

Reviews

DIMITRI VOUDOURIS **NPFAI.1/Palmos/NPFAI.3/Praxis - Pogus**

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A South African composer of Greek birth, Voudouris is interested in the "research of cognitive psycho-acoustic behavioral patterns in humans and the behavior of sound in relationship to continued environmental changes". Don't let the composer's difficult description fool you into thinking about some kind of cerebral pretentiousness, though, as this album contains instead four magnificent examples of his approach, music that's always challenging and, in many of its expressions, of extraordinary beauty. "NPFAI" stands for "New Possibilities For African Instrument"; the two namesake pieces are electroacoustic studies, one for kundi and m'bira, the other for African marimba. In both cases, Voudouris processes the instrumental sources via computer to originate soundscapes that mix the "percussive and organic" sonic environments generated by these fascinating textures. An extremely individual character comes out of these experiments, which produce hundreds of separated aural events that nevertheless find their unique place in the air once they're out of the speakers, finally spreading like an indivisible whole; the properties of the main instruments are soon forgotten in favour of a multidirectional modification of our sense of belonging to the very music. "Palmos", for Hammond organ, oboe and bandoneon, is a wonderful pseudo-static, ever-morphing halo of interacting overtones; Voudouris states that "consciousness itself is a vibration pattern" and I take my hat off to him for two reasons: one, he's the first artist who confirms what I've always believed and two, the awesome radiance of this piece, which really throws us into an ocean of doubts without a clue about the relationships between safe mental harbors and the perennial fear of the unknown. "Praxis" makes great use of a Christian Orthodox Greek male choir (computer processed, too), ending the disc with the most heterogeneous offer, a cross of mournful recollections and radical experimentation that will put many contemporary acousmatic composers under the threat of sounding surpassed. Sepulchral lamentations and modified pitches, obtained from a damaged recording of the memorial services for the Croatian genocides held in 1999 in Sofiatown, Johannesburg, work much better as a means of protest than a million words.

MASSIMO RICCI [March 2007]

History of Avantgarde Music

<http://www.scaruffi.com/service/about.html>

<http://www.scaruffi.com/avant/voudouri.html>

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Dimitri Voudouris (Greece, 1961), based in South Africa, founded "Unyazi", the first electronic music festival in the African continent.

NPFAI.1/PALMOS/NPFAI.3/PRAXIS (Pogus, 2006) collects four of his electro-acoustic pieces: *NPFAI 1* for kundi harp, mbira piano and computer; the 33-minute droning sonata *Palmos* for Hammond organ, oboe, bandoneon and digital processing; *NPFAI 3* for marimba and computer; *PRAXIS* for male choir, tape and computer. Each one explored different facets of sound, using the computer to create a focus for the listener. Basically, Voudouris' post-processing hijacks the mind of the listener so that it will listen to specific aspects of the sound and not to what would normally be its center of attention. In a sense, it also hijacks African music, by turning its traditional instruments into sources of emotions that are antithetical to the original spirit.

PIERRO SCARUFFI [Feb 2007]

Recipient of an NMC AWARD FOR MUSIC TASTE

Neural Media Art [Italy]

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http://www.neural.it/sound/2007/03/dimitri_voudouris_npfai1palmosnpfai3praxis.phtml

Dimitri Voudouris is Greek, long time Johannesburg citizen, chemist, electroacoustic composer, and founder of Unyazi first African electronic music festival. He's not new to digital audio and multimedia experiments, with researches innervated with a specific attention to contemporary social and cultural phenomena. The outcome is notably vivid, considering the peculiar geographical origin that makes immaterial approaches less likely there as well as relaxed relationships with technology. He records as Npfai.1 (New Possibilities For African Instrument) and digitally processes the traditional m'bira (a.k.a. kalimba) and kundi sonorities. Kundi is a sort of ritual harp, able to articulate spaced atmospheres, loosely glitched, never too synthetically or naturally typified, directly avoiding certain improvised exoticism. There are looped tonalities, drones and harmonic tone colors deleting the non-audible frequencies in 'Palmos', a flat but extremely suggestive composition, listed just before NPFAI.3, weighed on the use of a tenor marimba that loses its percussive nature through a granular amalgam and synthetic textures. Praxis is the last track where an Orthodox male choir peeps from meticulously divided, spaced out sounds, minimally modulated in frequencies.

