



Review for "ALL FRETS", magazine of FIGA, the Fretted Instrument Guild of America, by Johnny Baier

STUNG!

Arno Hagenaaars

When I'm called upon to review a recording from another banjoist, I admittedly tend to write as an anonymous third person. However, the new CD entitled STUNG! from Netherlands tenor banjoist, Arno Hagenaaars is so fresh, exciting and musically inspirational, I couldn't contain my commentary within an impersonal review. On the contrary, I could literally write pages about the delightful reactions I felt listening to each of the 14 tracks of this CD.

While noted that this is not a typical banjo recording in almost any sense, that is probably one of the reasons I like it so much. The material, technique, arrangements and production value are outstanding, a literal joy to experience..... and very difficult to describe. In my attempt to do so, I listened to the CD over and over and came to a personal conclusion: Arno is Harry Reser reincarnated in 2006. Quite a statement which must be explained further. As a banjo player, Hagenaaars' technique and style favor Reser at his single string picking best. However, the correlation goes so much further. With the exception of Reser's Crackerjack (absolutely brilliantly presented in the musical setting of a classical clarinet ensemble), all the selections on this CD are originals, many written by Hagenaaars himself. Like the classic solos Reser wrote for the tenor banjo, many of Arno's compositions are literal tone poems in multiple part with titles and content suggesting the musical portrait being offered by the artist. Before I looked at the title, the playful melody and musical interactivity in one selection conjured up a vision of wildlife cavorting in a meadow on a breezy, cool fall day. When the title turned out to be Squirrels, I knew that Arno Hagenaaars was on to something special. The musical complexity of each song and arrangement is modern (by banjo standards), but never to be considered "far out" by the traditionalists ... kind of Harry Reser heavily influenced by George Gershwin. If the four-string banjo is ever to find a way from its current musical niche into the mainstream, I believe it will be as the result of a recording such as this. As the consummate, contemporary musician of his time, I also believe that if Harry Reser has lived and remained forever young, he would have absorbed and made great use of all the changes and advances in modern music theory, composition and production which came after his banjo heyday of the 1920s and 30s. As reality prevented that pleasant dream from becoming reality, it's extremely exciting to see and hear Arno Hagenaaars' banjo fulfill the potential.

Johnny Baier