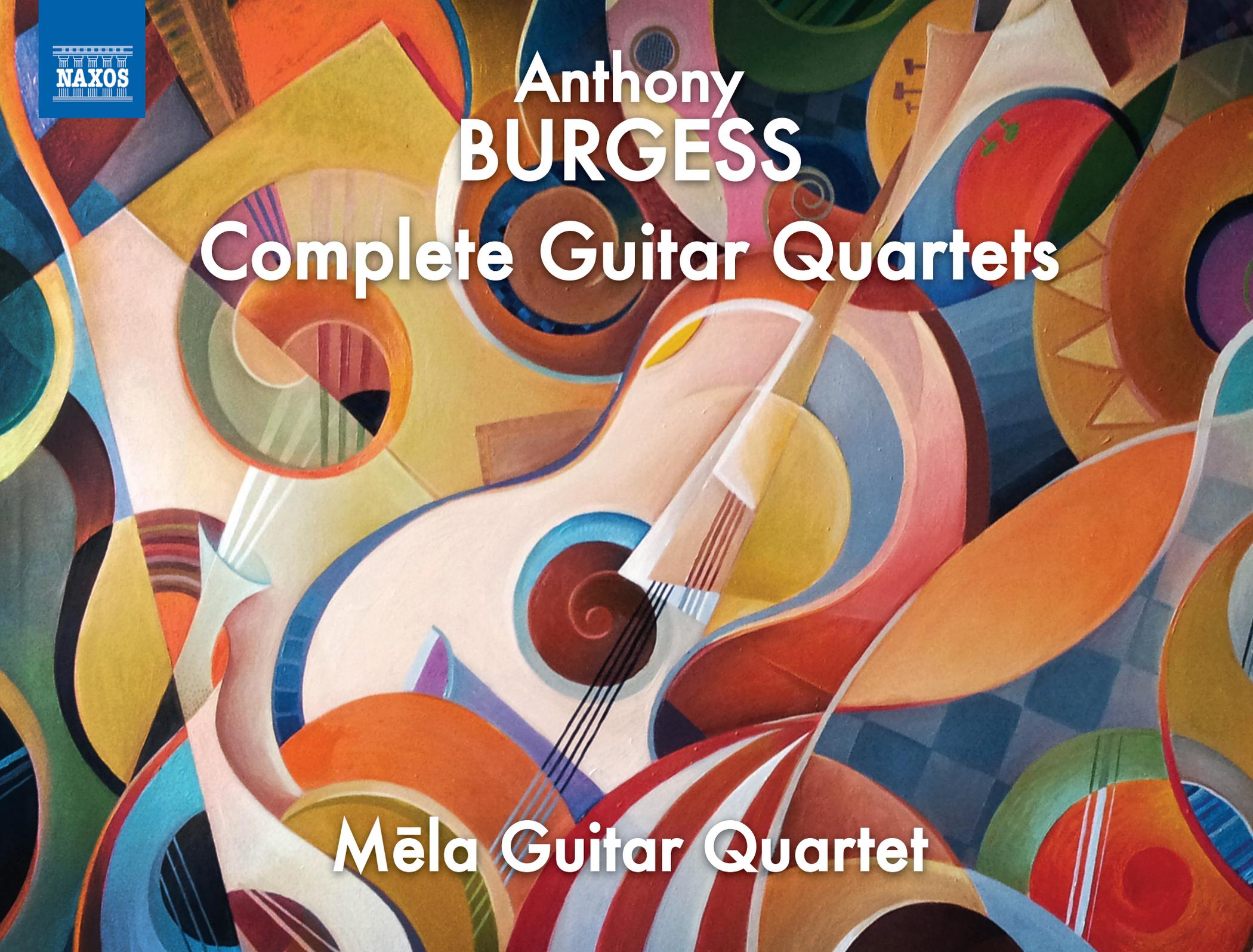


The NAXOS logo is located in the top left corner. It consists of the word "NAXOS" in a white, serif font, centered within a blue square. Above the text are three horizontal lines, and below it are three vertical lines, resembling a stylized architectural element or a bridge.The background of the entire cover is a vibrant, abstract painting. It features a central, stylized guitar body in shades of white, cream, and light blue. The guitar is surrounded by a complex, swirling pattern of organic shapes in various colors including orange, red, yellow, green, and dark blue. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century abstract art, with bold colors and fluid, overlapping forms. The text is overlaid on this artwork in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

