**The Passing of a Black Star New Zealand Guitar Quartet Rattle (CD)**

**Reviewed by Classical Guitar Magazine, December 8 2017**

A couple of years ago, in writing about the New Zealand Quartet’s album [The Storm](http://classicalguitarmagazine.com/cd-reviews-looking-in-on-new-zealand-classical-guitar-discs-from-mike-hoganchristopher-hill-john-couch-and-the-nzgq/), I noted that four of the large suites on the album had first been recorded by the LAGQ, who have, it’s fair to say, set the modern standard for guitar quartets (post-Los Romeros). Even then, the NZGQ—Owen Moriarty, Christopher Hill, Jane Curry, and John Couch—had its own identity, but with this magnificent new album, they prove without a doubt that they are now masters of their own destiny and in the top echelon of ensembles.

Once again, their recording is dominated by a diverse selection of multi-movement pieces, including a sparkling version of Bach’s instantly recognizable Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 (the LAGQ recorded only the opening “Allegro” many years ago; this arrangement is by the NZGQ’s Owen Moriarty); contemporary composer Bruce Paine’s six-part Aotearoa Suite (that’s the Māori name for New Zealand), which has structural and specific allusions to Bach, yet still feels refreshingly contemporary with its jazz and folk flourishes; Albéniz’s wonderful Spanish Rhapsody Op. 70, arranged by for guitar quartet by Moriarty from a two-piano score (destined to become a guitar quartet classic; mark my words!); and NZ composer Craig Utting’s evocative Onslow Suite, written for three pianos and arranged by Moriarty—a bracing dash of modernity after the Bach, full of surprises and many moods and colors.

The one free-standing piece is the 10-minute title track, The Passing of a Black Star, written by Slovakian-born Australian composer/conductor/guitarist Marián Budoŝ as a tribute to rock star David Bowie, whose excellent final album, released two days before he died of cancer in January 2016, was called Blackstar. Budoŝ inserts fragments of a couple of songs from that Bowie album into the piece but surrounds it with original material—as he writes in the liner notes, “the piece is an homage to the eclectic qualities of Bowie’s final masterpiece, in which pop, rock, and jazz are interwoven with classic music techniques.” It’s exciting and unpredictable, which is a comment you could make about this superb album as a whole.

Aotearoa Suite (Paine); Spanish Rhapsody Op. 70 (Albeniz; arr. Moriarty); The Passing of a Black Star (Budos); Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 (Bach); Onslow Suite (Utting; arr. Moriarty)

**NZGQ concert at the Guitar Foundation of America (June 2018)**

**reviewed by Classical Guitar Magazine June 22, 2018**

I’ve been a fan of the New Zealand Guitar Quartet for a few years now, but this was my first time seeing them perform, and it was quite an eye-opening experience. The first album I heard by them seemed to put them in the same bag as the LAGQ (not surprising given the fact that some of them studied with Bill Kanengiser, and they are still close; he was there at the show) in terms of approach and repertoire. But as the group has developed, they’ve taken an increasingly independent path, and at GFA we were treated to a highly adventurous program that included three contemporary works written for the quartet, and another modern piece arranged by group member Owen Moriarty. (The other three guitarists are Jane Curry, John Couch, and Vladimir Gorbach.) NZGQ warhorses by Bizet, Bach, and Rimsky-Korsakov were banished on this afternoon; instead there were intriguing sonic explorations that found the members employing spoons, and glass and metal slides on a series of works that sometimes thrummed intensely like a hive of insects, other times humorously broke down into bizarre bloops and bleeps. One of the members described a piece as “approachable and left-field,” which pretty much says it all.The opener, The Passing of a Black Star, inspired by and containing fragments of David Bowie’s music, was their lone concession to commercialism.

<https://classicalguitarmagazine.com/report-from-gfa-3-antigoni-goni-enchants-rovshan-rules-nzgq-delight-and-the-grigoryans-triumph/>

**What:** AOT New Zealand Tour

**Who:** New Zealand Guitar Quartet

**When:** Wednesday July 17 2019

**Where:** Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts

**Performers:** Owen Moriarty, Jane Curry, John Couch, Vladimir Gorbach

**Reviewer:** Sam Edwards (Waikato Times)

When I saw that this lot had been “Hailed as a national music treasure…”, I cried “Yeah right,” as Kiwis often do when they are not passionate believers. But in a programme of works/composers as diverse as this, I was given several swift clips around the ear, hearing the 18th Century Boccherini *Introduction and Fandango* followed by the Quartet’s rendering of the Planxty/Andy Irvine *Baneasa’s Green Glade* followed by Polish composer’s Marek Pasieczny’s homage to New Zealand composer Jack Body, I was given every reason for not trying to predict either programming or virtuosity. I was spellbound, captured by aural magicians, in thrall from the very first sound – which happened to be a tuning check. Supported, Atlas like, at one stage by Jane Curry’s contrabass guitar, tuned an octave lower to provide the sensibility of an orchestral double bass, and lifted always by the immaculately synchronous striking of strings, strummed or plucked, or gently enlivened by the steel, this concert was an instrumental revelation. In the revelation, one would have to include *Away to New Zealand* in which composer Vincent Lindsay-Clark included bagpipes, Irish dance, English folksong and the Welsh harp (exquisitely) in a fantasy of impossibility – creating the essence of the named instruments in the tonal straightjacket of guitar strings. Glorious, glorious, music. Towards the end of Irvine’s *Banaesa’s Green Glade* there is this line: “We’d talk of old times, fond memories we’d trade”. Concerts like this provide those memories.