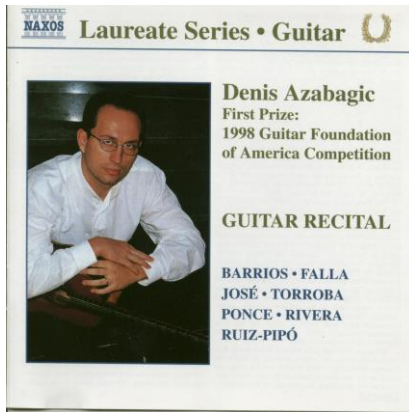


## American Record guide

March/ April 2001

Naxos CD



### Denis Azabagic

**Bosnian guitarist Denis Azabagic has a great feel for Iberian music, as was apparent in his impressive recording of the complete works of mystical Spanish composer Vicente Asencio.**

The composers on this recital are more familiar; some of the pieces are among the most played in the literature. **As always, Azabagic's playing is clean, smooth, and effortlessly musical.**

The well-worn works by Torroba, Barrios and Ponce get sophisticated readings here—sensitive, delicate, and finely etched. **Azabagic's marvelous consistent, round tone** is specially effective in the Barrios, where the high melodic passages can sound brittle in lesser hands. **Azabagic brings the same smooth tone and musical sensitivity to the Jose Sonata, a work that is rapidly becoming a standard in the repertory. His playing blends structural awareness with melodic fluency, at once formally tightening and softening the hard edges of a piece that I had previously found uninteresting and unlovely.**

The 3 Stancias of Ruiz-Pipo are not nearly as catchy as his popular Cancion y Danza, though they have much of the same rhythmic vitality. The dark outer movements suffer from a harmonic sameness, using too much rich chromaticism—it ceases to have an expressive effect. The Falla is of course one of the undisputed masterpieces of the 20<sup>th</sup> century guitar literature, despite its brevity; Azabagic's performance nicely brings out the Habanera rhythm without dispelling Falla's sense of shrouded recollection and muted mourning for Debussy.

Young composer Carlos Rivera's Whirler of the Dance is most effective in its energetic and intensive outer movements, which still project Spanish melancholy and mystery despite their playful character.

The middle movement is pretty and dark, but not as remarkable in the context of this program, which has a bit too much pretty and dark music already.