

OVER 100  
CD REVIEWS

# SONGLINE

## Martin Lubenov Orkestar

*Dui Drom - Two Roads*

Connecting Cultures CC 50018

Full Price (\$1 mins)

★★★

**Top instrumental work,  
let down by the songs**



I have to admit that until this CD appeared the name of accordionist Martin Lubenov

was unfamiliar to me, and quite unwarrantedly so on the evidence of his brilliantly judged and imaginative virtuosity here. Solidly rooted in the fierier side of Bulgarian tradition, typified by breathtakingly precise and intricate themes, and marked by long and sinuous improvised lines, his playing is one long stream of delight. And he is ably partnered by guitarist Ateshghan Yuseinov, whose off-the-wall contribution to 'Crazy Colo' covers all conceivable bases, bassist Nenad Vasilic, with a full woody tone and reliably propulsive grooves, and masterful clarinetist/saxophonist Zhivko Stoyanov, whose warm buzzy *zurna* (folk oboe) tone on the closing 'Ali Baba' is a revelation. So far, then, so good, a mixture of razor-sharp performance and imaginative passion enriching the basic material with touches plucked from the jazz, Latin and Turkish urban traditions.

To my mind, though, the CD is let down by the songs, all sentiment and little emotion,

redolent of tear-jerking cabaret and over-sweetened with soupy chromatic harmony. This is all the more disappointing because singer Neno Iliev has a wonderful voice, which matches Stoyanov's throaty saxophone and is technically immaculate. There is just something lacking in the material, which seems empty at its core. Yet even these songs are redeemed by some wonderful solo playing, and there is a notable exception to the rule in the moving 'Dano, Danice'.

Finally, the notes by Richard Schuberth deserve a special mention as the most informative treatment of the social position of Gypsies and their music I have ever seen in a CD booklet.

Kim Burton

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