

Overtures & Dances

Mēla Guitar Quartet

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Matthew Robinson

George Tarlton

Michael Butten

Zahrah Hutton

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| 1 | Mikhail Glinka (arr. George Tarlton)
Ruslan and Lyudmila: Overture | 5:22 |
| | Claude Debussy (arr. George Tarlton)
Deux Arabesques | |
| 2 | No. 1, Andantino con moto | 4:34 |
| 3 | No. 2, Allegretto scherzando | 3:47 |
| | Camille Saint-Saëns (arr. Daniel Bovey) | |
| 4 | Samson et Delilah, Op. 47, Act III: Bacchanale | 7:31 |

Maurice Ravel (arr. Matthew Robinson)

Ma mère l'Oye, M. 60

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| 5 | Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant. Lent | 1:42 |
| 6 | Petit Poucet. Très modéré | 3:12 |
| 7 | Laideronnette, Impératrice des pagodes.
Mouvement de marche | 3:34 |
| 8 | Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête.
Mouvement de valse modéré | 4:12 |
| 9 | Le jardin féérique. Lent et grave | 3:25 |

Sergei Rachmaninoff (arr. Vyacheslav Gryaznov / George Tarlton)

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| 10 | Polka italienne, TN ii/21 | 3:58 |
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Gustav Holst (arr. George Tarlton)

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| 11 | A Fugal Overture, Op. 40, No. 1 | 4:56 |
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Edward Elgar (arr. Zahrah Hutton)

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| 12 | 3 Characteristic Pieces, Op. 10:
No. 3, Contrasts: The Gavotte - A.D. 1700 and 1900 | 4:00 |
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Engelbert Humperdinck (arr. George Tarlton)

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| 13 | Hänsel und Gretel: Overture | 7:51 |
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Joe Hisaishi (arr. Daniel Bovey)

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| 14 | My Neighbour Totoro Suite | 5:37 |
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About the album

Overtures & Dances matured as a concept through years of touring and performing. Naturally, as we explored repertoire, we found pieces that resonated with audiences and had a special affinity with the quartet. These pieces tended to be ones that had a theatrical element in opera, ballet, or dance. The possibilities of arrangement enabled by guitar quartet add another dimension, either using the spectrum of timbral colours of the guitar like "an orchestra in miniature" (as the great Andrés Segovia used to say), or to expand the music of one piano between four guitarists to make a rich, sustaining sonority, unobtainable with fewer guitars. We believe this collection of pieces pushes the boundaries of how guitar quartet can be used, but always in a way that best serves the storytelling, lyrical beauty, and often childlike wonder of these works.

Mikhail Glinka

Ruslan and Lyudmila Overture (arr. Tarlton)

A mainstay of orchestral concert repertoire, the Overture from Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila* is a virtuoso showpiece, particularly for strings. This arrangement features the first use of the hocket texture that we employ occasionally across the album, where players alternate semi-quavers to achieve scales at staggering speeds, a technique established for classical guitar ensemble with repertoire such as Tedesco's *24 Preludes and Fugues* or Duo Assad's arrangements of Rameau.

The opera, based on a poem by the Romantic Russian author Alexander Pushkin, tells the story of the princess Lyudmila who has been captured by the evil wizard Chernomor and the heroic quest of the brave knight Ruslan to save her. Perhaps not the most original of stories, it is enlivened by its fantastical elements such as a giant head, a magic ring, a sleeping spell, and seductive young maidens.

Claude Debussy

Deux Arabesques (Arr. Tarlton)

An integral part of the Art Nouveau style, the arabesque was used to describe an ornamental design of natural curving, intertwining line and plant motifs in Moorish art and architecture. Cybele Gontar, in Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, proposes: *"the unfolding of Art Nouveau's flowing line may be understood as a metaphor for the freedom and release sought by its practitioners and admirers from the weight of artistic tradition and critical expectations"*. Debussy contrasts two types of arabesque; the flowing, curving, intertwining of individual voices in the *Andantino con Moto* and the impish, playful, ornamental version in *Allegretto Scherzando*.

