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Thanos Mitsalas

Curriculum vitae

Born in Naoussa (Greece). Thanos is steadily achieving recognition to be one of the leading virtuosos of his generation. His rich musicianship and perfectionism have already credited him with the highest praise from audiences and critics. It is his intense musical intuition, flawless technique and personal style in his interpretations that easily captivate the audience. Through his extended devotion to the study and performance of the idiomatic music of Sergio Assad, Thanos achieved to be regarded by the great Brazilian master as a top interpreter of his works. Sergio Assad, between other comments, writes for Thanos: "...An incredible musician and guitarist!...", "...Thanos has total control and understanding of my music!...". Classical Guitar Magazine (Blair Jackson-Nov 2017) refers to him: "...a formidable guitarist!...". American Record Guide (Kenneth Keaton-May 2012) mentioned: "Mitsalas's playing is excellent...His technical command and sense of invention and expression are impressive!" Sharon Isbin (Head of the guitar department at The Juilliard School) said for him: "Thanos has a brilliant virtuoso technique and an excellent musicianship – truly an extraordinary talent! His playing is of the highest professional caliber..." Reviewer Glyn Pursglove from MusicWeb International Magazine wrote for Thanos's solo Assad cd release: "Everywhere one senses a vitality of personal commitment and disciplined freedom in his interpretations. Thanos is an impressive soloist!..." Timothy Smith (Oct 2014) at minor7th mentions: "Mitsalas marries all of the elements of great classical guitar playing: enormous and evocative tonal range, world-class command of the instrument, and a unique and defining musical voice....Mitsalas' newest offering, entitled "Contemplation", is quite simply one of the finest recordings I've encountered in my decade of writing reviews."

Thanos started music lessons at The New Conservatory of Thessaloniki where he graduated with the highest honours in 1989, supervised by the eminent guitar soloist and professor Costas Cotsiolis. He attended post-graduate studies in Hochschule fur Music Cologne/Aachen with professor Thomas Muller Pering (graduated in 1994 with the highest honors) and finally at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York with professor Sharon Isbin, where he was honored to get a full scholarship from the institute, evaluated as one of its most brilliant talents.

During his graduate studies he also attended several master-classes with important masters like Leo Brouwer, Pepe Romero, David Russel, Roberto Aussel and others.

He recorded a complete solo recital (with repertory of the highest difficulty) for the Greek National Radio Television Network at the age of 14, and made his debut as an orchestral soloist at the same age, as well. His international debut came two years later in Poland, where he achieved to be the youngest prize winner ever (16yo) at the Silesian Guitar Autumn Contest (2nd prize and special prize as the youngest finalist). At that time he performed Rodrigo's Concerto de Aranjuez with such brilliancy, that critics and specialists praised him as an exceptional world –class upcoming

guitarists. The same step toward international recognition was followed again two years later in 1990, where he was again the youngest winner ever (18yo) at the Carrefour Mondial de la Guitare in Martinique (France). Thanos won several other prizes and distinctions at important international contests like Stotsenberg (Parkening) International Guitar Competition (USA), Volos International Guitar Competition (Greece) and Sinaia International Guitar Competition (Romania) among others. He was also awarded the prize 'musician of the year' (1988) from the New Conservatory of Thessaloniki and received "Dimitris Sgouros" scholarship during his studies. Also won the prestigious Greek Scholarship Foundation's fellowship, as well as Robert Nelson's Scholarship (USA) while attending his post-graduate studies.

