



Review for "THE RESONATOR", magazine of Banjos Unlimited,
by Eddy Davis (March 2013)

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Arno Hagenaaars

WOW! This year's crop of Banjo recordings is truly wonderful and finally proves to me that the four-string banjo is in marvelous hands and minds. From Johnny Baier's wonderfully clean, terrifically entertaining CD to Steve DiBonaventura's great jazz recording. Then there's Cynthia Sayer's eclectic, wonderfully arranged/played CD and we've always got the great jazz playing styles of Jimmy Mazzy, Howard Alden and Frank Vignola. Then standing along side of the all-time greats of the four-string banjo is perhaps (in my opinion) the greatest of anyone that ever puts their fingers on a four-string banjo – what can one say? I've heard Buddy Wachter do things that defy belief and then play with such passion that it brought me to tears.

AND NOW! **Arno Hagenaaars**. He composed most of the selections and performs on acoustic, electric and synthesized banjos on this landmark CD. The titles of the compositions are very explanatory of the music that follows.

A month or so ago, my old friend Frank Rossi asked if I would review this CD. He said, "I have this new CD, I don't understand it, but I think I like it. I'm waiting for you to tell me why." Well, Frank I'll try.

Upon playing the first track I heard a classical-style piece in 6/8 time, which soon turned in a syncopated jazz piece. On the second track Arno runs glorious arpeggios, then uses a tremolo style melody – oh, those glorious arpeggios! The next track is a piece by J.S. Bach played by a wonderful string ensemble. Arno's technic and control is something of the finest violinists on record. Going on, there is a syncopated (jazz feel) staccato piece with a terrific modern-classic harmony and feel. The fifth track is a happy little "pop feeling" thing, as if it were right out of a 1960's film score. Arno is certainly a fine diversified composer. Then comes a "tour-de-force" of arpeggios – Brilliant! Track seven is a jazz-blues piece featuring a Hammond B-3 organ and drums.

By the way, I should say that all of Arno's "side persons" (musicians that accompany him) are amazing, "top-of-the-line" professionals.



The way this man can go from one style (or feel) to another is amazing and his technic is beyond description. The eighth track is a very modern piece which contains electric banjo. It is made up of monotonous (not bad) arpeggios over a pedal bass, then on top of that is musical effects. Sometimes sounding sort-of modern “Spike Jones” like. Maybe a more classical modern version of Sun Ra. I could hear this as an interesting film score. Nine is an etude with a delightful concert feel. Very nice marimba and drums are added on track ten. Next comes a selection written on a mixed rhythm pattern which repeats sort-of like what the young people today refer to as “loops”. On track eleven Arno has written a wonderful Ragtime piece that really has the sound of classic ragtime. Man, this guy can do anything.

On track twelve he uses the electric banjo once again. The piece is a “tour-de-force” in cross rhythms. These guys could read the freckles off a beautiful young lady. Next comes a classical lament (Italian theatre style) with Arno playing his banjo in a Neapolitan mandolin tremolo style. A very passionate haunting piece. Many of these selections conjure-up very abstract visions of life. This is a totally different approach to the tenor banjo as is track fourteen, which is a solo un-accompanied piece. Fifteen sounds very lute like. It reminds me of Old Britannia. The next selection is another piece for electric banjo and this time he introduces synthesized banjo as well. It is entitled *Machine II* and is in the style of music being written in the 1920's by such composers as George Antheil (*Ballet Mechanic*). Much of this style music was written for films. There is much rhythm monotony under a melody of strange intervals. The banjo playing is again a tremolo style.

Track seventeen harks back (in my head) to “pop” influenced film scoring. Arno is again running sixteenth note melodic patterns and then does some chordal melody playing that leads to some wonderful light-Latin rhythm stuff. For me this is reminiscent of a 1940's playful South American film score. Wonderful stuff.

Next comes marvelous piano and banjo work on an *Arabesque* by Claude Debussy. All of this music would make wonderfully haunting film scores. Nineteen again uses electric banjo. Arno's friend Frank Witte is a marvelous avant-garde composer that really takes Arno's banjo to glorious heights! The title *Requiem for a Space Banjo* says it all. The last piece (track twenty) uses all of the banjos – acoustic, electric and synthesized.

Well, Mr. Hagenaars is a brilliant interpreter of music, a marvelous composer, an amazing technician, and oh, yes – an absolutely “Master Of The Tenor Banjo”.



I've too often heard the phrase "banjo music" or "this is a banjo song". I started playing the tenor banjo after playing many other musical instruments. The key word here is "musical". I started playing professionally on banjo at the age of seventeen with a college Dixieland band at Purdue University. I had been playing tenor saxophone with an Indiana territory dance band. The pay was \$14.64 a night (union scale). The "Salty Dogs Jazz Band" paid at least \$50 a night playing at other colleges around the mid-west. That was "big money" and I wanted it! When I asked to join the band they told me that the "banjo chair" was available. So I went to the local music store (Mahara's Music) and started a six-week trial plan to learn banjo. "Smilin'" Jimmy Wilson gave me a lesson book and a few lessons to get me started. The main thing was, I needed a banjo to join the "Salty Dogs". I fell in love with this new (to me) instrument immediately. I thought: what a great "musical" instrument. Then a year or so later the band and I were playing a job in Chicago and when we finished the guys in the band said "let's go around the corner and hear this great banjo wizard." I thought this will be great. Then I heard this guy play all of this stuff and he did it again on the second and then the third number and I said, I don't Like that! In his hands, I didn't hear a "musical" instrument. Such is usually the case, BUT every now and then, especially as of late, I hear a wonderful "musical" instrument and my goodness – it's a banjo!

Well, if you haven't realized it by now, I'm hearing (and loving it) a wonderful, marvelous, terrific "MUSICAL" instrument played by a "MASTER" of music and much to my delight... IT'S A BANJO!

Well Frank, old buddy, I think the reason you like this is simple. This man's love of the banjo and his genius ability to play it is so outstanding that it simply overpowers you and you are lost in the "musicality" of the moment! Everyone – please help the world find this man and his music. He is one of a very special few.

Eddy Davis