



**VAN STIEFEL SOLARIS**

**SOLARIS**, the first composition on this CD, employs computer-generated sounds and loops triggered by MIDI/electric guitar; however, most of the pieces simply use a clean, finger-style electric technique. Recalling classical guitar music, these pieces explore an inward, fragile sound world inherent in a simple physicality: fingers plucking amplified strings. With or without interactive technology, they embrace a wired reality of the electric guitar as amplified and *electric*, while referencing the intimacy of the instrument in chamber music – or as simply, a *guitar*.

The first piece for alto flute, electric guitar, and laptop is inspired by Stanislaw Lem's science fiction classic *Solaris* as well as the 1972 film adaptation by Andrei Tarkovsky, with its low-tech realism, glacial pacing, and creepy Bach arrangements. In the story, lovers and landscape animate a strange planet, here depicted by electric guitar and computer-generated processes. The scientist Kris Kelvin (flute) studies a liquid planet (guitar and laptop) whose monstrous ocean recreates people from personal memories. The protagonist is visited by Rheyra (also guitar and laptop), the ocean's life-like rendering of Kelvin's ex-lover. In my piece, Rheyra is most overtly represented by loops whose record/play modes are triggered in real time by notes on the guitar.

**SMOKE AND MIRRORS** recalls something of the cyclical narrative scale of 19th-Century violin sonata. I've wondered why historically there were so few large-form pieces written for violin and guitar. Was there really no taste for it? Was the voice of the guitar inappropriately light? Did the existing musical language for such forms "not fit" the instrument?

*Smoke and Mirrors* occupies a space suggested by such questions. I continue to wonder also about the illusion of storytelling through instrumental music, especially when – as is so often the case – there is no real story but the form of music itself. And what is musical form anyway: a seeming plot, a matter of persuasion, an art of smoke and mirrors?

**THE SHAPE OF HANDS** mirrors how repetitive patterning in a made thing or a gesturing hand reveals desire. When playing music, our fingers are compelled to shape sounds, and compositionally, our desires for particular sounds twist fingers. All four movements share a patterning of how intervals ascend and descend: the "shapes" of intervals constrain and are constrained by the "lay of the hands" on the instrument. This is indeed the reality of all harmony on a guitar, and though the tonal language of my suite is idiosyncratic, I think of this piece as an homage to Paraguayan guitarist-composer Augustin Barrios, whose mastery of tonality on the guitar inspires me and has twisted my fingers in the past.

**SOULS AND RAINDROPS** is a poem by American poet and musician Sydney Lanier (1842-1881) here set for two electric guitars and voice. The music was written for *Ursula's End* (Holly and David Nadal) performing with an extra guitarist (myself). The Georgia coast inspires much of Lanier's most celebrated work, and in this aphoristic little poem, the ripples left by raindrops on the ocean provide an object for meditation.

Van Stiefel  
January 2011

**SOLARIS** (for alto flute, electric guitar, and laptop)

- 1 Part One  
Arrival – The End of the Blue Day – The Solarists  
The Little Apocrypha – Rheya – Liquid Oxygen
- 2 Part Two  
Red Dawn Blazing – The Thinkers – The Dreams  
Wings of Foam – Assymetriad – The Old Mimoid
- 3 **SMOKE AND MIRRORS** (for violin and electric guitar)

**THE SHAPE OF HANDS** (solo electric guitar)

- 4 made
- 5 sewn
- 6 wrung
- 7 gesture
- 8 **SOULS AND RAINDROPS** (two electric guitars and voice)

Daniel Lippel, guitar tracks 3-7

Nurit Pacht, violin

Ed Schultz, alto flute

Holly Nadal, soprano

Dave Nadal, guitar track 8

Van Stiefel, guitar tracks 1, 2, and 8

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Mastered by Ryan Streber. Produced by Van Stiefel. [www.vanstiefel.com](http://www.vanstiefel.com)

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*Tiger Strikes Asteroid*, Philadelphia, PA. Photo by Adam Blumberg.

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