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RECORDING REVIEWS

Music from the Ether: Original Works for Theremin. Joseph Schillinger. *Melody* for Theremin and piano. *Mouvement électrique et pathétique* for Theremin and piano. Friedrich Wilckens. *Dance in the Moon* for Theremin and piano. Percy Grainger. *Free Music #1* for four Theremins. Bohuslav Martinů. *Fantasia* for Theremin, oboe, piano, and strings. Isidor Achron. *Improvisation* for Theremin and piano. Lydia Kavina. *Suite* for Theremin and piano. *In the Whims of the Wind* for Theremin, coloratura soprano, and piano. Jorge Antunes. *Mixolydia* for Theremin and tape. Vladimir Komarov. *Voice of the Theremin* for Theremin and tape. Lydia Kavina, Theremin. Joshua Pierce, piano. Elizabeth Parcels, coloratura soprano. Carol Eaton Elowe, piano. Kristen Fox, oboe. Portland String Quartet (Stephen Kecskemethy and Roland Lantz, violins; Julia Adams, viola; Paul Ross, cello). Liner notes by Olivia Mattis. (Translated into German by Sabine Feisst. Translated into French by Martine Jore.) 1999. Mode Records 76.

Music from the Ether is one of the few available discs employing the Theremin, and the most representative collection to date of art music written exclusively for the instrument. However, the importance of the disc is not only due to this fact, but because it symbolizes the significant role that the Theremin had in expanding the horizons of twentieth-century American music, preempting all other electronic instruments and becoming the standard method of producing electronic sound until the advent of the transistor in the late 1960s. Many forward-thinking people were intrigued by the new sounds made possible by electronic technology and predicted that this revolutionary instrument would change the course of music forever. Indeed it did! The Theremin brought electronic music into every household in America and captured the imagination of a nation—the optimism of 1930s Americana. Yet, as a performing instrument the Theremin failed to capture the attention of leading composers (perhaps because of its exclusive single-note homophonic

melodic character) and was never widely accepted by the public as a viable alternative to its acoustic cousins.

The Theremin was invented in 1917 by the Russian physicist Lev Sergeevich Termen (1896–1993) (later Leon Theremin). It was first shown to the public at the 1920 Moscow Industrial Fair and patented in 1921 under the name *Ætherphone*. The U. S. patent was granted for “Thereminvox” in 1928. Theremin invented a host of other bizarre musical instruments including the “Rythmicon,” devices and prototypes such as the first color television, gadgets like alarm systems for banks and prisons (used on Devils Island and in Sing Sing Penitentiary), antikidnap devices to protect infants in their cradles, espionage equipment such as the “Buran” (an eavesdropping device with which he supervised the Soviet bugging of American embassies throughout World War II and the Cold War), and pioneered methods for cleaning up noisy audio recordings. In the late 1920s and 1930s between 500 and 1,000 Theremin instruments were produced by RCA, manufactured by General Electric and Westinghouse. The instrument is like no other in existence in that it is played without being touched. The Theremin is a 3½-foot tall, three- or four-legged wooden radio/gramophone cabinet with two protruding antennas (one controlling pitch and the other volume) that supply a magnetic field that varies when the performer’s hands approach the instrument. The Theremin, then, is a space-controlled variable-pitch oscillator, that is, an instrument that is operated by moving toward the vertical antenna to raise the pitch, and coming within reach of the horizontal loop to lower the volume. The output is a monophonic continuous tone modulated by the performer, resembling a fixed timbre string sound (akin to violin or cello).

Leon Theremin came to America in 1927 as part of diplomatic efforts to promote a new USSR image (which had had Russia pictured as technologically backwards and condemned to political downfall). Theremin had previously performed his invention (initially called the “Termenvox”) in Russia, including a private appearance at the request of Lenin in the Kremlin. Then, during his European tour he appeared in Paris (Grand Opera House), Germany, and in England (Royal Albert Hall). The tour had made him a famous personality, having been praised by scientist Einstein, writers Hauptmann and Shaw, as well as musicians Ravel, Respighi, and Walter. While en route to America in 1927 aboard the celebrated steamship *Magestic*, he was subjected to telegraphed offers requesting demonstration-lectures (in excess of \$5,000 per appearance). Once in America he stirred a great fascination on behalf of American enterprises and firms, as well as keen interest by New York’s high society (including the Astors, Fairbanks, Fords, Rosens, and Vanderbilts) and artistic elite (among them Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, Josef Hofmann, Fritz Kreisler, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and Arturo Toscanini), from whom he extracted monies to continue his experiments. He immediately found financial success, bought a Cadillac, and engaged in a ninety-nine-year rental of a five-story house on 54th Street where he organized musical and choreographic studios. His laboratory was outfitted with a variety of electronic audio devices, electronic lighting devices, electronic dance platform, and a prototype color television—which in the late twenties would have seemed like a science-fiction fantasy come to life. In his studio he established and led

