

Mp3 Victoria Jordanova - Harps, Pamela Z - Voices, John Cage's - Postcard From Heaven

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20 ragas, 20 harps, eBows and voices. You dont have to die to go to heaven. Instead, listen to Victoria Jordanova's and Pamela Z's masterful realization of John Cages mysterious "Postcard from Heaven". 10 MP3 Songs CLASSICAL: Contemporary, NEW AGE: Meditation Details: How much of this music is Cage, how much Jordanova? Well, I honestly dont care at all. If this much intriguing, shamanistic beauty and soaring, inward and outward traveling takes off in Jordanovas interpretation of Cages performance instructions, Im with her for the ride, all the way. Ingvar Loco Nordin, Sonoloco Reviews Introduction Imagine twenty harps on a stage The harpists are playing by plucking or bowing the harp strings. Some of the performers are also humming the pitches while they play. This imaginary ensemble is painting in sound the image of a vast sky. The sound takes over. Like the clouds in the sky, various sound textures are appearing and disappearing. They create an impression of stillness and yet they abide to the flow. The heavens depth is defined by many different layers and patterns and colors of clouds. Like clouds in the sky, some sounds are very far away, some a little closer and some very close and clear. The sounds are coming from the various parts and sides of the stage. The ensemble is performing without a conductor. As in any orchestral piece (this is an orchestra of 20 harps), one can hear all instruments playing all at the same time or divide the sound into smaller groups. Sometimes one can hear a soloist. The performers are using a single page as the score. Each performer has three lines of printed music text as the individual part. Each is improvising on one of the 20 ragas written out for them by the composer. They are playing Postcard from Heaven by John Cage. This is somewhat a mythical and mysterious piece. It was written and premiered at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, in 1982 and performed rarely since 1985. It has never been commercially recorded, though performance tapes may exist. Although few have seen the score, including the Cage scholars. Cage fans, and many contemporary composers, most seem to have heard about the piece. In my experience, my mentioning the pieces name always brought out sunny smiles on peoples faces. Technical challenges John Cages instructions: "Three double ragas, double because either part may be used for ascending or descending. One may move from one side to

another of a single raga at transfer points, closed note heads. Where no such note heads exist, separate the use of one side of the raga from the other by silence. The associated numbers of talas on the basis of which phrasing or durations or sounds or silences may be improvised. Improvisation may be melodic and/or percussive. Melodic means proceeding stepwise, leaping only in the opposite direction, following a leap by a step or steps in the opposite direction, continually establishing, that is, the character of the raga. Ornaments are welcome. Percussive means single events preceded and followed by silence, or several events performed repetitively. These may be glissandi (the ragas permitting them); chords and /or single tones; the single tones may be produced conventionally, or with an EBow (electronic means of setting a metallic string into continuous vibration). Dynamics are free. The improvisation may be continuous or interrupted by silences, its total length to be determined by the players. It should begin and end with use of all harpists of the EBow, for a period of between one-tenth and one-sixth of the total time length. Any unintended sounds (clicking of the push button, etc.) are acceptable though not to be sought. Ossia: Hum ppp any one tone of the raga as long as the breath holds continuing after a new breath with the same or another tone of raga. Five pedal arrangements are given. Changes from one to another must be complete, but may take place at any time (during a passage, or between passages)" Although clear and comprehensive, Cages notes still leave the performer with a number of creative musical and technical challenges. What does he mean by raga and tala? Cage writes series of pitches in the form of diatonic pre-sets and calls them ragas. They deserve that name because like those in Indian classical music, they are neither scales nor melodies but rather the combination of the two. (However, Cages ragas are void of the poetic or religious connotation of the Indian ragas. Cage's ragas also do not involve any micro-tonal pitch bends). Cages melodic sequences are at the same time varied: one sequence is similar but clearly different from the other. They are different because each has the precise order of steps, half steps and smaller or larger skips locked within the each raga as its proper tonal structure. Improvising on each of the ragas means creating a metamelody based on the raga itself. In this metamelody, the diatonic sequence of the pitches of the raga must be preserved while playing chords, glissandi, scales, trills, patterns etc. I made a point of emphasizing certain note patterns characteristic for each of Cages ragas. This, according to Indian classical practice, brings out the mode or the flavor of each raga. The other improvisational aspect of the piece is the rhythmic cycle, the tala analog in Indian practice. Cage writes a series of numbers under the staff with each of the ragas. Each number indicates the number of beats

