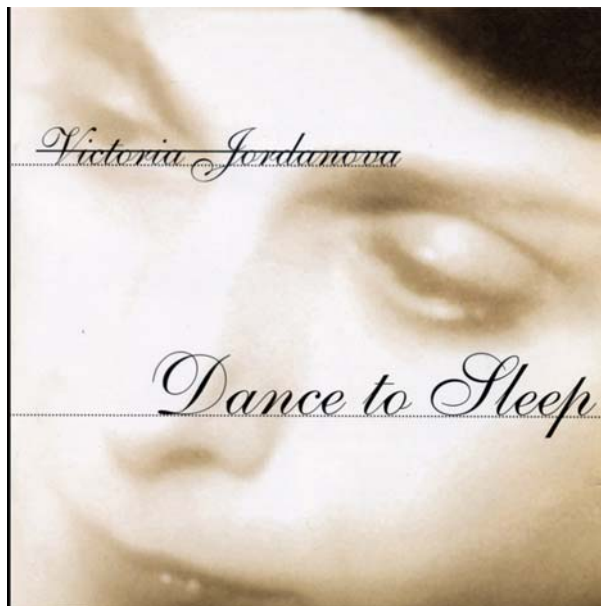


NWCR755

# Victoria Jordanova

## Dance to Sleep



### *Dance to Sleep*

Modules for Harp and Electronics (1995)

1. Dance to Sleep ..... (8:39)
2. Birds ..... (5:11)
3. Inbetween ..... (7:14)
4. Paddleboat ..... (10:38)
5. The Saw ..... (3:52)
6. Static Jam ..... (5:59)  
Victoria Jordanova, harp and electronics
7. *Mute Dance* (1994) ..... (8:52)  
Laura Carmichael, clarinet; Victoria Jordanova,  
harp, percussion, and sampled sounds

Total playing time: 50:25

© & © 1997, Composers Recordings, Inc.

© 2007 Anthology of Recorded Music, Inc.

## Notes

Today the routes to creative fulfillment become ever richer and more diverse for composers. For the past couple of centuries, a “composer” has been a rather clearly defined entity: one who notated original music in score form, so that it might be performed by others; who developed his/her voice from a fixed tradition, usually of the geographic region in which s/he resided; and who worked within an art-music tradition that increasingly defined itself by its difference from the music of popular culture.

Of course, it was not always so. In the fifteenth century, composers were perhaps the most cosmopolitan they have ever been: they wandered the European continent, propagating an “international style” long before the term was invented. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century, composers were expected to perform (or at least conduct) their own works, and composers as diverse as Beethoven, Bizet, and Bartok all used folk materials in their music. Up through the eighteenth century, improvisation was a part of creative practice, whether it was the figured bass of the Baroque continuo or a cadenza in a Classical concerto. In short, the Western musical tradition was neither as fixed nor as distant from the crazy, often illogical leaps of creativity that a term like “classical music” implies. It may have lost some of its contact with these earthy roots over the past 150 years, but it also has an enormous capacity for renewal. A generation of younger composers are rediscovering the great variety and richness of that tradition, which they are at the same time nourishing via encounters with new technology and the music of ever more distant cultures. Out of this bubbling stew is emerging the prototype for a global art music—a music that is familiar and exotic, challenging and accessible, futuristic and timeless.

**Victoria Jordanova** (b Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1962) is in the vanguard of this process. Raised in Belgrade when it was still the capital of Yugoslavia, she studied piano as a child, then took up the harp at age fifteen. From the beginning, she loved to improvise on any instrument she played, and these creative instincts were further excited in her late teens by her discovery of twentieth-century music. But she was not content in her home environment. From a very early, she felt a need to come to the United States, believing that, “as a woman, it would be easier there to do what I had to do.” Through friends of her family, she came first to Michigan State in East Lansing, then went on to New York University, where she studied medieval musicology, and finally to San Francisco. It was only after arriving in the Bay Area, in 1993, that a key event opened her up to her own creative potential. A piano was dropped down a staircase at a school where she taught, ending up a seemingly unusable hulk. Jordanova began to improvise on its shattered body, and eventually recorded a “single-take” improvisation that was then used as a sonic core with which she improvised on harp. What emerged was her *Requiem for Bosnia* (CRI 673), a haunting blend of acoustic and *concrète* sounds that attracted immediate critical and public attention. Since then she has released a flood of music, as though making up for the creative stasis of earlier years.

