

## Giacomo Fiore—CD and Live Performance Reviews

Concert Review, 3-1-2013, by Steve Smoliar @ Examiner.com

Last night guitarist Giacomo Fiore returned to the [Old First Concerts](#) series at Old First Church for what was mostly a solo recital involving a repertoire that stretched back only about 35 years. The first half of his performance was on acoustic guitar, followed by three electric guitar selections after the intermission. The first of these included a duet with Larry Polansky, composer of the music being performed.

Interestingly enough, Polansky was responsible for the oldest and newest works on the program. For the acoustic portion Fiore presented his early (1978) “...getting rid of the glue....” The phrase comes from Henry Cowell’s description of John Cage and his “New York School” colleagues with specific regard to their rejection of classical structures as devices to bring coherence to their compositions.

The intermission was followed by the world premiere of two of Polansky’s “translations” for electric guitar of the music of earlier composers. The source for the first of these was a hymn by William Billings, in the course of which Fiore sang the hymn itself against Polansky’s paraphrase. The second was the far more ambitious “Angels,” scored for six muted trumpets by Carl Ruggles. After realizing that trying to account for six trumpets with six guitar strings would be a bit much, Polansky composed this “translation” as a duet, performing the second part with Fiore last night.

Both the acoustic and electronic selections were engaging. Fiore clearly enjoys performing Polansky’s music, and even the older piece shows considerable inventiveness without feeling the need to go overboard on dissonance or provocative sonorous effects. My only regret is that this music is not performed more often, allowing listeners to become more familiar with both the logic and the rhetoric behind Polansky’s approach to composition, so it is good that he has a champion in Fiore.

The other premiere on the program was the first West Coast performance of a composition discovered through Internet search. “Sparks” was composed by Dai Fujikura, a native of Japan now based in London. It makes extensive use of upper harmonics resulting from touching the string lightly at critical nodal points. These are the “sparks” that emanate from the strings, less “visible” when those strings are plucked in the usual manner. The work is thus a relatively quiet study in contrasts given a sensitive interpretation by Fiore.

The overall repertoire ranged from relatively conventional offerings, such as Peter

Sculthorpe's "From Kakadu," with its evocations of the Australian landscape, and the Ciacona movement from Aaron Jay Kernis' partita to the more avant-garde offerings of Christian Wolff and Lanier Sammons. Both "From Kakadu" and Wolff's "Another Possibility" had been performed at Fiore's Tangents Contemporary Guitar Series recital last August. On that occasion I was struck by Wolff's approach to exploring the sonorities of the electric guitar. This time I was more interested in the extent to which he introduced an element of indeterminacy, writing exact pitches on the first page but specifying only the strings to be plucked on the second.

The most unique work on the program was Sammons' "Pollical Variations," described as being "for guitar and audience." The score is a collection of short pieces, each of which concludes with a vamp transition. During that transition the audience is asked to vote (Facebook-style with raised and lowered thumbs) on what was just played. The result of the vote then determined the piece that Fiore next selected. The entire process was facilitated by a laptop, which displayed the score for each piece and responded to a keystroke indicating the result of the vote (assessed visually by Fiore) to determine what would be displayed. This amounted to an amusing bit of boundary-breaking with at least some sense of how what was being performed reflected a democratic assessment of taste.

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## Concert Review, 8-4-2012, by Steve Smoliar @ Examiner.com

Continuing in his role as impresario, guitarist Giacomo Fiore arranged a concert last night at the First Unitarian Universalist Chapel (the venue for his Tangents Contemporary Guitar Series) for the duo of Glaswegians Aisling Agnew on flute and Matthew McAllister on guitar. Fiore then prepared three solo performances of his own to provide an "opening act." The result was an impressively diverse sampling of repertoire, all fit into a neat two-hour package.

Fiore even had a name for his opener. He called it *Strange Bedfellows*, not only because of the diversity of his own portion but also because each of his three selections required a different instrument. He began with a composition by Matthew Grasso for the just intonation resophonic guitar, an instrument developed by Lou Harrison. Just intonation favors the mathematically perfect fifth and major third over the uniform separation of pitches in an equally-tempered chromatic scale. (The latter actually yields very good perfect fifths, but the major third differs noticeably for that found in the interval between the fifth and fourth overtones of the harmonic series.) What is particularly interesting about Harrison's instrument is that each string has its own placement of frets based on the pitch that sounds when it is played open.

Grasso's piece, composed in 2010, was entitled "Three Spirits." Over three short movements he advances from a small subset of pitches from the diatonic scale, all of which are familiarly consonant, to the full chromatic gamut, in which the dissonances are decidedly more alien than those encountered in the equal-tempered chromatic scale. Whether or not Grasso was motivated by Joseph Yasser's *A Theory of Evolving Tonality* (a fascinating study on the thesis that the diatonic major scale "evolved" from the pentatonic scale and subsequently evolved into the chromatic scale), there was definitely a sense of progression through his three "spirits." Fiore definitely knew how to get the attention of his audience.

