

CD Review

Gruca White Ensemble: *A Different Take*

by Jarrett Hoffman



It's one thing to create a varied setlist exploring one different genre after another, and quite another to pull it off as convincingly as the Gruca White Ensemble does on their latest CD, *A Different Take*, out on November 13 on the Big Round Records label.

To give you a sense of the amount of ground covered here by flutist Linda White and guitarist Robert Gruca, there's contemporary classical, jazz, and tango; there's rock, funk, and soul; and there's music with roots in Japan, Mali, the Balkans, and the Middle East. Some works were written for flute and guitar, or even for this ensemble, while

others are arrangements.

Then there's the instrumental sort of variety. White trades her flute in and out for the alto and bass varieties, which prove to be absolutely gorgeous in combination with guitar — different shades of mellow coming together, but with sounds created in entirely different ways. Two brilliant examples are Carl Dimow's *Dreams of Yesterday and Tomorrow*, a mix of Jewish and Arabic music, and Alan Thomas's *The Shepherd's Dream*, inspired by a "Croatian Lovesong."

Even without changing instruments, White and Gruca produce quite a musical palette, at times by *imitating* other instruments, like the Japanese *shinobue* and *koto* during Masamitsu Takahashi's *Homage to the Harvest Moon*. Several pieces show off different

brands of percussion — taps on the frame of the guitar, and an array of sounds produced by lip and air.

The flute has such bold, colorful capabilities in that area that it can actually become distracting, as is the case during the covers of Bill Withers' *Use Me* and Peter Green's *Black Magic Woman*. In contrast, the other pop tune, Stevie Wonder's *I Wish*, thrives with a simpler arrangement: smooth, beautiful, and funky.

One constant throughout is the duo's tied-on-a-string sense of ensemble, which is immediately clear from the opening selection: the final three movements of Stephen Goss's *From Honey to Ashes*. Perhaps the most impressive moment of togetherness is when White and Gruca don't actually *sound* together: during the composer's fascinating set of two independent, pointillistic lines at the start of "The Hotel Kempinski." Once Goss brings them into the same rhythmic atmosphere, they lock in with a deep groove and unbridled energy.

Two other highlights come near the end of the playlist. Marshall Griffith's "Lake Effect," an excerpt from *Jazz Impressions of Cleveland*, gives off an appealing sense of the picturesque, with velvety flute and cascading lines on the guitar — the aural equivalent of falling snow as seen from somewhere warm. And Stephen Stanziano's *Bossa Blue* exhibits a unique and off-kilter sense of cool in 5/4 time.

One fun aspect of the overall arc: while Goss's *From Honey to Ashes* opens things up with a jolt of coffee, the Gruca White Ensemble closes out *Black Magic Woman* just like Fleetwood Mac and Santana did, with a classic fade-out.

Click [here](#) to purchase *A Different Take* upon its release on November 13.

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