which form a rhythmic cycle. These cycles are to be applied not only to the improvisational metamelodies on the ragas, but also and more importantly to the silences which separate them. Unlike the classic Indian tala, however, the composer does not insist on establishing a certain tempo, only on the number of the pulses within each of the beat cycles. The frequency of the pulses is up to each musician. When playing together, this allows for the chance element to determine the rhythmic texture of the piece, more a layered fabric than a rhythm. The main technical challenge is at the same time the most inspirational: creating the body of sound at the beginning and conclusion of the piece as well as the single sustained pitches by individual performers through the piece. Cage directed that it be produced by an EBow, a small hand-held-electromagnetic device used by electric guitar players to sustain the vibrations of a string. However, to my grave disappointment, I found the EBow did not work well on the harp because of the harp strings are spaced wider than those on the electric guitar, and the composition of the strings is different. So instead of having it custom made to fit harp I created the equivalent of using the EBow by employing live sound processing. I used the volume pedal and a plastic violin bow to create and record sustained sound layers. The volume pedal amplifies the sound after the attack, so that the attack of the note can be avoided all together. Realizing the music The realization of Cages instructions, detailed as they are, nevertheless confronted me with a number of possibilities. From the recording of the separate parts to final mixing and editing. After some self-debate, I accepted the fact that just as translating poetry depends on the translators language, cultural background, style and skill, so does the transformation of score to sound. I decided to be myself. I knew I had to be guided by inspiration in order to bring out the full meaning and scope of both poetic and musical aspects of the piece and Cages music in general. I recorded each of the 20 harp parts as separate track straight into a computer. By looking at the score while recording I was able to avoid mistakes both in terms of pitches and the transfer points from one to the other side of the raga. Then I listened to the previously recorded ragas while recording each new one. Pamela Zs voice was a very important contribution to this project. From my first studying of the Cages score last winter I heard the hums as a salient rather than an optional part of the piece. I asked composer and singer Pamela Z to record the ragas pitches as non vibrato, pianissimo, as long as the breath holds, in both very high and low tessitura utterances. Apart from her exceptional vocal technique it was Pamelas extraordinary musicality that came to full shine in improvising the humming notes. I liked those solo harp and solo voice tracks so much that I could not help but include six of them as separate sub-tracks. I think

that listeners of this CD should be able to get a taste of what an individual raga-improvisation sounds like just as buyers of DVDs can first watch the movie and then later enjoy the Extras section. In the great mix of all of the 20 harp-ragas, (first track on this CD) one can never hear each solo raga as a complete melody. I felt it was worthwhile to include six solo ragas as samples of the building blocks in their own right as the second track. This way, you will be able to hear Cages Postcard from Heaven both thick and also thin. I'd like to thank Glenn Freeman, an outstanding musician, percussionist and producer of Cages music on OGREOGRESS label who inspired me to begin working on this piece. I wish you great pleasure in experiencing John Cages postcard!

Victoria Jordanova San Francisco, October, 2006

Victoria Jordanova is a San Francisco based composer and harpist born in former Yugoslavia. In her compositions for harp she melds experimental techniques and interactive electronics with classical training. Jordanovas chamber music pieces were performed by various ensembles, most notably Bang on a Can All-Stars, Zeitgeist, EAR Unit, and Creative Voices. Jordanova is particularly focused on recording. Her discography includes CRI releases: Requiem for Bosnia and Other Works, The Composer-Performer 40 Years of Discovery, A CRI Fortieth Anniversary Retrospective, Dance to Sleep, Emergency Music, ArpaViva DVD release Panopticon, Innova Recordings Outer Circles etc. She was an Artist in Residence at the Cit Internationale des Arts in Paris, was awarded Langley Fellowship for graduate studies at NY University and the Bogliasco Foundation composers Fellowship, received grants from SFAC and The Spanish Ministry of Culture. Victoria Jordanova is the former faculty of Belgrade Conservatory, New York University and The Greenwich House Music School in New York City. In 2003 Victoria Jordanova established ArpaViva Foundation dedicated to publishing new music and media works. For more information visit victoriajordanova.com

