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SIMON THACKER

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This year the Park Lane Group are celebrating their 50th anniversary. The main aims of this annual music series is 'to provide a London platform for highly talented young artists'. Scottish guitarist Simon Thacker did very well in his performances of some fine pieces from the guitar's 20th-century repertoire. Roberto Gerhard (1896-1970) came to live in England from the time of the Spanish Civil War. He was the first President of the Park Lane Group, so it was even more fitting to hear his *Fantasia* for guitar. It is his only solo work for the guitar and dates from 1957. Simon Thacker established a good atmosphere from the very start of the piece. His playing was energetic in the lively passages with a calm control over the underlying rhythmic elements. Equally so in the *Ritmata* by Brazilian composer Edino Krieger. As the title suggests, it has a strong rhythmic element which carries a more experimental melodic line and Simon Thacker played it completely convincingly; in fact, the piece was so easy to listen to, that it seemed too short.

It might seem unnecessary to comment on the fact that Simon Thacker played his programme completely from memory, as this is the norm, but as he was playing some fairly complex contemporary repertoire, he is to be commended for it. The concert was shared by flautist Mary Callanan who amused us all by spreading the taped together pages of the music score for *Canto* (2002) by Giles Swayne over a continuous line of music stands, stretching across the concert platform. I suppose that was the other extreme. However, her playing was excellent and there was no lack of commitment in her performance because of this.

Simon Thacker has a strong sense of the melodic line always as he plays, which made his performance of these contemporary pieces successful and absorbing, such as *After Night* for solo guitar which was written by Nigel Osborne in 1997. The work was very moving and refers to material from the *Survivor from Warsaw* by Arnold Schoenberg.

Security Blanket for solo guitar was commissioned by the PLG from composer David Fennessy (b.1976) and premièred at this recital. It requires an out-of-tune tuning which reminded me of some of Harry Partch's pieces. He divides the piece into a work for two instruments: the top three guitar strings and the bottom three strings, but all played on the one instrument. Fennessy balanced the musical content with the out-of-tune and guitar division idea well; it developed in a way that held our attention to the very end, particularly in Simon Thacker's capable hands.

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