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**Chronomad: *Sokut***

Alien Transistor

While the idea of modernizing world music with contemporary electronics and rhythms sounds promising in theory, in practice the resultant fusion can sound more like vulgar kitsch than a novel genre-defining hybrid. Furthermore, the purity of the world style often gets lost in the process and the incorporation of modern elements ends up sounding merely contrived. So Saam Schlamminger (aka Chronomad) treads somewhat risky ground when he merges musical sounds and styles of the Middle East with the drums, keyboards, and programming of Markus and Micha Acher (of The Notwist, Tied & Tickled Trio, Lali Puna, and Ms. John Soda fame). Born in Iran and Munich-based since twelve, Schlamminger is no dilettante, though, having pursued musical studies in Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Iran, New York, and Paris. On *Sokut*'s ten tracks (really nine, as the tenth is a fleeting fragment), he plays the Persian zarb (a small-necked, cylinder-shaped wooden drum) and daf (a tambourine-like percussion instrument with rings in place of cymbals), as well as canjira (bell-like percussion), dohol (a large two-headed drum played with two sticks), gambe, guitar, and bass.

Not surprisingly, *Sokut* is most successful when electronics are used to convincingly re-create Eastern patterns and textures rather than conventional techno beats. In the portentous “Sama`I,” for example, zarb, daf, and electronic elements produce intricate Eastern rhythms and aggressive electro patterns to accompany the prickly picking of an exotic pipa-like stringed instrument. “Aksak” encompasses even broader global terrain by transplanting bluesy slide playing from the American south onto the song's swaying rhythms; once again, Schlamminger imaginatively weaves disparate elements together, in this case an anchoring acoustic bass motif, rolling drum patterns (presumably dohol-generated), and an electronic accent that resembles a whiplash. While the musicians' playing is made to sound 'live,' evidence of digital construction can be heard throughout. Voices and instruments are sometimes cut up and transformed into stuttering themes or configured into arresting rhythmic patterns, the string instrument and ululating singing voice in “Masmoudi” cases in point. Other notable pieces include “Wahda Sagra” for the bleeping Raster-Noton tones that accompany its high-pitched drum rolls and sitar-like sounds and “Do” for its hoedown of Eastern electro-funk.

Strangely, the album's muted teal-maroon, photo-montage cover design evokes Cold War-era Russian Constructivism yet obviously the album's musical styles are situated further south just one of the album's many unusual qualities. Much like forebears Trilok Gurtu, Glen Velez, Rabih Abou-Khalil, and Alice Coltrane, Schlamminger and the Achers create a convincing global fusion in *Sokut* by thoroughly integrating the component pieces of Eastern and Western styles as opposed to superficially grafting one onto the other. In this case, Schlamminger's risk pays off.

October 2004