Fiore then moved over to electric guitar for a somewhat earlier (2004), but significantly different, composition by Christian Wolff. The piece, "Another Possibility," is somewhat of an apology to Wolff's former colleague Morton Feldman. In 1966 Feldman wrote "The Possibility of a New Work For Electric Guitar" for Wolff. Wolff learned the piece and played it frequently until, sadly, he lost his copy of the score. "Another Possibility" is thus a reflection back on that time, as well as a memorial piece for Feldman.

As a student of John Cage, Wolff was fascinated with the possibilities of indeterminacy. Many of his scores, including the final pages of "Another Possibility," leave many decisions to the performer. Wolff also shared with Cage the belief that any sound could be engaged in the activity of making music. "Another Possibility" thus explores the sonorous qualities of the electric guitar that differ from those of the acoustic instrument. This includes not only the power of amplification to sustain tones for longer durations but also the ability to vary the amplitude of a tone while it is sounding. "Another Possibility" is very much an exploratory composition, and Fiore approached it with the sort of exploratory spirit that encouraged his audience to follow into new territories of both sonorities and musical structure itself.

The last of the "bedfellows" was the most accessible, as well as being the only work for acoustic guitar. This was Peter Sculthorpe's "From Kakadu." This not only refers to the name of a national park in the Northern Territory of Australia but also to the fact that Sculthorpe had previously composed an orchestral work entitled "Kakadu," some of whose thematic material resurfaced in the four short movements of "From Kakadu." This returned the audience to more familiar listening experiences, preparing the ground, so to speak, for the Agnew McAllister Duo. [...]

## Sierra Nevada Guitar Festival Review, 7-15-12, by Scott Cmiel @ SF Classical Voice

[...] Giacomo Fiore, a Ph.D. candidate in cultural musicology at the UC Santa Cruz and an excellent guitarist himself, gave a fascinating lecture recital on American music for just-intonation guitar. Even though composer Lou Harrison loved what he called the the “dulcet tones” of the guitar, he long refused to compose for the instrument, because its immovable, straight frets were locked into an equal-tempered tuning system, while Harrison preferred what he considered to be the purity and variety of just intonation, a system based on the natural harmonics of vibrating strings. The advent of guitars with complex fretboards that allowed for just intonation led Harrison to write a series of works for the instrument.

His last composition, *Scenes from Nek Chand*, was written for guitarist David Tanenbaum and meant for a unique instrument, a National Steel resonator guitar refretted in just intonation. The three-movement work, inspired by the sound of Hawaiian guitar music that the composer remembered hearing in his youth, as well as the artwork populating Nek Chand's Rock Garden of Chandigarh, India, was given an inspired performance by Fiore, who brought appropriate character to each movement: sensitive introspection for “Leaning Lady,” mercurial dancelike energy for “Rock Garden,” and an admirable flexibility for “Sinuous Arcade With Swings in the Arches.” In his lecture Fiore explained the complex mathematics involved in tuning the instrument, speaking with clarity and humor, and discussed recordings of outstanding ensemble music, including Barstow for speaker and guitar, by Harry Partch, and for jim, ben, and lou written for guitar, harp, and percussion, by Larry Polansky. [...]

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## Discography Profile by Dave Walker

Giacomo Fiore is an artist that any guitar lover should know. I have had a unique opportunity to hear three of his albums in the past few days, and they have given me such a respect for his artistry and a vivid demonstration of his musicality that I am presenting here my very first Artist Profile.

I began by listening to Mr. Fiore's wonderful album *Genteel*. This was a fortunate choice because it is a great introduction to the various sides of his musical personality. I was immediately impressed with his beautiful interpretations of Milano's *Ricecar IV* and *Fantasia XXXIII*. Giacomo Fiore's sensitive approach and intelligent playing brings out the beauty of the contrapuntal flow while never losing the sense of melody. This same care is taken in Scarlatti's *Sonata in A Major (K. 208)*, and in all of the classical guitar pieces, including his own fine piece *Genteel*, here played in its solo version.

When I first saw that he was to play two Lennon-McCartney tunes, *In My Life* and *Yesterday*, I looked forward to his interpretation, but I have to admit that by the time I got there I felt just a bit let down. Not that Mr. Fiore does not play them well - he plays them very well - but his superb performance of contrapuntal classical works left me wanting more. However, if my selfish wish was not met, I was more than compensated with a rich variety of works: *A Dance For Muriel*, a fingerstyle homage to one of his former teachers Muriel Anderson; Yocoh's intricate *Sakura Variations*; Giacomo Fiore's own selections *From the Scottish Lute Manuscripts*; and finally Peter Maxwell Davies' *Farewell to Stromness*.

At this point I realized that Giacomo is that rare artist who is equally at home in the classical and more popular worlds of music, with stunning technique for both classical and fingerstyle guitar; gorgeous tone and impeccable playing.

