

Gurdjieff - Ex Oriente (2019)

Written by bluesever

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01 Sayyid Chant and Dance (30.III.1926) 4'22 02 As if the Stormy Years had Passed 4'03
03 The Bokharian Dervish, Hadji-Asvatz-Troov 4'45 04 Prayer 2'43 05 Sayyid Chant and
Dance (22.V.1926) 6'48 06 When Gafar and Zeinab walk in a somnambulistic state 4'34 07
Sayyid Chant and Dance (undated) 5'10 08 Tibetan Dance, Fragment No.6 from 'The
Struggle of the Magicians' 2'10 09 Molto lento e liberamente 2'42 10 Fragment No.4, from
'The Struggle of the Magicians' 4'52 11 The Resurrection of Christ 3'16 12 Méditation 2'21
13 Reading from a Sacred Book 8'11 Electric guitar - Gunter Herbig Arranger - Thomas
de Hartmann, Gunter Herbig

One of the great mystics of the early 20th century, George Ivanovich Gurdjieff was born in Alexandropol on the border of Russian Armenia and Turkey. As a young man, he began to travel east as far as Tibet, Afghanistan and Central Asia, in search of spiritual enlightenment. Visiting ancient temples, Gurdjieff learned from spiritual teachers and absorbed music from all the places he visited. On his return to the West, he gathered a group of followers who were drawn to his charismatic personality.

One of these was the pianist and composer Thomas de Hartmann, and a unique collaboration between de Hartmann and Gurdjieff ensued which would produce well over 300 piano pieces. Gurdjieff would play his melodies on the guitar or the piano and de Hartmann would write them down, harmonize and provide them with minimalistic accompaniments. The guitarist Gunter Herbig came across Gurdjieff's writings and music in his youth. For decades he cherished the idea of transcribing these pieces for his own instrument, but it wasn't until he began to experiment with an electric guitar that he found a way of doing so. ---bis.se

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The idea of playing the music of the mystic G.I. Gurdjieff on an electric guitar might seem to be out in left field, but it works quite well in the hands of guitarist Gunther Herbig. This is partly because some of the music, played by Gurdjieff as part of mystical discussions or rituals, originated with ideas on an acoustic guitar; the music was filled out for piano ("transcribed" is not a sufficient word) by composer Thomas de Hartmann. More than that, though, the electric guitar properly conveys the interior, meditative quality of the music. It needs somehow to live in the present rather than having any antique connotations. The representational matter of Gurdjieff's pieces ranges from Sayyid chant to a Tibetan Dance to The Resurrection of Christ (sample this) to a piece called When Gafar and Zeinab Walk in a Somnambulistic State. Everything is minimalistic in texture and suitably quiet (the guitar is at the bottom of its dynamic range), but evocative in its way. BIS captures Herbig clearly in a New Zealand studio. Certainly what one thinks of Gurdjieff depends on what one thinks of musical mysticism more generally, but this recording is not the pure curiosity it seems to be; it does justice to its material. ---James Manheim, AllMusic Review

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