Important contemporary composers (S.Assad , G.Drozd , S.Iannarelli - to name a few) have dedicated works to Thanos. He has performed several International and National 'premieres' of guitar compositions (works by S.Assad, L.Brouwer, J.Clerch, C.Domeniconi, G.Drozd, S.Iannarelli among others) and repeatedly recorded for Greek and foreign International Radio and TV networks. In 1990, after he'd won the International Guitar Competition in Martinique he earned the privilege to perform the 'premiere' of the French composer Luc Nieto's guitar work 'Le yeux de Num' in three countries : Greece – Volos International Guitar Festival (1991), Cuba – Havana International Guitar Festival (1992) and Martinique – Carrefour Mondial de la Guitar (1992). Thanos has also performed as a soloist with several European Symphony Orchestras and ensembles (Silesian Chamber Orchestra, Symphony Orchestra of the Music Academy 'Franz Liszt'-Budapest, Symphony Orchestra of Zabrze, Sofia String Quartet, State Symphony Orchestra of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki Symphony Orchestra, etc), conducted by such important musicians like Leo Brouwer, Theodoros Antoniou, Josif Conta, Emir Saul, Jan Wincenty Hawel, Christof Esher, Alkis Baltas, Carolos Trikolidis, Slawomir Chrzanowski, Dimitris Agrafiotis and others.

Thanos has performed in many prestigious music halls like Alice Tully Hall – Lincoln Center of NY, Merkin Hall – NY, Pall Hall–Lincoln Center of NY, Hancock Auditorium (Los Angeles), Queen's Grand Theatre of Zhengzhou (China), Teatro Comico Principal de Cordoba, Athens Concert Hall (Megaron of Music), Thessaloniki Concert Hall (Megaron of Music), etc. He has a wide experience in directing courses and serves as a jury member in several international guitar competitions, as well as frequently performs in important guitar festivals and musical events like Aspen Music Festival (USA), Carrefour Mondial de la Guitar (Martinique), Volos-Naxos Intern. Guitar Festival (Greece), Festival Internacional de Guitarra de Monterrey (Mexico), Silesian Guitar Autumn Festival -Tychy (Poland), Festival de Cordoba (Spain), Movimento Violao SP (Brazil), Festival Internacional de Volcan – Colima (Mexico), Shenyang Intern. Guitar Festival (China), Guitar Art Festival- Belgrade (Serbia), Larnaca Intern. Music Festival (Cyprus), Gliwice Intern. Guitar Festival (Poland), Yellow River Intern. Guitar Festival (Zhengzhou-China), Zory Intern. Guitar Festival (Poland), Aachen Int. Guitar Festival (Germany), Athens Megaron of Music 'Music Matinees' (Greece), Thessaloniki Megaron of Music International Guitar Festival (Greece), International Guitar Festival "Sarajevo East" (Bosnia & Hercegovina), ArtFest of AUBG (Bulgaria), Focsani Intern. Music Festival-"Classic for Teens" (Romania), EGTA - Cyprus Guitar Festival (Cyprus), Festival Internazionale "Propatria" - Rome (Italy), Sinaia Intern. Guitar Festival (Romania), Athens Intern. Guitar Festival (Greece), Santorini's Intern. Chamber Music Festival (Greece), "Rhodes Intern. Music Festival" (Greece), Goche Delchef Intern. Guitar Festival (Bulgaria), "Dolumbia" Intern. Music Seminars (Greece), Veria Guitar Festival (Greece), Helexpo Intern. Music Days (Greece), "Dimitria" Intern. Festival of Thessaloniki (Greece), Thessaloniki Intern. Guitar Festival, and others.

Beside his performing activities Thanos teaches at the State Conservatory of Thessaloniki, and as guest professor at many international music festivals, summer music academies, Conservatories/Universities (i.e, The Juilliard School, ESMD Monterrey, Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln/Aachen, Zhengzhou University, and others). For ten years he held the position of the artistic director at the Municipal Conservatory of Naoussa (Greece). Many of his students have received international recognition and follow successful careers as performers or pedagogists of the guitar. For his artistic achievements and promotion of the cultural ideal in his country he received special award both from the Municipality of the Heroic City of Naoussa, as well as the historical Volos International Guitar Festival. Thanos is also a founding member and vice president of the the European Guitar Teachers Association in Greece.