Pamela Z is a San Francisco-based composer/performer and audio artist who works primarily with voice, live electronic processing, and sampling technology. She creates solo works combining operatic bel canto and experimental extended vocal techniques with found percussion objects, spoken word, electronic processing, and a MIDI controller called The BodySynth (which allows her to manipulate sound with physical gestures.) In addition to her solo work, she has composed and recorded scores for dance, theatre, film, and new music chamber ensembles. Her large-scale multi-media works have been presented at Theater Artaud and ODC in San Francisco and at The Kitchen in New York, and her audio works have been presented in exhibitions at the Whitney Museum in New York and the Dizesanmuseum in Cologne. Her multi-media opera Wunderkabinet -

based on the Museum of Jurassic Technology (created in collaboration with Matthew Brubeck and Christina McPhee) has been presented at The LAB Gallery (San Francisco) in 2005 and at REDCAT (Disney Hall, Los Angeles) in 2006. Pamela Z has toured extensively throughout the US, Europe, and Japan. She has performed in numerous festivals including Bang on a Can at Lincoln Center in New York, the Interlink Festival in Japan, the Other Minds Festival in San Francisco, Pina Bausch Tanztheater Festival in Wuppertal, Germany, and La Biennale di Venezia in Italy. She is the recipient of numerous awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Creative Capital Fund, the CalArts Alpert Award in the Arts, the ASCAP Music Award, and the NEA and Japan/US Friendship Commission Fellowship. She holds a music degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder. For more information visit pamelaz.com

The Story Behind this Recording of Postcard from Heaven and New ArpaViva Label As a precocious student of piano, harp and composition at the Belgrade Conservatory of Music and philosophy at the University of Belgrade young Victoria Jordanova got acquainted with the work of John Cage at the American Cultural Center and Library in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. As a matter of policy at the time American cultural institutions in socialist countries focused on the most innovative, avant-garde, daring, experimental, liberating, and creative in contemporary American art to showcase freedom of expression in American society. That approach inspired somewhat different American dream than commonly known one. Young artists and intellectuals were dreaming about a cultural climate that gave birth to Abstract Expressionism, Happenings, Fluxus, Pop Art, Beat poetry, and other wonders they discovered at these libraries, rather than about the economic prosperity of the American middle class. They believed whole United States were Black Mountain College, New School of Social Research, or lower Manhattan. For adolescent Victoria Jordanova it was a fateful day. Her American dream was born, although her American iconic hero was John Cage, not John Wayne. The man who changed forever the way her beloved piano sounded. Who asked audiences to listen to silence (perfectly appropriate for a friend and chess partner of Marcel Duchamp). And finally the man who described his music as a play that is an affirmation of life not an attempt to bring order out of chaos, nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we are living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and desires out of the way and lets it act of its own accord. (Hence his favorite Japanese Zen Buddhist saying *Nichi nichu kore ko nichu* -Every day is a good day.) Yes, he was a prince in that dream. Nevertheless Victoria Jordanova wanted to become a virtuoso harp player. Although, she took an opportunity to go to United States and study music

at Michigan State University, she didn't look for her youthful dream there. She pursued virtuosity as a harpist on French Government fellowship at Paris Conservatory, later also at Moscow Conservatory. She studied with the best teachers in the world, her skills were getting more amazing every day, yet something was missing. She decided it's time to change her approach to music. She moved to Manhattan after she won a fellowship from NYU for graduate studies in Musicology. She was playing contemporary music with NYU Chamber Music Society, she was teaching music, she completed her masters degree, and was settling in the routine of a music teacher's life. Then, few years later in San Francisco by chance (according to Cage that's how most excellent things in life happen) her youthful dream reappeared. She was attending an informal lecture and presentation by New Music composer Donald Swearingen at the (composer/media artist) Randall Packers loft, Pamela Z was there and few other future friends. Their enthusiasm for use of electronics and emerging digital technologies in music making reminded her of the time when her young imagination was set on fire by John Cage. Like if she was trying to make up for the lost time she rushed to attach pickup microphones, digital sound processing devices, digital delay, and all gamut of Rock and Roll pedals to her harp. Her imagination and creativity now fully awakened and her extraordinary musicianship and virtuosity still there her harp became alive. Whole specter of sounds never heard before was being born. Ingeniously she would use all kinds of objects to squeeze out ever more new sounds out of her instruments. She was suddenly living her dream. Unfortunately, as it often happens in life, as Victoria recaptured her dream her former country was living the nightmare, it was dying in a cruel, bloody civil war. The central Yugoslavian Federal Republic of Bosnia and Hercegovina was the site of the worst horrors of war. At the same time an accident happened at the French American School in San Francisco where she was teaching. The piano movers dropped a piano. The piano fell through two flights of stairs and was laying broken in the lowest hallway of the school. Trying to see if there is any life left in the instrument Jordanova played few notes. The sounds coming out of the piano intrigued her, they were different and dark, in line with her feelings. She became obsessed with the sound and decided to record an improvisation dedicated to her beloved now dying old country. She mixed in a layer of harp improvisation and, by chance (not exactly Cagean chance, but still a chance) recorded a child's voice singing an innocent tune during her broken piano performance. The result was published one year later by the CRI label of New York as Requiem for Bosnia and Other Works in addition to Requiem it included several solo harp pieces. Critics were raving about the CD. Jordanova was compared to Mozart,