The name arabesque became synonymous with classical ballet in the mid-nineteenth century. In the *Traité élémentaire* of 1820, Italian dance master Carlo Blasis gave the first recorded description of the arabesque pose, describing it as having *"harmony, grace, and a sense of lightness, expressed through flowing motion."*

Camille Saint-Saëns

Samson and Delilah, Op. 47, Act 3: Bacchanale (Arr. Bovey)

Saint-Saëns' most successful opera, *Samson and Delilah* is based on the epic biblical tale. Samson is betrayed by Delilah and captured by the Philistines. They cut his hair, sapping him of the secret to his strength, and chain him up in the temple of Dagon. The priests, preparing for a sacrifice, dance the debauched and wild *Bacchanale*. Samson prays to God to restore his strength, pulling down the pillars to which he was chained and collapsing the temple on top of them.

This piece has been recorded previously by the Mela guitar quartet for the album *Pluck, Strum, and Hammer*. In *Overtures & Dances* we are delighted to bring a fresh perspective to our interpretation, not to mention two different quartet members and the fantastic expertise of TRPTK.

Maurice Ravel

Ma mère l'Oye, M.60 (Arr. Robinson)

Ma mère l'Oye (Mother Goose) was originally written in 1910 as a piano duet for children. Based on a set of fairy tales, the work is firmly in the impressionistic style. It was later orchestrated by Ravel to become a ballet, adding more movements and interludes.

Opening with Sleeping Beauty's enigmatic *Pavane* (a slow processional dance), tranquility gives way to *Petit Pouchet* (Tom Thumb) wandering through the forest. He is searching for a trail of breadcrumbs to find his way back home, unaware that birds have come and eaten everything! Both stories are from Charles Perrault's *Les Contes de ma Mère l'Oye* (Tales from Mother Goose).

Laideronette (little ugly one) is based on the tale *Serpentin vert* (Green Serpent) by Madame d'Aulnoy. A cursed princess is sent off to a far away land where she is rescued by a king that had been transformed into a green serpent. The princess becomes empress of the small residents of this land, called Pagodes. Ravel writes on the score:

"The pagodas and pagodines began to sing and play their instruments. Some had theorbos [lute-like instruments] made of walnut shells and others had violes made from the shells of almonds - for they had to have instruments made of their own small proportions." This arrangement takes some textures from the orchestrated version, in particular florid harp gestures to emulate the pagodas strumming on their theorbos.

The fourth movement, Beauty and the Beast, is a waltz based on Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's famous tale. The first two sections see the Beauty's gentle high melody contrasted with the Beast's low theme, incorporating a rather beastly de-tuning of the low E string to achieve a grotesque lower octave sound, akin to a contrabassoon as found in Ravel's orchestration. A magical lydian glissando across the four guitars signifies the transformation of the Beast into a prince.

Finally, *Le Jardin féérique* (the magic garden), is not based on any particular fairytale but an imagined story from Ravel himself, building on the theme of transformation

found throughout the suite. Subtitled *Apothéose*, the piece progresses in the rhythm of a sarabande before slowly building to a huge, joyful climax, celebrating transformation into something greater than oneself.

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Polka Italienne TN ii/21 Trans. Gryaznov (Arr. Tarlton)

Rachmaninoff left Russia in 1917 during the Bolshevik revolution with his family, with only a few suitcases and a small amount of money. He made it to America where, in his exile, he sought to make a living as a concert pianist. Natalia Rachmaninoff, herself a skilled pianist, would play the piano duet version of *Polka Italienne* with her husband as an encore and at parties, to the point that Sergei joked *"this is the only thing Natashenka knows!"*

The excellent Russian piano virtuoso Vyacheslav Gryaznov arranged the work for solo piano, gaining huge popularity worldwide for its creativity and virtuosity. We immediately saw the possibilities of transcribing this version across four guitars, adding a wonderfully energetic dance to our programme. We would like to thank Vyacheslav Gryaznov for your kind permission in allowing us to transcribe his excellent arrangement.

