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## White ghost dancing (Works by Ross Edwards)

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Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra  
*White Ghost Dancing* (Works by Ross Edwards)  
ABC Classics 476 227-0

Reviewed by Michael Hannan

The Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Richard Mills has produced a very high standard recording of six of Ross Edwards' orchestral works, five from the 1990s and one from the 1970s. The performances of the orchestra and the soloist (guitarist Karin Schaupp) are excellent, as are Mills' interpretations of these remarkable pieces of music.

In particular, the performance of *Mountain Village in a Clearing Mist* (1973) is revelatory. This work marks the end of Edwards' complexist modernist period and the beginning of an approach to composition characterised by simplicity and the creative contemplation of the sounds and rhythms of nature. Yet in contrast to Edwards' subsequent music it has many remnants of an earlier era such as the use of dissonant Messiaen-like chords. What makes this piece different are the extremely static textures, the exquisite obsession with the details of timbre and timbre combinations, and the distinctive way in which Edwards assembles the sonic ingredients. There is a real sense of the simulation of the intermittent but overlapping rhythms of bird, insect and frog calls. This unique aspect of the composition is brilliantly realised in the performance.

All the other works on the CD come from a period when Edwards' style of composing had been consolidated into a number of distinct approaches. One is a form of ecstatic modalism which has some similarities with the music of Arvo Pärt. Both *Veni Creator Spiritus* (1993) and the "Chorale" from *Enyato I* (1993) explore austere textures made from simple modal melodies, drones and deliciously intense modal harmonic clashes. The listener is invited to meditate upon the deeply resonant quality of the sounds produced.

The other type of music is Edwards' *maninya* style, consisting of repetitive dance-like constructions that Edwards claims are also inspired by the rhythms of nature. The *maninya* style is a feature of *White Ghost Dancing* (1999), the outer movements of *Concerto for Guitar and Strings* (1995) and the "Ecstatic Dance" movement from *Enyato I*. In fact, the *maninya* sound which emerged in the 1980s is what makes Edwards' music particularly recognisable to the ear. However one might also argue that it has become formulaic. Admittedly over the years Edwards has produced many subtle variants of the *maninya* style but I would like to see the idiom develop in more radical ways.

This opinion, by the way, is a minor gripe. This CD is outstanding value. It provides a good selection of Ross Edwards' orchestral music, and is an excellent vehicle for the talents of the TSO, Karin Schaupp (a Freedman Fellowship winner) and Richard Mills.

