

The latest recording offering by Smaro Gregoriadou, with works by Bach, Britten, Gubaidulina and Hétu

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The distinguished guitarist **Smaro Gregoriadou** is a special case among classical guitarists, in that she never stops exploring new sonic and technical possibilities of her instrument due to her inexhaustible love for research -- an ability that does not decrease but intensifies over time. Her constant companion is her guitar teacher **George Kertsopoulos** (b. 1952). Kertsopoulos, a student of the unforgettable guitarist and Professor **Dimitris Fampas** (1921-1996), has been extensively involved in the construction of musical instruments, mainly guitars; this has given him the opportunity to experiment in depth and proceed to creating instruments that offer new possibilities to their players. Gregoriadou performs and records exclusively with his instruments in her hands.

Even in the difficult circumstances we are all experiencing, the soloist proves that she is firmly and consistently present in the music scene, not only in Greece but also internationally. Gregoriadou recently recorded a new album, her fourth release by Delos, the American label based in Sonoma, California.

The album, bearing the meaningful and significant title *A Healing Fire*, hosts music from two eras; one composer is from the baroque and the other three are contemporary -- two of whom are even from the 21st century. All the works are arranged by the soloist herself, allowing the space and freedom to add her individual interpretive touches!

The program opens with a guitar arrangement of *Violin Sonata II, in A minor, BWV 1003*, by **Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750). Gregoriadou performs the introductory part, *Grave*, with the required contemplative mood, then proceeds to the second movement, *Fuga*, where she illuminates the Bachian polyphony with classical clarity and care. She grafts with emotion the third part, *Andante*, and her finger flexibility and energy stand out in the fourth movement, *Allegro*.

Next, Gregoriadou explores *Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op. 70*, by **Benjamin Britten** (1913-1976), completed in 1963 for the leading and recently deceased guitarist and lute player **Julian Bream** (1933-2020). The latter premiered the piece on June 12, 1964 at the Aldeburgh Festival. We should not forget that thanks to Bream, the guitar repertory of the 20th century was enriched with numerous valuable works. He had the perspicacity, readiness and foresight to prompt and inspire great composers of his time -- William Walton, Michael Tippett, Richard Rodney Bennett, Malcolm Arnold, Alan Rawsthorne, Lennox Berkeley and Hans Werner Henze, to name just a few -- to write music for the guitar, an instrument completely special and indeed inaccessible to anyone who does not know its secrets well.

Britten's *Nocturnal* is based on a theme from the wonderful song *Come, heavy Sleep*, taken from the *First Book of Songs or Ayres of Four Parts*, a collection of 21 songs for voice and lute, published in 1597 by the remarkable English (or Irish) Renaissance composer **John Dowland** (1563-1626). Gregoriadou unfolds with deliberation and immediacy the eight variations and the

theme (which appears not at the beginning as usual, but at the end of the work.) She handles the rhythmic alternations and harmonic transformations of the parts in full attention, while never failing to underline the distinctive character of each.

The contemporary Russian composer **Sofia Gubaidulina** (b. 1931) has proven her love for the classical guitar by writing four works to date: *Serenade* (1960), *Toccata* (c. 1969), *Repentance* (2008), *Sotto Voce* (2010, revised in 2013). From these, Gregoriadou chooses the first, a fruit of the composer's youth, offering a reading that gains in atmospheric disposition and lyricism.

The album is sealed with the *Suite pour guitare, Op. 41*, by the distinctive Canadian composer and university professor **Jacques Hétu** (1938-2010). Hétu, like Gubaidulina, has dedicated four scores to the guitar: *Suite, Op. 41* (1986), *Intermezzo, Op. 80* (2008), Concerto for Guitar and String Orchestra, *Op. 56* (1994), and Concerto for Two Guitars and Orchestra, *Op. 77* (2007). The Suite's dreamy mood (first movement, *Prélude*), inner calmness (second movement, *Nocturne*), apocalyptic narrative (third movement, *Ballade*), illusiveness (fourth movement, *Rêverie*) and virtuosity (fifth movement, *Final*) are showcased under the fingers of Gregoriadou, who is able to listen to the subtlety of Hétu's gentle thoughts, and colors every musical phrase with sensual pervasiveness, while exploring the different universes of sonic shades.

A disc of psychic stimulation, a suggestion for hope. A Healing Fire.