When I next listened to *Tones from an Open Heart*, I had my earlier judgment confirmed. Giacomo Fiore is that rare artist who will appeal to both classical and fingerstyle guitar lovers, and pretty much anyone who loves good music.

*Tones from an Open Heart* is a magnificent collection of original pieces by Giacomo Fiore. Every one burns with a fiery passion that many search for but few attain. As with virtually every piece he plays, Mr. Fiore is utterly convincing that this is how the piece should sound. You can hear his commitment to each piece in his playing. Don't ask me how you can hear "commitment" because I don't think I could tell you, but unless I'm deaf I can hear it in every single piece. Here is an artist who is holding nothing back.

It is hard to single out tracks as each is outstanding in its own way. I was very happy to hear that *Genteel* did not lose any of its freshness with the addition of viola and cello (in a lovely arrangement by Michael Ferrari). This is a standout track if only for that. Lee Holland has his work cut out for him adding percussion to these spirited pieces, and he brings an excellent sub-structure over which Mr. Fiore's guitar just flies.

This outstanding album will impress and delight both classical and fingerstyle guitar fans. Mr. Fiore's music, like his playing, clearly comes straight from an open heart.

Not one to repeat himself, Giacomo Fiore's album colors: modern music for guitar is devoted to classical guitar music of the past 50 years. This is a repertoire that is neglected by players as well as audiences, so presenting an entire album of it is both a bold and brave move. And it works wonderfully. These composers could not ask for a more sensitive or sympathetic reading of their works.

The album begins with Takemitsu's 1988 *All in Twilight*. The four movements of this piece are a challenge to read as much as to play, and yet Mr. Fiore plays them with a flow and gentle touch that brings out the subtlest nuances - and Takemitsu was a master of subtlety.

Michael Tippett's 1983 *The Blue Guitar* completes an illustrious link of 20th century masterworks. Picasso's painting of "The Old Guitarist" from his "Blue Period" inspired

Wallace Stevens' poem "The Man with the Blue Guitar." The poem in turn inspired Tippett to write this sonata wherein each movement reflects a mood or gesture taken from his reading of the poem.

Possibly the most fascinating piece is Lou Harrison's 2003 Scenes from Nek Chand. The work might be exotic enough as it commemorates architectural elements of Nek Chand's Rock Garden of Chandigarh, India combined with Harrison's recollection of Hawaiian music he heard as a child. However, the instrument trumps all of this: it is written for a steel-string resonator guitar refretted in just intonation. (Just intonation is a system of tuning that contains purer intervals than our standard equal temperament, but only for a single key.) This is an amazing piece of music and kudos to Mr. Fiore for even finding the instrument, never mind bringing it to the world on this album!

Benjamin Britten's 1963 Nocturnal after John Dowland, like the Takemitsu and Tippett pieces is dedicated to and edited by Julian Bream. Given Segovia's famously conservative tastes in music, Bream performed a major service to the guitar world by convincing some of the best modern composers to write for the instrument. I have always been impressed by Bream's magnificent performance of this piece, and Giacomo Fiore's is the first interpretation I have heard that stands beside that of Bream, bringing out a few new details that keep the piece fresh and fascinating.

Giacomo Fiore is an artist that you want to get to know.

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### “Colors: Modern Music for Guitar” reviewed by Bradford Werner

I was very pleased to receive a copy of this recording from the young and very accomplished guitarist Giacomo Fiore. What interested me most, at first, was the excellent repertoire. Many of these pieces such as the Britten have been personal favorites of mine since I was first introduced to the repertoire and others such as the Takemitsu have become new favorites in recent years.

Mr Fiore has a musicality that fits the repertoire chosen very well and he offers a great amount of variety and versatility in his musical skills when navigating from the colorations of Nocturnal to the sitar-like meditations of the Lou Harrison work. His skills as a guitarist are very strong and he is able to navigate all the technique easily with some surprising virtuosity here and there. Another aspect of his recording that I enjoyed was his willingness to play aggressively and push the instrument even if it meant a bit of roughness in a few spots. I've always liked live playing far more than classical guitar recordings but it's always appreciated when a player just goes for it on a recording rather than making every note studio perfect.

The recording quality is good overall, more clear than lush but it gives a nice growl to the bass notes and a clear glassy sound to the trebles. Overall I like the sound.