Since 2008 he has intensively devoted himself to the music of the legendary guitarist – composer Sergio Assad. Thanos was honored to participate – as an acclaimed ambassador of S.Assad's music- in several tribute concerts around the globe (Greece, Brazil, USA, Germany, etc). He had the great chance to perform at special Gala concerts together with the legendary Assad Brothers and Assad Family representing Sergio's music (Volos IGF, 2019 & Athens IGF, 2024). He was also hosted by the composer in the Brazilian TV (SESC TV & Movimento Violo, 2019) for a recording and broadcast tribute to his solo guitar compositions. It is worth to mention that he was the special guest artist to participate in the tribute concert organized in honor of the composer by the Arizona State University (Tucson, 2024) , as well as, “Planet Brazil” Festival dedicated to S.Assad in Germany (Aachen-Spegtra IGF, 2022).

Additively, Thanos is in charge of a special CD project which will be released in 2025 , a collaboration with Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra, which will include the premiere recordings of “Naoussa Concerto” (2021) and “Concerto popular do Rio” (2015). He also premiered “Naoussa Concerto “ for Guitar & Symphony Orchestra (which is dedicated to him) at a very special Concert Gala (April 2022) attended by the Greek President, highest officials of the Greek State and Sergio Assad as the honored composer. Mitsalal's recordings include solo guitar music, as well as chamber music works and concertos by the Grammy awarded Brazilian master. Among other pieces, he has presented world premieres (either CD recording or/and live performances) of such important and enchanting compositions like “Naoussa Concerto” & “Concerto popular do Rio” for guitar & Symphony Orchestra, Concerto Fantasia “Mikis” for Guitar and Strings, “Eli's portrait”, “Sandy's portrait”, “Seikilos Epitaph's Fantasy” and “Barbad's Fables”.

Thanos has got outstanding reviews by great personalities of the music world and the press for his recordings (8 CDs) which are published by Clearnote (Ohio-USA) and Davinci Classics (Osaka-JAPAN). His Cds include works by S.Assad, J.S.Bach, A.Barrios,N.D'angelo, C.Domeniconi, G.Droz, E.Gismonti, S.Iannarelli, L.Legnani, M.Llobet, R.Miranda, A.Piazzolla, A.Tansman, F.Tarrega, M.C.Tedesco, J.Rodrigo, G.Regondi and A.York. It is worth to mention that Thanos's interpretation of Sergio Assad's *Fantasia Carioca* (from Cd “Thanos Mitsalal Plays Music By Sergio Assad” - Clearnote 2009) is recommended in Enrique Robichaud's book “Guitar's Top 100”.

Thanos is a Knobloch Artist/Ambassador. He uses Sterling Silver Bass Strings (SS 34.5 - high tension) , CX Carbon 2nd - 3rd Strings (34.5 - high tension) and BIO Nylon 1st String (0.73 - high tension). He performs on his Thomas Humphrey (1999 - Millennium Model/Spruce-top) , Constantine Dumitriu (2021) and Vasilis Sigletos (2016 - Cedar Top) guitars. He is represented from the prestigious CLM Artists Management Office (Chicago,IL).

Short representative reviews about Thanos & his recording projects:

“... An incredible musician and guitarist! ..He has total control and understanding of my music!.. Thanos ranks today among the top performers in the whole world!”

Sergio Assad (*multiple Grammy Award Winner Guitarist & Composer*)

“... Thanos has a brilliant virtuoso technique and excellent musicianship - truly an extraordinary talent. His playing is of the highest professional caliber!”

Sharon Isbin (*Director of the guitar department at The Juilliard School*)

“... A rich musical talent! His clear virtuoso, musically inventive and impressive performance easily gains the highest appreciation of the listener! ...”