Verdi, Britten, and Eliot Carter. Tim Page of New York Newsday selected her CD as one of the 10 best classical recordings of the year. Since that time Jordanova had numerous performances in most iconic New Music venues. Her music was performed by ensembles such as Bang on the Can All Stars, California E.A.R. Unit, Zeitgeist etc. She published several CDs of her music that won acclaim of critics and audiences alike. She mastered techniques of digital recording and editing and the craft of the music producer. In the fall of 2005 Jordanova received an e-mail from Glenn Freeman, the producer for OGREOGRESS productions. He asked her if she would be interested in recording John Cage's Postcard from Heaven for 1 or up to 20 harps. The piece was performed only once in Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis in 1982 and was never published as a recording. She was recommended as a person uniquely qualified to accomplish this recording by herself. As she was discussing technical details of production, studying the score and experimenting with techniques recommended by Cage (like use of EBow on harp strings) she didn't recognize the obvious signs immediately. It was Cage, it was a harp, better yet 20 harps, it was a postcard from the Prince of her youth, only seemingly coming more than 20 years late, but actually finding her right at the time when she was ready. It was destiny. Fortunately, it didn't take too long for an intuitive person like Victoria Jordanova to realize that. Jordanova called Glenn Freeman and told him she has to do this on her terms and publish it as a first CD on her new ArpaViva label dedicated to the celebration of new life of old instruments. The new life Cage gave to piano by preparing it, or the new life Jordanova gave her harp by liberating its sound potential with new technologies. Mr. Freeman was delighted. As a true admirer of Cage's work he didn't care who will get the credit as long as Postcard gets recorded and published. After almost a year of work Postcard from Heaven was ready for release. Victoria Jordanova recorded all of the harp parts, her friend Pamela Z contributed performances of all the vocal parts. Jordanova edited and mixed everything by herself controlling every aspect of the production from the beginning to the end. This is the first published recording of the work. The CD 001 in the catalogue of ArpaViva Foundation Inc. This label and this CD are result of a life long dream of one Victoria Jordanova and a homage to one and only John Cage. The story would end here if something else didn't happen. One night not too long ago I had to drive from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Victoria gave me the CD of just finished final mix of Postcard from Heaven and Six Solo Ragas to listen to while I drove, since I didn't have a chance to hear it before. Once on the open road I pushed the play button. The sounds projecting unique sense of space and color filled the car. The

beauty of it surpassed everything I've heard before. Certain spiritual power that sublimated mysticism of Jordanova's Eastern Orthodox heritage, John Cages Zen Buddhist beliefs, and Pamela Zs spiritual background turned the car into the cathedral floating over Highway 5 through the night sky illuminated by millions of stars. I played the CD five more times before Ive reached Los Angeles. The music was only getting more luminous, space larger, and spiritual power more overwhelming, I was in real danger of finding God that night for the first time. Now I know you are thinking Ive got it all wrong. Its all about aesthetics of chance. Cage determined the number of possibilities for each aspect and then used chance to select a particular possibility: the number of possibilities would be related to one or a series of numbers corresponding to the sixty-four hexagrams of the I Ching, or something like that. Or it is just Cages tongue in cheek cultural reference to harp as an instrument²⁰ harps had to be heavenly. Or he was just experimenting with the possibilities of a raga as a form. And you would be right its all there. But, I am telling you, there is much, much more than that in this first recording of Postcard from Heaven, believe me, I know the whole story behind it. Relja Penezic San Francisco October 2006

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