

# Yehuda Hanani: FROM BACH TO BACHIANAS: Songs Without Words on ALBANY

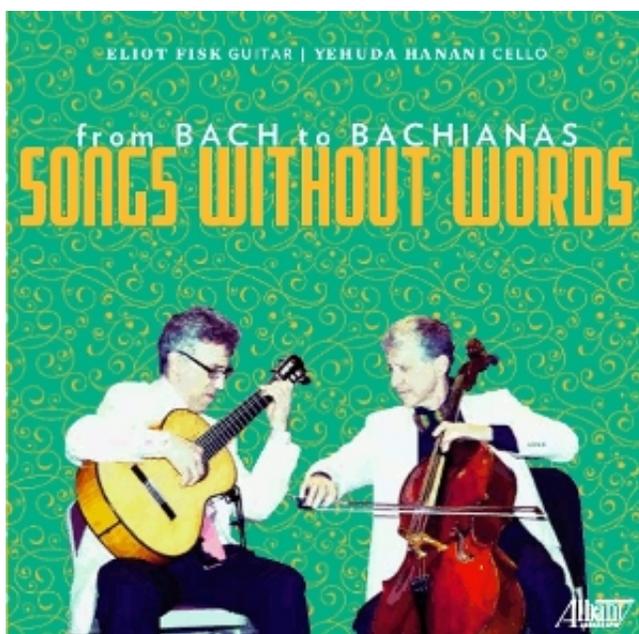


Written by [Jerry Dubins](#)

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FROM BACH TO BACHIANAS: Songs Without Words • Yehuda Hanani (vc); Eliot Fisk (gtr) • ALBANY 1510 (78:00)

BACH-GOUNOD Ave Maria. CUI Orientale. FAURÉ Sicilienne. LECUONA Andalucia. MONTI Czárdás. BLOCH Prayer. SCHUBERT An die Musik. Wohin?. Gretchen am Spinnrade. Der Lindenbaum. Das Fischermädchen. Gute Nacht. Der Musensohn. Ständchen. BEASER Mountain Songs. BOCCHERINI Sonata in A. VILLA-LOBOS Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5.



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Regular readers of this publication are bound to know that I'm not generally receptive to programs of works transcribed for settings other than those for which they were intended, much less to programs made up of excerpts from complete works thrown together in a seemingly hodgepodge compilation. I make an exception, however, for this particular album for two reasons: First, a number of these transcriptions aren't that far removed from their originals; it's not hard to imagine, for example, that a piece originally for cello and piano, such as Fauré's *Sicilienne*, op. 78, would be quite effective with the piano part transcribed for guitar. And second, two internationally acclaimed artists, cellist Yehuda Hanani and guitarist Eliot Fisk, have come together here to make well over an hour's worth of gloriously beautiful music.

My one and only complaint is the skimpy album note; devoted mainly to bios of the two artists, it provides little information about the works on the disc, requiring more time and effort to identify the provenance of some of the pieces than one should have to spend. For example, if you weren't familiar with Robert Beaser's *Mountain Songs* you would learn from the liner note only that they were originally for flute and guitar, but unless you did your own research, you wouldn't learn that come from a collection of eight songs, of which only four of them—Nos. 1, 2, 7, and 5, in that order—are included in these transcriptions for cello and guitar. Likewise, you wouldn't necessarily know that César Cui's "Orientale" is the ninth number out of 24 pieces for violin and piano from the composer's *Kaleidoscope*, op. 50; that Bloch's "Prayer" is the first number in the composer's suite of three pieces for cello and piano, titled *From Jewish Life*; that "Andalucia" by Ernesto Lecuona is the second number out of six pieces in the composer's Suite *Andalucia*, originally for solo piano; or that Luigi Boccherini's A-Major Sonata, published in London sometime between 1770 and 1775, is G 4 in the Yves Gérard catalog of the composer's works. Information such as this is expected and should be included in an album's documentation. As for the "Whitman's sampler" aspect of the disc, Eliot Fisk silences all objections when he writes, "In cheerful defiance of the present ubiquitous tyranny of the one-composer CD, these selections hark back to an earlier time, when titans like Casals and Segovia, our respective mentors on cello and guitar, walked the earth and romanticism was king."

