



Mostar Sevdah Reunion

Legends Of Life

[Snail] Artist: Mostar Sevdah Reunion

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Review

by Jon Lusk

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After a stellar career in the kafanas (music bars) of former Yugoslavia, Gypsy singer Ljiljana Petrovic fled the Balkan war for exile in Germany in 1990, changing her name to Buttler through marriage and living in obscurity. Then intrepid producer Dragi Sestic 'rediscovered' her, and with virtuoso acoustic group Mostar Sevdah Reunion, they made *The Mother Of Gypsy Soul* (2003), a beautiful album of classic Bosnian sevdalinka – slow, tragic love songs often dubbed 'Bosnian blues'. The release of this marvellous 2005 follow-up of Roma and Yugoslav standards was delayed by a legal dispute, but happily it finally appeared 'and it's every bit as good as her

earlier album. Unfortunately, the band that made it are no more, having split in two as a result of more music business shenanigans, although Sestic continues to do wonders with his Balkan brand.

The overwhelming tone of *The Legends Of Life* is one of sad resignation over doomed love, as the lyric translations reveal. Buttler's deep, sobbing, androgynous voice is just made for this kind of melancholic wallowing and it's on the mournful ballads such as *Kazi Zasto Me Ostavi* and *Jos Ne Svica Rujna Zora* that she really excels. It's hard to tell her apart from (male) Gypsy legend Saban Bajramovic on the stunning duet *Rupini*, another undoubted highlight.

The bulk of the songs are traditional, but Buttler's own brooding masterpiece *Tesko Je Umreti* hangs in the air with a mesmerising power, amplified by sterling instrumental support. The slithering violin of Slobodan Stancic lights up this and several other pieces, as does Mustafa Santic's empathetic accordion and clarinet. A walking bass on *Mirisni Cvetak* is one example of the subtle jazz influence that colours some arrangements, and the epic traditional song *Placem Vec Tri Dana* sounds like an inspired Balkan rewrite of Led Zeppelin's blues showstopper, *Since I've Been Loving You*.

There are a few upbeat dances such as *Verka Kaludjerka* and *Andro Verka* and even some laughter to lighten things, but it's the slower numbers that really burn themselves into the memory. Misery has seldom sounded so musical.