

EL ALEPH

20TH AND 21ST CENTURY GUITAR MUSIC



SMARO GREGORIADOU

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EL ALEPH

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FERNANDE PEYROT: Préludes pour Guitare
Larghetto ♦ Moderato ♦ Scherzando vivace
♦ Vivo con fuoco, Più lento, Tempo 1

AGUSTIN BARRIOS: Prelude in C Minor
♦ Las Abejas ♦ Aire de Zamba ♦ Danza
Paraguaya No. 1

MANUEL PONCE: Thème, varié et finale

HANS WERNER HENZE: Drei Tentos
Du, schönes Bächlein ♦ Es findet das Aug oft
♦ Sohn Laios

NIKITA KOSHKIN: Toccata

SEAN HICKEY: Tango Grotesco

RENÉ EESPERE: Tactus Spiritus

ŠTĚPÁN RAK: Temptation of the
Renaissance

SMARO GREGORIADOU: El Aleph after
Jorge Luis Borges*†
Prism ♦ Cantus ♦ Yo, no

SMARO GREGORIADOU, GUITARS

*OPEN SOURCE GUITARS

HELMUT OESTERREICH, CONDUCTOR

†World premiere recording

Total playing time: 59:00

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SMARO GREGORIADOU

Fernande Peyrot:

Préludes pour guitare (6:05)

1. I. Larghetto (1:16)
2. II. Moderato (1:58)
3. III. Scherzando vivace (1:27)
4. IV. Vivo con fuoco – Più lento
cantando – Tempo I (1:24)

Agustin Barrios:

5. Prelude in C Minor (2:09)
6. Las Abejas (2:15)
7. Aire de Zamba (2:43)
8. Danza Paraguaya No. 1 (2:18)

9. **Manuel Ponce:** Thème varié et Finale (8:33)

Hans Werner Henze:

Drei Tentos (6:11)

10. I. Du, schönes Bächlein (1:53)
11. II. Es findet das Aug oft (1:50)
12. III. Sohn Laios (2:28)

13. **Nikita Koshkin:** Toccata (2:20)

14. **Sean Hickey:** Tango Grotesco (4:03)

15. **René Eespere:** Tactus Spiritus (7:12)

16. **Štěpán Rak:** Temptation of the Renaissance (5:02)

Smaro Gregoriadou:

El Aleph after Jorge Luis Borges (for guitar ensemble) (10:00)*†

17. I. Prism (5:06)
18. II. Cantus (3:14)
19. III. Yo, no... (1:40)

*Open Source Guitars,
Helmut Oesterreich, conductor

†World premiere recording

Total playing time: 59:00

All solo works arr. Gregoriadou for classical pedal guitar (tracks 1-7, 9-12, 14, 16); high-tuned pedal guitar in scalloped frets and movable back (tracks 8, 13); and high-tuned, double-course pedal guitar tuned in octaves (track 15).

Instruments, tuning schemes, string configurations by Kertsopoulos Aesthetics

INSTRUMENTS

In 2009 I introduced the term “reinventing guitar” to describe my overall interpretive and pedagogical approach, which is to express the need to redefine the classical guitar’s sound and technique on an international scale. This redefinition is crucial, especially for early music interpretation, given the great distance between modern classical guitar and performance practices and sound idioms of the past; but it is equally important for contemporary guitar music that depends on new tone qualities or colors for its expression. My purpose, therefore, is twofold: to provide historically informed, well-substantiated, compatible guitar interpretations of Renaissance and baroque music that at the same time can be fresh, alive and convincing; and to offer a new reading for new repertoire, suitable for modern audiences and venues. Hence my use in this album of a variety of exceptional instruments which, although they maintain the form and sound characteristics of the standard guitar, are upgraded with various constructional features and acoustic applications, newly developed strings and alternative tuning configurations that enrich sound, technique, interpretation and style.

Listeners of my two previous albums (*Reinventing Guitar, Volumes I and II*, DELOS 3398 and 3419) are probably familiar with such innovations. They belong to Kertsopoulos Aesthetics, a platform of pio-

neering achievements in guitar and string construction that focuses on reviving/ redesigning the historical forms and sound traditions which have significantly marked the guitar’s evolution. In addition, Kertsopoulos Aesthetics seeks to expand the highly advanced instrument-building standards of today regarding modern repertory.