Gustav Holst

A Fugal Overture Op.40 no.1 (Arr. Tarlton)

Holst wrote of this piece: *"As soon as I got to work after my visit I unexpectedly wrote a thing that was meant for an overture and even now is in strict sonata form: but it happens to be a Fugue! Also it is a Dance! At present I am calling it Bally Fugue, although perhaps Fugal Ballet would be more correct."* Premiered in 1923 as an overture for his unrelated opera *The Perfect Fool*, the harmonic and rhythmic language certainly is reminiscent of highlights from *The Planets* suite, though it cannot be said

to have been enjoyed by many of Holst's contemporaries. Writing on her father's music, Holst's daughter Imogen considered it "unsatisfactory", finding only the central section a "merciful deliverance" from the "noise" of the fugue which "assaulted the ear."

We find the piece an incredibly engaging, imaginative work with vivacious rhythm and ingenious compositional skill that works extremely well across four guitars. We would like to dedicate the arrangement to Ian Morgan, who has an expert knowledge of repertoire and made us aware of this piece as a possibility for quartet.

Edward Elgar

3 Characteristic Pieces, Op.10: No.3, Contrasts. The Gavotte, A.D. 1700-1900 (Arr. Hutton)

The idea to arrange this piece came to quartet member Zahrah Hutton after searching for an English dance to pair with our English overture. Written in 1899, the work is certainly full of character and English wit, throwing us from a pastiche of a baroque dance into something distinctly romantic in Elgar's own distinctive voice. Elgar wrote in a letter to a friend how he was inspired by a dance he saw in Germany: *"I saw two dancers once in Leipzig who came down the stage in antique dress dancing a gavotte: when they reached the footlights they suddenly turned round & appeared to be two very young & modern people & danced a gay & lively measure ... They had come down the stage backwards & danced away with their (modern) faces towards us: when they reached the back of the stage they suddenly turned round & the old decrepit couple danced gingerly to the old tune."* The guitar is an instrument almost uniquely suited to the transformative temporal leap in this piece, with a history of repertoire encompassing both the polyphony of Renaissance and Baroque lute repertoire, and Romantic lyricism.

Engelbert Humperdinck

Hansel and Gretel, Overture (Arr. Tarlton)

Humperdinck's opera from 1893 is based on the fairytale by the Brothers Grimm. Two children, sent into the woods to look for strawberries by their impoverished parents, encounter the Sandman, who sprinkles his magic sand on them. They sing the *Abends will ich schlafen geh'n* (Evening Prayer) for angels to watch over them as they sleep; the theme of the Evening Prayer is heard at the very beginning of the overture, frequently returning throughout. The third act of the opera sees Hansel and Gretel defeat an evil witch in her gingerbread house by tricking her into an oven before they themselves are eaten. Our arrangement for guitar quartet is dedicated to Catherine Savory, George's mother.

Joe Hisaishi

My Neighbour Totoro Suite (Arr. Bovey)

The final piece of the album is our own imagined 'overture' of music from the Studio Ghibli film *My Neighbour Totoro*. The film tells the story of two sisters who move into an old house in the Japanese countryside where they meet forest spirits, one of which is a large, friendly and furry creature called Totoro. Recently, the Royal Shakespeare Company brought *My Neighbour Totoro* to life in theatres with their live production involving puppetry and Joe Hisaishi's excellent score. Hisaishi has a uniquely accessible, memorable style that frequently reveals flashes of influence from the French Impressionist masters, Debussy and Ravel. Defining an overture as a collection of themes from the work, this suite weaves many of the tracks from the film including *The Village in May*, *Totoro*, *Evening Wind* and *Cat Bus* (the cat bus, as its name suggest, is a large magical cat that is also a bus for the forest spirits, and runs through the sky with mice headlamps, a huge grin and a big ringleted tail). We follow the same form as the Eminence Symphony Orchestra's *My Neighbour Totoro* suite and thank them for their inspiration. We would also like to thank Joe Hisaishi and Wonder City Inc. for granting us the permission to arrange the *My Neighbour Totoro Suite*, it is a dream to be able to include this music on the album.

Mēla Guitar Quartet

Winners of the prestigious Guitar Foundation of America International Ensemble Competition 2023, the Mēla guitar quartet are known for their imaginative, engaging programming, ingenious arrangements and commissioning celebrated original works.

