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World Music CD Reviews, November 2006

Album of the Month



Boom Pam: *Boom Pam*

Essay Recordings

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Boom Pam is a band that defies logic and plain good sense. I mean, Israeli music is supposed to be all about old klezmers kvetching into their clarinets and women wailing ethnically, like Ofra Haza or Yasmin Levy. Right?

Well, yes and no. Remember that Israel is a nation of immigrants, and it's got lots of nice waterfront. As much as anything, those two factors explain Boom Pam's pairing of duo surf guitars with tight tuba basslines. Crazy Balkan time signatures and minimalist percussion make their self-titled album irresistible to the musically curious, whether your usual fare is rock or world music. Mostly instrumental, the feisty songs bear titles such as "The Souvlak," "Kova Plada (aka Tango)", and "Wedding Song."

One should take warning of the immensely creepy song "Let Me Touch" with lyrics indicating a certain, um, lack of romantic sensitivity. I'm not saying I dislike it -- I laughed out loud at the over-the-top lyrics. But it's scary enough that I included it in a Halloween show. Whether because of that track or in spite of it, this album comes highly recommended.

[Whether the surf guitars have anything to do with the [surfing scene in Israel](#), I don't know. Maybe you should ask someone at the [beach](#).]

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THIS JUST IN! ... New World Music CD Releases

The Idan Raichel Project: *The Idan Raichel Project*
(Cambancha)

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www.idanraichelproject.com

Another, far different Israeli album comes from Idan Raichel. Initially released in December 2002, this album flowed from Raichel's immersion in the music and culture of Jewish immigrants from Ethiopia. He recorded samples, and built onto those additional tracks of music and rhythms. If you're in Israel, this is old news and you know that Raichel released a hit second album called *Out Of The Depths* in 2005. But for US listeners, this is the first exposure to this talented young artist.

Raichel has a few mid-November 2006 dates in the USA (DC, NY, CA) - see his [website](#) for details.

Dromedary: *Quartet* (self-released)

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Is it a conflict of interest to like an instrumental world-music group whose members include a fellow world-music radio dj? That's right, Andrew Reissiger (guitar, charango) also holds forth as host of [World Tour](#) (which was recently picked up by Georgia Public Radio -- congrats, Andrew!). The rest of the group is Rob McMaken (mandolin, [cumbus](#), guitars), Neal Fountain (bass) and Jeff Reilly (drums). Dromedary's acoustic sound is tight and engaging, something like Bolivian bluegrass or Appalachian jazz. *Quartet* exudes a gentle melancholy, from the lengthy, change-filled "Childhood" to the exotic scales in "Backroads" to the slowly somber "Blues for High Water."

Jerry Leake: *The Turning-Percussion Expansions*
(Rhombus)

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"The Turning" is a drum rhythm of the Ewe people of Ghana, played while dancers execute a graceful turn. On his CD of the same name, Jerry Leake uses it as a metaphor for exploring new ideas and combinations of instruments. You won't notice any such combinations on the opening track "Woodwork" (for balafon, sticks, cajon, clave, etc.), but then "En Tundra" launches with resonant tabla, which is quickly joined by the Ewe drums sogo, kidi, and kagan. Among other twists are vibraphone covers of jazz standards by Miles Davis and Bill Evans. "Ramki" includes Indian vocal percussion and tabla alongside balafon and agogo. For a percussion album, *The Turning* has plenty of changes to keep things interesting, and from start to finish the combinations work. Sure, the percussive delivery of the thoughtful lyrics on "It's About Time" may not be completely convincing, but with 21 other tracks to choose from, who's complaining? Recommended for

any world percussion fan's library

Mohenjo Daro: *Rajdhani Express* (Tandem)

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Indus Red: *Indus Red* (self-released)

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These two albums have different limbs, but the same heart: tabla player/multi-instrumentalist Jim Feist. Mohenjo Daro is rounded out with flautist Johnny Ruzsa and Zach Mechlem on guitar, dumbek, and banjo-mandolin ([see one](#)), who also make appearances on *Indus Red*. *Rajdhani Express* is more of an ensemble work, with great rapport between the players in creating rich instrumental tapestries that will strain those trying to categorize the music. Tabla and dumbek wrestle under the aloof flute on "Chappelwallah," while the title track sounds has roots in tradiitonal raga.

Indus Red is more of a vehicle for Feist's solo abilities, as on the sunning is-it-live-or-is-it-multitracked percussion piece "Tabla Panch (5)." As a big fan of tabla, I appreciate having it so clear and centered in the music, as it is on the bhajan-based "Mataji's Smile" and the vocal-percussion piece "Rhythm Talk." Included are remixes of the songs "The Mighty Bhima" (with interesting drum loops and guitar licks added) and the violin-led "Serpent Dance" (a much less successful electronic blob). I'll skip the latter, and love this album for the tabla.

Sunny Jain Collective: *Avaaz* (Sinj)

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Another Indian-jazz-fusion group? Well, yes. India-born, NYC-based Jain is a jazz drummer who also serves as an official Jazz Ambassador of the United States. *Avaaz* veers more toward the jazz side of the continuum than, say, *Autorickshaw*, though the ethereal vocals by Samita Sinha and Rez Abbasi's sitar-guitar keep an ethnic feel on the title track and elsewhere.

Various artists: *Electric Gypsyland 2* (Crammed)

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Is this a continuation of the Rom (Gypsy) path of wandering into new cultures and absorbing and transforming them? Maybe. There's so much great (and relatively undiscovered) Rom music out there, it might seem premature to mix it with artists like Balkan Beat Box, Smadj, Cibelle, Susheela Raman, Nouvelle

Vague and the like. *EG2* has its charms, but for now I'm spending more time with the roots: artists like Kocani Orkestar, Taraf de Haidouks, Mahala Rai Banda (who are included on this compilation) and artists like KAL, Boban Markovich, and Besh O Drom (who aren't).

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