Motorboat” — The DJ’s calling with an ostinato line in upper strings while the cello and guitar mingle with the crowd. A percussive section invites everyone to get up and move as the players shout, “Dance Party!”

The final work on *Dance* is Luigi Boccherini’s *Guitar Quintet No. 4 in D* — the one with the famous fandango. The performance by Vieaux and the Escher is splendid as they set a sunny scene in the “Pastoral.” Driving, full-bodied lines along with crisp, clear articulations and well-shaped phrases imbue the “Allegro maestoso.”

The brief “Grave” with some wonderful solo playing by Barnett-Hart leads to the sexy Spanish dance. Exquisite portamentos and ricochets combined with smooth passing of the musical line build until the castanets are added. If you’re playing this during dinner, don’t be afraid to get up and dance. Jason Vieaux and the Escher Quartet invite you to do so.

The album’s producer and digital editor is Alan Bise. Engineering and mastering are by Bruce Egge.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com December 12, 2019.

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