Anthony
BURGESS
Complete Guitar Quartets

Mēla Guitar Quartet

Anthony Burgess (1917–1993) Complete Guitar Quartets

Composer-novelist Anthony Burgess is a unique creative artist whose dual mastery of literature and music is unparalleled. A celebrated author of more than 60 books encompassing fiction, non-fiction, biography, auto-biography, verse and much else, and a prolific journalist in a dizzying range of subjects, he also played piano, wrote numerous arrangements and composed approximately 200 works, including symphonies, concertos, musicals, a ballet and a wide range of chamber, keyboard, and vocal works. During the Second World War as a sergeant in the Army Educational Corps stationed in Gibraltar, Burgess often heard the guitar played in La Línea. As the English master at Banbury Grammar School in the early 1950s, he tried to learn to play it, and in 1951 composed a guitar sonata that he deemed 'unplayable'. Upon meeting harmonica virtuoso John Sebastian in Rome 20 years later, Burgess composed two works for him scored for harmonica and guitar, *Panique* and *Sonatina in C*.

In early 1986, Burgess, then living in Monte Carlo, sought a guitar teacher for his wife, Liana Macellari Burgess, and engaged Philippe Loli, an instructor at the local music academy, to teach her. Upon learning that Loli was a member of the Aïghetta Guitar Quartet, Burgess offered to compose a work for the ensemble. Loli readily agreed and was amazed when Burgess presented him with the complete score of *Quatuor pour Guitares* just four days later! This was the first of a series of original works and transcriptions for four guitars, featured on this recording, that Burgess composed for the Aïghetta Quartet during the next three years.

Completed on 30 March 1986, *Quatuor (N° 1) pour Guitares* is an attractive, well-crafted work whose fast outer movements in G major surround a slow passacaglia in F minor. Several themes are borrowed from the second movement of Burgess's *Third Symphony*, which may help explain the speed with which he composed this quartet. The first movement contrasts a lively first theme with a slower, more lyrical one. The *Passacaille* is built upon an eight-bar ground bass, introduced by Guitar I, which is played 15 times altogether in various tempi and textures with imaginative rhythmic and harmonic alterations. The third movement moves at a quick pace until the recapitulation, where the first theme returns in a slow, cadenza-like manner; a brisk fugato in 6/8 then ensues to bring the work to its exciting conclusion. Alternately titled *Quatuor en hommage à Maurice Ravel*, this quartet was included on a recording by the Aïghetta Quartet released in 1987, the semicentenary of Ravel's death. In his liner notes for that album – the first commercial recording of any composition by Burgess – he wrote, 'It is a straightforward work in orthodox sonata form which is intended to be a homage to Ravel. It flirts with the polytonality of Darius Milhaud but in other respects may be regarded as very British. The slow movement is a passacaglia inspired by the example of Henry Purcell, a master of the form.'

The quicksilver style of *Mercury* from *The Planets* lends itself surprisingly well to transcription for guitar quartet, requiring just a few small cuts that leave Burgess's arrangement 18 bars shorter than Holst's original version. The arrangement is dated '21 janvier 1987', the same day that Burgess completed his *Guitar Concerto in E minor*.