Jordanova’s compositional process combines many threads of late-twentieth-century aesthetics and practice. First is tradition. She is open to both the traditions of classical music (embodied in her harp and fluent performance technique) and the sound of her folk-music roots. A solemn, even sinister quality suggestive of an archaic music (seemingly preserved in amber) pervades such pieces as *Mute Dance*, with its insistent tread of bells (attached to the composer’s foot and shaken while she plays the harp). The piece’s source,

according to Jordanova, is as an ancient tradition from the Balkan mountains, a dance done by a circle of people in total silence. She describes *Mute Dance* as “giving sound to their silence.”

The second thread in Jordanova’s compositional process is improvisation. She is unafraid to root her compositions in discoveries made in the moment of improvisation, and out of those discoveries to shape a work that can continue to grow and mutate through different versions and instrumentations. The creation of works such as *Dance to Sleep* begins with the recording of a wide range of audio samples gathered directly from the composer’s environment (everything from harp and piano to the sound of a brush rubbed on a lampshade is fair game). These samples are then edited, processed, and reshaped until they constitute an “orchestra” of sounds that are multitracked to create a tape part. Then Jordanova creates a live harp part in dialogue with her “virtual” instrument. As she jokingly says, “my fingers are my primary sound processors.” In the case of *Mute Dance*, the work not only exists in the form heard on this disc, but also transcribed as a fully notated work, written for the Bang On A Can Festival’s virtuosic house-band sextet, the All-Stars. For the other works on this disc (which she calls “modules”), Jordanova first recorded a series of single-take improvisations. The recordings that seemed most suggestive were then subjected to a rigorous process of editing; they were shaped and shaved until their pacing and proportions suited her. Jordanova describes the act of improvisation as “a special magic.” The act of improvising is for her almost an act of “channeling,” in which she becomes a vessel for ideas that seem beyond her own experience, as she listens very intently to the sounds she creates, following their implications, guiding their transformations. When Jordanova improvises on stage, “I completely forget the audience. Nothing is wrong then.” While she says she feels as though she is playing only for herself at these moments, the state she intuitively is, ironically, one of “self-oblivion.”

The creative use of technology and the extension of performance technique together form the third strand of Jordanova’s practice. In the post-World War II era, recorded tapes, live processing, and computers have allowed composers to act as veritable “one-person bands.” Jordanova is constantly experimenting with new equipment in a symbiotic process: she may create a work in order to explore

and learn a new piece of gear, and that experiment may in turn lead to the invention of a technique that manifests itself in an entirely different manner in another piece. Each of the “Modules” explores a different sound-world elicited via a variety of processing methods. *The Birds* uses extensive delay and distortion—in it, a saw slides a triangle beater over strings as the latter are plucked to produce a “love song with a sweet tonal bass and dissonant sighs in the upper register.” *Inbetween* creates a continuous game of contrasts between sounds created with the volume pedal turned on and sounds created with the pedal off (just what one is not supposed to do with the equipment; perhaps, Jordanova suggests, she is “listening to two sides of myself, [seeing] a single world with different vision”). *Paddleboat* similarly “violates” the harp’s own performance practice, by changing the pedaling of notes as they are plucked, so as to bend the tones like a slide guitar. And *Static Jam* is a study using the Jam Man sample delay box, creating layer upon looping layer of music until the texture becomes so dense that the sound “can only be shut off.”

When speaking with Jordanova, one cannot help but be swept up by her energy, her sense of adventure, and the purity of her artistic impulse. Like many women composers at this point in music history, her art develops out of an extremely intimate relationship with both her instrument and the actual sounds she lovingly shapes into personal meaning (I think of Meredith Monk’s extended vocals, Elizabeth Brown’s *shakuhachi*, Diamanda Galas, Pamela Z’s corporeal blend of voice/body/electronics, and Pauline Oliveros’s accordion). There is a vigorous yet non-doctrinaire feminism in her work, which enriches an already valid artistic product. Of course, hers is only one strand of the fabric of late-twentieth-century music, indeed only one of a myriad of approaches used by female composers, ranging from the most traditional to the avant-garde. But it is an important development. In Jordanova, many strands of culture are merging—aesthetic, experimental, technological, political—in a manner that could only be accomplished by an “outsider” who has been set free in an environment of maximum liberty (American society in San Francisco, at the end of the twentieth century). The fruits of that interface, the most recent station on her fascinating pilgrimage, are here for us to enjoy on this CD.

—Robert Carl

---

## Production Notes

Produced by Victoria Jordanova. Executive producer: Joseph R. Dalton. Mastered by Robert Wolff, engineer, Sony Music Studios, NYC. Editing of sampling for *Dance to Sleep* by Eric Schurig. I.Q. for *Modules* by Miguel Lopez.

Photography: Ron Atik.

Art design: Relja Penezic.

CRI production manager: Allison Wolf.

This CD is dedicated to Relja Penezic and was made possible through the generous support of the Virgil Thomson Foundation.