

Pedro Soler & Gaspar Claus “Barlande”

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PEDRO SOLER & GASPARD CLAUS – BARLANDE

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Having each trod their own paths in very different musical spheres, the father son duo of flamenco guitarist Pedro Soler and experimental cellist Gaspar Claus recently reunited to produce *Barlande*, a beautiful piece of work that celebrates equally the differences and similarities of this pair. A celebrated flamenco guitarist, Soler decided early on in his training to concentrate on the 'dynamics and sonority' of this passionate style, rather than the emotionless virtuosity that was so prevalent in his youth. Like father like son, Claus left his cello training at Perpignan Conservatoire to explore the possibilities of the 'textures and raw sounds' of the instrument, becoming active in avant-garde and electronic music as well as traditional styles.

Opening with a choppy cello attack, 'Insomnio Mineral (Rondeña)' is a gentle introduction to the album. Intricate guitar and cello motifs weave around each other, at first in shy fragments, as though testing each other; trying out a few ideas to see what sticks. Gradually becoming more assured, the duo move on to more drawn out passages and dramatic crescendos to contrast the sparser moments. From the outset there is an intimacy to the album; the sound of Soler's hand brushing against the guitar neck and other such incidental sounds bring you straight into the room with them.

The playful melodies of tracks such as 'Guajira Borrachita (Guajira)', where the cello flitters and weaves its way around Soler's lilting guitar, feel very much like the excitable son trying to impress as his father diligently plays on. These details bring an engaging edge to the album and once again immerse the listener in this seemingly private world. Although the duo went into the studio with a few sketches of pieces, the emphasis was always on improvisation and the spontaneous nature of the sessions certainly comes across with genuine enjoyment and involvement taking place over seeming perfection.

From the intoxicatingly joyous elements of 'Caballitos de Mar (Algeria)' to the beautifully sparse 'Caminos', the duo's technical skill never diminishes the emotional warmth of these tracks. The material becomes less bound to tradition as the album continues, with 'Sueños Indecisos (Tientos)' in particular showcasing Claus' desire to escape the trappings of his classical beginnings, flitting between scratchy fragments and deep, mournful melodic lines within a split second.

Closing track 'Encuentro en Brooklyn' features Sufjan Stevens on harmonium and Clogs' Bryce Dessner on guitar and provides a stunningly beautiful close. Dense swathes of electric guitar and harmonium are interrupted by Soler's percussive playing as the cello weaves its way throughout the harmonies. At just over 9 minutes long, this track contains a wealth of textures and shows a sensitivity of playing from all involved; for a predominantly improvised piece there is a superb control of varying dynamics and it is a stand out track on this truly astounding release.

Overall an absolutely enthralling album that has only grown on me with repeated listens. Although the flamenco influence runs throughout, *Barlande's* appeal goes way beyond its roots with Claus' use of extended technique on the cello and Soler's wide range of guitar textures making sure the duo never stay in any one place for too long. As well as merging the traditional and the modern, the work as a whole is imbued with that rarest of qualities – true musicianship and emotional warmth. – Recommended

- Katie English for Fluid Radio

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