



Review for "ALL FRETS", by Johnny Baier (February 2013)

SYNCHROPATION

Arno Hagens

As a tenor banjo player, I have always been – and remain – a big fan of Arno Hagens from the Netherlands. His musicianship, impeccable technique and creative ideas for the tenor banjo have always been an inspiration to me. As such, I could not wait for the opportunity to review his new CD, *Synchropation*.

To preface my comments, Arno himself comments in his liner notes, “As the repertoire is so diverse, the extent to which particular styles or compositions will appeal to the listener may well vary depending upon personal taste and preferences.” With a song list which contains titles ranging from *Etude in F Major* to *Requiem for a Space Banjo* it is understandable why Arno may have felt the need for such a caveat. However, diverse as the program was, I enjoyed every track and new direction in which the artist Hagens chose to take his tenor banjo. Yes, I will admit to initially enjoying certain tracks more than others. But, on subsequent listening, I found the diversity creating a sort of support group for the surrounding compositions and styles. Of the 20 selections, there are 18 compositions original to this project (with 14 written by Hagens himself). While this results in a program of mostly unfamiliar music, it also resulted, for me, in a greater intensity in listening and anticipation of what was coming next. Chamber music settings are contrasted with synthesized banjo; flawless single string lines that seem to go on forever are juxtaposed to equally brilliant broken chords arpeggios which comprise full compositions; musicianship and creativity abounds. As any attempt to highlight and describe each track or note favorites would unfairly discount other tracks, suffice it to say that I found *Synchropation* to be a musical and tenor banjo gem from start to finish and consider it required listening for any serious student of the tenor banjo.

Johnny Baier