ensembles, coached Theremin students (such as Lucie Bigelow Rosen), offered public lectures, and worked on musico-scientific problems that eventually realized the compositional and artistic intentions of Henry Cowell, Joseph Schillinger, Leopold Stokowski, Edgard Varèse, and abstract filmmaker Mary Ellen Bute, to name but a few. In America, he conducted appearances at major venues such as the Metropolitan Opera and Carnegie Hall. Theremin surrounded himself with others, such as Schillinger (who taught music analysis and composition in his studio), who aided in the scientific study of musical phenomenon employing modern electrical instruments—most of which Theremin himself had invented. Visitors to Theremin's studio included George Gershwin, Jascha Heifetz, and Yehudi Menuhin. Theremin became an overnight millionaire and found himself within the inner circle of the Fords, DuPonts, Morgans, and Rockefellers. His main source of income was the Tele-touch Corporation, a firm specializing in producing original alarm systems, which according to his specifications could be activated by a change in the reflectance of a light beam to a hidden photocell. Theremin quickly rose to become *the* advisor to an ever-widening range of clientele. He had a number of small talks in his studio with the then-obscure Dwight Eisenhower, as well as exchanges with an undistinguished military expert Leslie R. Groves (who later supervised the atomic Manhattan Project).

While *Leon* was "romanced" by a host of American intelligence agencies, *Lev Sergeyevich* was subjected to weekly "visits" from Soviet embassy personnel wearing gray hats (which took place at a shabby café on Fifth Avenue). He was not sure if counterspy services suspected him, but he was confident that his secret activities were harmless, and that his legal life was of benefit to America. There is a question as to why the FBI did not disclose him, as Theremin publicly combined concerts with multimillion-dollar business affairs and intelligence missions. He emphasized that his firms and studios were created in accordance with the Soviet government. Perhaps by mutual consent of all agencies involved, or by his own personal request, Theremin was kidnapped from his New York studio and forcefully escorted by the NKVD to communist Russia in 1938. He disappeared from his young wife of three months (Lavana Williams, a ballerina with the First American Negro Ballet), his studio, a triumphantly successful million-dollar empire, and the free world, for over fifty years.

Theremin was not met with a hero's welcome, nor were there excited crowds and the journalists he had become so accustomed to meeting while in America. Upon his return to the Motherland, Theremin became a victim of Stalinism and the Cold War. He was imprisoned in Magadan (a notorious Siberian labor camp), thrown into a gulag, and sent to a sharashka in Tosk (a secret KGB research institute and laboratory in which scientists worked under house arrest), where among other projects he worked on remote-controlled aircraft and systems for tracking ships behind enemy lines. There were newspaper reports in the West that Theremin had been tried and executed for crimes against the State. He remarried in 1947, continued work with the KGB until 1964, and then was named Professor of Acoustics at the Moscow Conservatory. As a result of the embarrassment caused by an article in the *New York Times* claiming that Professor Theremin was in fact alive and living in Mos-

cow, he was stripped from his academic ties and sentenced to retire as an obscure technician. Termen was eventually allowed to leave Russia in 1989, and at the age of 93 entered the United States for a last time in 1991. While he had not been aware of the great impact his work in electronics had had on American society and American music, he was bestowed the honor of receiving the distinguished Centennial Medal at Stanford University in recognition for his contributions to electrical technology and music science. In 1993 Termen died in Moscow at age ninety-seven. The authoritative Theremin story was first aired in a 1994 BBC documentary by Steven M. Martin (*Theremin: An Electric Odyssey*, Orion Home Video, 1995), and compiled by American composer Albert Vincent Glinsky (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1992; published in 2000 as *Theremin: Ether Music and Espionage* by the University of Illinois Press).