AURELIO CIANCIOTTA [March 2007]

The Wire [UK]

Adventures In Modern Music

Issue 278 - *soundcheck*

Dimitri Voudouris was born in Athens in 1961 and now lives in South African. He began composing in the 90s for acoustic instruments, electronic sound sources and multimedia including dance and theatre. Now he is taking African materials as the basis for electroacoustic composition. *NPFAI.1* [New possibilities for African Instruments 1] is a piece for kundi and m'bira [finger piano] with computer assisted processing. The kundi is a bowed harp originating from the Congo. *NPFAI.3* uses African tenor marimba in a Xhosa Just Intonation tuning, processed using granular and subtractive synthesis, while *Palmos* features Hammond organ, oboe and bandoneon and use subtractive synthesis to enhance certain inaudible frequencies to an audible level. The use of organ carries reminiscences of Terry Riley's early work in its purity of intention and tonal qualities. *Praxis* is a four channel tape piece using a recording of a Greek Orthodox male choir, which builds on the distorted nature of the sound source into the composition in a way that disorients the listener. But the African-directed pieces are more attractive the originality of Voudouris's compositions lies in the sound sources-an attempt to draw on African music in the service of Western art music's often academic environment of electroacoustic compositions. The problem remains that he doesn't weld this material into a really convincing unified composition. But even though his work doesn't show the mastery of composers such as Jonathan Harvey and Trevor Wishart, Vodouris's work is never less than engaging.

ANDY HAMILTON [April 2007]

The Living Composers Project

<http://composers21.com/>

It is remarkable that Voudouris's music, despite its rather mathematical and/or scientific methodology, sounds completely organic. I could relate to his terminology "artificially organic", because that is what our society demands, but at the same time I am not sure that it applies entirely to what he invents. I applaud his effort to create pieces which are not merely "soundtracks"; on the contrary, these are works which demand total attention. Congratulations!

DAN ALBERTSON [March 2007]

Paris Transatlantic Magazine

Global coverage of New Music

http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/monthly2007/04ap_text.html#10

Dimitri Voudouris was born in Athens in 1961 but relocated to South Africa quite early on, where he studied pharmacy, science of religion, philosophy and sociocultural anthropology (whatever that is). He came to composition quite late, it seems (in the 90s), and describes his approach as being based on "research of cognitive psycho-acoustic behavioral patterns in humans" – though I dare say that would apply to just about any composer, whether s/he realised it or not. *NPFAI.1* – that stands for "New Possibilities For African Instruments" – comes with a rather dry, detailed set of notes explaining how the sounds of a *kundi* (bowed harp) and an *m'bira* (thumb piano) are processed into 15 different sonic layers, manipulated and recombined. There's also a forbidding-looking diagram of the "sound field construction" which is well nigh impossible to understand without a powerful magnifying glass, but presumably designed to impress, as if the music wasn't impressive enough. *NPFAI.3* gets busy with the sounds of a tenor marimba (tuned in Xhosa just intonation in case you're interested), applying granular, algorithmic and subtractive sound synthesis to end up with 13'30" of intriguing swoops and squiggles. To what extent it triggers archetypal images and thought patterns in accordance with the composer's Jungian intentions depends, I guess, on how closely you listen. *Palmos* is slower, longer (33'34" in fact) and easier to get lost in, weaving sounds sourced from a Hammond organ, an oboe and a bandoneon into a rich and carefully worked texture of great precision and beauty. But the best is saved until last: *Praxis* commemorates what Voudouris describes – alarmingly – as the Croatian genocide (the Croatians' systematic victimization of Orthodox Christians during the recent war), processing recordings of an Orthodox church service in Johannesburg into no fewer than 556 "sound compartments" which combine considerable complexity with real affective power. It's this kind of mixture of serious science and raw emotion that we associate with another famous Greek exile, Iannis Xenakis, and *Praxis* could stand alongside any of Xenakis' electronic works with pride.

