

# Recordings to Revisit

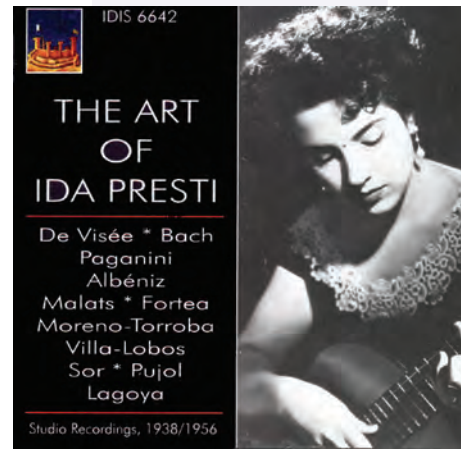
**Ida Presti: The Solo Recordings** by Candice Mowbray

Ida Presti (1924-1967) was a virtuoso guitarist whose work as a soloist and duo partner exemplified the highest levels of classical guitar performance. As evidenced in her recordings and remembered by those who heard her perform, Presti's virtuosity worked in the service of her interpretive imagination and expression. As we look forward to the ninetieth celebration of Presti's birth, revisiting her recordings is to the benefit of all who love guitar. Recordings of Presti performing in duet with her husband, Alexandre Lagoya (1929-1999), are plentiful and worthwhile acquisitions for all music enthusiasts. The released solo recordings by Presti are more limited in quantity, but offer views of Presti as both a child prodigy and a mature performer.

Presti's earliest solo recordings were made in 1938 when she was about fourteen years old. She recorded "Allegretto" from the *Sonatina* by Federico Moreno Torroba (1891-1982), "Romance" from the *Grand Sonata in A Major* by Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840), *Rumores de la Gaieta* by Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909), *Serenata espagnole* by Joaquín Malats (1872-1912), *Andaluza* by Daniel Fortea (1878-1953), four movements from the *Suite in D Minor* by Robert de Visée (c.1655-1732), and a courante by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). These recordings belie the age of the performer and elicited contemporaneous comparisons to Andrés Segovia (1893-1987).

Some of the musical ideas represented in this collection of repertoire include: harmonics, *glissandi*, parallel octaves, Alberti bass accompaniments, rapid scale passages, counterpoint, ornaments, slurs, *vibrato*, *pizzicato*, and contrasts of timbre. Melodic lines and phrases are well defined and the performances display her intrinsic connection to rhythm. There is a noticeable absence of mis-fretted notes, string noises or other mistakes. Each composition is not only performed cleanly, but is also expressive and energetic.

Presti's recordings from 1938, along with recordings by Luise Walker (1910-1998), were made available on a compact disc titled *Les grandes dames de la guitare* (Pavilion Records, 1995). John Duarte (1919-2004) wrote liner notes for this disc in which he stated, "Presti's technique was awe-inspiring ... and if it had limits these never became apparent, but it was unfailingly placed at the service of the music." The same recordings were recently reissued on a disc titled *The Art of Ida Presti* (Istituto Discografico Italiano, 2012). In addition to the childhood recordings of Presti, this disc includes five recordings from 1956 and a track salvaged from a television performance during which Presti played Heitor Villa-Lobos' (1887-1959) first *Prelude* for guitar. The 1956 recordings include *Andante Largo* by Fernando Sor (1778-1839), *Evocación cubana* (Guajira) by Emilio Pujol (1886-1980), *Rêverie* and *Caprice* by Lagoya, and "Andante" from the second *Violin Sonata* by Bach.



Above: *The Art of Ida Presti*  
(Istituto Discografico Italiano, 2012)

In Presti's recording of *Evocación cubana* by Pujol, listeners can observe Presti as a mature performer and hear trademark characteristics of her interpretive style. Her execution of *pizzicato* is exceptional. Melodies are wonderfully connected. The harmonics, slurs and scale passages are deftly performed. Presti's ease of technique and her innate rhythmic sense allow for the playful and expressive use of *rubato*, thus creating a communicative quality to the statement of each musical idea. This is enhanced by Presti's changing tone colors.

This collection of recordings is also special for its inclusion of two compositions written by Lagoya in dedication to Presti. *Rêverie* is a lovely, slower-tempo work that is sentimental in character, while *Caprice* is more whimsical and spritely. The opportunity to hear these works interpreted by the dedicatee is a privilege echoed by Lagoya's concurrent solo recording of Presti's *Danse rythmique*.

Recordings of the Presti-Lagoya Duo are legendary, but the few solo recordings of Presti also give evidence to the remarkable abilities of this fantastic performer. Listeners have the chance to hear Presti's attributes as guitarist in a solo setting: robust tone, expressive *vibrato*, clear *pizzicato*, colorful timbres, technical virtuosity, and vitality. Presti's performances, as a soloist and duo partner, exemplify what can be achieved when technical skill is matched with superlative musicianship.

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