Lydia Kavina (b. 1967, Moscow) is one of the few active professional Thereminists in the world. She is the second and last of the original student protégés of Termen himself—following in the footsteps of the great Russian virtuoso Clara Rockmore (1911–98), who dated Termen while in her teens and exclusively performed on the instrument between 1934 and 1954. (Rockmore's recording, *The Art of the Theremin*, was issued on Delos CD 1014 in 1987.) Kavina began studying with Termen (her grand-uncle) at age nine, made her stage debut at fourteen, concertized in Europe during her teens, and went on to study at the Tchaikovsky State Conservatory, completing both undergraduate (1992) and postgraduate studies (1997) in composition. She is a lecturer at the Theremin Centre for Electro-acoustic Music at the Moscow State Conservatory. As a Thereminist she appeared as a guest artist on several labels (such as SERVIsound, Humba Records, and ACT) and in a full solo concert (*Lydia Kavina: Concerto per Theremin; Live in Italy*, recorded in June 1998 in Castelbianco, Italy, and issued in 2000 on Teleura T-CDA-0001).

The Theremin repertoire is extremely small and remains mostly unheard (until the current disc). Theremin music is mostly in the hands of private collectors and museums. In the 1940s and 1950s the instrument was used for sound effects in Hollywood movies such as *It Came from Outer Space* and *The Delicate Delinquent*, as well as in scores composed by Robert Emmett Dolan (*Lady in the Dark*), Ferde Grofé (*Rocketship X-M*), Bernard Herrmann (*The Day the Earth Stood Still*), Miklós Rózsa (*Spellbound*, *The Lost Weekend*, and *The Red House*), Max Steiner (*King Kong*), Oliver Wallace (*Alice in Wonderland*), Franz Waxman (*The Bride of Frankenstein*), and Roy Webb (*The Spiral Staircase*). Other composers and arrangers used the Theremin as a mellow dreamy instrument for romantic Tin Pan Alley melodies and background music. One of the leading Thereminists of this genre was Samuel Hoffman, who released a series of 78-rpm recordings for Capitol Records with Les Baxter and Billy May (recently rereleased as a three-CD boxed set by Basta Music [Basta 9093] titled *Dr. Samuel J. Hoffman and the Theremin*).

Music from the Ether is an attempt to focus on the body of music specifically written for the instrument, rather than target other well-known music and tunes arranged for the Theremin. The disc consists of twelve tracks and totals just over one hour of listening time. While as a solo instrument the sound of the Theremin can quickly wear thin, the pieces in this compilation range

from solo unaccompanied Theremin, duets for Theremin and piano, Theremin and voice, Theremin and magnetic tape, through a quartet for four Theremins, to full ensemble for Theremin, oboe, piano, and string quartet. The composers of these pieces are Joseph Schillinger (1929 and 1932), Friedrich Wilckens (1933), Percy Grainger (1936), Bohuslav Martinů (1944), Isidor Achron (1945), Lydia Kavina (1989 and 1994), Jorge Antunes (1995), and Vladimir Komarov (1996)—an impressive battery covering over seventy years of music history presented in chronological order. The disc comes complete with a detailed booklet (presented in English, German, and French) outlining historical background, listing the contents, credits, and sponsors, as well as informative liner notes by Olivia Mattis about the pieces and performers.

