

*A
Healing
Fire*



SMARO GREGORIADOU

Bach, Britten, Gubaidulina, Hétu

DE 3582



A Healing Fire

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Bach, Britten, Gubaidulina, Hétu

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

VIOLIN SONATA NO. 2 BWV 1003 (23:05)

Grave • Fuga • Andante • Allegro

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

NOCTURNAL AFTER JOHN DOWLAND, Op. 70 (17:27)

Sofia Gubaidulina (1931-)

SERENADE (3:05)

Jacques Hétu (1938-2010)

SUITE POUR GUITARE, Op. 41 (15:34)

Prélude • Nocturne • Ballade • Rêverie • Final

All works arr. Gregoriadou

Total Playing Time: 59:10



A Healing Fire

SMARO GREGORIADOU
plays music of Bach, Britten, Gubaidulina, Hétu

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in A minor, BWV 1003 (23:05)

1. Grave (3:54)
2. Fuga (8:02)
3. Andante (4:52)
4. Allegro (6:18)

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913-1976)

5. Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op. 70 (17:27)

- i. Musingly (Meditativo) • ii. Very agitated (Molto agitato) • iii. Restless (Inquieto)
- iv. Uneasy (Ansioso) • v. March-like (Quasi una Marcia) • vi. Dreaming (Sognante)
- vii. Gently rocking (Cullante) • viii. Passacaglia • Slow and quiet (Molto tranquillo)

SOFIA GUBAIDULINA (1931-)

6. Serenade for solo guitar (3:06)

JACQUES HÉTU (1938-2010)

Suite pour guitare, Op. 41 (15:34)

7. Prélude (1:28)
8. Nocturne (3:44)
9. Ballade (4:08)
10. Rêverie (2:21)
11. Final (3:53)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 59:10

All works arr. Gregoriadou for high-tuned pedal guitar in scalloped frets (tracks 1-4, page 10) and classical pedal guitar (tracks 5-11, page 9) of Kertsopoulos Aesthetics.

Beneath the surface... burn many fires...
Empedocles

The compositions in this collection offer encouragement and hope against today's dystopia and chaos; they explore spirituality, self-knowledge and transcendence, illuminating dark and ambiguous regions of the human psyche with a different kind of light, a different sort of fire. They are conduits for catharsis, an escape from conflicts, antinomy and traumas this world torments us with. From Bach's ecstatic Credo to Gubaidulina's submersion into the most transparent awareness prayer can bring; and from Hétu's suspended scream to Britten's self-absorbing surrender to Sleep and Nothingness, these towering masterpieces are, above all, essays on the mystical, reflections of the sacred!

Bach's Sonatas and Partitas — or *Sei Solo a Violino senza Basso accompagnato*, as he titled them — represent an undeniable summit in the violin's repertory. They have offered fertile soil for arrangements and transcriptions to such masters as Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms and Busoni; and they have served as archetypes for the composition of new music by later generations of composers, including Ysaÿe, Bartók, Gerhard and Gubaidulina. In all available sources, Bach appears to delib-

erately stress the lack of accompaniment by a continuo instrument, which would normally provide harmonic elaboration. This is a groundbreaking innovation for the standards of the era. Although unaccompanied works for the violin already existed prior to Bach's collection (those by Biber and Westhoff, for example), the *Sei Solo* exhibit — among many other virtues — Bach's unparalleled skill in extracting true polyphony out of a monophonic instrument, adding to the works' splendor and fullness.

