**All Music Guide**

It's unusual right off the bat: a collaboration between a Cuban guitarist and a Cuban composer, recorded in the still officially Cuba-phobic United States. And, for all except Latin American listeners, the kind of collaboration represented here will be exotic. Is this "classical music?" Surely it is; both artists emerged from the world of conservatory training, and the music is notated and technically rigorous in ways that one associates with the classical tradition. Yet the notes by composer Eduardo Martín, except in a "Preludio, Son, y Allegro" specifically pointing toward Bach, speak of "a typical son," "a conga written for Iliana for this recording," "a romantic song." The beauty of this music is that in it, the distinction of classical and popular means very little: the resources of classical guitar are used in order to elaborate popular bases, and the classical and popular are woven into a language in which they are not easily dissociable. Most of the pieces are short, based on dances or brief melodies but filled in with complex passagework. The patterns are not only Cuban but range northward to the blues, southward to a variety of South American traditions in "Anunciación," and back in time to Bach in the marvelous "Preludio, Son, y Allegro." Guitarist Iliana Matos is a major unheralded talent, with clean articulation of rapid, hard passages and a winning way of drawing the listener in by slightly hanging back at a piece's beginning. This nicely recorded guitar disc could make an excellent way into a rich musical tradition that history has partially obscured in some countries. **James Manheim. © 2007 All Media Guide**