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Review by Raymond Tuttle in 2006

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Review of *Stélé*

Although he was born in England, Jacob Cordover seems to have spent most of his life as a guitarist - starting with lessons in Melbourne at age 11 - in Australia. That's a good continent for guitarists: think of John Williams, who coincidentally was born in Melbourne. Compared to Williams, though, Cordover is a youngster (he was born in 1982), and although he's already won several awards and his share of critical praise, it remains to be seen whether or not he will be his generation's next John Williams.

If he doesn't, it won't because he didn't walk in the older guitarist's footsteps. This CD - Cordover's first - is comprised entirely of music already recorded by Williams. This is not entirely surprising, given their shared Australian backgrounds, and also given the fact that Peter Sculthorpe's *From Kakadu* and Phillip Houghton's *Stélé* both are associated with Australia. Kakadu is one of Australia's national parks, and it has inspired Sculthorpe to compose other music as well - specifically, *Nourlangie* and *Kakadu*. *From Kakadu*, in four sections, is an apt musical description of that huge park's diversity, mystery, and wildness. Like Sculthorpe, Phillip Houghton is an Australian composer. *Stélé*, however, is less Australian than Mediterranean in content. (The word refers to stone monuments erected on coastlines in memory of those who have been lost at sea.) Again, the work is in four sections: "Stélé," "Dervish," "Bronze Apollo," and "Web."

Leo Brouwer is an Afro-Cuban composer whose works for the guitar have been explored more deeply, as of late - not just by Williams, but also by Naxos, who is recording Brouwer's complete works for guitar. *El Decameron Negro*, in three sections ("The Harp of the Warrior," "Fleeing of the Lovers through the Valley of Echoes," and "Ballad of the Maiden in Love") is based on the eponymous book by Leon Frobenius, which retells African legends about a warrior-cum-musician. As its title suggests, *Hika* is a memorial piece for composer Toru Takemitsu who died in 1996. Carlo Domeniconi's *Koyunbaba* is another suite in four short movements. "Koyunbaba" has several meanings, including "shepherd," and it is also a geologically rough area of Turkey. Of the composers on this CD, it is Joaquin Rodrigo who needs the least introduction, and his *Invocación y Danza* probably is his most popular work for solo guitar.

Cordover's playing is extremely fluid; there's no question about his technical abilities. Compared not just to Williams, but to other guitarists who have recorded this repertoire, Cordover is generally slower and more reflective in what is already, for the most part, reflective music within an intrinsically reflective genre. The risk is that a hint of sameness might creep in

over the length of the CD, so for most effective listening, one should not play this CD straight through. Nevertheless, this is a promising debut for the young guitarist, and I am looking forward to hearing how he will distinguish himself from currently more prominent guitarists as time goes on. This CD was recorded in England - Gloucestershire, to be specific - and one could hardly ask for warmer and more complementary engineering. The absence of booklet notes about the music is a drawback, however; only a bio of the guitarist is included, apart from the track listing.

One can purchase Cordover's CD from his website - www.jacobcordover.com - but American buyers should check CD Baby and Los Angeles Classical Guitars first.