The *Sonatas* consist of four movements in the typical slow-fast pattern of the *sonata da chiesa* form. As in all sequential forms, the movements chain themselves to each other through a powerful bond of flow and continuity, each being nurtured by the preceding one and feeding the one that follows. **Violin Sonata No. 2 in A minor BWV 1003** opens with a rhapsodic *Grave*, essentially a bassline-structured prelude that navigates through highly contrasting harmonies and rhythms showcasing the emotional potential of the minor mode and preparing the ground for the *Fuga*. In this masterpiece of conception and compositional realization, strict contrapuntal passages intertwine with episodes in an exquisite *concertante* style featuring Bach's inventiveness at its best. The *Andante* echoes the fugue's determination to leave

every doubt behind and keeps moving forward at a steady pace of unbroken eighth-notes in the manner of Vivaldi, while a smooth but assertive melody expands our horizon and promises release. The *Allegro*, splendidly exploiting the momentum, adopts the mesmerizing inner action of a *moto perpetuo* to celebrate the triumph of faith over spiritual death, a typical notion in Bach's entire corpus: *Absorpta est mors in Victoria! Death is swallowed up in victory!* (Corinthians 15:54)



*Come, heavy Sleep, the image of true
Death;
And close up these my weary weeping
eyes;
Whose spring of tears doth stop my vital
breath,
And tears my heart with Sorrow's sigh-
swoll'n cries.
Come and possess my tired thought-worn
soul,
That living dies, till thou on me be stole.*

Benjamin Britten's Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op. 70 (1963) was written for Julian Bream and consists of a set of variations on *Come, heavy Sleep*, No. 20 of Dowland's *First Book of Songs or Ayres of Four Parts*, published in 1597. The last of five remarkable works with gui-

tar that Benjamin Britten composed over a decade, *Nocturnal* represents organic aspects of the composer's identity: his determining influence from early English music, particularly Dowland and Purcell; his passionate commitment to revitalize early vocal forms and transmute them in new contexts; and his melancholic obsessions with Dream, Sleep and Death as stages of his existential pursuit.

Nocturnal marks the beginning of Britten's final phase of composition, dominated by purity, transcendence, and, in his own words, an effort "to clarify, to refine, to sensitize...to tear all the waste away." In Op. 70, Britten deploys bitonality as an agent of harmonic and tonal ambiguity (even concealment) that probably hints at hidden themes and acute private conflicts. Moreover, he uses the remarkable innovation of the reverse variation format (as he did in *Lachrymae, Op. 48* and *Cello Suite No. 3, Op. 87*): Dowland's theme appears at the end of the piece, after eight masterly variations that emanate like branches or omens from the very core of it. In the last variation, a three-part passacaglia that is truly apocalyptic in terms of dramaturgy and emotional intensity, the persistent ostinato ground fights against boldly contrasting thematic material. This creates a highly charged sonorous environment that urges for release, expiation and for-

givenness: a perfect threshold for Dowland's meditative theme to appear!

But Britten's real *tour de force* is the exemplary way he exploits the expressive power of textual-based musical rhetoric and channels it into different means, instrumental combinations and timbre entities — here for solo guitar! In *Nocturnal*, Britten establishes a stable, rhetorically infused ground for the creation of a "song without words"; or, as I conceive it, a song in which the unuttered words generate a hidden undercurrent of constantly fermenting active and receptive energies that determine the emotional contour of each variation. In *Nocturnal*, the central theme of Sleep is being gorgeously transformed into a silent zone of forgetfulness or mystical withdrawal; a delicate existential line between noise and silence, life and death; a dreamlike region where neither life nor death exist independently, if they exist at all!



Sofia Gubaidulina is one of the most important composers alive today. Devoutly religious, Tatar and Russian Orthodox, she belongs to the generation of "unofficial" composers of the 1960s and 1970s (including Schnittke and Pärt) that came to prominence as the Soviet system gradually lost

its grip on power through the 1980s. Gubaidulina ingeniously juxtaposes Russian and Central Asian regional styles with the most contemporary Western avant-garde techniques. In her own words: "There are composers who construct their works very consciously, but I am one of those who instead 'cultivate' their works. And this is why the entire world as I perceive it forms more or less the roots of a tree, and the work which grows out of it represents the branches and leaves. One can call them new, but they are nonetheless leaves, and from this point of view they are always traditional, old."

