

TONI IORDACHE

Sounds from a Bygone Age, Vol. 4

Asphalt Tango 1307

The trawl through vintage Romanian Gypsy, or Lautari, music that the label's done on its previous three releases has opened a lot of ears to sounds largely unheard outside the country, but with this volume they've outdone themselves by showing the world a true genius: the late cimbalom (hammered dulcimer) player, Toni Iordache, who died in 1988 in disgrace after smuggling dollars into the country. These tracks, recorded between 1964 and 1980, showcase a talent that's virtuosic, playing with formidable technique at unbelievable speeds, but always with a superb sense of melody – and amply matched by whoever was backing him on the occasion. There are vocal and instrumental cuts, but you'll really need to play the album several times just to take in anything after the impact of his playing on the opener, "Variatiuni Pe Tema 'Foaie Verde Si-O Cr it'." It's nothing less than stunning, especially the coda, where he appears to be about to head into the stratosphere, playing 25 beats per *second*. There are touches of jazz on some tracks, but for the most part this is the roots music that made him famous and helped him tour internationally. It's a comment on the increased profile of world music that if Iordache were to come along as a fresh face now, he'd be hailed as a major star. As it is, we get his talent in retrospect. To say we're not worthy hardly does him justice. Simply one of the best, and beautifully commemorated. — CN