

TomJohnsonForSix

A project by Tony Peña and Javier Ruiz

The collection that we have called *TomJohnsonForSix* is a comprehensive view of the complete work for guitar by the American composer Tom Johnson. The disc contains all the pieces composed for one or more guitars, and an additional version of the 1973 piano piece *Septapede*.

The idea arose when Tony Peña decided to apply the technique of an ergonomic neck to the interpretation of contemporary music with electric guitar. This technique, learned from Frankue Martínez, uses a supplementary neck that provides a greater level of independence of the hands. It soon became clear that the use of this device was going to help a lot with the delicate nuances of most of the pieces by Tom Johnson.

A particular case is *Septapede*, an arrangement of the piano masterpiece by Tom Johnson. Originally written for piano, it consists of a variable loop turning around on seven keys. The performer repeats the loop freely, sometimes introducing very slowly the change to the next bar. Playing this piece with guitar needed the use of scordatura (changing the fourth string to C#) and a special care damping the strings to get the written durations. Some of the loops were unfeasible, and the performer just skipped them.

Alexandrins pour guitare are nine miniatures in phrases of 12 and 13 notes, following the rhythm of classical French poetry. Here the interpretation is very relaxed, but trying to avoid too much rubato, an expressive feature unrelated to the minimalist world.

When one has to record a piece for six guitars, there is always the option to phone five colleagues and invite them to participate in a live recording and a nice chat afterwards. But if your recording studio is small, you simply fire up your digital audio workstation and tape all the tracks yourself. For *Canon for Six Guitars* there are six slightly different colors, and the guitars are spread out in the stereo field. All the tracks were recorded in full, without any copy-paste.

The five short movements of *Arpeggios* are logical up-and-down progressions, often with open strings. The third movement, *Weaving*, with its changing accents of a repeated loop, was the first approach of Tony Peña to the minimalist world of Tom Johnson.

The last piece is the musical image of a geomagic square. *Tinkelenberg Rhythms* owes its title to Frank Tinkelenberg, a maths puzzler and programmer who found a special kind of magic square. Here the guitar sounds dry, at times even harsh, but the rhythmic patterns formed by three of the nine squares are crystal clear.

TomJohnsonForSix is an attempt to show many years of music with a unified approach, and with the color of the electric guitar, that shares most of the virtues of the classical one and shines with new ones.