In the solo part of this album, the main section (tracks 1-4, 5-7, 9, 10-12, 14, 16) was recorded with two types of standard classical pedal guitars differing in string materials and timbre. Barrios’ **Danza Paraguaya** (track 8) and Koshkin’s **Toccata** (track 13) are interpreted on a high-tuned pedal guitar with scalloped frets and movable back, tuned five semitones higher than standard tuning. For Eespere’s **Tactus Spiritus** (track 15), I have used a double-course pedal guitar tuned in octaves, seven semitones higher than ordinary tuning. Both of these pedal guitars possess an extra-clear, brilliant, distinct coloration and articulation that project the nobility and delicacy of the high frequencies. I find their timbre particularly relevant for harpsichord or lute transcriptions (being mindful that all genuine branches of the guitar family have been double-course and high-pitched, with brilliant timbres of gut or metal strings and very sharp attack). Alternatively, I use these pedal guitars for contemporary pieces that either have folk origins or influences or adopt techniques from folk-related instruments. I also use them to effectively recreate the

preferences of certain composers, such as Barrios, who used metal 1st and 2nd strings searching for a brilliant and penetrating tone color in his high register.

Finally, all instruments' tunings are based on slightly different "A" rates, varying from 428 to 438 Hz, according to their individual harmonic potential and general acoustic response.

– **Smaro Gregoriadou**

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

During her lifetime, French-Swiss **Fernande Peyrot** (1888-1978) was considered one of the most important female composers of the 20th century. Peyrot's skills and unique musical personality brought her to the attention of legendary musicians of her time, including guitarist Andrés Segovia and conductor Ernest Ansermet. Her well-crafted compositional output is quite extensive, including orchestral works, chamber music, choral works and songs. Until fairly recently she belonged to the mostly forgotten composers of her generation. Her four **Préludes pour guitare**, most probably composed in the early 1930s, show her at her very best. These are four delicate miniatures, contrasted in mood and harmonic and rhythmic development. **Prélude No. 1** (Larghetto) is calm and serene. It gives way to the following **Prélude No. 2** (Moderato), the longest of the set, which is much more inquisitive in expression and unfolds in a sequence of short, interrupted musical

phrases. **Prélude No. 3** (Scherzando vivace) is brighter, playful and quite contrapuntal. The cycle closes with **Prélude No. 4** (Vivo con fuoco-Più lento cantando-Tempo I), a last monologue with impressive vitality and a somewhat recitativo narrative style.

Guitarist-composer Agustin Pío Barrios Manzoré (1885-1944), known as **Agustin Barrios**, was one of the finest classical musicians from his native Paraguay. Barrios was a polyglot and polymath who, during his early years, was equally captivated by mathematics, philosophy and literature. A number of Paraguayan guitarists followed in his footsteps to success. Barrios' music can easily be described as coming directly "from the heart" and was much influenced by the rich traditional melodies and rhythms of his country. Due to the refined and poetic feeling of his music, Barrios is often called "the Chopin of the guitar." The structure of the **Prelude in C minor** (one of his most-performed pieces) recalls the sublime simplicity of Johann Sebastian Bach's Prelude in C major, BWV 846 (from *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I*). It is shaped in a continuous movement filled with touches of sweet melancholy. **Las Abejas** (The Bees), composed in 1921, is a highly virtuosic piece of programmatic character. The rapid succession of triplet notes directly expresses the bees' busy flight. The **Aire de Zamba** ("manner of Zamba") from the *Suita Andina*, draws its inspiration from the folk cultures of Argentina, Chile and Peru. Zamba is a form derived from

a dance that is both imposing and refined in character. According to the most important autograph manuscript available (found in the Jacinto Matiauda Collection, Paraguay), this work was composed in 1923. Its dance character and frequent rhythmic changes are well combined with melodic elements that are passionately romantic in expression. **Barrios' Danza Paraguaya No. 1** is one of his best-loved creations. Its sunny, optimistic pulse and generous, songlike melody never fail to impress. The guitar seems to imitate the sound of the Paraguayan harp, the national instrument of his country.

Like Barrios, Mexican composer, pedagogue and scholar Manuel María Ponce Cuéllar (1882-1948), known as **Manuel Ponce**, was also inspired and influenced by the traditional music of his country. From an early age, he proved his exceptional skills as a pianist. His most important piano professor was Martin Krause, who had also taught Claudio Arrau and had himself studied with Franz Liszt. At the age of 43, Ponce went to Paris to study composition with Paul Dukas, and it was there that he met Heitor Villa-Lobos and Joaquín Rodrigo. Even though he composed works for other instruments (some of his piano compositions are brilliant) as well as songs, chamber and orchestral music, it is Ponce's music for the guitar that keeps his name alive today. The Spanish guitar virtuoso Segovia collaborated with him very closely and asked for new compositions, thus expanding the general guitar repertoire and the guitar scores among the

composer's works. Segovia, Ponce's junior by nearly a decade, unquestionably made his name known worldwide.