Giacomo Fiore is a player I'll continue to follow! 'Colors' is a recording filled with excellent repertoire, interesting playing, and spirited performances. I look forward to his future projects and recommend you check him out. Since 2009 he has been continuing his explorations of the modern art-music repertoire as a PhD candidate at the University of California, Santa Cruz

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### "Colors: Modern Music for Guitar" reviewed by Stephen Smoliar

Almost exactly a year ago, those San Francisco music lovers informed enough to follow the Old First Concerts series, given at the city's Old First Church, had the good fortune to hear an exceptional recital of the guitar repertoire of roughly the last half century. The guitarist was Giacomo Fiore, a student of David Tanenbaum at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and a doctoral candidate in Cultural Musicology at the University of California at Santa Cruz. For the benefit of those who missed this fortuitous opportunity, through either bad timing or lack of carfare, Fiore has now released *Colors: Modern Music for Guitar*, a CD featuring three of the works presented at this recital, along with one previously recorded by Tanenbaum. The latter is Michael Tippett's suite, *The Blue Guitar*, included on his *Acoustic Counterpoint* CD, released by New Albion in 1990. Fiore's recital selections include Toru Takemitsu's "All in Twilight" (also included in *Acoustic Counterpoint*), *Scenes from Nek Chand*, Lou Harrison's last completed composition, and Benjamin Britten's *Opus 70*, the "Nocturnal After John Dowland," dedicated to Julian Bream, who first performed it at the 1964 Aldeburgh Festival.

This is an impressive array of repertoire. Each of these compositions is highly expressive in its own way. They all go far beyond the usual limits of what most listeners expect to encounter at a guitar recital, and each is grounded in its own set of highly cerebral foundations. Nevertheless, the level of intellect never interferes with the resulting expressiveness, although the ambitious listener is likely to find the experience enhanced by knowledge of what goes on down in the engine room, as Peter Grunberg likes to put it.

The most accessible of the works on this CD is probably the Harrison composition. *Nek Chand* is an Indian artist; and the "scenes" of this work's title are from his eighteen-acre sculpture garden in the city of Chandigarh, which "grew" from his recycling of materials collected from demolition sites. The cerebral side of this work involved Harrison inventing an instrument, called the "just-intoned resophonic guitar," for the performance he had conceived. This name has to be unpacked in order to be appreciated.

"Resophonic" is the simpler concept. It refers to the body of the instrument having three independent resonant chambers, each of a different size and shape. The result is that each

chamber enhances its own characteristic portion of the acoustic spectrum, which means that every note played by the instrument induces, through resonance, its own characteristic “natural harmony.”

The approach to intonation, on the other hand, is a bit more advanced and slightly more complicated. Just intonation, as it is defined, for example, in the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, is the tuning system in which all intervals of the chromatic scale are determined by the first five natural harmonics, which include the octave (2:1), perfect fifth (3:2), and major third (5:4). Harrison took a similar approach but began with a gamut of the six successive intervals that occur between the sixth and twelfth overtones, assigning the pitch D to the sixth overtone. This results in two “Wolf-notes,” which differ from any pitch in the equal-tempered system; they are C-sharp (the leading tone to D) and F (the minor third above the D).

How much of this is necessary when it comes to listening to Harrison’s score? That is for the listener to decide. Harrison was clearly influenced by the Indian setting of Chandigarh, so there is a good chance that he was seeking a unique expression of the elaborate resonant qualities of the sitar. Those qualities are reinforced by his used of glissando in a very sitar-like fashion. However, one can appreciate these qualities without getting too involved in either physics or mathematics; so one can decide how much one wishes to investigate in detail just what makes this “engine” run and how much one is sufficient to see where Harrison leads by piloting up in the wheelhouse. Either way, one is likely to be fascinated by the sonorities of this score.

Takemitsu’s “All in Twilight” was similarly art-inspired. In this case the inspiration was a “pastel-touch” picture (a particular approach to watercolor) by Paul Klee of the same name. Klee’s technique led to a genre of impressionism decidedly different from that of the French movement, and Takemitsu’s score strikes the listener as an attempt to capture that particular approach to impressionism in music. As with Harrison’s composition, however, any detailed account of the relationship between visual and auditory impressions may be secondary to an awareness that Takemitsu’s palette of sonorities is as compelling as that of Klee’s colorations.

Tippett’s composition is similarly inspired by a painting, but through a more circuitous route. In this case the canvas is “The Old Guitarist” by Pablo Picasso. However, Tippett’s focus was not on this painting but on the poem it inspired, “The Man with the Blue Guitar” by Wallace Stevens. In 33 stanzas Stevens digs deep into the philosophical questions of the relationships between objective reality and artistic representation. However, because this is a poem, his “philosophical investigation” is pursued through evocative connotation, rather than explicit denotation. Tippett’s suite draws upon three specific evocations from Stevens’ poem, a lion transformed to stone, the act of juggling, and impressions of morning dreams. Here again we encounter music whose expressive power owes much to its command of a rich palette of sonorities, meaning that, once again, the listener may rest content with navigating the flow of those sonorities without worrying about the sophisticated details of Stevens’ text or the relationship to those details to Picasso’s arresting image.

