

## **Pictures at an Exhibition**

**By James Reid**

If this were a debut CD, one might criticize the choice of repertoire, as it consists entirely of transcriptions. The Minneapolis Guitar Quartet is now approaching its twentieth year in existence, however, and on its previous two recordings a number of original works were programmed, so no one could accuse this ensemble of being too conservative. In fact, it is a mark of maturity that the MGQ can turn again to transcriptions at this point in time. All of the transcriptions on this CD were realized by group member Joseph Hagedorn (with some acknowledged contributions from the other quartet members) and conceived for four traditional six-string guitars, although sometimes with the employment of major re-tunings to extend range. The recording opens with several pieces by Astor Piazzolla – thankfully, pieces which have not been played too much by guitarists. The ensemble playing is impeccable here as it is in the three movements from Albeniz' *Iberia* which follow. Every player in the ensemble plays with assurance both technically and musically. The most ambitious work on the disc is Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Originally composed as a suite for piano in 1874, it was later orchestrated by Maurice Ravel. Those of us with long memories will recall that the Japanese guitarist Kazuhito Yamashita recorded and performed this suite as a guitar solo back in the 1970s and early 80s. While it is debatable that a single guitar can really do justice to this work, the MGQ makes a strong case for programming it as a guitar quartet. They are able to achieve a considerable dynamic range and much more attention is given to clarity of voices than is possible on one instrument. The majesty of Mussorgsky's music comes across quite clearly in this transcription from the plodding sections of *The Gnome* to the triumphant conclusion in *The Great Gate of Kiev*. With this recording, the Minneapolis Guitar Quartet has cemented its stature as one of the world's foremost ensembles.