Ponce composed **Thème varié et Finale** (*Tema variado y final*) in 1926, the same year he composed his delightful little *Prelude for guitar and harpsichord*. The work includes a theme, six variations and a finale. The theme is beautifully simple and pensive, leading the way to a set of variations that have remarkable structural and technical inventiveness, contrasting moods and a strong Latin American flair. The finale is festively Spanish. Among the composer's opuses in variation form written for the guitar, it is worth noting that this is the only one based on an original theme that Ponce himself created.

German composer **Hans Werner Henze** (1926-2012), a towering figure of the post-1945 era, was influenced by styles and sounds coming from different cultures and idioms, from Arabic music to jazz. In 1953 he left his homeland for Italy, where he remained until the end of his life. Henze left a massive compositional legacy that includes operas, symphonies, chamber music and songs. Guitarists today can proudly include in their repertoire a few important Henze works, headed by the colossal diptych *Royal Winter Music*. It was written in 1976 and 1979, inspired by Shakespearean heroes and dedicated to Julian Bream. Then there's the triptych of miniature intermezzi named **Drei Tentos**, included in the present album; it was part of *Kammermusik 1958* (*Cham-*

ber Music 1958, poetry by Friedrich Hölderlin) that was dedicated to Benjamin Britten. While Henze's compositional style is difficult to ascribe to any one modernist movement, his outstanding *Drei Tentos* definitely belong to a period in which the composer had already abandoned the twelve-tone system and was searching for a new simplicity in his musical language. The two outer pieces of the guitar triptych are rhapsodic and delicately tender in style, while the second movement is rhythmically straightforward, determined and energetic. In the first movement, *Du schönes Bächlein*, a major second interval dominates throughout. The movement seems to suggest a center on F sharp, but without using a traditional tonal harmonic environment. Frequent changes of time signatures produce a sense of rhythmic discontinuity, outlining an ingeniously shaped fragment-by-fragment structure. The second movement, *Es findet das Aug oft*, reintroduces a rhythmic anxiety that progresses in a highly dissonant and unstable atmosphere, where the *tiento* character of improvisation appears more clearly than anywhere else. Strikingly, the frantic movement suddenly comes to rest on an E-minor chord, which alludes to the tonal orientation of the next movement, *Sohn Laios*. This last lyrical miniature is structured in two juxtaposed, self-contained musical ideas, one standing next to the other without any obvious relationship or transition between them.

It is worth noting that a number of Henze's sketches for *Kammermusik* were done in Greece during his sojourn in the summer

of 1958. The composer states: "These three *tientos* or *ricercas* sound much as I imagine Greek music must have sounded and are characterized by the interplay of thematic structures and harmonic textures found throughout the piece as a whole: each of them functions as a nucleus that provides material for the rest of the piece. And I think it is true to say that they contain something of what I think of as Hellenism whenever I hear Stravinsky's orchestral music or his melodrama *Persephone*. It is as though this music – music which, whenever it deals with themes from classical antiquity, invariably recalls the Baroque or Monteverdi or the Renaissance – were a gateway through which one must pass in order to establish or maintain a living relationship with classical Greece, a link with our roots, with all that is most essential in our lives, with the art of metaphor and with tragedy." (Hans Werner Henze, *Bohemian Fifths: An Autobiography*, trans. Stewart Spencer. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 156.)

Nikita Koshkin (b. 1956) holds his own place among Russia's guitarists-composers. His fairytale suite for guitar, *The Prince's Toys* (1980), was his first major success and, apart from being very imaginative, includes a number of innovative sound effects on the instrument. His work heard on the present album bears the title **Toccata** and belongs to the diptych *The Fall of Birds* (Andante Quasi Passacaglia and Toccata). Even though it is an early work, produced in 1978 and first

performed in London, it is hailed as one of Koshkin's best scores. The title comes from one of the composer's dreams during which his work was announced as "The Fall of Birds." Koshkin also connects his title with the image in *The Apocalypse (Book of Revelation)* of birds falling dead on Earth. The ostinati rhythmic patterns of the piece, combined with an unsettling mood of terrifying anxiety, depict the birds falling at the end of the world.