DAN WALBURTON [April 2007]

Tokafi : Discover New Music

www.tokafi.com

Dimitri was born in 1961 in Greece, and lives, works, creates, and operates from South Africa. His music, to get to the point immediately, is highly intellectual in its conception and extremely technical. He drives this fact to the extreme by pointing out his techniques in detail in the booklet, that accompanies the CD. There are even graphical designs to explain his sound field constructions. Let me just quote what he wrote: '...the natures of percussive sounds and organic environments created were from frequencies generated by the decomposition of the original sound source in the process of obtaining continuous sounds out of discontinued ones, as there is a logarithmic relationship between the increase in density and perception... ..as we examine ever smaller particles of matter - people made of cells, made of molecules, made of atoms, made of protons/electrons, made of quarks, etc. - we eventually reach a state of reality where the smallest particles, when broken further, do not yield smaller particles which we can put names on, but rather a universal energy matrix of relationships of vibration patterns... ..these procedures were not to defamiliarize the sound of the instrument but rather to explore the deeper analogies of organic identity in the construction of micro sound environments, focusing on capturing the physical properties of the instrument and its organic sound textures...'

So far, so good, and while you follow me reading this review, excuse me for trying to elaborate on this in more common language and more oriented on what these sounds have done for my feelings and my individual experience, instead of going on talking in the language of science. So, remember what you have read before, when I quoted Dimitri Voudouris: What do we learn from his explanations? Do we really need this type of information? Do we, people who like sounds and sound-created atmospheres and the ever new temptations of the boundaries of music and sound, need to indulge in the process of creating such music? Before I answer this question, let me provide you with further information, very essential to your final assessment of my question. The first track is called NPFAI.1. The abbreviation stands for New Possibilities for African Instruments. Those instruments are the kundi and the m'bira, traditional instruments, the first being a bowed harp, most commonly used as a ceremonial instrument. The m'bira, also known as kalimba, is a finger piano, build from wood and equipped with metal strips. The sound of these traditional, quite rudimentary instruments is changed by the computer, manipulating the sounds so far that even their basic characteristics have been altered, thus producing a new quality. The same technique is implied by Dimitri, when he uses a Hammond organ, an oboe and a bandoneon on Palmos, the African marimba on NPFAI.3 or an

very divergent feelings. While I actually had the expectation to hear and be a witness of the marriage of traditional African instruments with modern technique, there was a certain degree of disappointment. Reason being, the sounds of the traditional instruments were altered in a way, that I, for the most part of the composition, couldn't even distinguish their emissions from those generated by the computer. It all sounded electronic. Whether or not this was the intention of the composer, I really can't say. The same thing happened to me when listening to the second track, Palmos, and also with the third, NPFAI.3. The music, generally calming and peaceful,

not very diverse and yet precise and well worked out in its detail, couldn't establish the connection between traditional instruments, not even the relatively modern ones among them (as in Pالموس). Although I enjoyed the sounds, they didn't keep the promise made by the waterfall of information, that almost drowned me. An exception, however, is the last track, called Praxis. (Is the title really a coincidence??) This is an almost overwhelming piece of composition, that caught all of my attention, sharpening my ears and allowed me experience exactly what I had missed before: Here, the music does not serve the purpose of theoretical hoopla, but of honest, living and true experience. Here, the connection between the centuries in musical development has been made in an almost ingenious way: The computer doesn't reign in a dictatorial way, but assists and interprets as an equal, a medium to help improve the overall theme. Sounds are accomplished and produced that create a fascinating adventure, that captivates from the first to the last note. I will even go so far as to say, that this piece may well revolutionize the experimental scene and serve as a beacon for future developments. For this piece alone, I can only advise you to buy this CD. **Fred M. Wheeler [May 2007]**

