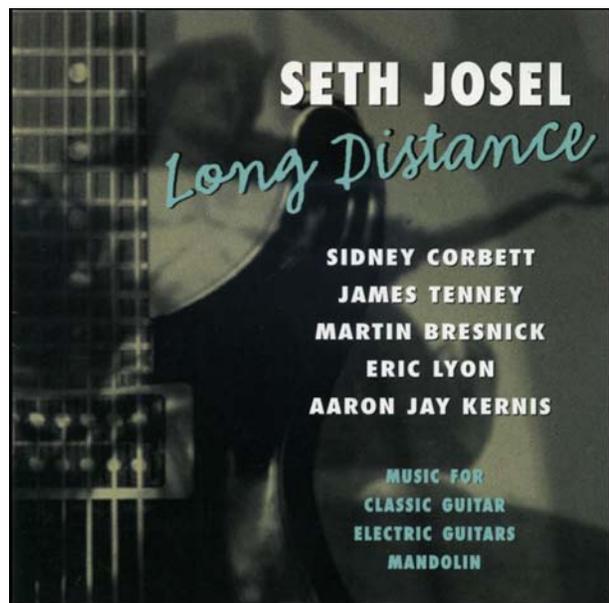


NWCR697

# Seth Josel

## Long Distance



Sidney Corbett

*Arien IV: Solo Music for Guitar* (1986)..... (21:06)

For Classic Guitar

1. Prelude ..... (2:58)
2. Meditation ..... (4:31)
3. Tarantella ..... (5:53)
4. Discant ..... (3:52)
5. Ricercar ..... (5:53)

James Tenney

*Water on the Mountain - Fire in Heaven* (1985) ..... (24:27)

For Six Electric Guitars

6. Section A ..... (8:11)
7. Section B ..... (8:08)
8. Section C ..... (8:08)

Martin Bresnick

*Bag O' Tells* (1984) ..... (12:12)

(*An Archeology of the Mandolin*)

9. Catacomb ..... (4:07)
10. Mbira ..... (2:07)
11. Canzona ..... (2:50)
12. La Bamba ..... (3:07)

Eric Lyon

13. *Greaseball* (1992) ..... (6:52)

For Electric Guitar and Tape

Aaron Jay Kernis

14. *Ciacona* (1981) ..... (7:24)

*From Suite in Three Parts for Classic Guitar*

Seth Josel, guitar, Classic guitar from Yuichi Imai, 1992  
“Special” Electric guitars from Steinberger and Fender

Total playing time: 72:23

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## Notes

Every composer, every listener to music—intent or casual—has to come to terms with the guitar. As the sonic flesh of Western popular music for much of the last half century, it is simply inescapable: there are few places left so remote that the sound of the guitar is unknown or shut out.

Given its ubiquity, though, the guitar is an instrument of surprisingly few, if powerful, associations. Amplified at great volume, it is rock’s instrument of potency and persuasion, of sex and rebellion; it cries tears and comforts the lonely in country and western music; it is a gentle accompanist and social unifier in folk music; it is a symbol of Spain. In classical music, the guitar’s ancestor, the lute, was widely used in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, but since then, outside of Spain, it has been a minor player. In our century, the modernist school of composers has acknowledged it but not its associations, finding in it, instead, a vast potential for color and variety of sounds—an approach that has had little popularity outside of a specialized audience.

Yet the tension created by the guitar’s unavoidable historical and ethnic associations, its present-day ubiquity, and its ability to continually renew itself happen to make it an ideal vehicle for musical postmodernism—the instrument, that is, for our times. Consequently, the music performed by Seth

Josel herein, which is centered around the culturally unstable 1980s and 1990s, turns out to be a kind of wide-lens snapshot of our musical era that would be hard to match in a collection of new works for any other single instrument.

