

Songlines

Besh o Drom

Bold, wide-ranging and hugely fun music from Eastern Europe This is Besh o Drom's second CD and, since their 2000 debut on Fono Records, they've matured 'into a spectacular force, despite losing Agnes Szaloki, the vocalist who was the highlight of the previous disc. Based in Hungary, the eight-piece band serve up a sizzling selection of mainly Hungarian and Balkan material. The tunes of the opening track come from Greece, Egypt and Lebanon, but despite some fizzing bouzouki solos it sounds distinctly Macedonian, with its punchy saxophone and darbuka percussion. There are deft shifts of gear as it moves from one ebullient groove into another. The following track is a complete contrast, restrained and contemplative, featuring the breathy sound of Gergö Barcza on ney. Jozsef Csurkulya on cimbalom brings a more Hungarian sound, although often the instrument is combined in a novel way with Balkan-style brass and winds. This is notable on the exuberant "Cigansko Oro" (Gypsy Dance) with the funky scratches of DJ Mango. The Gypsy vocals of Ando Drom singer Mitsou feature on a couple of tracks, including one of those percussive Gypsy scat songs, "Pergetö". In short this album is a confident, virtuoso and hugely enjoyable feast of music drawn from diverse sources but all clearly stamped with Besh o Drom's marker - their name is a Gypsy idiom for "Go your own way". Well worth catching live, I suspect.

Simon Broughton March/April 2003