**Ingram Marshall's Dark Florescence: The Music Behind the Story**

**Jackson Braider; edited by Sarah Elzas**

**When guitarist Benjamin Verdery approached Ingram Marshall to write an orchestral piece featuring two guitars, Marshall was hesitant. Or so says Verdery:**

VERDERY: Well, he sort of said, 'well, it's very daunting ... and well, he never says no and he never says yes. It was more like, wow, what will I do?)

But then the **American Composers Orchestra called Marshall for a piece to premiere at Carnegie Hall in New York, and the Gilmore Music Library at Yale commissioned him to compose a musical work to mark the library's fifth anniversary. So, Ingram Marshall set to work.**

> DARK FLORESCENCE MUSIC

**Ingram Marshall has been tagged with many aesthetic labels – minimalist or New Romanticist. He experiments with "concrete" elements -- sounds found in the "real" world that he manipulates and mixes with live performers.**

**For Marshall, music isn't just notes, meter, and harmony -- it also involves, in the purest sense, sounds -- sounds in conjunction, sounds in contrast.**

**In Kingdom Come, for example, the composer brought together the orchestra with an altered tape of a funeral service he had recorded in Croatia. In another, Fog Tropes II, he combined the sound of a fog horn in San Francisco Bay with a string quartet – in the case, the Kronos.**

ACTS: Marshall: Fog Tropes II, Kronos Quartet, Nonesuch CD 79613

**And so it was, inspired by an extravagant blooming of wild flowers he saw up in the California Sierras, Marshall engaged the tonal colors offered by an unusual combination of instruments – an amplified classical guitar, an electric guitar, and a full orchestra – in the creation of his latest piece, Dark Florescence. Composer Ingram Marshall:**

MARSHALL: Its subtitle is Variations for two guitars and orchestra. It's not variations on a theme, it's variations on an idea, a modal idea ...

**He was intrigued by the idea of working the guitars into the fabric of the orchestra. In that sense, it was not going to be a concerto in the style of Beethoven.**

MARSHALL: Well, the idea of a concerto where the solo instruments would be pitted against the orchestra disappeared very quickly from my radar. I just lost interest in that idea quickly, and I realized more and more that I wanted to write a kind of harmonious piece that really blended things together

**But Marshall faced a challenge in how to make the two instruments blend.**

MARSHALL: One was a traditional classical guitar, although amplified and that is very important and the other is an electric guitar, the wonderfully vernacular American instrument ... which has become probably the most heard instrument in all the world's history

**He laughs: concert composers typically don't think in terms like "the most heard instrument in all the world's history." And they don't often imagine writing for rock stars, either. Yet that is exactly what Marshall was expected to do here: take the electric guitar, played by Andy Summers, ex- of the Police, the classical guitar, played by Ben Verdery, and blend with an orchestra until done.**

**(bring up DF, then fade to black)**

**The composer's challenge here? Break the laws of physics. Sound is a very physical thing, and the three musical elements in Marshall's composition work in very different physical environments. Think about it: home for the classical guitar is the quiet little room; the concert hall is where the orchestra plays; as for the electric -- that can split ears as easily in a stadium as in a recording studio.**

ACTS: J.S. BACH, trans. Verdery: Sarabande from Cello Suite no. 6 in D, BWV 1012; GRI Records GRICD 002)

MARSHALL: The classical guitar is a very mellow, quiet, refined, well-behaved, and so beautiful instrument -- you can hear those little strains of -- what's that Tarrega thing? dududud -- you know, those beautiful Spanish things.

**The soothing, well-modulated tones of the classical guitar Marshall describes had almost refined the instrument right out of**

**existence. By 1825, few composers were even bothering to write for it.**

**That's why classical guitarists through the 20th century depended so much on transcriptions. What you're hearing right now is Ben Verdery's own transcription of the sarabande in D major from Bach's sixth cello suite:**

(audio -- classical guitar trax)

(crossfade to Above the World)

MARSHALL: On the other extreme, you know, is the outrageous, loud, kind of out of control, distorting

ACTS: Andy Summers: Above the World, from Earth and Sky, Golden Wire GW 1001-2)

**Whatever kind of sound the electric guitar makes, you almost know it's bound to come out on top. That's why they call it lead guitar-- Andy Summers, Above the World from his album, Earth and Sky.**

