

MASAKAZU ITO

Concert Guitarist

BIOGRAPHY

Masakazu Ito is recognized as one of today's top guitarists, acclaimed by musicians, composers, conductors, and critics for his mastery of the instrument and its repertoire.

Since his professional debut in Tokyo in 1987, Ito has won top prizes and critical acclaim in seven major international guitar competitions, including the Andres Segovia International Guitar Competition, the Tokyo International Guitar Competition, the Guitar Foundation of America International Guitar Competition, and the Seto-Hashi International Guitar Competition.

Ito has been featured as soloist with symphony orchestras throughout Japan and the United States. He appeared with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra in 2006, of which the Denver Post wrote, "Guitarist Masakazu Ito further contributed to the overall spellbinding performance." Ito has also been a guest at festivals such as the Musikfest in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the Methow Valley Music Festival in Twisp, Washington, the International Guitar Week at the University of Denver, and the Colorado Music Fest at Colorado State University, Pueblo, among others.

A recital in Germany marked his 1995 European debut. The following year, he performed at the Luckman Theatre in Los Angeles. Of this performance, the Los Angeles Times noted, "Ito displayed conspicuous skill and tonal range... [he] proved himself to be a clean and technically adroit player, whizzing through thorny passages with aplomb."

In March of 2003, he was chosen by the Japanese government to celebrate 150 years of US-Japan relations with a solo guitar recital at the residence of the Japanese Consul General in Denver.

Ito has performed world premieres of works by three prominent American composers: Daniel Pinkham's Sagas, for guitar and cello, at the Rocky Mountain Music Festival in 1997; Quiver Songs, a work by Stephen Everett for shakuhachi and guitar, at the Modern Festival in 1998, which featured Japanese portraits at a world music concert; and Ricardo Iznaola's *Musique de Salon No. 8* for guitar and string quartet, which was written for and dedicated to Ito in 2003.

Some of his favorite guitar music comes from Spain. The Classical Guitar magazine called Ito's 1998 recording *iEspaña! Music from Spain* "a recording of depth... most musically satisfying." His new CD *Poesía Pura* explores compositions influenced by *poesía pura*, a Spanish poetic style introduced by Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958), featuring works by Federico Moreno Torroba, Eduardo Sainz de la Maza and Antonio José.

Another unique dimension of Ito's career involves his friendship with popular Japanese musician Kitaro. The two collaborated in an outdoor duo concert in 1991. In 2000, Ito wrote and performed guitar parts for Kitaro's album, *Thinking of You* (Domo Records). The recording won a Grammy in January 2001 for Best New Age Album. Kitaro has been an influence on Ito's own work as a composer: Ito's album *Intimate Guitar*, contains some of his own compositions.

Ito is also active teaching; he has been on the faculty at the Lamont School of Music of the University of Denver since 1990.

www.masakazuito.com

Contact: Jennifer Ito jito@frii.com 303-882-9565 10292 West Spread Eagle Mountain Littleton, Colorado 80127

MASAKAZU ITO

Concert Guitarist

REVIEWS - page 1

"Ito displayed **conspicuous skill and tonal range** ... proved to be a clean, and technically adroit player, **whizzing through thorny passages with aplomb.**"

– Los Angeles Times

"... one of the most **musically satisfying** I have heard in ages ..."

– Classical Guitar Magazine , UK

"... guitarist Masakazu Ito further contributed to the **overall spellbinding performance.**"

– The Denver Post

"... sensitive playing ... **technically fluent** with impressive control ... **vast technique** ..."

– Soundboard Magazine

"... a complete musician ... Ito's music is **full of musicality**, and phrases were carefully treated with **immaculate tone**. Overall balance and tempo selections were **perfect** and **technical stability and flair is first-rate.**"

– Gendai Guitar Magazine

"Masakazu Ito is one of the **most exciting guitarists** to emerge in recent years. **He has it all: virtuosity, musicality and flair.** He is certainly a name to watch."

– Ricardo Iznaola , Guitarist and Composer

"A splendid player."

– John Duarte, Music Critic and Composer

"He is a **highly sensitive musician** with a **deep understanding of his instrument** and the music he plays."

– Douglas Bostock, Musical Director and Principal Conductor
Carlsbad Symphony Orchestra, Czech Republic

"I cannot help but be **impressed by his accomplishments and his refinement**. He must surely be considered as **one of the finest of a new generation of guitarists** to emerge in recent time."

– Gilbert Biberian, Guitarist and Composer

www.masakazuito.com

Contact: Jennifer Ito jito@frii.com 303-882-9565 10292 West Spread Eagle Mountain Littleton, Colorado 80127

MASAKAZU ITO

Concert Guitarist

REVIEWS - page 2

CD Review by Tim Panting, Classical Guitar Magazine (London, UK)