The oldest work on the recording is the Britten. This composition is usually described as a

set of eight variations on the song “Come Heavy Sleep” by John Dowland. However, these are not variations in any traditional sense of the concept. Rather, they are based on a deconstruction of the source being varied. Each explores a very specific feature of that song in isolation; and, to make the game more interesting, the song is not performed before the variations are introduced. Thus, the basic structure is one of theme-and-variations in reverse order; and the listening experience is rather like the auditory equivalent of assembling a jigsaw puzzle. One begins with pieces, as the compositions develops, one encounters suggestions as to how those pieces may be assembled, and, by the conclusion, the assembly of the Dowland source is “played straight” to the listener. Familiarity with Dowland is helpful, but one can come to that familiarity through repeated listening to this recording.

I suppose it goes without saying to conclude that I was as impressed with Fiore’s recorded performances as I had been when I heard him in recital. However, I should also repeat that, while all of these selections can involve a mental workout as satisfying as it is intense, each of them has any number of fascinating surface features that can provide just as much pleasure at face value. The result is a CD that invites repeated listening, and repeated listening is always the perfect vehicle for moving from surface structure to deep structure. Fiore has prepared a most inviting program through this recording, and the invitation is well worth accepting.

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## 09-10-2010 Old First Concert review by Stephen Smoliar at the SF Examiner

In contrast to Yuri Liberzon’s Old First Concerts solo guitar recital at Old First Church, with compositions from the seventeenth century to the recent past, Giacomo Fiore’s program for the same series focused on the guitar repertoire of roughly the last half century. The oldest works that Fiore performed were three preludes from a set of five composed by Heitor Villa-Lobos in 1940; and the newest was one of his own short works, which he took as an encore. The Villa-Lobos preludes interleaved with the other offerings on the program, serving somewhat as a “foundation of modernism” for the entire evening. However, Villa-Lobos’ modernism was heavily influenced by the music of his native Brazil (“cross-bred” with his intense interest in Johann Sebastian Bach); and each of the other pieces on the program reflected a characteristic nationalist perspective.

The first composer was the Cuban Leo Brouwer, whose three-movement suite, *El Decameron Negro*, was inspired by reading African epic tales collected by the German ethnographer Leo Frobenius. This was followed by Toru Takemitsu’s four-movement “All in Twilight,” a Japanese reflection on Paul Klee’s “pastel-touch” picture of the same title. Lou Harrison was then represented by one of his final compositions, *Scenes from Nek Chand* (2002). This required an instrument of Harrison’s own invention, called the “just-intoned resophonic guitar.” The adjective “resophonic” refers to the body having three independent resonant chambers, each of a different size and shape, meaning that each

enhanced its own characteristic portion of the acoustic spectrum. Just intonation is the tuning system in which all intervals are determined by the first five natural harmonics, which include the octave (2:1), perfect fifth (3:2), and major third (5:4). Harrison used this system to construct his own six-tone scale, two of which would be called “Wolf-notes,” due to their distance from any pitch in the equal-tempered system. Nek Chand is an Indian artist; and the “scenes” are from his eighteen-acre sculpture garden in the city of Chandigarh, which “grew” from his recycling of materials collected from demolition sites. Thus, the nationalist influence here is Indian, reinforced by not only Harrison’s tuning system but also his sitar-like use of glissando.

Following the intermission, the focus shifted to the British composers Peter Maxwell Davies and Benjamin Britten, both of whose works were seriously challenging. Maxwell Davies’ “Hill Runes” was named for a work by the Orkney poet George Mackay Brown and evokes the harsh geography of the Orkney Islands, where Maxwell Davies now lives. Britten composed his Opus 70 “Nocturnal after John Dowland” in 1963 for Julian Bream. The work is a set of eight variations, each of which explores a different feature of Dowland’s song, “Come Heavy Sleep.” However, it is only after these variations have unfolded that the “source theme” is presented in its original form, meaning that the usual approach to theme-and-variations plays out in reverse order.

Each of the works on this program presented its own set of challenges, and Fiore was clearly up to all of them. He performed with a very unassuming style, always focused entirely on his instrument, always sensitive that each note sound (and resound) with just the right intonation. Once again, the acoustics of the Old First Church sanctuary were most conducive to the sensitivity of this approach. His appreciation for the contemporary repertoire may be due, in part, to his studies at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music with David Tanenbaum (also an active member of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players). However, the cultural spectrum of the program he arranged probably also reflects his doctoral studies in Cultural Musicology at the University of California at Santa Cruz. This was certainly one of the more well-informed programs in the Old First Concerts series; but the listening experience was far more than an academic exercise.

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“Genteel” reviewed by Jamie Anderson

Classical pieces like Milano’s “Ricercare IV” are included on this instrumental guitar disc; as are great finger style covers of Beatles classics “In My Life” and “Yesterday.” No matter the time period, every piece is executed beautifully, with just enough embellishment to showcase the great melodies. He studied with Muriel Anderson and Mario DaSilva at Belmont University, and it shows in songs like “A Dance for Muriel” and “Sakura Variations,” the latter he calls “a sort of musical Holy Grail.”