Quatuor N° 2 pour Guitares is the longest, most unconventionally structured and harmonically adventurous, and least tonal of Burgess's three guitar quartets. He completed it in Lugano on 19 July 1988 and sent it to Loli two days later with a letter characterising the work rather disingenuously as '*tonale, mélodique, pas trop longue ni trop difficile*' ('tonal, melodic, not too long nor too difficult'). Consisting of four movements preceded by a *Prélude*, it begins with an atonal cadenza, divided among the four guitars, which ends with a halting phrase on six pitches. Proceeding directly to the *Fuga*, these same six pitches are repeated as the start of an 18-note subject containing all twelve tones except one; the fugue, which is extremely chromatic and without a prevailing key, concludes on an E major chord, E having been the missing pitch of the opening subject. The *Scherzo* combines repeated-note motifs, quartal arpeggios and whole-tone sonorities in a whirlwind tempo that demands the utmost virtuosity. Beginning on C, each guitar enters sequentially, playing one step higher

than the last, resulting in the whole-tone cluster C–D–E–F sharp. This idea is promptly repeated upside-down, F–E flat–D flat–B, with similar whole-tone formations returning later in the movement. Further rhythmic and tonal manipulations involving hemiola, imitative counterpoint and other compositional tools of the trade proceed until a fugato on a new jig-like theme is introduced midway through the movement. The rapidly shifting key centres of the *Scherzo* seem headed toward a final cadence in A Mixolydian, but swerve to D at the last moment. The soothing harmonies, soft dynamics, and serene pulse of the *Chorale* impart a feeling of gentle calm briefly interrupted by an outburst of loud unison chords midway through the movement. More tonal than the preceding movements, the *Chorale* opens in E and ends on a half cadence in C sharp minor. The *Rondo* finale is a richly melodic movement that traverses a varied range of keys, tempi and textures before reaching its final resolution in F major; it incorporates a theme used previously in *Mr W.S.* (available on Naxos 8.573472) and *Petite Symphonie pour Strasbourg*.

Around late 1988, Burgess arranged two Irish pieces for a performance of his compositions and arrangements for guitar quartet on 18 January 1989 in the Princess Grace Theatre in Monaco. *Quatuor en hommage à Maurice Ravel*, the *Overture to Oberon*, *Mercury* from *The Planets*, *Quatuor N° 2* and *Two Irish Airs* comprised the programme. Later, Burgess converted the latter to *Trois Morceaux Irlandais* upon adding *No. 1. The Ballad of Persse O'Reilly* ('*Ballade de Perce-Orville*') from *Finnegans Wake* to precede *No. 2. The Lark in the Clear Air* ('*L'Alouette à l'Air Clair*') and *No. 3. Jig 'The Irish Washerwoman'*.

In November 1989, Loli requested a new work from Burgess to be performed by the Aïghetta Quartet the following summer at a music festival in Arles. Burgess obliged by composing *Quatuor N° 3 pour Guitares*, completing it on 28 December. The spiky first movement opens with a twelve-tone theme comprised of two six-note whole-tone scales in the shape of an inverted V: an ascending scale starting on C followed by one descending from B. With the arrival of a more melodic second theme, varied treatment of these two themes fills the rest of the movement. A unison low E leads *attacca* into the second movement, a loosely structured passacaglia constructed on a five-bar ground bass. Set principally in G Dorian (yet ending in E Phrygian), this haunting movement employs frequent polytonality, often involving C sharp minor. The finale, a rhapsodic movement that opens in E minor and ends in A, is closely related to the finale of Burgess's *Violin Concerto*, composed in 1979. Both movements incorporate the *Flower of the Mountain* melody from Burgess's *Blooms of Dublin*, composed around 1970, and share other themes. The similarity of these movements demonstrates Burgess's remarkable memory, since he wrote the quartet a decade after the concerto, without access to the score, having given his original manuscript to Yehudi Menuhin, to whom it is dedicated, without keeping a copy for himself.

In 1983, Burgess accepted a request from John Cox, artistic director of Scottish Opera, to write a new libretto for Carl Maria von Weber's *Oberon*, and on 23 October 1985 the updated *Oberon* opened in Glasgow. For a subsequent production at La Fenice in early 1987, Burgess arranged the overture for guitar quartet, preserving the full length of the original. To help celebrate the new production, the Aïghetta Quartet travelled to Venice to perform Burgess's arrangement of the *Overture to Oberon* together with his *Quatuor (N° 1) pour Guitares*.