!Espana! Music from Spain, Volume 1

This is a cleverly put together volume of works that all have serious weight as compositions. Their quality assures a recording of depth that is one of the most musically satisfying I have heard in ages. The highly consistent sound production is marvelous. Ito's tone is commanding and his phrasing feels very natural. The Turina *Sonata, Op. 61* is a forceful statement with the unmistakable Spanish idioms that I almost associate with the sound of Segovia. The openness of the guitar harmonies and rugged melodic lines are played with a marvelous control. What I like about Ito's playing is that he sails close to the edge and appears to be smiling as he does so. Not reckless, but not reticent, either. Rodrigo's *Zarabanda Lejana* is a beautifully plaintive work that deserves to be heard more in concert. The tricky chord voicings are here played with precision. The *Fandango* from *Tres Piezas Españolas* with Rodrigo's signature layers of rhythm and complete use of the fingerboard is taken at a perfect tempo. Each piece is made musical sense of, thus making the listening experience most enjoyable. The *Passacaglia* and *Zapateado* are given equally positive treatment. That Ito has an affinity with this music beyond mere understanding is in no doubt. First the first chimes of the *Invocación y Danza* and the subsequent storm that is brewed Ito lets the guitar breathe fire. Inserted for pure pleasure is Ito's transcription of *Dedicatoria* from *Cuentos de la Juventud, Op. 1* by Granados. The inspiration that Sainz de la Maza evoked in those around him is well noted. Here we can hear some of his valuable contributions to the guitar repertoire. You can tell Ito loves this music. It is rare to hear a recording work so well and want for nothing. Roll on Volume Two!

Review by Marlene Hall, Rapid City Journal

... After intermission, the highlight, Masakazu Ito, finally emerged to an eagerly anticipating audience. He sat next to the conductor facing the audience and cradled his guitar as if it were a baby or a fragile gift that could break. The nearly full concert hall was enraptured with the amazing fluidity of Ito's playing. He caressed his guitar without a music score, and he elevated into a different level of consciousness as he occasionally closed and had his head closely bent lovingly over his guitar. He started out playing the *Concerto de Aranjuez* ... and the audience gave a resounding ovation at the end of this set. ... Ito then played two solos, while the orchestra and the audience attentively looked on. The solos flowed continuously together, *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* and *Gran Jota*. ... Ito's performance was flawless and beautiful ... just amazing. The crowd rose to its feet and gave Ito rousing applause and an encore. Just superb.

www.masakazuito.com

Contact: Jennifer Ito jito@frii.com 303-882-9565 10292 West Spread Eagle Mountain Littleton, Colorado 80127

MASAKAZU ITO

Concert Guitarist

REVIEWS - page 3

Guitarist Ito Builds on Solid Foundation, Josef Woodard, Los Angeles Times

One of the unfortunate aftereffects of the closure of Ambassador Auditorium last season has been the attrition hereabout of classical guitar recitals, a regular feature in that grand little hall. In an impoverished cultural atmosphere, each event takes on increased importance, which added to the allure of Masakazu Ito's appearance at the Luckman Fine Arts Complex at Cal State Los Angeles on Sunday afternoon. In the main, Sunday's recital was built from pillars of the guitar repertoire – Spanish stalwarts Federico Moreno-Torroba and Francisco Tarrega, pieces from the Bach cello suites, a few gems from Brazil's Heitor Villa-Lobos – on which Ito displayed conspicuous skill and tonal range. The guitarist also veered away from the tried and true in small doses. Yuquijiro Yocoh's *Sakura* is a set of variations on a theme, a familiar, minor-mode Japanese folk song, here treated with koto-like effects and making colorful use of harmonics and muted strings. Russian composer Nikita Kishkin's *Usher Waltz* – after the Edgar Allan Poe tale – is a quirky, house-of-mirrors waltz that goes pleasantly amok. In spite of the occasional digital glitch, Ito proved himself to be a clean and technically adroit player, whizzing through thorny passages with aplomb. But he also waxed sensitively on softer, more lyrical moments in the program – the genteel bravado of Moreno-Torroba's *Andante*, from his *Sonatina*, and the vision of restrained loveliness in Villa-Lobos' *Schottish*. Nice to see the instrument again – played boldly, at that.

Review by Ron Slaughter, The Mountain Mail

... The first of the Tarrega pieces was *Capricho Árabe*, a work of such complexity and energy one wondered where Ito could go from there. The second piece, titled *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*, called for more virtuosity still; and the third – *Gran Jota* – required unbelievable resources of technique and speed, resources unavailable to all but a handful of world-class players. The excitement during *Gran Jota* was strong enough that audience members would forget to breathe for measures at a time. At the conclusion of that piece, the audience shot to its feet, whistling, pounding its hands and shouting approval with an energy that seemed almost to jolt the performer.

Review by Gretchen Beall, Daily Times-Call

The audience responded very warmly to the guitar concerto performed by guest artist Masakazu Ito. The piece by Spanish composer Rodrigo used a small orchestra, and was skillfully composed so that the orchestra did not cover the guitar. The ancient Spanish air, the principal theme of the work, was highly effective as traded between the orchestra and the soloist. Ito played with fine technical skill and musicality throughout. Especially beautiful were the variation section in the second movement and the short cadenza in the last movement, in which Ito displayed fine articulation and rhythmic flexibility. Throughout the work, the contrast between the orchestra and the soloist gave a true concerto feeling.

www.masakazuito.com

Contact: Jennifer Ito jito@frii.com 303-882-9565 10292 West Spread Eagle Mountain Littleton, Colorado 80127

MASAKAZU ITO

Concert Guitarist

HEAD SHOT



www.masakazuito.com

Contact: Jennifer Ito jito@frii.com 303-882-9565 10292 West Spread Eagle Mountain Littleton, Colorado 80127