Gubaidulina's sonorous universe is underpinned by sophisticated mathematical procedures, polytonality, rigidly rooted rhythms, strikingly colorful timbres and instrumentations. Like Bach, she expresses exalted joy and light via brutally contrasting dark and unsettling sonorities that can impact radically the listener's inner world. She has written: "I am a religious person, and by 'religion' I mean re-ligio, the re-tying of a bond...restoring the legato of life. Life divides man into many pieces. There is no weightier occupation than the re-composition of spiritual integrity through the composition of music."

Gubaidulina's output for guitar is very small but significant. **Serenade** (1960)

is a solo piece of her youth. Chromatic motives unfold amidst polarities of dissonance-consonance, restlessness-serenity and, like in Britten's *Nocturnal*, tonal ambiguity. The soloist surrenders into the subtleties of tone and ascends chromatically to the guitar's higher range until a therapeutic G major chord is finally reached. The chromatic scale, also fervently used by Bach in the Fuga of the *Sonata BWV 1003*, is a typical symbol of spiritual uplift at the cost of self-sacrifice.



While the great Shostakovich had encouraged the young Gubaidulina "to be herself," the prominent French-Canadian composer and teacher **Jacques Hétu** received this prophetic advice from his professor, Henri Dutilleux: "You already know your calling!" For Hétu, this "calling" was for independence, for liberation from any ties! "What is essential," he wrote, "is not to look for some novel way of arranging sounds but to find your own way of thinking about music." Hétu was a self-styled neo-Romantic composer who used neoclassical forms in a modern musical language; but, like Bach, Britten and Gubaidulina, he never rejected the tradition from which this modernity emerged. His entire compositional style was marked by the gradual abandonment of serial tech-

niques in favor of using the chromatic and octatonic scales. His refusal to write what he called "du Boulez" cost him the support of the modern-music establishment and a painful ostracism. But at the same time it saved him from serious compromises. "I continue to advance on the path that I have chosen," he wrote in 1996, "aware of being perceived as a rather solitary hiker; but I love this creative solitude."

Hétu composed four significant guitar works: *Suite, Op. 41* (1986) and *Intermezzo, Op. 80* (2008) for solo guitar, *Concerto for Guitar and String Orchestra, Op. 56* (1994) and *Concerto for Two Guitars and Orchestra, Op. 77* (2007). The **Suite pour guitare, Op. 41**, commissioned and premiered by Alvaro Pierri, was conceived as a succession of poetic scenes. In Hétu's words, "It utilizes simple and rigorous forms whose unity is ensured by harmonic and melodic constants, the privileged melodic intervals being the major third and the perfect fourth, the sonority type being the major triad with an added augmented fifth."

The opening *Prélude* offers a determined arpeggio that orbits around E, pointing directly (both as form and function) to Bach's pattern-preludes. *Nocturne* (a free canon) and *Ballade* (a scherzo) are stunning peaks in the instrument's repertoire. Their almost exclusive, pervasive use of Messiaen's 2nd

mode of limited transposition (C \sharp , D, E, F, G, A \flat , B \flat , B \natural) evokes wonderfully the sonorous landscapes of Stravinsky, Bartók, Messiaen and Scriabin (especially his magnificent *Piano Sonata No. 6*). The *Rêverie*, like a short recitative, releases the extremely condensed emotional gravity of the *Ballade* and ushers in the *Final*, a *moto perpetuo* that oscillates uneasily around several tonic centers until it finally reaches an E major chord with an added minor sixth, one of Hétu's most fulfilling harmonic "constants." The *Suite* exhibits an irresistible lyricism. "Without adhering to any schools or 'sect' in particular, I am first and foremost a melodist," Hétu wrote. And, as evident in Op. 41, it is mainly in the melodic interactions between the colliding musical cells and voices of his fascinating music that he finds essence, inspiration, appeasement.