He includes one original, the title cut. Originally written to play with a string duo, he offers a solo version here so he could really show his interpretive style. Its gorgeous melody soars

through several different moods, from delicate to percussive. I love his use of harmonics – something he also uses effectively in “Yesterday.” A series of short pieces adapted from Scottish lute music wrap up the disc, with the full-length “Farewell to Stromness” fitting in nicely at the very end.

The guitar is recorded well with few, if any, effects. It’s perfect background for a quiet Sunday or at the end of a workday, with a glass of rose in hand. Recommended.

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### “Genteel” reviewed by Perf de Castro

I met Giacomo Fiore in 2008 at a house concert I gave at luthier Alan Perlman’s San Francisco home. Several years prior to that meeting we’ve been exchanging views and opinions on Acoustic Guitar Magazine’s Classical Corner online forum. In all counts, the tall and lanky Genovese comes across as a warm, personable and easily likable guy: and these descriptors are easily applied to his wonderful guitar playing as well.

“Genteel” is his 2nd release and is dominantly classical in its approach, no doubt tempered from his studies with David Tanenbaum at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. The overall feel of the record is that of a performer who is one with his instrument and plays with great command, sensitivity and a love for and of the music that is evident from start to finish.

The material is mixed fare: from Renaissance (da Milano’s *Ricercare* and *Fantasia*), Baroque (Scarlatti’s *Sonata K208*) to World/Folk music (*Stefania*, *Tarantella*, *Scottish Lute* selections, *Sakura*, *Farewell to Stromness*), to the Beatles (*In my life*, *Yesterday*), to his own composition, and the CD’s title track, “Genteel”. While programming-wise the selections may not make sense at first, the exuberant playing all throughout wefts through the music forming a sort of musical tapestry.

My last statement is confirmed after reading the liner notes. Each piece is from a particular stage of Fiore’s development as a musician, and is dedicated to his mentor of that period. The liner notes are written from a personal slant: there is enough information to give insight behind each piece, and informal enough to make them endearing.

While I enjoyed the whole disc, there are a few tracks that stood out for me. Pasquale Taraffo’s “Stefania” is a spirited, spicy and infectious piece that oozes Mediterranean flavor. Peter Maxwell-Davies’ “Farewell to Stromness” is beautifully played... despite closing the disc, it certainly hints of exciting future offerings from this artist. I should also mention Fiore’s “Genteel”. One of the word’s definitions is “elegant or graceful in manner, appearance, or shape”, and this piece certainly embodies that definition in musical form. Sensitively played, the melody is something that sticks in one’s head and gladly carried throughout the day.

Giacomo’s Paul McGill guitar is captured quite nicely, providing a warm timbre to the

music. The recorded sound has roomy reverb that doesn't overpower the music and lends a sense of intimacy to the listener. However, I would have preferred to have longer silences in between tracks. It's a little surprising at first to have the next track start right away as I was still digesting the previous track. One gets jolted especially when a lively piece like "Stefania" suddenly comes in as the strains of the Scarlatti Sonata have just barely faded! All in all, a highly recommended release from an artist worth watching out for.

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### "Tones from an Open Heart" reviewed by Larry Pattis

I love the fact that Giacomo Fiore, a 22 year old classical and steel-string guitar musician, has enough original music for an entire album. I love the fact that Giacomo, along with some fellow student-colleagues got together and produced a CD, mostly of his solo guitar work, with just a hint of percussion (and one piece with viola and cello) on the side. I love the fact that what he has created is, quite frankly, really good music. I mostly love the fact that this album, "Tones From An Open Heart," is in fact played with enormous heart.

Giacomo Fiore, to his credit, does have some serious classical chops as a part of his musical training...and also to his credit, as a young man, he has an understanding that music is more than the sum of it's parts, and much more than demonstrating technique for techniques sake. What he manages to convey with strong melodies, technique in the service of the music, passion and energy, along with subtle nuance leaves the unexpected listener with a picture of maturity beyond his years.

I am a sucker for good liner notes, and Giacomo definitely has something to say, which helps set the scene with each piece of this album. With his necessarily short introductions Giacomo proves to be both a good story-teller and a young man with some stories well-worth hearing...

From the opening measures of the first track, "Kilkenny," I am immediately struck with Giacomo's youthful exuberance for this music...and when the piece takes an introspective turn it is a natural turn, emphasizing both the earlier frenetic pace, and the joy of the quieter moment. This is followed by the very classical-sounding "Tennant," and blends perfectly, album-wise, while also immediately presenting the listener with information about Giacomo's obvious talents on the nylon string guitar and a more classical approach to the instrument.

I won't go through and analyze this CD piece by piece, because that is a journey that the listener should take, unimpeded by someone else's take on this music. Suffice it to say that this album is indeed worthy of any music collection.

