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Xenakis: Electronic Music by Iannis Xenakis (review)

Robert Coburn

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DISCS

XENAKIS: ELECTRONIC MUSIC

by Iannis Xenakis. Electronic Music Foundation, Albany, NY, 1999. <<http://www.emf.org>>. EMF CD 003.

Reviewed by Robert Coburn, Conservatory Computer Studio for Music Composition, Conservatory of Music, University of the Pacific, Stockton, CA 95211, U.S.A. E-mail: <rcoburn@jarl.cs.uop.edu>

The Electronic Music Foundation (EMF) was begun in 1994 by Joel Chadabe and others as a resource for the dissemination of electroacoustic, computer and other forms of new music. From its beginnings as an on-line source for hard-to-find recordings, it has grown to be one of the most important sources for a variety of information on new musical expression.

Recently the EMF has moved beyond selling recordings to producing a series of compact discs on its own label. One of the first of these is a recording of the electronic works of one of the most significant and unique voices in twentieth century music, Iannis Xenakis.

For many years the electronic music of Iannis Xenakis was available only on an out-of-print Nonesuch recording. This new compact disc reissues several of the works from this earlier recording and introduces some more recent pieces. With works dating from 1957 to 1992, it provides a notable retrospective of electronic music from Xenakis's long compositional involvement with technology.

In the well-written (although minutely printed) liner notes, Makis Solomis categorizes the pieces by technical approach into four periods, of which three are represented on this disc. The first includes those works pro-

duced at the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM): *Diamorphoses*, *Concret PH*, *Orient-Occident* and *Bohor*. These are by far the best known of Xenakis's electronic works and present a wonderful view of his unique approach to *musique concrete*. The compositional techniques used in these works parallel Xenakis's approach to acoustic works from the same time and give each of these pieces a flavor all its own. *Orient-Occident*, perhaps the most easily approached by a listener, was written for the film by Enrico Fulchignoni and is recognized as a masterpiece of early electronic music. Of the four GRM works, *Concret PH* has long been a favorite of mine. Xenakis mixed fragments of the sound of smoldering coals—the single sound source of the piece—to produce a highly evocative world of constantly varying and infinitesimally detailed clouds of sound.

Of the later pieces, *Hibiki-Hana-Ma* (1970) and *S.709* (1992) represent, respectively, the music Xenakis composed for his polytopes and compositions done most recently with the GENDYN system. The polytopes were constructions for which Xenakis realized a complete fusion of art forms. First composed as a work for 12 separate tracks, the current recording of *Hibiki-Hana-Ma* presents a stereo version of this highly spatial piece. (This might be a fine candidate for the five-channel surround of the new DVD medium.)

The GENDYN program realizes Xenakis's goal of creating a system for composition that simultaneously produces the micro- and macro-structure of the work from the composer's specific input. In this program there is no differentiation between synthesis and compositional structure. As stated in the notes, "The program consists of an algorithm which explores stochastic timbre more thoroughly than ever before, resulting in a waveform which then evolves constantly through the introduction of 'polygonal variations' with the help of probability procedures."

Xenakis has done more than any other musician to unite the creative act of composition with the calculations of mathematical structures and processes.

The works represented on this CD comprise a remarkable example of the success of this synthesis of music and mathematics. Highly unique and listenable, *Xenakis: Electronic Music* will challenge and satisfy the listener who wishes for an experience beyond the norm.

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE
MUSIC

by Komar & Melamid and Dave Soldier. New York, NY: Dia Center for the Arts, 1997.

Reviewed by Clive Bell, 1 Clyde Circus, London N15 4LF, U.K.

Reading the results of Komar & Melamid's "Music Survey" made me realize I had made some bad career choices at an early age. The two instruments that I play, the flute and the accordion, are both among the "Most Disliked Instruments." In fact, the accordion, at a whopping 13%, is right up there with the bagpipe at the top of the unpopularity poll. Maybe I should have asked around before taking these major decisions as a youngster. It is clear from these figures that I should have taken up guitar or piano (23% and 22% Most Liked), or even cello (in third place at 8%). But surely you have to trust your own intuition and principles. You cannot just base everything on what the general public thinks. Or can you?

Soviet émigrés Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid have enlisted composer Dave Soldier for their latest market research-based art project, a hilarious pairing on

Reviews Panel: Fred Andersson, Rudolf Arnheim, Wilfred Arnold, Eva Belik Firebaugh, Andreas Broeckmann, Sean Cubitt, Shawn Decker, Tim Druckrey, Michele Emmer, Josh Firebaugh, George Gessert, Thom Gillespie, Tony Green, István Hargittai, Paul Hertz, Rahma Khazam, Richard Kade, Douglas Kahn, Nathalie Lafforgue, Patrick Lambelet, Michael Leggett, Michael Mosher, Axel Mulder, Kevin Murray, Frieder Nake, Jack Ox, Robert Pepperell, René van Peer, Clifford Pickover, Harry Rand, Sonya Rapoport, Kasey Rios Asberry, Edward Shanken, Rhonda Roland Sheaver, Yvonne Spielmann, Barbara Lee Williams, Stephen Wilson, Arthur Woods. Advisors: Roy Ascott, Annick Bureau, Marc Battier, Curtis E.A. Karmou, David Topper, Nic Collins. **Corresponding Editors:** Roy Behrens, Molly Hankwitz, Bulat M. Galeev.

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