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Stathis Skandalidis Plays Gilbert Isbin, Tern 007

This is the first CD of the very distinctive music for lute composed by the Belgian composer, player and improviser, Gilbert Isbin. The twenty three compositions are played with impressive virtuosity and commitment by Stathis Skandalidis.

The CD opens with two lively and directly appealing pieces, 'All The colour You Bring' and 'Sign' and the album goes on to explore a range of moods. Isbin's individual style is manifest everywhere: in the melodic-but-elusive pieces like 'Weaving', in the attractive and unusual settings of old Flemish songs, in rhythmic

and sinewy pieces like 'Delicate' and finally in the simple and directly emotional, 'Yes Love'.

Gilbert Isbin's musical background is very unusual for someone composing for lute. He came to the lute about seven years ago. Before that he played guitar (amplified classical guitar) as a soloist and in groups, blending different genres: elements of contemporary jazz, world music and contemporary classical music. He has made many CDs including arrangements of the songs of singer-songwriter, Nick Drake.

His interest is in the unique sound of the lute itself, and its musical possibilities as an instrument of today and not as an instrument to be wholly tied down to its historical repertoire. Isbin's individual 'voice' comes from his enthusiasms for jazz, world music, contemporary classical music, and no doubt, many other influences) but now distilled through the medium of the lute. Unlike some other composers for the lute today, he doesn't turn to the traditional lute repertoire as models.

On the other hand, Isbin's music often has a dynamic relationship with popular and non-classical forms of music of today, just as much lute music of the past also had with popular songs and dances. He often has inventive 'vamp'-like figures in his compositions and the driving rhythms in pieces like 'Reunion Dance' are, perhaps, absorptions of world music.

As a performer on the lute Gilbert Isbin sometimes explores improvisation and free improvisation using non-pitched sounds. This aspect of his work is explored on his recent CD, *Recall*, with double bassist Scott Walton. However the solo lute compositions reflect his statement: 'for me the lute demands lyricism . . . a mixture of melancholy and happiness'. In this way, Isbin's lute music is quite different from much of the music for lute associated with the Swedish lute virtuoso, Peter Söderberg. Söderberg has been a determined champion of highly modernist, abstract music that explores unusual sound worlds. Isbin, in contrast, aims to write music that is primarily melodic and which conveys emotion. His compositions are often in the form of a 'journey' with sections melting into contrasting sections and finally returning home. Isbin's pieces usually end with a sort of signature enigmatic closure.

Stathis Skandalidis plays throughout with great conviction and, at times, with stunning virtuosity. The Lute Society are to be congratulated on publishing Gilbert Isbin's lute music, some of it only requiring an 'intermediate' technique and I hope players will be encouraged to play this individual and distinctive music.

Stuart Walsh