The disc may be looked upon as a three-part narrative. Part 1 is a compilation of pieces written for the Theremin before Kavina. Part 2 is a showcase for Lydia Kavina, the composer. Part 3 is an intersection between the Theremin and twentieth-century electronic music. The disc opens with two Schillinger pieces. The first is a beautiful song without words and is actually the piano reduction of the opening movement to the *First Airphonic Suite*, performed in 1929 by Theremin himself as a soloist accompanied by Schillinger on piano with Nicolai Sokoloff conducting the Cleveland Orchestra. The second, more thematic in character, is a show of mathematical (geometrical) principles as found in the *Schillinger Method of Musical Composition* (where the piece is used for illustratory purposes). Wilckens's *Dance in the Moon* is a lyrical duet between piano and Theremin in an impressionistic style. The piece exemplifies how well the idiom suits the instrument. Percy Grainger's *Free Music #1* is a fascinating exercise that employs a unique graphic score (left and right hands are notated on separate staves), an arrangement calling for four Theremins (all played by Kavina), and a compositional style of free tonality. Unfortunately, the piece lasts only 1'22" and the listener is left hanging in the air. Martinů's *Fantasy* (premiered by Lucie Bigelow Rosen in 1945) is a beautiful piece that places the oboe in a position as the pivot between timbres of the Theremin and the strings (quartet and piano). While it was penned as one continuous movement lasting 14'23", the piece resembles a chamber concerto employing an ABA form. In between dynamic peaks, the listener is led through an emotional soundscape running the gamut of human experiences. Isidor Achron was known mostly as the accompanist for Jascha Heifetz, yet he did write some music. His *Improvisation* was dedicated to Lucie Bigelow Rosen as a recital piece. After a short introduction, the piece conforms to a more standard ABA form, and might have been intended to place the Theremin in between the more popular Tin Pan Alley and classical music styles. Kavina's two compositions are most definitely the showpieces of the disc. Her performance expertise and compositional insight offer the listener an opportunity to hear the Theremin at its best, and on the highest artistic level ever recorded. Her three-movement *Suite for Theremin and Piano* was premiered in Poland in 1989. The middle movement, which stands in great contrast to the two outer lyrical sections, is a dynamic demonstration of the range of effects that can be achieved with the instrument; it has, in fact, been arranged for Theremin and synthesizer as a stand-alone number. Her second piece, *In the Whims of the Wind*, was written for the singer

Elizabeth Parcells in 1994. It is an etude highlighting timbre control—attack and balance—as eloquently illustrated in the interplay between the electronic Theremin and Parcells's human voice (coloratura soprano). The technical ability of Kavina here is as yet unprecedented by any other Thereminist—even Rockmore! Undoubtedly, this is a masterpiece performed by two master performers. The listener should be aware that the extreme frequency range of the Theremin may damage some speaker systems, and if any piece on this disc will do it, this is the one!

The final two tracks are especially interesting to those with tastes for new music. Jorge Antunes wrote *Mixolydia* for Lydia, and as its name punfully suggests, it is written in the modal style of the sixth century B.C., with added magnetic tape supplied by two French electroacoustic research studios. The last piece, by Vladimir Komarov, is a biographical sound collage depicting Theremin—his personality, invention, and history—composed to honor his centennial. The piece is called *Voice of Theremin*, which is especially befitting as the Russian language still refers to this instrument as the Termenvox, and because the piece is built around synthesized processed sound bites of Theremin's own voice recorded by Komarov himself who accompanied Professor Theremin on his 1991 visit to America. While the impression is that the piece involves a vast amount of computer-generated sounds, it appears that no other sounds except his voice were added. The collage attempts to illustrate Theremin's whirlwind life story, including Mikhael Glinka's *Sky-lark* melody (the same melody Termen performed for Lenin in 1922), and a churning waltz exemplifying his fashionable ballroom standard of living while in America.

Lydia Kavina is a perceptive, insightful, creative, and intelligent performer-composer. In her hands, the Theremin stands out as an instrument well deserving the fruits of new compositional efforts. While some might feel that *Music from the Ether* is the perfect gift for the classical fan who has everything, this of course is nothing more than a belittling understated cliché. The Theremin, and the music written for it between 1925 and 1950, is as much a part of Americana as was the Packard, Hudson, DeSoto, rumble seat, drive-in movie, soap-box racing, zoot suit, two-toned shoe, hand-painted necktie, pompadour hairdo, ice-box, soda fountain, Kool-Aid, dial telephone, phonograph, player piano, Wurlitzer, washboard, nickel & dime (5 & 10) store, Horn & Hardart's Automats, Heinz 57 varieties, Ed Sullivan, and so on. All American musicians, music libraries, musicologists, and everyday listeners should embrace Kavina's *Music from the Ether* with pride.

Warren Brodsky
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

George Antheil. *McKonkey's Ferry (Washington at Trenton): A Concert Overture. Symphony No. 4 "1942." Symphony No. 6.* National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine; Theodor Kuchar, conductor. Liner notes by Joshua Cheek (translated into French by Jeremy Drake; translated into Spanish by Jaime Suñén). 2000. Naxos 8.559033.

George Antheil. *Symphony No. 1 "Zingareska." Symphony No. 6 "after Delacroix." Archipelago-Rhumba.* Radio-Sinfonie-Orchester Frank-