For instance, *Arien IV: Solo Music for Classic Guitar*, which was written in 1986 by **Sidney Corbett** (b Chicago, 1960), explores many of the guitar’s possibilities as a modern instrument. But the composer has also written that beyond technique, the work stems from his own personal relationship with the guitar. “This piece can therefore also be understood as a kind of mirror against both the existing and nonexistent guitar literature.” Indeed, throughout this suite Corbett—who earned a doctorate in composition from Yale University—reinterprets history in our language.

In the Prelude, Corbett notes, “hard flamenco attacks and arpeggios stand in stylistic opposition to the quiet, polyphonic texture played in natural harmonics.” *Meditation* recalls a kind of night music in the manner of a Chopin nocturne. In the Tarantella, a complex rhythmic structure is gradually transformed into an Irish Jig. The lyrical melody in *Discant* is accompanied by a three-voice canon played on the bass strings in natural harmonics—which, of course, obscures the canonic writing, thus turning an early music technique into

modern musical graphics. The last movement, *Ricercar*, is also based upon Baroque technique, although there are hints of the repetitive techniques of the aggressive late twentieth century.

*Water on the Mountain ... Fire in Heaven*, by **James Tenney** (b Silver City, NM, 10 Aug 1934), is electronic guitar music. It is even scored for what might seem like the kind of heavy-metal assault force—six oddly tuned electric guitars—for which tonal and timbral subtlety is often quite beside the point. Yet this remarkable score inhabits its own unique and fastidious sonic world, and employs extraordinary harmonic effects that radically alter the tone of the instruments.

One of the most important innovators in music today, Tenney worked with Harry Partch in the 1950s, and was instrumental in both the nascent computer music of the 1960s and in the early minimalism of that period. Since the mid-1970s, he has devoted himself to harmonic theory and the practice of microtonal music, and he has been responsible for major advances in both areas. Written in 1985, *Water on the Mountain ... Fire in Heaven* is a notable demonstration of that new way of harmonic thinking, where harmony is used not for dogged forward motion but to affect timbral perception.

Tenney's piece is structurally arresting as well: it comes into being as it progresses through its three parts. Conceived as two independent polyphonic layers, the piece has a first part that consists of only the top staff of each guitar part; the second part is the bottom staff, and the third part combines the two staves. This results in the epiphanic satisfaction that pianists—who learn music first for one hand, then for the other—know so well, namely, the delayed gratification of not discovering the whole until the individual staves are known. But Tenney's score is also an emerging music on all levels, since each of the two polyphonic strata consists of bits and pieces from the six different guitars spread in space. Each line has irregular rests and overlaps of notes and decays that produce a mysterious complexity, a music that gives the sense of still coming into being.

A generation younger than Tenney, **Martin Bresnick** (b New York City, 13 Nov 1946) also has a background in computer music. He has evolved a career as a widely performed composer and influential teacher in his capacity as coordinator of composition at Yale University's School of Music. His *Bag O' Tells*, which was written for a 1984 Mandolin Celebration in Hartford, Connecticut, is also a transformative music, although its approach to timbral transformation is entirely different from Tenney's. With the intention to investigate the distinctive characters of four musical "tells," or archeological digs, it evokes cultures and musics far removed from those we normally associate with the mandolin. Bresnick emulates the "dark and somber sounds" of the Russian balalaika in *Catacomb*; he imitates the sounds of the African thumb piano in *Mbira*; he models *Canzona* on the Italian song style in which a repeated note begins each phrase; and in *La Bamba* he celebrates the Latin American dance known to all mavens of '60s pop music. (As a kind of bonus track in this guitar disc, Bresnick's work for mandolin displays Seth Josel's musical versatility and ability to move across boundaries to another, fundamentally dissimilar, plucked string instrument.)