**The last element of Marshall's musical puzzle is the orchestra. 80 or 100 players all together on one stage:**

ACTS: Beethoven: Symphony no. 3 in E flat, Allegro; Chicago Symphony, Sir George Solti, London Records

**So, three musical entities which really shouldn't be in the same room at the same time, yet here they are. Two of them are guitars. But here's a funny thing: Marshall doesn't actually know how the guitar works:**

MARSHALL: Peter Scullthorp -- he's actually one of the better known Australian composers. He has written quite a few pieces for guitar and orchestra and for guitar solo for John Williams, who's one of the best-known classical guitarists and also from Australia originally... and in a book... he mentioned being told by John Williams not to try to learn how to play the guitar while he was writing for it. It will just make you write all the old cliches. So I took that as encouragement to go ahead and compose for this instrument about which I knew very little.)

ACTS: Marshall: Soepa, movement 2. Benjamin Verdery, guitar and effects; Mushkatweek Records 002)

MARSHALL:  I think sometimes you get ideas you wouldn't think of otherwise ... I imagine what I want to hear and I write it down and hopefully they can play it and if they can't, they figure out a way to do it or we change it. And that's what happened with Ben. Some of my writing with Ben has really been more of a collaboration than just a one-sided I'm the composer and you're the player.)

**By thinking beyond the inherent sonic limitations of the classical guitar, Ingram Marshall was able to redefine what the instrument could actually do. You can get a sense of this by the choice of synthesizer voices he used when preparing the score of Dark Florescence on the computer in his studio. First his imaginings of the classical guitar:**

(ACTS: from Marshall's studio

**And then as it actually sounded at the premiere in New York:**

(Music)

**As for a synthesized imagining of the electric, Marshall has to search for another file on his computer:**

MARSHALL: Just give me a second ... the woodwinds and mallet instruments are doing this stuff and the electric guitar comes in playing these longer lines, kind of like a cantus firmus to 46:43)

(Music)

**So, while the amplified classical guitar offered a percussive attack and short-lived notes, the sound the composer wanted from the electric demanded sustain. The notes had to endure amid the ruckus of the other instruments.**

**And then there were the sensibilities of the soloists to think about. Early on in the writing of Dark Florescence, Marshall had been speaking with Andy Summers:**

MARSHALL: He told me, sort of casually, well, you know, mate -- he's English, you know, I can just destroy the orchestra with a sweep of the ol' the power of the instrument. So I'm going to let him do that a couple of times ... 5:20 There's a place in the piece where the electric guitar builds these chords up using this looping device and they're very loud and they're going to be very overwhelming, in fact he's going to obliterate the

orchestra)

ACTS: Ingram Marshall: Dark Florescence. American Composers Orchestra, Steven Sloane, cond. Andy Summers, electric guitar; Benjamin Verdery, classical guitar NCA)

**That happens only once. In his vision of a harmonious piece that blends things together, Ingram Marshall generally avoided the extreme characteristics of the two instruments.**

**And that raises one of the more intriguing challenges facing Summers and Verdery: How does a guitarist play with an orchestra?**

**Guitarists are rare guests in the orchestral hall; so, even in the most mundane elements of performance, they have a different sense of how music works. For example, in the matter of rhythm. Andy Summers:**

SUMMERS: The classical or orchestral version of where time is and what the jazz or rock musician or whatever -- but because of the actual the bow pulling across strings, you tend to feel (pause) the time in a slightly different place. It lags. It lags.) (4:17) ... You've got a kind of a three-way thing: Your own idea of phrasing in your own head and time, watching the conductor's minimal hand movements and where the orchestra feels it. So you've got to find a way through the middle of that timewise, which is a real musical thing and very specific which will make it sound good or bad.)

(MUSIC)

**In spite of all we might have expected from this ensemble -- the pretty classical guitar, the roaring electric, the massive orchestra -- Ingram Marshall's Dark Florescence turns our expectations on their heads. demonstrating there can indeed be sonic harmony among very different voices.**

**Which brings us back to the laws of physics – as an old professor once said, they're not just good ideas, they're *laws*. Still, we could do worse than break the regulations of physical space that kept these musical forces of nature apart from each other for far too long.**

**I'm Jackson Braider.**

**Musical samples:**
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Andy Summers: Above the World, from Earth and Sky, Golden Wire GW 1001-2

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