Paul Phillips

Mēla Guitar Quartet

The Mēla Guitar Quartet was formed in 2015 while the members were studying at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and the Royal Academy of Music. The ensemble were International Guitar Foundation Young Artists in 2015/16, Park Lane Group Young Artists in 2018/19 and Royal Over-Seas League chamber music finalists in 2019. The quartet's first project was a collaborative recording of the guitar chamber pieces of Stephen Dodgson (Naxos 8.573762, 2017), with its second album, *Pluck, Strum, and Hammer* (2018) featuring an eclectic mix of repertoire including works by Saint-Saëns, Milhaud, Brubeck/Desmond and Gismonti. Notable performances include appearances at Kings Place's Hall One, St James's Church, Piccadilly, the Barbican Centre's Milton Court, St George's Bristol, Westminster Abbey, Jimi Hendrix's Brook Street bedroom and a tour of China in 2019. The quartet also create arrangements of popular orchestral works and have commissioned new music, including *My Clock is Broken!* by Laura Snowden, *Albion on the Road to Hell* by Michael Finnissy and *Venezuela* by Stephen Goss, which were premiered in the Southbank Centre's Purcell Room in 2019.

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Photo: © Dave Hughes



Composer and novelist, Anthony Burgess, was a unique creative artist whose dual mastery of music and literature resulted in a career strewn with an output of remarkable diversity. Burgess came into contact with the Aïghetta Guitar Quartet while living in Monte Carlo in 1986, and the sublime arrangements and original works in this recording were all composed for this ensemble. The three guitar quartets range from the well-crafted *First Quartet* intended as a homage to Ravel, while the *Second* and *Third Quartets* explore virtuoso technique alongside adventurous and at times haunting harmonies and polytonality.

Anthony BURGESS (1917–1993)

Complete Guitar Quartets

<p>Anthony BURGESS Guitar Quartet No. 1 ‘Quatuor en hommage à Maurice Ravel’ (1986) 12:56</p> <p>1 I. Très vif 4:20</p> <p>2 II. Passacaille: Assez lent 4:14</p> <p>3 III. Très vivace 4:17</p> <p>Gustav HOLST (1874–1934) 4 The Planets, Op. 32 – III. Mercury, the Winged Messenger (1916) (arr. A. Burgess, 1987)* 4:08</p> <p>Anthony BURGESS Guitar Quartet No. 2 (1988) 16:15</p> <p>5 Prélude: Poco lento – I. Fuga: Molto moderato 3:24</p> <p>6 II. Scherzo: Presto 3:25</p> <p>7 III. Chorale: Moderato 4:31</p> <p>8 IV. Rondo: Allegro 4:49</p>	<p>TRADITIONAL Trois Morceaux Irlandais (arr. A. Burgess, 1988)* 4:57</p> <p>9 No. 1. The Ballad of Persse O’Reilly 2:04</p> <p>10 No. 2. The Lark in the Clear Air 2:01</p> <p>11 No. 3. Jig ‘The Irish Washerwoman’ 0:52</p> <p>Anthony BURGESS Guitar Quartet No. 3 (1989) 12:11</p> <p>12 I. Allegro vivace – 5:07</p> <p>13 II. Andantino 2:52</p> <p>14 III. Moderato molto 4:11</p> <p>Carl Maria von WEBER (1786–1826) 15 Oberon, J. 306 – Overture (1826) (arr. A. Burgess, 1987)* 8:57</p>
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* **WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Mēla Guitar Quartet

Matthew Robinson • George Tarlton • Daniel Bovey • Jiva Housden

Recorded: 29–31 May 2017 **1–3** **5–15** and 3 September 2018 **4** at All Saints Church, Weston, UK
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Daniel Bovey **15** • Booklet notes: Paul Phillips • Publisher: from manuscript with kind permission of The International Anthony Burgess Foundation • Cover image © Martin Cambriglia / Shutterstock.com