

Tom Yoder – Twisted Circles and the Theory of Everything

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CD Review by David Hodge

Twisted Circles and the Theory of Everything is the latest CD from Tom Yoder. The idea behind it is simple and intriguing enough – take a dozen classical pieces and play them on guitar. Not classical guitar pieces, mind you, but full orchestral pieces. And we're not talking about a single guitar – there's a guitar serving in place of each orchestral instrument. This is an incredibly ambitious undertaking.

Three works from Mozart open up the disc, beginning with The Overture from "The Marriage of Figaro." And while some of the guitars have been given some digital effects that sound synthetic, there's still an unmistakable guitar quality to all the voices, whether they sound like harpsichords or like horns (done with backwards recording) or like some chicken-picking country lead guitar lines from Chet Atkins. You'll get dizzy following the various melodic leads chasing each other around.

"Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" then sets the bar even higher – right from the start, the multiple guitar parts give the piece a very different sonic quality that makes you listen closely to all the various symphonic parts with new ears. It's like you never noticed all the different interweaving lines before. Of course, you most definitely have, but you gain a new appreciation of a bit of music that you may have grown too used to. And it's these revelations in tone and texture continue to grow and deepen throughout this piece, as well as in the First Movement from Mozart's Symphony #25 in G Minor, which follows.

"Spring," from Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons" and the Fourth Movement from Haydn's String Quartet #34 in D are appropriately airy and playful and feature some wonderful counterpoint. Again, though the material is familiar, there is a magical lightness that playing the various parts on the guitar brings out. And that is the case even when the original piece was written for instruments other than violins or other strings. There are two movements, the Rondo and the Adagio, from Mozart's Serenade for 13 Wind Instruments in Bb and both are given new intensity. The Adagio especially comes off well, with various backwards – recorded guitars sounding like a wild hybrid of synthesizers, accordions, harpsichords, and calliopes. It's like being trapped in an insane fun-house at a haunted amusement park.

Likewise, the two movements from Mozart's Oboe Quartet #30 in F, though they give you more of an overall guitar quality to grab onto, you find yourself not paying attention to the instruments but rather focusing on the whole of the music

– how each part relates to the other and how each part plays its own vital role in the entire piece. The Rondo from the Oboe Quartet gets you so caught up in all four parts that you easily lose yourself to the beauty of the music.

You also get Bach's Brandenburg Concerto #3 tossed in there as well as the Overture from Mozart's The Magic Flute and the disc closes with a quirkily beautiful realized arrangement of Paganini's Caprice #15.

What I find myself marveling at each time I listen to this is how much the "gimmick" of this disc – the playing of all the parts by guitars – makes me not think about guitars at all. Rather, I find myself totally caught up in the music itself. I've heard guitarists who have made me marvel at the guitar as an instrument and way too many whose music is all about putting the focus on the guitarist. With "Twisted Circles and the Theory of Everything," Tom Yoder manages to put the music itself first and foremost. And the results are awe inspiring.

You can download a digital copy at [Tom Yoder's CD Baby Page](#) (and be sure to check out his other CDs!) and you can also find out more about Tom at his own [website](#).

Peace