INDEPENDENT ELECTRONIC MUSIC

<http://iem.nigilist.ru/en/getreview.html?id=4280>

Dimitri Voudouris is greek-born composer living in South Africa. In 2005, he organized the first ever festival of electronic music on African continent, which took place at the University of Witswatersrand in Johannesburg Voudouris is the strong follower of socio-cultural behaviorism in music - his interests are formed around interaction of psychoacoustics and environmental transformations in application to soundfield. His music is dealing a lot with media and technologies, history of contemporary music, evolution of compositionary thought. In his works we can hear acoustic instruments and electronic sound sources as well, but theoretical base is very close to technical specification. For example, in "Implo" piece the field recordings of wild world are combined with TV commercials in quite unusual way. This particular album is named after four long pieces contained here, and they all have common feature developed in computer-processed traditional instruments - some of them are traditional (oboe, bandoneon, electro-organ), others are coming from african cultures (mbira, kundi, marimba etc). In the last piece "Praxis", even the male choir of greek orthodox church was used as source material, defragmented and arranged in barely recognizable context. Very abstract and mind-challenging piece of work, focused on soundscaping and personal approach to the left-field artifacts, what means another step aside from the traditional harmony to the alien tapestry of textures and timbral mysteries.

Dmitry Vasilyev [31 March 2007]

La Folia Online music review

<http://www.lafolia.com/archive/covell/covell200706ea5.html>

Born in Greece but now working in South Africa, Voudouris' leisurely progressing pieces raise the image of delicate giants. In **NPFAI.1** (New Possibilities for African Instruments), we hear the kundi and m'bira and an African marimba in **NPFAI.3**. Suggestions of Schaeffer's early foolery at concrète's infancy commingle with eerie Tudor landscapes as Voudouris filters percussive sounds through his digital sandbox. **Palmos** is an unhurried exploration of sinusoidal contours. Working with fewer source materials, **NPFAI.3** deftly organizes clever and engaging episodes. There's much to admire in these pieces. I hear **Praxis**, which uses choir and computer processing, as the clear winner. **Praxis'** source is an inadvertently damaged tape of an Eastern Rite memorial service in Johannesburg commemorating victims of the mid-1990s Croatian genocide. Distorted voices, bells and speech whirl through a work neither sanctimonious nor apocalyptic, but heartfelt and compassionate. **Grant Chu Covell**

Chain D.L.K

<http://www.chaindlk.com/reviews/?id=4563>.<br

Another great work on Pogus, this time it's Dimitri Voudouris' turn, he's a composer hailing from Greece and this collection features four pieces of his music composed between 2002 and 2004. Even if that's to be taken with a grain of salt the sound of this release in someways joins Un Caddie and Chris Brown But let's see exactly what I mean speaking about the singular tracks. NPFAI.1 takes some traditional African instruments like kalimbas is decomposed with the use of computer assisted processing that despite the work of layering you may notice and of which he speaks in the line notes of the booklet you're not gonna have a wall of sound but a thin, silent work instead. In NPFAI.3 (which stands for New Possibilities For African Instruments) the central instrument in the process is the marimba: a prepared marimba and he reported also how he has changed the pitch of the instruments and why. While the atmosphere is not that far from the opening track, this one I less silent and deals much more with tradition in someway maybe just for the fact Voudouris intentionally reinterpret it immersing himself into a sort of Jungian search of archetypes. In describing Palmos the composer speaks about the discovery of a sound environment that is alien and familiar at the same time and it makes sense above all if you reflect on the fact he's the same person that mentioned Jung. Who better than Current 93, but above all Nurse With Wound, vivified Jungian conceptions in music? Well, imagine this Greek composer as the academic and more abstract answer to that anarchic abstraction and keep in mind the use of African instruments bring the sound back to the origin of our culture. In Palmos we float in that nowhere-land where past and present get mixed up in a chaotic limbo, but in this work everything is not magmatic and quasi industrial, weird to write it but it's true, but c'mon! that's the real point, sacred and profane sometimes can be so fucking close. According to what I've read this composer: "bases his technical and theoretical compositional approach in research of cognitive psycho-acoustic behavioral patterns in humans and the behavior of sound in relationship to continued environmental changes. His socio-cultural interests have led him to research the survival of music in the 21st century and the impact that media and technology have on the composer." It all makes it even more interesting, but the fact alone this came out on Pogus it's enough to think cclassify it as "intriguing". **Andrea Ferraris [July 2008]**

EARLABS

<http://www.earlabs.org/release/review.asp?reviewID=910>

A nice disc enables the listener (including the reviewer) to get acquainted with the music of the South African Greek (or Greek South African). It's a pleasant experience.

