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## CHARLIE SCHMIDT

### XANTHE TERRA

STRANGE ATTRACTORS AUDIO HOUSE CD

BY MIKE BARNES

The first thought that comes to mind when listening to *Xanthe Terra* is that it sounds rather like John Fahey. One feels a bit lazy branding it so, except the sleeve notes reveal that not only was Schmidt a friend to Fahey, the late guitarist was his mentor, he plays one of Fahey's old guitars, and the CD is dedicated to his memory. And, amazingly, one of these tracks in Fahey's possession at the time of his death ended up on a posthumous archival *Best Of* CD by mistake. That said, ultimately the guitarist wishes this to be an aural accompaniment of an imaginary walk on Mars.

Surely Fahey would approve of this paean of sorts. Not that Schmidt is simply ersatz Fahey — far from it. The links most easily drawn with the late guitarist's trademark acoustic style — which was abandoned then re-emerged in his last releases — is the steady tolling pace at which *Xanthe Terra* progresses. But as with Fahey, there's no hint of sluggishness. Instead, there is a peculiar poise and strength of line in pieces like "Kanaranzi Waltz" and "Chillum Heights Blues", that acts as a strong framework for the sweetest of picking, sleight-of-hand rhythmic shifts and punctuations with atonal chordings. Schmidt's compositions are often exquisitely melancholy, but he slips into a higher gear on "Acidalia Planitia".

Schmidt also effortlessly osmoses classical and hymnal elements into his compositions. In this respect he recalls another guitarist who tips his hat to Fahey, Gary Lucas, who has successfully tackled all manner of music from Wagner through Bernard Herrmann to mid-20th century Chinese pop tunes. Schmidt generally operates at lesser speed than Lucas's often dazzling velocity, but is no less impressive or mesmeric. He excels here on *Firebird*, where he weaves together themes from Stravinsky's ballet to breathtaking effect. On "Slavic Mountain", which begins with Tchaikovsky's *Marche Slave*, Schmidt ends up painting a big grin on the face of Greig's *In The Hall Of The Mountain King* and commands it to dance around, klezmer style.