

Guitarra Azul - Mariposa



Jesse Cook - Guitar
Luis Villegas - Guitar
Steve (Stefano) Edwards - Guitar
Michael (Miguel) Cascio - Percussion
Robert (Roberto) Skiba - Guitar
Tony (Antonio) Mhoon - Bass

I have never been to Spain. Probably, when someone says or suggests Spain to those who have been there, a collage of real life memories and events is conjured in thought. Guitarra Azul (Spanish for blue guitar) with the twelve original compositions on their new CD titled Mariposa (Spanish for butterfly), has done something similar for the rest of us. They have created music so vivid and palpable, that the rest of us can just close our eyes and be transported away. Our destination, however, is not the Spain of real life. Not a Spain of car traffic, cell phones, smog, or any of the other realities that any modern nation must face. No, our destination is a different Spain. A Spain of the mind.

As we travel there, I will tell you a little about our hosts... Guitarra Azul is a Chicago-based instrumental group. The music of Guitarra Azul is perhaps best described as Rumba Flamenco and Latin Jazz. Rumba Flamenco retains the heart of more traditional Spanish flamenco music, the flamenco guitar, yet shows a world influence by adding the use of bass, drums and a variety of percussion instruments. The band incorporates elements of contemporary Latin jazz, pop, blues, and salsa. Guitarra Azul uses strings and percussion only, This is music with rhythm that begs to be danced to. Influences of Guitarra Azul include well regarded Rumba Flamenco guitarists Jesse Cook and Luis Villegas. Steve (Stefano) Edwards is the composer of the entire album and plays guitar. Michael (Miguel) Cascio (percussion). Robert (Roberto) Skiba (guitar), and Tony (Antonio) Mhoon (bass) round out the core of the group. In addition, Mariposa features several guest percussionists. The musicianship across the board is superb. Percussion (especially from several sources) can be difficult to record and mix but the sound quality is fabulous on this recording. Uh, oh. I hear landing gear.

With their blazing strings and throbbing percussion, the songs "Milagros" and "Azul y Verde" bring me to a heroic Spain. A Spain filled with the bravery of larger than life toreadors, flashing red cloth in front of the path of danger. Or equally brave Conquistadors, voyaging on rough seas in huge wooden ships to uncharted places. "Esperanza," "Mariposa," and "Senorita" use smoldering guitars and a mix of understated and driving rhythm bring me to my favorite Spain. This is a Spain of elegant romance and powerful emotion. The sound of crickets and the scent of roses fills the air during a midnight rendezvous in the garden of a towering castle in Seville. A beautiful senorita, with long ebony hair, offers me her smile, gleaming against the night. The red wine we share makes my head heavy and my feet light as we dance until dawn. Of course, this is a personal journey, and your landing points may vary. Share this music with your spouse, your significant other, your lover, or the one you want to be your lover. Mariposa offers a great deal of fun and fantasy in musical form. I hope the Mariposa and Guitarra Azul make a second flight soon.

Mariposa has been nominated for Best Contemporary World Music CD and Best Production of an Instrumental CD in the Fiftieth Grammy Awards.

By: Randy Freedman