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Shadow dances (Slava Grigoryan plays works by Nigel Westlade)

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Shadow Dances: Music for Guitar by Nigel Westlake
Slava Grigoryan
ABC Classics 476 5744

Slava Grigoryan continues his impressive career as a performer of new music with this diverse collection of Nigel Westlake's chamber and orchestral music using guitar.

Hinchinbrook Riffs for guitar and digital delay, inspired by the Queensland tropical Hinchinbrook Island, is a hypnotic piece based around repeated melodic decorations over a slowly evolving progression of chords. The digital delay element adds to the mesmerizing effect of the texture because every note the guitar plays is heard again 0.6 seconds later. To make the texture work the performer has to play strictly in time at 100 beats per minute. It is a device used for decades in popular music recording but it also works well to enhance the textural range of the solo performer. Grigoryan carries it off flawlessly.

Jovian Moon for guitar and piano is a set of responses to the extraordinary images of the moons of Jupiter captured by the Voyager space missions in the late 1970s. The icy crusted Ganymede is reflected in cold and austere textures dominated by upper register piano figurations and ostinato patterns for the guitar. The smooth surface of Europa is represented with a flowing regular interlocking of piano and guitar parts. Oddly Callisto which is the iciest planet of them all is given the warmest treatment while Io, the most volcanically active, is suitably the most energetic. The whole piece relies for its musical language too much on the diminished scale (an alternation of semitones and tones), although the explorations are inventive. Piano and classical guitar are an odd combination and difficult to keep in a happy balance. Grigoryan and Michael Kieran Harvey tackle the challenge in a masterly way.

Much of *Songs from the Forest* for two guitars and double bass, like *Hinchinbrook Riffs*, has groove based rhythmic textures with clear influences from Latin, jazz and fusion styles. *Flying Fish* is probably the most unusual piece on the CD employing the two classical guitars, dobro (resonator) guitar and a twelve string guitar. It too has strong groove elements through exploration of interlocking patterns between the four instruments.

The chamber music is balanced by the inclusion of two orchestral works involving guitar. *Shadow Dances* is the most abstract of the works presented here. At the outset it explores orchestral textures and colorations in the Debussy tradition and also acts as a vehicle for guitar figuration virtuosity. I'm not convinced the marriage between orchestra and guitar is always effective although the faster and more energized second part of the piece works better in this respect.

Antarctica is a spin-off from one of Westlake's IMAX screen scoring projects. In the first movement, "The Last Place on Earth", after some static elements designed to project the isolation of this frozen continent, there are some full orchestra chordal passages representing its grandeur. The movement settles down into a solo guitar

meditation before developing some contrasting rhythmically energetic sections. The musical language of the second movement, "Wooden Ships" is very tonal and filmic. In the third movement, "Penguin Ballet", there are obvious elements designed to capture the physical movements, often comic, of this remarkable bird. To finish "The Ice Core/Finale" uses a variety of orchestral strategies and features a guitar cadenza admirably played by Grigoryan.

Shadow Dances contains a great variety of music by Nigel Westlake, works that are all excellent vehicles for Slava Grigoryan's similarly impressive versatility. Highly recommended.