

# MOSTAR SEVDAAH REUNION

**Café Sevdah** Snail Records SR 66009

Bosnia's Mostar Sevdah Reunion look to have followed Macedonia's Kocani Orkestar – who split into two Kocani Orkestars so creating weakened units. What is it with bands from former Yugoslavia splintering so bitterly? It's as if the destruction of Tito's state has to be enacted across relationships. Such was the case when, this summer, most of the members of Mostar Sevdah Reunion split from producer/ manager/ band founder Dragi Sestic. They did this after recording what was going to be their third album, leaving Sestic with an unreleasable album as they signed with a wealthy Bosnian who promised them great riches. The loss of such key members as Ilijaz Delic (the veteran *sevdah* vocalist) and Mustafa Santic (the extremely gifted singer and clarinet/ accordeon player) would sink most bands but Sestic has, quite brilliantly, formed another MSR by drawing on the huge pool of *sevdah* musicians in and around his beloved city of Mostar.

*Café Sevdah* – as ever, beautifully packaged and recorded – is a brooding, very Ottoman-flavoured album. New vocalists Nermin Alukic, Elmedin Balalic and Suad Golic handle things superbly while the arrangements vary from jazz piano flavours on two tracks to the elemental Ottoman voice, hands and feet of *Ali-Pasha In Herzegovina*. Sestic's always proved a master at digging out superb traditional songs and then arranging them in a manner that avoids framing them as 'folklore'. How does *Café Sevdah* hold up against MSR's two previous albums? Well, really well. Perhaps the musical majesty of Mustafa Santic is missed – there's very little clarinet on this album – but plenty of beauty. The new MSR look set to build upon the superb foundations set by the first. A bit like Mostar itself, a city destroyed yet beautifully rebuilt.

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*Garth Cartwright*