**Eric Lyon** (b 1962) also has an academic background in music—Princeton University, Eastman School of Music, and

a Ph.D. in composition from the University of California, San Diego, where he has pursued postdoctoral research in computer music. His music is carefully proportioned (the composer explains that the two large sections "are buffered by interpolated micro-movements") and includes use of advanced technology in the processing of sampled sounds. Yet here, the guitar means rock music, and *Greaseball* is an internationally disturbing statement about the inevitable and maybe irreconcilable conflict between Generation X and the traditional world of classical music. "There are several allusions to death, illustrating the tragic dilemma of contemporary music in the classical tradition," Lyon explains. "The opening tape chord is built from a set of frequencies found by researches to be useful in communicating with the dead." The vocal samples come from an interview with a musician who had promised to commit suicide on stage during a performance, but who died of an accidental heroin overdose before he got the chance. *Greaseball* dates from 1992 and was written for and premiered by Seth Josel, who also recorded the sampled guitar parts.

**Aaron Jay Kernis** (b Philadelphia, 15 Jan 1960) studied at Yale as well, and is also a composer whose music often reacts to the existential crises of our times, especially in a recent series of large-scale orchestral works. *Ciacona*, though, is an example of the composer's early attempts to combine repeated musical process, expressive melody, and strong emotion, all within his personal take on an early Baroque form. A movement from his 1981 *Suite in Three Parts*, it employs six chords as a chaconne, which are arpeggiated minimalist style in the outer sections and strummed in the middle sections. In that process, *Ciacona* serves not only as a lyric epilogue to Lyon's more recent and aggressive angst but also as one more instance of the guitar anchored to both its history and our present.

Originally from New York and now residing in Berlin, **Seth Josel** has become one of the leading guitarists of his generation, active in a broad diversity of styles and genres. As a soloist and an ensemble member, he has premiered more than two dozen works including Louis Andriessen and Robert Wilson's opera *De Materie*, John Cage's *Five<sup>4</sup>*, Sidney Corbett's *Die Stimmen der Wände*, and James Tenney's *Form 4*. He has performed throughout Europe and North America, including with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Southwest German Radio Orchestra, and the Schoenberg Ensemble of Amsterdam, and at numerous festivals including the South Bank Festival, Strasbourg Musica, the Holland Festival, and the Munich Biennale. Since 1991, he has been a permanent member of the Musikfabrik Nordrhein-Westfalen, a state-subsidized ensemble devoted to the performance of contemporary music. He has been associated with many of the leading young composers of Europe including Richard Barrett, Johannes Kalitzke, and Manfred Stahnke.

Seth Josel's teachers have included Manuel Barrueco, Eliot Fisk, Robert Guthrie, and harpsichordist Richard Reppann and he has participated in master classes of Oscar Ghiglia and Andres Segovia. He earned a Bachelor of Music degree at the Manhattan school of music and he received Masters degrees and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Yale University. Among his honors and awards are a Fulbright-Hays grant and an artist's stipend from the German state of Baden-Württemberg for residency at Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart.

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## Production Notes

*Arien IV* and *Ciacona*: Recorded in the Liederkränzhalle, Stuttgart, Germany, on January 5, 1995. Producer/engineer: Markus Heiland (Tritonus). *Arien IV* published by Moeck Verlag, Celle, (ASCAP). *Ciacona* published by G. Schirmer (BMI).

*Water on the Mountain ... Fire in Heaven*: Recorded in the Electronic Studio of the Technische Universität Berlin on December 9 and 10, 1994. Producer/engineer: Folkman Hein. Published by Sonic Art Editions (PROCAM).

*Greaseball*: Recorded at Slavin Electronic Music Studios of New College University of South Florida, Saratoga, FL, on March 24, 1994.

Producer: Eric Lyon. Engineer: Robert Constable. Published by Frog Peak Music (BMI).

*Bag O' Tells*: Recorded in Sprague Hall of Yale University, New Haven, CT, on March 21, 1994. Producers: Michael Friemann and Martin Bresnick. Engineer: Eugene Kimball. Published by CommonMusic Music Publishers. (ASCAP).

Mastered by Markus Heiland at Tritonus Musikproduktion, Stuttgart.

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton.