



New York Classical Guitar Society presents Meng Su in Review



**NEW YORK CLASSICAL GUITAR SOCIETY PRESENTS MENG SU
MENG SU, GUITAR
SYMPHONY SPACE, NEW YORK, NY
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The 2015 Parkening International Guitar Competition Gold Medalist, Chinese-born Meng Su, played a successful debut recital this past Friday to a large audience with a fair number of guitarists in it. As her biography states, she is the first guitarist to have won both the youth and the main Parkening Competitions, and she is also the first female guitarist to win the Gold Medal (or even to make it to the final round) in the main competition. Such victories are certainly significant, but they are not the sole highlights of Ms. Su's busy professional life.

As Ms. Su commented with easy elegance from the stage of Symphony Space, she has played in New York a number of times before, though usually sharing the stage, for example as part of the Beijing Guitar Duo with Yameng Wang at Weill Hall in 2010. She has also toured extensively in Europe and the US in a trio with her mentor the well-known Manuel Barrueco, under whose tutelage she received her Master of Music degree from the Peabody Conservatory. Ms. Su also has recorded several CD's, which can be obtained from Tonar Music via Ms. Su's website: <http://www.mengsuguitar.com>. In fact, those who missed her solo recital debut in New York will find much of the same repertoire on her latest CD, *Meng*— missing only the *Aquarelle*, by Sergio Assad (b. 1952), but instead offering "Avner's Theme" by John Williams (1932) and Tarrega's *Rosita*.

Ms. Su's recital program featured a carefully selected cross-section of the classical guitar repertoire, from Bach's famous *Lute Suite No. 4 in E major* (after the magnificent Violin Partita BWV 1006), moving chronologically to the Sonata *Omaggio a Boccherini*, Op. 77, of Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968), to *Five Bagatelles* by William Walton (1902-1983), and *Rounds* by John Williams (b. 1932, the film composer for *Star Wars* and *E.T.*, etc., not the noted guitarist of the same name). The recital closed with Assad's 3-movement *Aquarelle*. It was substantial fare, thoughtfully presented and played.

As one might expect from a competition veteran, there is no question about Meng Su's technical skill, as her performances throughout the evening were seemingly effortless and stunningly polished. She is also an artist who interprets with sensitivity and respect for the score. Add to that a beautiful – and fashionable! – stage presence, and she is poised to be in high demand.

Solo guitar recitals can easily verge on the monochromatic, but Ms. Su avoided that pitfall with skillful pacing. She renders her dynamics with fine control, as was soon evident in her Bach, drawing the listener into a tonal world that happily dwells quite far from the decibel levels of Broadway just outside, though still reflecting contrast and variety. One appreciated especially her nuances between lower dynamic levels – Bach, himself, was said to favor the clavichord for its exceptional potential for gradations in the *piano* and *pianissimo* range. While this listener will tend always to associate this great *Partita* with the bolder violin tones for which it was originally written, Ms. Su is a convincing advocate for it as lute music (not that guitarists have ever needed any endorsement for playing it!). Not only did Ms. Su achieve clarity and distinction between dance movements of her Bach Suite, but within each movement there were subtle color changes that kept the music vibrant and engaging.

The Sonata *Omaggio a Boccherini*, Op. 77 of Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco followed perfectly, giving a nod to neo-classicism – with all due respect to its composer who wrote, “I have never believed in modernism, or in neo-classicism, or in any other ism.” A classical spirit does permeate this elegant work, and Ms. Su captured it well in each of the four movements. Slower sections struck me for the first time as sharing a kinship with the gentle grace of Rodrigo's *Fantasia para un gentilhombre*, another guitar gem that was composed around twenty years later.

After intermission, Ms. Su re-emerged in a red ensemble (contrasting with the black and white of the first half), remarking after she played the Walton that “apparently, the second half is more contemporary ... and colorful.” Colorful it was, with the Walton *Bagatelle* taking us far from what might be expected based on his other music (Viola Concerto, other symphonic works, etc.). Moments of it have a lush exotic quality, especially apparent in the central “Alla cubana” movement, which seemed to inspire Ms. Su in reaching new levels of lyrical expressiveness and freedom.

Rounds, by John Williams, was written for the Parkening Competition in tribute to Christopher Parkening's great work in the service of music. Only around six minutes in duration, it showed considerable brilliance from composer and performer alike.

The closing work by Sergio Assad, *Aquarelle* (“Watercolor”) was, as one would expect in the composition of an expert guitarist, very idiomatic and effective, with jazzy Latin elements lending it a different flavor from the other works on the program. Ms. Su played it with zest, but as elsewhere favoring restraint over showiness and drama.

With such facility as Ms. Su possesses, there should be no limit on what she can achieve as she continues to explore her own individual gifts. The appreciative audience earned an encore of Tarrega's *Gran Vals*, a piece with the dubious distinction of having a small fragment that today is a famous ringtone. It was a humorous touch that sent the audience out smiling.