

## Iannis Xenakis □ – Music For Strings (2005)

Written by bluesever

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- 1 *Syrmos for 18 strings* (1959) 12:04 Cello – Cecile Tacier, Maike Reisener Double Bass – Caroline Menke, John Eckhardt  
Violin – Andreas Paff, Florian Mausbach, Hyun-Jung Kim, Kamila Namyslowska, Susanne Zapf
- 2 *Aroura for 12 strings* (1971) 11:05 Cello – Inga Raab
- 3 *Voile for 20 strings* (1995) 5:06 Cello – Inga Raab, Ruslan Vilensky Double Bass – John Eckhardt Violin – Andreas Paff, Wolfgang Bender
- 4 *Theraps for solo contrabass* (1975-76) 13:45  
Double Bass – John Eckhardt
- 5 *Analogique A+B for 9 strings & tape* (1959) 6:46  
Cello – Inga Raab, Ruslan Vilensky Double Bass – John Eckhardt, Tobias Grove
- 6 *Ittidra for string sextet* (1996) (8:42)  
Viola – Sophie Bansac Ensemble Resonanz Johannes Kalitzke – conductor

This CD brings together all of Xenakis' chamber music for strings for the first time (with the exception of the string quartets). The music spans almost 30 years.

- These visceral, sonically bold works explore the many possibilities of writing for strings, including howling glissandi, clustered pizzicatos and tremelos, the clatter of bouncing bows, and a rich palette of dynamics and color.

- The anarchic character of *Syrmos* alienated Xenakis from the traditional as well as the Darmstadt avant-garde of the 1950s, where it was felt that this music paid no heed to conventional harmony, counterpoint and musical theories -- and even required players to "do violence" to their instruments!

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- Performances are by Ensemble Resonanz, one of Germany's leading string ensembles. They are devoted to works of the 20th and 21st centuries, as well as juxtaposing these with a specialty to early music.

Unlike most of his avant-garde contemporaries, Iannis Xenakis did not avoid using strings. And, as Michael Struck-Schloen points out in his informative booklet-note, string timbre provided a direct aural equivalent to the graphic depictions of sound Xenakis used as an alternative to conventional notation. The procedure is vividly demonstrated by *Syrmos* (1959), with the listener compelled to find a path through dense but exhilarating thickets of tone. It could have been written last year, let alone half a century ago - whereas *Analogique A+B* (1959) feels wholly of its time, with neither the string component nor its electronic transformation arresting enough to make the amalgam more than a technical exercise.

One of Xenakis's achievements was in evoking a recognizable (though never traditional) sonic context, against which sound could express itself in directly musical terms. Thus we get the Homeric landscape of *Arouta* (1971) with its heightened interaction between violent gestures and an even more intense silence, and the transcendental virtuosity of *Theraps* (1976) - its succession of powerful images redefining the double-bass persona. While not lacking impact, the final piece reflects the creative impasses Xenakis arguably had reached by his last decade. The pungent chordal sonorities of *Voiles* (1995) and intricate layers of sound compromising *Ittidra* (1996) feel arrested in time: defiant more out of desperation than conviction.

Much to respond to, then, in these assured performances by Ensemble Resonanz (John Eckhardt a bassist of stature), recorded with an ideal combination of clarity and spaciousness. How about a second disc of string music to feature *Shaar*, Xenakis's masterpiece in the medium? --- Richard Whitehouse, Gramophone, September 2006

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