I will say that as I write these words trying to convey the full extent of my appreciation of what I am hearing, Giacomo's "Embers In the Fireplace" left me in awe. I am also a sucker for a hauntingly beautiful melody. There are few guitarists today that make me forget about

the guitar itself, and leave me just enjoying the music. Giacomo Fiore has done that...and with apparent ease, all throughout this CD. This album is filled with refreshingly energetic music, as well as appropriately introspective moments. I think we can see (if just a bit) into the life and soul of Giacomo Fiore as his heart skips and glides across these tunes.

As Giacomo himself has said (from his website), "Finally, I can say I have summed up the first chapter in my musical journey in the recording of "Tones from an Open Heart," which was finished in the Spring of 2005"...and what an exceptional first chapter it is! I am sure that we will enjoy many more pages from Giacomo in the years to come. back to top

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### "Tones from an Open Heart" reviewed by Patrick Ragains

I'll be playing this CD for a long time. Fiore composed all pieces and plays mostly steel-string guitar here, accompanied by tasteful percussion and, on "Genteel," by viola and cello. Highlights include "Tennant," played on nylon-string, "A Hundred Days/Dance of the Lilies," played on the steel-string but with a classical approach, "Genteel," where Fiore plays a delicate melody supported by a string duo, and "How Good it Would Be."

Fiore composes and plays with a charming lyricism. "Comfort of the Sun" seems to typify his approach: melodies evoking optimism, rhythmic variations and interesting movement in the bass register, accompanied by light percussion. On first listening, I thought many of these tunes would sound great with lyrics, and that Fiore might broaden his appeal by writing words for his music or working with a lyricist. As it is, this is a very enjoyable effort-one I recommend for all fingerstyle enthusiasts. back to top

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### "Tones from an Open Heart" reviewed by Catherine Tully

Giacomo Fiore has been playing guitar since he was 8 years old. You can tell. This CD has 10 tracks, all written by Fiore. There is nowhere to hide on an all-acoustic album, and no need for this artist to do so. He is quite skilled, mastering the music to which he has dedicated his life, studying at a university in Nashville, far from his home in Italy.

The songs all have been inspired by something special, be it a yearning for love, travel to a distant land, or a cherished friendship, and you can feel the emotion he pours into his playing. You can almost see the different people and places inspiring him. It is interesting to read the short notes about each song and try to picture what Fiore is trying to say through his music. Or if you aren't up for all of that, just kick

back and enjoy some good playing.

Fiore is joined on this effort by Lee Holland on percussion, Ashley Fisher on viola, and Justin Saunders on cello. These artists offer a nice compliment to Fiore's arrangements and are never too overpowering. Their contributions round out the project and at give it a softer edge.

There is a great ebb and flow to this CD, although I have to call out track 1, "Kilkenny," as my absolute favorite. If you enjoy the acoustic guitar, this is a great CD. Fiore is quite young, especially to play this well, so I expect we will be hearing from him again. And again. This is really beautiful stuff. back to top

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### “Tones from an Open Heart“ reviewed by Henk te Veldhuis

This young Italian acoustic guitarist presents his debut album called Tones from an Open Heart. After studying awhile in Italy attending Armando Corsi's teaching program he moved to Nashville, Tennessee in the USA to continue his classical guitar study at the Belmont University. There he met his teacher Muriel Anderson who taught him as well the techniques as well the inspiration which lead to this debut CD. His guitar style has as well Celtic, Mediterranean as classical influences.

Fiore plays as well on classical as on steel-string guitars. On this album he is assisted by a percussionist, a viola player and a cello player.

All compositions are written by Giacomo Fiore. The combination of a steel-string guitar and a classical guitar shows that Fiore knows to excel in both areas and dares to explore a wide range of possibilities in guitar music. His selected pieces are as well varied as with a poetic approach played.

The typical classical compositions Tennant and A Hundred Days/Dance of the Lilies and the grooving Kilkenny with additional percussion show as well his excellent techniques as his versatile setups in composing abilities. His impressive talent show balance, structure and excellent melody line building attainments, as on Embers on the Fireplace and Genteel, where touching intimate settings create a moving atmosphere. Giacomo Fiore takes you on an intimate and challenging journey in a poetical ambiance. back to top

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“Tones from an Open Heart” reviewed by David Thornton @RibMag

Organically fed - 4/5 ribs.

As suggested by the title, these 10 tracks are instrumental interpretations of moods – mostly odes to loves lost and found. Barring the occasional bongo beat, tap of the tom-tom, body slap or rise and fall of a rain stick, this is ideal Sunday morning reflection music – with no frills to mess with your mind. Highlights of this independent release from the 22-year-old "Italian John Mayer", a transfer classical performance major at Nashville's Belmont University, include the exceptional "A Hundred Days/Dance of the Lilies," the happy-go-lucky yet tinge of sadness in "Dealing With Rejection" and the haunting, achingly beautiful "Genteel" with "Song Remains the Same" strings provided by his friends, Ashley Fisher and Justin Saunders. back to top

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“Tones from an Open Heart” reviewed by Alef @genovatune.net

Some people write music, while others write poetry in music. Some people listen to music, while others dream with it - and as soon as you put this album on you begin to dream. You lean back in your chair and you're not "listening" anymore. You're sipping on a freshly-drafted pint of beer, tasting the barley before swallowing each mouthful.