The clutch of Schubert songs is both the easiest and the most problematic to deal with here. As far as I know, Schubert did not write anything for guitar, though a myth persists that he actually played the instrument. It's not hard to imagine, though, a guitar accompanying his songs in a setting where a piano was unavailable or, as a matter of practicality, not likely to be found, as at a picnic on the bank of a stream. The more debatable issue is the matter of recasting a vocal piece as an instrumental number. Mendelssohn wrote songs without words, but Schubert's songs are not wordless. Therefore, lovely as these transcriptions for cello and guitar are to listen to, and as beautifully played as they're by Hanani and Fisk, their contextual meaning is lost.

None of the other items on the disc suffers this fate because each involves the transcription and transposition from one instrumental medium to another. In two cases—the Fauré and the Bloch—the pieces are already for cello, so only the piano parts are here realized on guitar. The Boccherini, which is also originally for cello, is a special case. The G 4 Sonata in question here is one in a long list of some 30 such sonatas Boccherini designated for "cello and basso." The "basso" part, however, is not what you might think. It's not the type of figured bass line one would expect to be filled in by a keyboard player performing a continuo function. Though these sonatas are not included in Boccherini's autograph catalog, there seems to be general agreement that the "basso" part was actually intended for a second cello. Given its unharmonized, unadorned "basso" line, Fisk singles out the Boccherini for special treatment, explaining in his note that he has fleshed out a virtuosic guitar part from the score's skeletonized second staff. It turns an otherwise drab, Sans Serif-sounding piece into one with a Wingdings bold personality. If only Boccherini had thought of that.

The *Czárdás* is the only piece by which Vittorio Monti (1868–1922) is remembered today, though he wrote a number of ballets and operettas during his time in Paris, while serving a stint as

conductor of the Lamoureux Orchestra. Composed in 1904, the *Czárdás*, as you'd guess from its title, is one of those archetypal gypsy violin pieces, the formula for which is enshrined in works such as Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen* and Saint-Saëns's *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso*, and grotesquely parodied by Ravel in his *Tzigane*. I wouldn't go so far as to call Monti's *Czárdás* a work for beginners or unaccomplished amateurs—its perpetual motion second half poses some technical challenges—but the technical demands don't rise to the level of the Sarasate, Saint-Saëns, or Ravel pieces. This transcription for cello and guitar works quite well, and the guitar even gives the *Czárdás* an authentic flavor of music-making in a gypsy camp, where the violin would probably have been accompanied by a guitar-like plucked instrument, perhaps a mandolin. All manner of arrangements of the work exist, including one for violin and guitar by a G. dos Santos.

Of Villa-Lobos's nine *Bachianas Brasileiras* suites, the uniquely scored No. 5 for eight cellos and a wordless soprano vocalization has always been the most popular. The first of its two movements, *Aria*, is a hauntingly beautiful piece, and it's this movement we hear in this arrangement for a single cello and guitar.

Beaser's *Mountain Songs* in their original form for flute and guitar were recorded by Eliot Fisk and Paula Robison on a Pergola CD (5173217), and while I'm sorry to say I haven't heard it, I have heard and reviewed the flute and guitar versions performed by Carla Auld and Ana Maria Rosado on MSR in *Fanfare* 34:5. Much as I liked that recording, for me, the flute simply cannot bring out the deeply rooted feelings of the American heartland that resonate in this music the way the cello can. In just a few musical notes, these songs convey the sense and spirit of America's Deep South and midlands in a way that words cannot possibly communicate.

While it may be true that composers have rarely written for cello and guitar, Yehuda Hanani is not correct in stating in his album note that no literature exists for this combination of instruments. At least one composer with some degree of name recognition, Friedrich Burgmüller (1806–1874) composed *Three Nocturnes for Cello and Guitar*, and there are others, too, though perhaps more obscure, such as Justus Johann Friedrich Dotzauer (1783–1860), who composed *Potpourri for Cello and Guitar*. I imagine if one looked long and hard enough, one could put together a program of original works for cello and guitar, but these transcriptions and arrangements, all made by Hanani and Fisk, suit the instruments nicely and are imaginatively realized as well as superbly played by two master musicians. Highly recommended. Jerry Dubins

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