American composer-guitarist and pianist **Sean Hickey** (b. 1970), a very active artist, has composed a number of works (including symphonies, concertos for clarinet and cello, two string trios, a string quartet, a flute sonata, pieces for solo instruments, orchestral music and a film score) that are frequently performed. Featured on this album is his **Tango Grotesco** (2001) about which he writes: "It is an extremely humble homage to one of the greatest of my fascinations: the music – particularly the art music – of Latin America. A guitarist from an early age, I find writing for the instrument incredibly intimidating. This happens to be my only work for solo guitar. First performed and recorded by guitarist Oren Fader on my debut Naxos release, *Left at the Fork in the Road*, the piece has also been championed by Nadav Lev, an extremely gifted performer. I'm delighted to have it recorded again. A two-bar falling phrase of sixteenth notes begins the piece before the tango rhythm – in a way a caricature of one – establishes itself in thick, strummed chords. A quasi-fugal mid-section

departs from the key center before returning to the tango rhythm and progression before concluding in the briefest of codas. The piece has been performed numerous times in the US, Israel and Argentina, and I'm honored to have it recorded here by the wonderfully talented Smaro Gregoriadou."

Estonian composer and professor **René Eespere** (b. 1953) has composed works that are strongly spiritual in nature. His works include vocal music, symphonic pieces, musical plays, chamber works, film scores and children's music. Evi Arujärv writes that "...in René Eespere's music the opposite sides of human existence meet – sincere joy of playing, ritual pathos and world-weariness. That is also evident in the choices of the form of expression: for more than three decades the genres associated with word and message and a concert genre that carries the elements of movement have held a central place in the composer's work." **Tactus spiritus** (touch of spirit, spirituality) is a beautiful and meditative piece. Writing about his score and about the present recording the composer states that: "Music must touch our souls and spirits - sometimes gently, sometimes painfully. Why and for whom do I write music? Probably mostly for myself. Sometimes for joy, sometimes for consolation, perhaps also somehow to justify my existence. Writing music is like entering an irrational world where birth would rather be rebirth, death would not be just final disappearance; where joy is mixed with sadness, sadness is united

with hope. This world is almost like a moment of spiritual touch. If I can express that feeling in music then the audience could perhaps also feel that touch. I wrote *Tactus spiritus* (2012) for my dear friend Argentinian guitarist Esteban Colucci, whose playing has always touched me. The premiere took place on the 28th of April 2012 in Buenos Aires. It makes me very happy that now Smaro Gregoriadou's brilliant rendition of my music has also been recorded."

Rusyn-born and resident of Prague guitarist-composer **Štěpán Rak** (b. 1945) is well-known as a soloist, professor and guitar innovator. He has had great success traveling around the world and sharing his compositions and performances with enthusiastic audiences. Even though he has composed for different instruments and orchestra, most of his works are dedicated to the guitar. In some of these compositions, Rak incorporates humorous elements and references to different styles of music. His **Temptation of the Renaissance** (1992) is one of his most well-known compositions and pays homage to the Renaissance period. It begins with a somewhat nostalgic theme, written in the antique fashion, followed by a number of well-crafted variations that explore the guitar's technical possibilities. Dance elements appear throughout the work.

Smaro Gregoriadou composed **El Aleph** after **Jorge Luis Borges** responding to a commission in 2013 by the Staatliche Hochschule

für Musik Trossingen. The work was premiered in 2014 by Open Source Guitars, the university's guitar ensemble, under the direction of her dear friend and colleague Helmut Oesterreich. The composer writes about her work: "In his most famous compilation of short stories entitled *El Aleph* (1949), the amazing Argentine writer, poet and translator Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) explores great issues of human existence with his unparalleled narrative depth. Immortality, transcendence, limits between reality, allegory and dreams are Borges' common themes. Aleph – "alpha" in Greek, "alif" in Persian and Arabic – is the first letter of the sacred Jewish alphabet. For most ancient civilizations it stands as a symbol of the pure and limitless divinity. In Borges' short



Helmut Oesterreich, conductor

story, Aleph is a unique point into an old cellar, from where all points of space can be seen simultaneously. It is the place where coexist without being intermingled all the places of the universe, as seen under every possible angle from every possible point in space and time. The first movement, *Prism*, is a free canon; it consists of laconic intervallic, melodic, chromatic and rhythmical repeated kernels, and a variety of plucked and percussive textures that intrude progressively denser and denser creating a complex polyphonic canvas of increasing tension. Approaching the climax of this tension one of the players narrates: "Before going into the battle nobody knows who they are...Someone might think of himself as a coward and be brave – and the other way round." The vocal involvement gradually deconstructs the form into the essential elements of its beginnings, generating a serene underlying calmness. The following *Cantus* introduces microscopic sonic entities of discontinuous and agitated character, which, pushed forward by solid sound blocks of plaintive chords, create an undercurrent of nervousness and instability. This is the ground above which the main melody is rising into existence as a distant descendant of a medieval *cantus firmus* or an ancient hymn. The title of movement 3, *Yo, no...* refers to Borges' words: "My flesh may be afraid, I am not..." It expresses a kind of musical and structural emancipation of the thematic material from anything happened until that moment. A fluid syncopated rhythm –a tribute reference actually to the rhythmical tradition of Borges' Latin American

heritage– combines with monotonous chromatic lines that move unvaried till the end."

