

**LTH:** "It depends, in north Vietnam it varies. If they just pick up the poems, the content of the song is the content of the poem. And the topic varies, maybe a description of a scenery, or a person explains his feelings about a certain event in his life, or it could be a political problem. In central Vietnam it's mainly three topics, it would be a love song, or it could be a song about a beautiful natural phenomenon, or it could be a political song. But political songs are very subtle, it's not as strong and direct as in the west, it's



represented in different indirect ways. When you talk about a nation, the country, or political leader, in the actual lyrics it would refer to mountains, rivers and water, and things like that. But if you decode it you actually know what the song is about. And in south Vietnam I find that it's very interesting that most of the classical songs are concerned with love (laughs). So I would say that the south Vietnamese are maybe more romantic (laughs)."

**How would you describe the instruments that you play?**

**LTH:** "I'll talk about the Zither (Dan Tranh) first. It's a long board Zither, which is similar to the Japanese Koto, or Chinese Guzheng, and it has between seventeen and twenty five strings, and each string has its own moveable bridge. And when I play, I pluck on the right side a string, and then I touch the other side and bend the pitch, and create ornamentations. The tuning of the instrument is mainly pentatonic, but in the process of playing we can create different pitches by bending the string as well. The other instrument from the CD is the Moon Lute (Dan Nguyet), it has only two strings, it looks a bit like the Banjo, but the fret is very high, between four and five centimetres, and it allows the performer to press the string down, and bend the string to create ornaments after plucking it. The Dan Bau (Monochord) has only one string, and to play it you have to stimulate the harmonics on the string, it has one movable stick at the end, so when you play you have to pluck and touch the string at the same time, and you bend the stick to produce other pitches."

**Your latest album 'Landscapes of Time' signals a departure from your usual performance of traditional music. What was your general approach to the composition of the music?**

**LTH:** "I wouldn't say that it's a departure, because I have been doing two things simultaneously in the past ten years or so. I love to play traditional and classical music of Vietnam, because it's beautiful and I enjoy playing it, but when you live in a modern world, a contemporary world, you have things that you would like to express, you would like to say, and you need to make your own music. And in doing so, I use the traditional concept of music, which allows the performer a lot of freedom, so I emphasise the aspect of improvisation. So for each piece of music, I create

on paper, and I display the idea and maybe some musical rhythm or pictures, a few beats of melody here and there. And we just sit down and play from the beginning to the end, so each time may a bit different. We also use a number of traditional instruments, which may sound a bit weird to western ears (laughs). In the past sixteen years I've had the chance to live in Australia, and met a lot of musicians from different backgrounds, and I've had the chance to travel to other countries as well, to perform and exchange ideas with traditional and contemporary musicians. And I was impressed with the richness of musical cultures in Australia and around the world. So if I see something that I'm impressed about, I just pick an instrument, go home and try it myself (chuckles). Sometimes I just find my own way (laughs), and I incorporate those tone colours into my compositions as well."

"Landscapes of Time - Contemporary Sound Art of Vietnam" distributed by Move Records. PO Box 266, Carlton South, Victoria 3053, Australia. Tel & Fax: (03) 9547 7749.



## VLADIMIR KOCIBELLI MY FEELINGS

Vladimir Kocibelli was born in Korce, Albania, and started to play the violin at the age of six. Under the guidance of violinist Robert Papavrami, he completed a Bachelor of Music at the Albanian Conservatory of Music in Tirana. In the twenty-year period following 1971, his close association with the Albanian State Opera and Ballet led to many international tours, including China with the Opera Ballet Orchestra, and Greece with the Albanian Symphony Orchestra. He also taught violin and cifteli at the Tirana College of the Arts. The cifteli is a two-stringed traditional Albanian instrument related to the saz, with one string set aside for the melody and the other used mainly to produce a drone.

Since his arrival to Australia in 1991, he has performed at countless music festivals throughout Australia, as well as on various SBS and ABC television programs. He currently performs with his own band Vladimir Kocibelli's Gypsy Feeling, dedicated essentially to traditional Eastern European music, with the inclusion of Albanian, Gypsy, Hungarian, Rumanian, Russian, Jewish and Bluegrass traditions. In the past six years he has also managed to establish himself as a member of the Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra, Lira Symphony Orchestra, Orana Multicultural Chamber Orchestra, Malvern Symphony Orchestra, Camerata Orchestra and Geelong Chamber Orchestra.

The album 'Feelings' was recorded at the ABC Studios in Melbourne, and highlights Vladimir's talents as arranger, orchestrator, composer and performer. Included are some inspiring virtuoso violin performances, with accompaniment provided by Nazif Besimi on piano, accordion, organ and

clarinet. The content is all traditional Albanian folk music, with the exception of a track titled 'Kaba', being an original piece. Included is a performance of the 500 year-old folk song 'Arbereshi Song', composed in protest of the Ottoman Empire, being a dedication to the Arberesh people who fled Albania to settle in Italy, during the Turkish occupation.

"My Feelings" distributed by Vladimir Kocibelli. For further information write to Vladimir Kocibelli, C/- Mixdown Monthly, 3-5 Jessie Street, Richmond, Victoria 3121, Australia. Or contact Vladimir directly on (015) 839 777.



## THE SITAR

The Sitar is a large, fretted long-necked Lute, and was invented by Sufi poet-musician Amir Khusrau in the thirteenth century. The body usually consists of a shell, a long hollow neck, and a small second gourd resonator fitted at the back of the neck. There are six or seven main strings, with four dedicated to playing the melody, and two or three auxiliary ones used to produce the drone. It is played with a twisted-wire plectrum, and there is also between eleven and nineteen additional strings called 'sympathetic strings', which vibrate to create a shimmering tone. These two sets of strings are fitted on different bridges, and there are 20 movable brass frets that can be adjusted to suit the tuning of a specific raga. A feature well suited to the elaborate system of scales that constitute North Indian 'Hindustani' music. The various types include the Tarafdar or Concert Sitar, Sada 'Plain' Sitar, Kachva 'Tortoise' Sitar, Cherubim Lute or Small Sitar, and Carnatic Sitar.

For more information about Indian instruments, as well as other musical instruments contact Roger Lewis at Lewis' Music Store. The business was established in 1961, and today is clearly one of the most interesting music stores in Melbourne. 124 Russell Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000, Australia. Tel: (03) 9650 9305, Fax: (03) 9654 5364. I would also like to thank Maritza Pertout (La Trobe Research Section, State Library of Victoria) for researching information.

