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Spiros Exaras

PHRYGIANICS-Laughing Buddha Records, 250 West 54th Street, Suite 602, New York, NY 10019; Phone: 212-977-8940; Fax: 212-977-8919. website: www.Laughingbuddhamusic.com
Phrygianics; Reincarnation; Deer's Leap; Do You Hear Me; Keeping The Promise; Virtue Is Gone; Ode To Aegean; Thrace Bop; Three Years Ago; I Will Never Forget.

PERSONNEL: Spiros Exaras, classical and electric guitar; Henry Hey, piano, Keyboards; Matthew Garrison, electric bass; Gene Lake, drums; Lefteris Bourmias, Greek clarinet, various reeds; Arto Tunçboyacıyan, percussion, vocals

By Winthrop Bedford

The most telling aspect of the drive and truth behind Spiros Exaras' music is the wonderful statement he writes at the very end of the copy in the liner notes in the accompanying CD booklet. "At last, I would like to thank all those who did not support me in any way, which helped me to get the strength to come this far." Yes, without the challenges he unintentionally experienced, he would not have been forced to overcome the prophecy of negative hopes and expectations that others provided for him. The result is that the obstacles have made his music come alive.

Born in Salonika, Greece, Exaras studied classical guitar and composition at the Athens Conservatory of Music. That's where also was enrolled in a two-year seminar in jazz improvisation and orchestration. While in Greece he taught classical guitar and music theory for 4 years and worked and performed with many prominent musicians and composers, including the National Radio Symphony Orchestra (ERT) and the Orchestra of Colours. After relocating to the US in 1996, Exaras has collaborated with a variety of artists including Mariah Carey, Randy Brecker, Harvey Swartz, members of Spyro Gyra, and others.

Exaras music comes alive from the opening sounds of *Phrygianics*. The title tune opens with vocalizations in his native Greek language, and segues to an upbeat ethnic influenced fusion groove. The song makes tasteful use of rhythmic

space and long tones. Various instrumental voices emerge and fade and exit—Greek clarinet, saxophone, then full ensemble. Exaras solos confidently on electric and acoustic guitars.

"Reincarnation" features a catchy melodic line over a maze of cross-rhythms, in 3/4 (or perhaps 6/8) time. Exaras soars with aplomb soloing over the full-sounding, energetic but relaxed and powerful support he gets from the piano-bass-drum rhythmic section. Exaras switches to classical guitar on "Deer's Leap" which he composed for his daughter Ileana. Henry Hey who provides superb accompaniment throughout this recording, steps out for a brief and shining solo outing on this track.

The level of musicianship shines throughout *Phrygianics*. Gene Lake provides rock solid time, and tasteful, driving accompaniment, without getting in the way of Exaras. His facility with the various rhythms and time signatures helps this acoustic, fusion, ethnic inspired music a seamless effort.

The recording quality of this Laughing Buddha label release is top shelf. Gene Lake's drums, Henry Hey's piano, Matthew Garrison's electric bass, and Exaras' guitars are reproduced with crystal clarity. Exaras demonstrates his well-developed skills as both a composer and improviser on guitar on this CD. His eleven originals offer up compelling structures of rhythm, melody and harmony. This is an enjoyable 50 minutes worth of music.