— **Constantine P. Carambelas-Sgourdas**

OPEN SOURCE GUITARS

Open Source Guitars (OSG) is the ensemble of the Guitar Department at the National University for Music in Trossingen, Germany. OSG was established in 2008 by the group's artistic director, Prof. Michael R. Hampel, and is conducted by Helmut Oesterreich. "Open Source" can be understood in its literal sense: it is a special and receptive ensemble that naturally breaks new ground in many areas of its work. The ensemble, for instance, issues composition commissions to renowned composers and has also been looking for points of contact with artists from other disciplines, such as the installation and performance artist Thomas Putze and the sculptor Pablo Wendel. The ensemble's numerous concerts have been enthusiastically received by audiences and critics alike. Together with David Tanenbaum, one of the most important American guitarists, OSG has re-recorded the classic "Electric Counterpoint" by Steve Reich. Another highlight was an extensive concert tour in Brazil in 2012. OSG was the only music ensemble to be included in the IQF (*Innovations und Qualitätsfonds*), the state-supported program for innovative and excellent projects at universities and colleges in Baden-Württemberg in 2012. Members of OSG in 2014: Robert Menczel, György Michelberger, Martin

Schäfer, Marius Schnurr, David Heieck, Nadia Hagenauer-Wild, Carola Gehrung, Matthias Arbter, Chaehong Lim, Alexander Ptitsyn, and Kaspar Stoll. Conductor: Helmut Oesterreich

SMARO GREGORIADOU

www.smarogregoriadou.com

Greek guitar virtuoso and composer **Smaro Gregoriadou** is attempting a redefinition of the classical guitar's sound and technique through her "reinventing guitar" project based on the Kertsopoulos Aesthetics platform of inventions. Introduced in 2009, her innovative artistic and pedagogical approach has since generated enthusiastic response worldwide. As the eminent American critic Raymond Tuttle put it: "Gregoriadou's 'reinventions' are leaving the standard classical guitar and modern tuning behind, at least for the time being ... In her own way, Gregoriadou evokes musicians such as Vladimir Horowitz, Glenn Gould, and Wanda Landowska in her willingness—her need, really—to find a new way to express herself and to reanimate the music, without letting innovation become an end in itself." (*Fanfare*, Nov/Dec 2012.)

Smaro Gregoriadou has studied with distinguished and inspiring contemporary musicians and composers, including pianist-conductor George Hadjinikos, guitarists George Kertsopoulos, Jesus Castro-Balbi, Paul Galbraith and Roberto Aussel as well as

composers George Sioras, Theodore Antoniou and Dinos Konstandinidis. She has been awarded a Senior Exhibitioner Scholarship to continue her postgraduate classical guitar studies with Carlos Bonnel at the Royal College of Music, London. She has also won numerous international music awards both for composition and solo guitar interpretation, including the "Gina Bachauer Soloist



Prize 2013." As a guitar soloist, she has appeared in Europe, Russia, Canada, Australia and the United States and has collaborated with major Greek and other orchestras abroad, as well as chamber music groups. Her compositions have been premiered by ALEA III (Boston), Ensemble Octandre (Bologna), Helsinki Chamber Ensemble, and the Open Source Guitars (Trossingen), and she has also received commissions from several artistic institutions including Biennale Rome, the Trossingen University of Music and the Athens Byzantine and Christian Museum.

Today she devotes her time mainly to solo guitar performance, music composition and teaching – as well as conducting classical guitar workshops and multidisciplinary artistic projects worldwide. She is a member of the Greek ISCM (Greek Composers Union). Her two highly acclaimed CD albums, *Smaro Gregoriadou: Reinventing Guitar, Volumes 1 and 2* (DE 3398, DE 3419) were released in 2009 and 2012 by Delos. Her composition *Balkan Dances for Solo Guitar* was published in 2011 by Brandon Music Ltd.

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(707) 996-3844 • Fax (707) 320-0600 • (800) 364-0645
contactus@delosmusic.com • www.delosmusic.com
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DE 3398



DE 3419