Tadashi Sasaki (*Director of the guitar department in Hochschule fur music Koln/Aachen*)

“Seikilos Epitaph’s Fantasy” (DaVinci Classics- 2021)

A fabulous album from Thanos Mitsalás. Go buy it!... Thanos delivers a stellar performance....Mitsalás gives us a state-of-the-art performance... This is a must-have recording!

Al Kunze - Soundboard (vol 88, n1)

“Tribute” (ClearNote- 2017)

Outstanding guitar artistry in an outstanding release. An impressive concert by a first-rate musician.

Fritz Balwin - November 2017 (Audiophile Audition)

Mitsalás’s playing is flawless—and, more than that, unfailingly tasteful and deeply expressive. Virtuoso passages sparkle, contemplative passages draw the listener into profound beauty. He is one of our finest artists.

Ken Keaton – March/April 2018 (American Record Guide)

Sergio Assad - "Mikis" Concerto Fantasia (Works for Guitar & Strings – ClearNote 2016)

In today's world, where CDs are so easy to produce, very few recordings stand out above the vast sea of CD's released every year. It is my great pleasure to introduce one of these very special recordings featuring chamber works for guitar and strings. This extremely well produced CD was recorded and engineered in Thessaloniki, Greece. The artists involved are of the highest caliber with a profound knowledge and understanding of chamber music. The exquisite classical guitarist from Greece Thanos Mitsalal surrounded himself with top Greek string players and recorded this full album dedicated to some of the chamber music that I wrote over the years.

It is a true honor to have my music so well presented here in this excellent recording!!

Sergio Assad (2016)

A truly wonderful album!

Blair Jackson – September 2017 (Classical Guitar Magazine)

A treasurable recording!

Ken Keaton - (American Record Guide - Sep/Oct 2016)

"Contemplation" (ClearNote 2014)

"Contemplation" is quite simply one of the finest recordings I've encountered in my decade of writing reviews".

Timothy Smith - November 2014 (minor 7th)

...And indeed the *Lullaby for Sarah* does lull us into a sense of great satisfaction and serenity but Mitsalal has not finished yet! His transcription of the great *Chaconne* from the *Violin Partita no2* BWV1004 is the valedictory wakeup call to pull us to our senses and make us leave the concert hall grinning from ear to-ear, relishing in that post recital glow, after witnessing something rather special. It really is a performance to wax lyrical about. The impressive restraint in the contemplative moments succeeds in making the explosive virtuosity of the fast passages doubly striking.

A wonderful example of how a recital CD should be presented. Highly recommended!

Tim Panting - Nov 2014 (Classical Guitar Magazine)

Guitar Classics- "In the Italian Tradition" (ClearNote 2012)

Thanos can even make silk purses out of proverbial sow's ears!

Kenneth Keaton - September 2012 (American Record Guide)

We are fully in the hands of a top-flight player!
Al Kunze - Soundboard (vol 38, n4)

"Thanos Mitsalás plays music by Sergio Assad" (ClearNote 2009)

A highly recommended CD!
James Manheim - April 2012 (All music review)

...The fluid and expressive nature of Assad's works leave plenty of room for unique interpretation, and Mitsalás takes full advantage of this. Instead of simply reciting the compositions according to Assad's directions, there is a true sense that Mitsalás wanted to use the works as a medium for his own artistic statement. While it may be Assad's notes, the music is undoubtedly coming from Mitsalás. He delicately phrases the characteristic Latin melodies and effortlessly navigates the technically challenging passages. Although young, Mitsalás's musicianship is remarkably mature, and this disc serves as an excellent introduction to this budding guitarist.

Timothy Smith – Jan 2010 (Minor 7th music magazine)

.....Though tackling these works would seem like a daunting task for any accomplished guitarist, the Juilliard trained performer and educator excels in the face of this challenge, producing an album that is not only enjoyable to listen to, but that stands up to the level of scrutiny that any work containing Sergio's music would surely face.....

Matt Warnock – January 2011 (Guitar International Magazine)