

ECM

François Couturier
Nostalghia — Song for Tarkovsky

François Couturier: piano
Anja Lechner: violoncello
Jean-Marc Larché: soprano saxophone
Jean-Louis Matinier: accordion

US Release date: October 3, 2006

ECM CD: B0007151-02

A special recording from a new group led by François Couturier. *Nostalghia – Song for Tarkovsky* is the first ‘leader’ album issued under Couturier’s name in many years. Apart from a handful of duo recordings, his energies have long been invested in the musical concepts of others. A generous, thoughtful, lyrical player, he has worked particularly closely with Tunisian oud master Anouar Brahem in the last decade, joining Brahem’s trio on *Le pas du chat noir* (recorded 2001) and appearing on its sequel, *Le voyage de sahar* (2005). Couturier and accordionist Jean-Louis Matinier (also heard on *Nostalghia*) have had an important role to play in Brahem’s new musical directions.

In the course of the Brahem sessions, Couturier and producer Manfred Eicher discussed possible projects. The pianist being a musician of wide-ranging artistic interests, it was decided to present a recording that would reach beyond the scope of ‘jazz’, and offer an *hommage* to a director whose work transcended ‘film’.

Nostalghia is not the first ECM album dedicated to the memory of Andrei Tarkovsky, that distinction belonging to Arvo Pärt’s *Arbos* (Jan Garbarek’s *All Those Born With Wings* also contains a dedication), but it is the first to address Tarkovsky’s inspirational world, and the ‘spiritual’ aura of the great Russian filmmaker’s work.

Couturier explains in his brief liner note that Tarkovsky is his favorite director. “*Andrei Rublev* was a revelation for me. Since then I have seen all his films over and over again... They are long poems, hypnotic in their slowness, and pervaded with spirituality (...) I did not seek to make ‘scenic’ music of any kind.” – This is not ‘soundtrack’ music, and Couturier goes out of his way to avoid the illustrative. “I have tried, instead, to represent in each piece a specific *emotion* linked to the universe of this director – to his

films, of course, but also to some of his favorite actors – or composers. Or even to the very original way he plays with shades of color. This recording is our way of paying tribute to this great artist.”

Song for Tarkovsky is a project that fits very naturally in ECM’s soundworld. The label has long explored links between the arts, has often considered music ‘cinematically’, and has provided a context for soundtracks of Godard and Angelopoulos. Tarkovsky’s description of filmmaking, moreover, as “Sculpting in Time” could quite easily be applied to the label’s production philosophy.

A word about the album title: for Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-1986), *Nostalghia* signified more than “nostalgia” in the sentimental English sense, and more, too, than the limited Russian meaning of “longing for one’s homeland”. The term as applied in his film *Nostalghia* (1983) was intended, he said, to indicate a “global yearning for the wholeness of existence”. (In a 1995 interview, director Theo Angelopoulos recalled, “Once in Rome, I was staying in the same apartment building with Andrei Tarkovsky. He was shooting *Nostalghia* at the time. And we talked about ‘nostalgia’ the concept and feeling, and he tried to tell me it was a Russian word, but of course I explained it was Greek: *nostos*, meaning homecoming. So we argued about it. Finally he said ‘Excuse me, nostalgia is so deeply a part of the Russian soul and spirit, that I feel it is we who developed it!’ So it is with the Greeks!”)

With the exception of the group improvisations “Solaris” and “Solaris II” and the duet improvisation “Ivan”, the music on this *Song for Tarkovsky* is composed by Couturier but maintains a sense of openness throughout. “Le Sacrifice” and “L’éternel retour” draw inspiration from Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* and Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* (Tarkovsky greatly admired both composers, and used the aria “Erbarme dich” from the *St Matthew Passion* at the beginning of his film *The Sacrifice*), while title track *Nostalghia* and “Andrei” quote a theme from the third movement of Alfred Schnittke’s 1978 *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano*.

Individual tracks are variously dedicated to: composer Edouard Artemyev who worked closely with Tarkovsky on the soundtracks of *Solaris* and *Stalker*; the great cameraman Sven Nykvist (who filmed *Sacrifice* and is closely associated with Ingmar Bergman); screenwriter Tonino Guerra (who worked on *Nostalghia* and most of Angelopoulos’ films); and actors Erland Josephson (who appeared in *Nostalghia* and *Sacrifice* and dozens of other critically-lauded films, from Bergman’s *Scenes from a Marriage* to Angelopoulos’ *Ulysses’ Gaze* and, indeed, Eicher’s own *Holozän* film) and Anatoli Solonitsyne (who was discovered by Tarkovsky, and played the lead in *Andrei Rublev*).

The group heard here is comprised of three French musicians – Couturier, Larché, Matinier – who have worked together frequently in shared projects, plus German cellist Anja Lechner. A member of the Rosamunde Quartet whose ECM recordings include performances of compositions by Mansurian, Silvestrov, Shostakovich, Webern, Haydn

and more, Lechner is also versed in improvisation in different traditions, working with musicians from Dino Saluzzi to Misha Alperin. In 2004, with Vassilis Tsabropoulos, she recorded music of Gurdjieff (*Chants, Hymns and Dances*), a project with historic-philosophical links to the present disc: Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* was Gurdjieff-inspired.

François Couturier was born in Fleury-les-Aubrais, near Orléans, in 1950, and began playing piano at the age of six. After completing studies in classical music and musicology in the early 1970s, he began improvising in earnest, initially taking his cue from modernists Paul Bley, Chick Corea and Joachim Kühn. By the end of the 1970s he was working regularly with drummer Jacques Thollot, one of the key protagonists of the French 'free' movement. Inside Thollot's group he befriended bassist Jean-Paul Celea. Couturier and Celea played in duo, then developed their concept to include other musicians. Amongst them: Daniel Humair, François Jeanneau, Dominique Pifarély. In 1980 Couturier won France's coveted Prix Django Reinhardt which increased his international profile. Shortly thereafter he joined John McLaughlin's group, touring and recording with the English guitarist.

Couturier's late 80s group Passagio, again including Jean Paul Celea, recorded two discs for Label Bleu. Couturier's first appearance on ECM was on Anouar Brahem's *Khomsa* in 1994, a recording that also marked the ECM debut of Jean-Marc Larché. Contact between Brahem and the pianist had been initiated in 1985 when they worked together at the Festival of Carthage. The association was revived in 2001, and Couturier has toured widely with the oudist's trio that also includes accordionist Jean-Louis Matinier. Meanwhile he continues to work in the most diverse contexts, including recently a project with countertenor Dominique Visse playing music "from Machaut to Berio".

The Song for Tarkovsky quartet made its international debut at the Bergamo Festival in April 2006.

Autumn appearances include the ECM Festival in Dinant, Belgium, on September 30, and a special release concert in Paris at the Salle de la Chapelle des Récollets of the Maison de l'Architecture, on October 5.

Nostalghia – Song for Tarkovsky is released worldwide at the end of August 2006. In fact, December 2006 marks the 20th anniversary of Andrei Tarkovsky's death. The CD booklet includes stills from his work, made exclusively available to ECM by the Institut Tarkovski, Paris.

**For further information, please contact Tina Pelikan by telephone: (212) 333-1405,
fax: (212) 445-3509 or e-mail: tina.pelikan@umusic.com**