Hailed for their "collective technical brilliance and preternatural ensemble making" - Gramophone, the quartet have released three albums, Anthony Burgess; complete guitar quartets, Stephen Dodgson; complete guitar chamber works, both with Naxos, and the self-released album Pluck, Strum, and Hammer!

Notable performances have included the Southbank Centre's Purcell Room, Kings Place Hall One, St. James' Church Piccadilly, Barbican Centre's Milton Court, St. George's Bristol, Westminster Abbey, Soest Germany, and of course Jimi Hendrix's bedroom. In 2019 the quartet embarked on an 8 concert tour of China, including Shanghai Oriental Arts Centre, Changsha concert hall and Tianjin Grand Theatre. The GFA winners prize tour of 2025 includes performances in California, Florida, Texas, New York, Rhode Island, Nevada, Virginia, Minnesota and Canada. The tour includes the USA premiere of Burgess' Concerto Grosso for Four guitars and Orchestra with conductor Paul Phillips in Stanford's Bing concert hall.

In 2015 the quartet formed as graduates of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Royal Academy of Music. They became International Guitar Festival Young Artists 2015/16, then Park Lane Group young artists 2018/19 and Royal Over-Seas League chamber music finalists 2019. The members Michael Butten and Zahrah Hutton joined founding members Matthew Robinson and George Tarlton in 2023.

The quartet are enthusiastically adding to the guitar quartet repertoire through their adventurous arrangements of much loved orchestral works and their commissions of new music. Laura Snowden, My Clock is Broken! (2019), The Emperor's New Clothes (2023), Michael Finnissy, Albion on the Road to Hell (2019), Stephen Goss, Venezuela (2019) are all pieces commissioned and premiered by the quartet.

All guitars used in this recording were crafted by British luthier Michael Gee.

Thank you

The quartet would like to give a huge thank you to everyone who made this album possible and for helping us on our artistic journey. Firstly to previous quartet members Daniel Bovey and Jiva Housden, who continue to be our close friends and colleagues, for 'passing the baton' so brilliantly to Michael and Zahrah.

Thank you to Alexander Kaniewski for assisting Zahrah in the creation of the album artwork.

We would like to thank our partners James, Meghan, Blythe, and Willemijn. Friends, Wakana for her very helpful language skills, Richard Townend for the rehearsal space, and Michael Gee for his masterly crafted guitars. Thank you to D'addario for sponsoring us as artists.

To Brendon, Hans, and everyone at TRPTK, thank you for putting so much of yourselves into this album and making it truly special.







In the heart of what we do lies a simple truth: music should be felt as much as heard. Our label is founded on the idea that the purest form of listening replicates the magic of a live performance. It's not about grandeur; it's about authenticity, about capturing the essence of the moment when music comes alive.

With each recording, we try to craft an auditory journey, where the walls of your listening space dissolve to reveal the vaulted grandeur of a concert hall, the sacred quiet of a church, or the intimate warmth of a studio. Our role is that of a careful curator — we blend into the background, allowing the artists and the space to speak through the music.

We choose artists who resonate with this philosophy: musicians who inspire us not just with their talent, but with their drive to push boundaries whilst maintaining a heartfelt connection to their audience. It's this balance that guides our collaborations and helps us fulfill our pledge to bring forth recordings that honour the integrity of high fidelity sound, and the essence of musical storytelling.

At TRPTK, we quietly step back and let artistry take the spotlight. We're here to capture rather than enhance, and to deliver not just the sound, but the very soul of the music to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Brendon Heintz'.

founder & senior recording and mastering engineer

Credits

Recording & mastering engineer Brendon Heinst

Editor Hans Erblisch

Assistant mastering engineer Tycho Verhagen

Cover artwork Zahrah Hutton

Session photography Brendon Heinst

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Equipment

Microphones Josephson Engineering C617 & Ehrlund EHR-M

Microphone preamplifiers Grace Design m802mk2

AD/DA conversion Merging Technologies Hapi MkII

Headphones Audeze LCD-X

Loudspeakers Grimm Audio LS1be

Cabling Purecable Optimus Series

Tuning Pura Power Supplies linear power supplies and power conditioners

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