

music forum

MULTICULTURAL

Chitarre Acustiche
d'ItaliaArt Phillips (Arturo di Filippo)
APMD0534

www.artphillips.com

Reviewed by Courtney Day



Art Phillips has a formidable reputation as a successful composer, guitarist, and producer. While Phillips grew up in Erie, Pennsylvania, USA, he relocated to Sydney in 1987, where he now operates a music design company. As the title suggests, this album is an exploration of Italian acoustic guitar music, including traditional classics such as *O Sole Mio*, the film music of Nino Rota, and original compositions. On this disc, Phillips arranged many of the pieces, and performs acoustic guitars, ukulele and mandolin.

Phillip's Italian/American heritage was the simple source of inspiration from which this project sprung, and the album is a very personal tribute to his father, Antonio, himself a talented guitarist. The disc jacket includes family photographs, and text that describes Phillips' family history, his musical upbringing, and the aim of the recording. Strengthening the family ties, the instruments used on the album include Phillips' father's guitar, and his grandfather's mandolin.

Chitarre Acustiche d'Italia opens with the gorgeous *Tra Veglia e Sonna*. This piece is the perfect introduction to the album, as it exemplifies the melancholy, yet uplifting spirit that lies at the core of much Italian music. The disc inspires a wide range of emotional responses, as it exudes passion, joy, calm, and intoxicating warmth. Somehow, this music arouses intensely visceral bodily responses – frequently either laughing, crying, or dancing.

Grandpa's Kitchen is the only original composition on the album, and is a light-hearted triple-metre

tune written in homage to 'Uncle Raymond'. While the piece is pleasant enough, it is a little too nondescript and repetitive for my tastes.

Phillips' arrangement of Nino Rota's *Love Theme from the Godfather* is beautiful as a stand-alone piece, although it involves an electronic backing which sounds at odds with the rest of the album.

Never On Sunday (which won the Academy Award for Best Original Song in 1960) was written by the Greek composer Manos Hatzidakis for the film of the same name. Although the melody in the original version is sung, in Phillips' arrangement, the vocal line is played by acoustic guitar, and the effect is deliciously exotic.

Vaya con Dios ('Go with God') is the only other piece that is not of Italian origin. However, because of the nature of Phillips' arrangements, the popular tune blends well with the traditional works that constitute the body of the album.

Like much folk music, the songs of *Chitarre Acustiche d'Italia* often involve the use of simple, singable melodic verses which are repeated many times. Phillips' playing is full of vitality and demonstrates a broad variety of timbral and textural effects, and the recording quality is superb. This album is certainly worth listening to, as the music that stems from Italy really does embody the nationalistic qualities of sensuality and charm.

