

From Dusk Till Dawn

Rale Micic imagines Bartók in the nocturnal present.

Jazz guitarist Rale Micic figures he has a lot in common with Hungarian classical composer Béla Bartók. Like Micic, Bartók was of Serbian ancestry and enjoyed Eastern European folk music. He also once lived just a few blocks away from where Micic now resides, in the Bronx neighborhood of Riverdale. Bartók died in 1945, more than a half-century before Micic, a 41-year-old from the former Yugoslavian city of Belgrade, made the community his home.

As Bartók did, Micic also loves the hours after sunset — a time he captures in *Night Music* (Whaling City Sound), an evocative offering inspired by Bartók's post-twilight rambles. "Before he moved to New York," Micic says, "Bartók would go out into the night and listen to the sounds of nature and try to recreate them in his music." If Bartók lived in present-day Riverdale, he continues, "the sounds would be very different. So my idea was to imagine if he walked to downtown Manhattan and what kind of sounds he would hear from dusk until dawn."

Micic was introduced to classical music by his grandfather; his first instrument was a violin, and he notes that Bartók was one of his favorite composers. During the war between Yugoslavia and Bosnia in the early '90s, Micic switched his focus from classical to jazz, partly, he says, because Belgrade's jazz clubs were safe places to go. "No one was carrying guns there, and hearing jazz played live drew me into the music." Yet his fondness for Bartók never flagged, due partly to what he sees as the composer's subtly jazzy instincts. "Some of his chords sound exactly like what Thelonious Monk would play," he says.

On *Night Music*, Micic adapts Bartók's lovely "Melody in a Mist," and two versions of his "Nocturne" (one acoustic, one electric) frame the album's vivid title track. But the album is dominated by the guitarist's own tunes, including "Hotel Insomnia," whose drum-and-bass rhythms, Micic says, are meant to conjure the experience of "passing by a dance club and hearing the music that's blaring out."

A second current Micic release, *Inspired*, which teams him with fellow guitarists John Abercrombie, Peter Bernstein and Lage Lund, salutes another past master, jazz giant Jim Hall. But *Night Music* holds a special place for him, partly because he gets to re-experience it during his many evening sojourns. "I always walk after dark," he says. "And I love the sounds of the night." —Michael Roberts