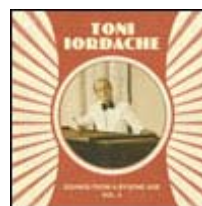




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Toni Iordache

Songs from a Bygone Age, Vol. 4
Asphalt Tango
2007
B+



The word of Sergiu Celibidache may not mean much these days. But in Romania, throughout the 20th century, Celibidache was a national treasure—a local boy made good. Celibidache, you see, was the principal conductor of the venerated Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra from 1945 to 1952. So, for a man surrounded by world-class musicians on a daily basis to be brought to tears by Toni Iordache...well, it's no small thing.

Iordache's instrument of choice was the țambal. A cross between a marimba and a piano, it's an easy instrument to play and **a hard one to master**. Iordache's training, however, began at the age of four and his home was frequently visited by fellow *Songs from a Bygone Age* subjects the **Gore Brothers** and **Dona Dumitru Siminica**. As soon as he was able, he began to play in wedding groups, further honing his skills amid the wild and exhausting celebrations that rarely lasted less than 24 hours.

Listening to any of the songs from *Songs from a Bygone Age, Vol. 4*, you'll begin to understand the true insanity Iordache and others underwent during these festivals. On "Intr-O Joi De Dimineata," for example, you'll hear Iordache playing so fast that the accordion barely keeps pace over its frenetic six minutes. Similarly, "Ca La Breaza" (the compilation's best track) is a certified banger that sees Iordache dressing up a simple tune with plenty of embellishments, exactly as you might imagine a bored jazz player might.

There are plenty of virtuoso moments, though, and it's silly to simply focus on the speed of Iordache. What made Iordache great was his ability to infuse a remarkable amount of feel into his work. When he played slower than his top recorded speed of 25 beats per second (!), it's hard to deny the yearning ("Balada Haiduceasca") or swing ("Cântec De Ascultare Al Lui Stoican Batrinul") he could bring to the table. While most modern audiences only know it as the sound of the țambal as Gollum's leitmotif in *The Lord of the Rings*, one only needs to listen to a few songs of Toni Iordache to understand the full breadth of possibilities inherent in the instrument.

Typical of musical geniuses, Iordache's story is a tragic one. Despite their independence from communist Russia's direct influence, Romania's government was a strict one and when Iordache was caught with foreign currency at the beginning of the '70s, he was jailed for three years during the prime of his life. Sure, he continued to play after his release, but who knows? Maybe we wouldn't be relying on Asphalt Tango to help us remember one of gypsy music's leading lights. Lucky for us, they seem to be glad to bring more and more listeners to tears.



Reviewed by: Todd Burns
Reviewed on: 2007-07-20
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