INSTRUMENTS: Listeners of my Delos discography are probably familiar with the way I approach guitar sound and timbre as a whole—and baroque transcriptions in particular (the *Reinventing Guitar* project.) In this album I continue to exploit Kertsopoulos Aesthetics, a versatile platform of innovations offering a tremendous variety of instruments, string materials, acoustic applications and tuning ranges for the entire spectrum of repertory. The *Violin Sonata No. 2 BWV 1003*

in A minor (tracks 1-4) that Bach himself transcribed in D minor for the harpsichord (BWV 964), is performed in D minor on a high-tuned guitar with two pedal mechanisms and scalloped frets (page 10), offering a distinct coloration particularly relevant to the brilliant, dry and clear timbre of the harpsichord. It is tuned five semitones higher than standard guitar tuning, thus approaching the frequency range of the original instrument, violin. As for the contemporary compositions (tracks 5-11,) given their diverse needs in sound, style, technique and expression, they are performed on a classical guitar in standard tuning with a single pedal mechanism (page 9), adding dramatic depth and tone subtlety.

— Smaro Gregoriadou
Athens, 2020



Classical pedal
guitar of
Kertsopoulos
Aesthetics
(tracks 5-11)

High-tuned pedal
guitar in scalloped
frets of Kertsopoulos
Aesthetics
(tracks 1-4)



Greek guitar virtuoso and composer **Smaro Gregoriadou** attempts a redefinition of the classical guitar's sound and technique through the *Reinventing Guitar* project she introduced in 2009, based on Kertsopoulos Aesthetics' platform of inventions. Her innovative approach to interpretation has 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 Horowitz, Gould, and 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 has studied with distinguished specialists of our time, including pianist-conductor George Hadjinikos, guitarists George Kertsopoulos, Jesus Castro-Balbi, Paul Galbraith and Roberto Aussel; also, composers George Sioras, Theodore Antoniou and Dinos Konstandinidis. She was awarded a Senior Exhibitioner Scholarship to continue her postgraduate guitar studies with Carlos Bonnel at the Royal College of Music, London. She won numerous international awards both for composition and solo guitar interpretation. She has appeared as soloist in Europe, Russia, Canada,

the USA, Australia and China, and collaborated with major orchestras and chamber music groups in Greece and abroad. Her compositions have been premiered and commissioned by important artistic institutions and ensembles worldwide, including ALEAIII, Ensemble Octandre, Helsinki Chamber Ensemble, Open Source Guitars, Biennale Rome, Trossingen University of Music, Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, and many others. She is a member of the Greek ISCM (Greek Composers Union.)

Today Smaro devotes her time mainly to solo guitar performance, music composition and teaching—as well as conducting solo and ensemble classical guitar workshops and multi-disciplinary artistic projects titled "Inclusive Interpretation and Functional Technique." Her three highly acclaimed albums, *Reinventing Guitar, Vols. I and II* (DE3398, DE3419) and *El Aleph* (DE3490) were released by Delos in 2009, 2012 and 2016. Her 2019 album *Sequences* (AN ART AAAR006) consists of original compositions for solo guitar by Greek composer Nikos Athanassakis in their first world presentation. Smaro's transcriptions for classical guitar are published by Reinventing Guitar Editions.

www.smarogregoriadou.com

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Delos Co-Executive Producers: Carol Rosenberger and Mark Abel

Engineer: Nikos Arkomanis

Delos Mastering Engineer: Matthew Snyder

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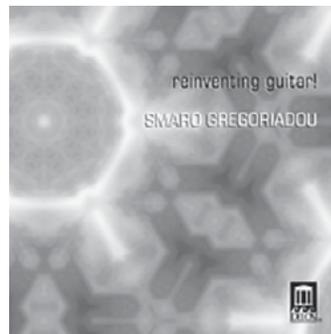
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Smaro Gregoriadou wishes to express special thanks to Mark Abel

Also available



Reinventing Guitar
DE 3398



Reinventing Guitar II
DE 3419



El Aleph
DE 3490

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(707) 996-3844 • (800) 364-0645
contactus@delosmusic.com • www.delosmusic.com



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