This album is a journey in which emotions are told by the guitar, and as the listener finds himself in respectful silence, he realises the only thing that stirs in this new magical world are the leaves on the tree branches.

As the notes spread across this enchanted land, you will be reflecting on the most meaningful moments of your life, picturing yourself in an imaginary stroll across the Irish countryside - or lazily throwing pebbles in a creek.

It will be easy to smile, to burst into laughter at a happy syncopated rhythm, as your foot keeps the time along with your entire body. When viola and cello come along, again you will find yourself between a thousand memories of times past, and you will feel more and more at peace with yourself.

Along this entertaining journey, you will have time to think, to feel swept away by a cascading melody, to sense this music as a thread of life in its ability to make you sad, only to console you a moment later. And you will be rendered mystically powerless by all you will hear in this magical world. Sensations will be sketched in front of your eyes as by an invisible pencil, and the unseen player will take you to a timeless dimension like a graceful gondolier.

By the way, I forgot to mention who is the architect of this world: he's a guitarist of not even 22 who left his Italian home for a place as far as Tennessee. His name is Giacomo Fiore, his art is more poetry than music: it's like a light caress made of melodies, perfect

essence between joy and sorrow.

I will not indulge in trite data such as track numbers and titles: I would rather invite you to close your eyes and let this music take you. I, for one, want to get back to my new world... or should I say his. And the journey takes just a little less than an hour. back to top

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## “Tones from an Open Heart” reviewed by Bill Binkelman, KFAI

I had never heard of Giacomo Fiore until his CD arrived in the mail one day. After listening to just a few tracks, I knew I was hearing something special. Now, after multiple playings, I'm convinced that Fiore is at the beginning of a great career recording instrumental acoustic guitar music. Tones from an Open Heart swings from rambunctious and joyous to reflective and quiet with uncommon grace and ease, always displaying the artist's abundance of talent and technique.

While this is more or less a solo effort, he is joined here and there by Lee Holland (percussion), Ashely Fisher (viola) and Justin Saunders (cello). Shining through loud and clear, in both the music and the liner notes (which are certainly personal and even funny at times) are Fiore's heart-on-the-sleeve sincerity as well as his breezy unpretentious manner. Tones from an Open Heart is instantly likable and connects with the listener on such a friendly and, well, “open” level that it's like the man is in your house playing just for you. This is a trait he shares with artists like Clarelynn Rose and Johann Helton, to name just two contemporaries. However, all three artists, while similar in “feel” (i.e. immensely accessible and entertaining from the get-go), are all distinct and separate in their musical motifs and methods.

Whether you favor the uptempo numbers like the rousing opening track “Kilkenny” which will have you tapping your feet, the happy-go-lucky “The Comfort of the Sun” or the more somber tunes here (“Embers in the Fireplace” and “Beauty from Ash”) you're going to fall with this CD if you are any fan of acoustic guitar at all. With influences ranging from Celtic to folk to subtle world fusion (on “A Hundred Days/Dance of the Lillies”), the album's ten tracks each hold their own special pleasures. Allowing them to work their magic on you will be the major treat in store for those who exercise the good judgment to latch onto this gem. Besides being an excellent background recording, I also highly suggest some dedicated listening to this music as it's worthy of your undivided attention. Finally, it will almost certainly be an outstanding driving CD if you are traveling the rural backroads, especially in spring or autumn. I sure do hope we'll hear lots more from Giacomo Fiore in the future. The man who brought us Tones from an Open Heart certainly deserves a long and successful career!

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## August 2005 Live at the Schaubude, Kiel, Germany

The 21 year-old Italian, who studies classical guitar at Belmont University in Nashville/Tennessee doesn't sing and plays guitar exceptionally well. The melodies, pickings and themes derive from classical music, are inspired maybe by Italian and Slavic folklore. His solo contribution is without a doubt and easily the strongest of the evening. His originals are convincing with their lightness and uncrankiness. Easily accessible, without being trite, Giacomo Fiore's playing requires a certain amount of concentration from the listener. An unusually focused and quiet concert for the Schaubude, where even moving bar stools are too loud. Songs like *Dance of the Lilies* or *Embers in the Fireplace* prove in an unacademic and gentle way that the popular ductus of music has left its mark on Giacomo Fiore. Sensual are his melodies, beauty over virtuosity, and that's certainly the strongest point of this young guitarist who's just on his way, certainly not at the end of his musical journey. So one can give in to the associative, almost meditative melody lines, revel and dream if one likes to, and be sure that not a mean note will disturb the mellowness. At the end they play a few songs together again, then it's over. No encores, only two times someone asks for more music. End of applause - end of concert. Not a bad proverb either.