Greek composer Voudouris graduated at the University of Witwatersrand (ZA). He started composing in the 90s. Cognitive psycho-acoustic behavioural patterns and the behaviour of sound in relationship to continued environmental changes play a major role in his composition.

They deliver the building blocks for Voudouris' compositions. In 2003 Voudouris became director of electronic music for an organisation that promotes contemporary new music in South Africa.

The disc starts with NPFAI.1 (New Possibilities for African Instruments), an electro-acoustic composition for kundi and m'bira with computer assisted processing. It is a perfect example to get into the right mood for Voudouris works. The booklet shows the 'score' for this work: a rasterized scheme full of blocks and lines, notated with great detail. Those who are familiar with the African instruments will recognize the originals through the granulations, the roll-ons and -offs. This granulation is the building block with which Voudouris constructs his composition.

Second is Palmos. A oboe, hammond organ and a bandoneon, instruments with rich overtones, each play for 33 minutes. Through filtering some overtones are allowed into the mix whereas others are kept away. Lasting 33 minutes, this composition really takes its time to develop. As a listener you need to take your time for this. Voudouris handles the listener's attention span quite well, though. With these minimal instrumentation he is able to constantly grab the listener by collar and move him along.

NPFAI.3 is the third composition and one would expect to hear a similarity in composition. But that is not really the case. The instrumentation is different (marimba) and the structural approach is not as continuous and fluent as NPFAI.1 but also has its more cluster-like moments. Which is more to my personal liking, btw. I like this better because the pauses between these clusters allow me to reflect on what I have just heard. Which is harder when the sound just continues in a more or less even manner.

Final track is Praxis. The basic material consists of a tape with the recording of a Greek orthodox choir singing at a memorial service in remembrance of the victims of (Voudouris' own words) Croatian genocide on the Christian orthodox people during the mid 90s. The liner notes show Voudouris's indignation and this is perfectly reflected in the music itself. The vocal elements are for the most part recognizable but totally deconstructed from the sounds of a traditional mass into an electronic mass with haunting parts, very rich metaphors, interesting development and movement in the structure.

Whereas Palmos is quite strong from a conceptual point of view (both in concept and elaboration) and NPFAI.3 is a very entertaining investigation into the sonic potential of the Marimba, I think Praxis is, sonically, the best part of the disc.

Jos Smolders 23/01/2009

MonkMinkPinkPunk

<http://ronsen.org/monkminkpinkpunk/17/voudouris.html>

“NPFAL.1 / Palmos / NPFAL.2 / Praxis” CD ([Pogus](#))

Greek-born, Johannesburg-residing composer Dimitri Voudouris uses the computer to transform acoustic instruments to great effect on these four pieces. The highlight is the half-an-hour long “Palmos” which mixes the overtones of a Hammond organ, an oboe and the bandoneon (a South American accordion) into a lovely, waverly drone of gentle swirling effects and insect-like chirps. At times sounding like a lost organ work by Scelsi or Legiti, or an electronic work from the Touch label, I hear new things within this work on each listen, and I've listened to this piece many times. From the liner notes:

“Consciousness itself is a vibration pattern and it is these vibration patterns that through our subconscious state of mind give one the experience of being in a sound environment that is alien and familiar at the same time.”

“Praxis” uses a damaged tape recording of a church choir, memorializing the Greek Orthodox victims of the 1990's Yugoslav wars, creating a dramatic and cryptic soundscape of twisted vocal sounds. These sounds, some muffled as if emerging from a cave, others broken down to shushes and groans of agony, resemble the sprawling multimedia pieces of Kenneth Gaburo. The confusion between what was (the church service as recorded) and now what is (Voudouris' reconstructions) mimics my personal confusion surrounding the ethnic/religious/national wars of that time. Voudouris writes of distortion in historical and religious senses. Like “Palmos,” this remains interesting after multiple listens. The two “New Possibilities for African Instruments” originate from recordings of m'bira (thumb piano), kundi (bowed harp) and marimba and are processed by computer. The points at which one can recognize the source instruments are the weakest, as they suffer from a particular dull equalization from the computer, but the sections of truly new sound transformations are interesting and enjoyable. Both pieces move episodically between these two poles of more and less recognizable material.

review by Josh Ronsen