



...Ivan Smirnov's guitar is more than an orchestra.

Russian State TV Company

...supreme mastery of acoustic guitar. World class.

Edinburgh Fringe Festival

...connection between ancient folkloric forms and real life.

GreenWave International's artists review

IVAN SMIRNOV

Moscow, Russia

A Russian guitarist Ivan Smirnov is one of those few post-soviet musicians whose level and distinctive character of performing leaves nothing to be desired. Still, even among these outstanding ones Smirnov's name stands on top. His creative works, referred to as «world-music» pieces, in fact belong to exclusive Russian traditional culture, its folklore roots, though simultaneously - in a peaceful and natural way – abound in jazz, rock, avant-gardes, free improvisation elements, as well as melodies and harmonies of other ethnic layers.

A brilliant player and composer, skillful at making arrangements, Ivan Smirnov is commonly taken for a main «perfectionist» of a modern Russian music culture; known for his hard-line approach both to the material played and to the sound itself. Smirnov embodies the very meaning of the word «virtuoso». Some playing modes created and applied by Ivan have no prototypes world-wide. But the technique is no objective in itself, that's only a means for him to produce a supreme sound.

Smirnov was born in 1955 in Moscow. His artistic development seems rather characteristic of that time's soviet musicians' generation. He starts to play guitar in his early teens, then enters a musical college (where one might take only classic, folk or, at the best, pop guitar courses) but drops his studies. He prefers playing a more interesting kind of music, working with amateur and semiprofessional bands.

1975, Smirnov co-works with a Moscow fusion-band «Second Breath», the latter subsequently considered to be a key band that contributed to the Russian jazz-rock phenomenon formation. 1979, on giving up «Second Breath» he joins Eduard Artyemyev's experimental electronic music ensemble. From 1984 till 1990 Smirnov cooperates with the most known USSR jazz-rock band, Alexei Kozlov's «Arsenal». The band, being directed by one of the most powerful and authoritarian personalities on the soviet stage included best musicians of the time and surely could have claimed for an international fame but for the state's policy. Still, even under conditions of the Iron Curtain, «Arsenal» managed to make a lot. It is when being a member of the band that Ivan Smirnov made the first note in his discography: 1986 the «Pulse-3» record gets released.

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The beginning of the 90's grew to be a breaking point: Smirnov starts his own career and changes his electric guitar for an acoustic one, although having on his rank-list numerous titles of a «nation's best fusion guitarist». The decision the artist made in his late thirties was taken by his colleagues and fans for an odd and incomprehensible one. Anyway, in a couple of months Smirnov showed that he apparently had been going towards this very decision for his whole life. The move let him be what he is today - one of the most authentic, influential and famous Russian musicians.

In 1996 he releases his first solo album, **«Merry-go-round Man»** that gets sensational in the country. The album's concept lies in life perception of a folk character, fair entertainer, a clown, a fool, whose unrestrained joy and optimism may conceal deep feelings and melancholic philosophy.

The **«Merry-go-round Man»** music was classified by critics as an impressionistic one, still this characteristics appears not that correct. In his very first work Smirnov proved that he is beyond comparison in the craft of creating music, although some of its components are seemingly unfitting. There was everything in **«Merry-go-round Man»** to make the album comprehensible for any audience. Distinctive Russian national melodies, other cultures' (Spanish, Asian, Celtic) ethnic elements, jazz, free improvisation, avant-gardes strokes... **«Merry-go-round Man»** grew to be a best-seller and one of the most notable guitar albums in the Russian recording ever. 1999 it was reissued as an export project entitled **«At The Other End Of The World»**.

Smirnov's solo career was taking an avalanche shape. Starting from participation in regional events, soon after Ivan performed at the greatest guitar forums and festivals. He took part in «Washburn Days In Russia» (feat. Michael Angelo), shared the stage with Al Di Meola and John Scofield; had festival gigs in Great Britain, France, Germany, Turkey; gave a solo concert in Budapest (Hungary) on a special state's government invitation. Al Di Meola involved Smirnov into his Russian tour performance; undeniable artistry of Ivan's was admitted by the international juries' members (such as Allan Holdsworth, Steve Lukather, Scott Henderson). At the end of 1990s «Takamine» guitar firm names Smirnov its «company's face» in Russia.

Smirnov works a lot over his new music, makes recordings (**«The Land Where The Sun Slumbers»** – 2003, **«Crimean Holiday»** – 2004), performs as a head-liner at all large Russian festivals, including Grushinsky's 50.000 gala-concert audience. He produces soundtracks to movies which take «Silver Lion» and Grand-Prix at Venezia Film Festivals. Smirnov's current discography counts more than 15 releases. He is one of those few artists who can afford monthly performances at one of the most prestigious venues in Moscow. October, 2005 the band was honored to give a concert at the Russian Government House.

The Ivan Smirnov's current band is no-ordinary in its structure: the most promising flamenco-player **Dmitry Safonov**, **Mikhail Smirnov** (synth, keys, accordion, percussion), **Sergey Klevensky** (ethno-wind player, who determines the state of ethnically authentic music on a modern Russian stage). Extraordinary staff - no bass and traditional drums – not only makes the band's sound unique, but creates a foundation for non-standard models of arrangement, improvisation, composition and staging.

Ivan Smirnov group represents a classic example of a «surprise band», its creative activity extremely hard to be described in words - a really tremendous impression for those who see it for the first time.

IVAN SMIRNOV GROUP



Ivan SMIRNOV

acoustic guitar, leader

Mikhail SMIRNOV

keyboards, piano, synths, percussion, cymbals, accordion

Sergey KLEVENSKY

clarinet, assorted ethnic woodwinds, voice

Dmitry SAFONOV

acoustic guitar

SOLO DISCOGRAPHY



Ivan Smirnov

«**MERRY-GO-ROUND MAN**»

1996 (CD)



Ivan Smirnov

«**LAND WHERE THE SUN SLUMBERS**»

2003 (2 CD), 2004 (DVD)



Ivan Smirnov, Mikhail Smirnov

«**CRIMEAN HOLIDAY**»

2004 (CD)

SELECTED POLLS

«**Best acoustic guitar in Russia**» (1995-2005, several times/juries)

«**Best fusion guitar**» (1994)

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