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**Mēla Guitar Quartet**

**4-6 April 2019**

**Jordan’s Courtyard (Ilminster), Bridport Arts Centre (Dorset)**

**Creative Innovation Centre (Taunton), Dance House (Crewkerne)**

If the case needs to be made for the validity of four guitars providing a concert of quality music, both stimulating and enjoyable, then the Mēla Guitar Quartet presented all the necessary evidence and proof on their mini-tour to four venues with *Concerts in the West*.

Matthew Robinson, George Tarlton, Daniel Bovey and Jiva Housden have incredible credentials for this instrumental medium. Their armoury of technical ability allows for diverse and quality programming. From the glittering sound colours of Philip Houghton’s *Opals,* the rhythmic energy of Bryan Johanson’s *Pluck, Strum and Hammer* (the title of their latest CD album), the bell-like harmonics in Timothy Bower’s *Fantasy*, the panache of Darius Milhaud’s *Brasilieira* to the hugely entertaining and often witty but musically substantial content of *Carmen Fantasy* (Steven Goss), Mēla demonstrated ensemble playing of the highest order. No small part of this excellent feature was due to the whole programme being played from memory. The physical awareness of each other, their understanding at any given point of individual roles, their confidence in their collective abilities gave an aura of cemented musical agreement and of genuine friendship.

The Quartet’s arrangement of Saint-Saëns’ orchestral *Bacchanale* (from *Samson and Delilah*) was an open offering that gave the near capacity audiences a thrilling idea of what was to follow. However, in this beautifully constructed programme there were reminders that the guitar is not just about *flamenco*-style vivacity, but is an instrument that can engage with the clear melodic lines of a Bach fugue, in this instance the G minor *Organ Fugue,* and the harmonic and rhythmic nuances of the music of Dave Brubeck (a *Medley* of Brubeck classics arranged by George Tarlton). Mēla’s final items took us to one of the great homes of guitar music, namely Brazil, and the decidedly romantic song-melody of *Água y Vinho* by Gismonti and the wonderful mix of rhythmic ingenuity and compelling virtuosity in Sergio Assad’s *Uarekena.*

Mēla have great presentational ability. The group is ‘audience-sensitive’ and engages appropriately with the listeners before them, both during and after the performance.

This was a triumphal series of concerts by the Mēla Guitar Quartet, finally secured for the enthusiastic audiences by the lightning finger-speeds of the players in their show-piece encore, an arrangement of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Flight of the Bumble Bee.*

[www.melagq.com](http://www.melagq.com) [www.concertsinthewest.org](http://www.concertsinthewest.org)

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