



***Chamber music by Alexander Balanescu; Maria T.
The Balanescu Quartet including Steve Arguelles***

(percussion).

Produced by Michael J. Dutton.

MUTE : CDSTUMM242 0724386027504



In 1969, in order to escape Nicolae Ceausescu's despotic regime, the Balanescu family fled to Israel. The youthful Romanian violinist (& viola player), Alexander Balanescu, subsequently studied in London and at Julliard. Later, back in Britain, he joined the Arditti Quartet. Eventually however, Alexander decided the majority of Arditti's repertoire simply targeted fellow composers and critics and more recently as both composer and violinist he has strived to bridge the gap between classical and popular music. Highlights of these years have included his collaborations with Kate Bush, the Pet Shop Boys, Spiritualized, Michael Nyman and David Byrne.

In this, his fourth release for Mute, Balanescu turns his attention to his homeland, complementing and incorporating the music of revered Romanian folk singer Maria Tanase (1913-1963).

Like both French chanteuse Edith Piaf and Portugal's 'fado' songstress, Amalia Rodrigues, the Romanian artiste epitomized her homeland. She distinguished herself as a theater and film actress, as an operetta singer and a music hall star. But it's principally as an interpreter of Romanian folk songs that her legacy lives on.

*Tanase played a part in *The Living Dead* by Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi (1945), *Horia* by Mihai Davidoglu (1956), Edmond Audran's operetta *Mascota* (*The Mascot* - 1944) and a starring role in the musical comedy *The Hollywood Sphinx*, by Ralph Benatzky (1946). She had over forty tours in the last fifteen years of her life — including those abroad : in New York — at the *International Exhibition* in 1937 where she sang with Grigoras Dinicus*

Orchestra and in Istanbul (1941) among the chorus line directed by Nicolae Kiritescu and Aurel Maican. There during about 60 shows she presented Romanian folk music and Turkish folk songs learnt on the spot from a strolling player who was also offered the chance to accompany her in the luxurious hall of Taxim.

Tanase recorded her first album a year before at the Columbia Recording Studios in 1936. She continued her cooperation with the same studios and then went on working with the Electrecord Recording Studios. Many of her songs were recorded on tape in the studios of the Romanian Radio and Television Society.

In 1952, Maria was offered a post in the newly created folk song department at the Music School No. 1 in Bucharest and 10 years later she championed Taraful Gorjului (The Gorj Folk Music Band) in Targu Jiu. Tanase was honored with the medals Ordinul Muncii (The Order for Activity), Premiul de Stat (The State Award) and the title Artista Emerita (Honoured Artist of the Republic) in 1957.'

Typically Balanescu sets out with hypnotic minimalist-style rhythmic figurations (e.g. 'Empty Space Dance') and bittersweet melodic strings (e.g. 'The Young Conscript and the Moon'); eventually breaking into captivating Balkan idioms (e.g. 'Turning Wheels'). On four of these tracks Tanase's recorded folk lyrics convey a palpable aura of timelessness. My response to Balanescu's opening 'Spotdance' remains divided, yet the remainder of this 78-minute offering resonates with beguiling, often mystic moods ... alternately ethereal, joyful, and ardent.

In Balanescu's own words – "I use Maria Tanase's actual vocals, combined with live material; for the idea that we can meet somehow with the help of new technology – is really exciting. The core of her art is the fatalistic Romanian folk philosophy, with its central idea of the transience of existence. Ultimately she passed on a message about the transcendence of daily suffering by ordinary people."

Mesmerizing stuff – exquisitely accomplished.

NB : I refolded the CD notes to replace Mute's ghoulish front cover.

Howard Smith © 2005

Track Listing

- 1 SPOTDANCE**
- 2 THE YOUNG CONSCRIPT AND THE MOON**
- 3 EMPTY SPACE DANCE**
- 4 TURNING WHEELS**
- 5 LIFE AND DEATH**
- 6 MOUNTAIN CALL**
- 7 ARIA**
- 8 INTERLUDE**
- 9 LULLABY**
- 10 WINES SO GOOD**
- 11 LULLABY DREAM**

howard smith | 8/120 ngaumutawa rd | masterton 8510 | new zealand |
enigma09@clear.net.nz | www.islamey.com
tel +64 6 377 5136 | cell 027 636 1902