

Homegrown Music

Finding local sounds in local stores.

Every holiday season, I encourage our readers to consider an alternative to products made by exploited workers for the profit of distant megacorporations and sold in the malls and big box stores: gifts of music created by local or regional artists, bought at locally owned record stores. Here are some suggestions for music from our North Pacific region — including right here in Eugene.

Two evocative new discs by popular local ensemble **Americanistan**, whom you may have heard at Holiday Market or performing with belly dancers around town — offer a choice of moods. First, inspired by music from Turkey, Israel, Morocco and neighboring regions, *Mosaic* is a harmonium- and percussion-driven album whose mix of original and traditional tunes can accompany dance routines — you can practically see the bellies bouncing.

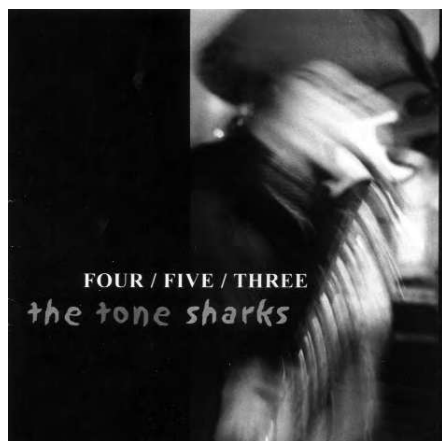
Journey East is all original, acoustic music intended to accompany yoga, dance or movement meditation, inspired by full moon gatherings held in various churches, gardens, and other sacred spaces. I could have done without the echo effect and nature sounds on a couple tracks, but they probably add to the appeal for New Age types. The musicians (Wayne and Denise Gilbertson, Janet Naylor, Tina Dreisbach, David Helfand and David Wilson) deploy a rich array of colorful sounds — harmonium, kanoon, dumbek and various other percussion, flutes, mandocello, occasional vocal chants, and more in albums that should appeal to fans of world music.

I discovered the high-spirited neoblugrass band, **Foghorn String Band**, at an OFAM concert in which the famous Appalachian bluegrass pickers they opened for declared Foghorn to be every bit as compelling as the old schoolers from back East. They were right: Foghorn rescues bluegrass from the folk-art museum and refreshes it with a vim and vigor approaching its original vitality.



Emerging from Portland's burgeoning old-time music scene, these hot young pickers (fiddle, guitar, vocals, banjo, mandolin, bass) pour rock 'n' roll energy into their modern takes on traditional music. Foghorn's release, *Rattlesnake Tidal Wave*, will appeal to anyone entranced by the *O Brother Where art Thou?* soundtrack and other music with deep American roots.

Probably the bravest and weirdest album by one of my favorite Northwest bands, **Tone Sharks**, *Four/Five/Three* represents drummer/leader Dave Storrs' avowed inten-



tion to capture the "meanderings, wrong turns and belly flops" of an unplanned, real time recording session, in order to avoid the creeping sameness that afflicts the studio recordings of practically every other group that's been together half as long (two decades).

These master musicians (Reed Wallsmith on sax, Mark Balar on Robmbone, guitar, vocals; Tom McNalley guitar, Page Hundemer and Keith Brush, electric and acoustic bass, Mike Klobas and Storrs, drums) are certainly qualified to improvise spontaneously, but as much as I admire the courage, artistic ambition, and careful listening it takes to just follow impulsively generated ideas wherever they lead, some of the ideas don't go very far and were probably more fun for the players than the listeners. Nevertheless, fans of out-there jazz and leap-before-you look musical invention — not to mention superior playing — might want to give this a try. For a first bite of the Sharks, though, I'd start with *Chunks of Zen*, which manages to be coherent and surprising at the same time. The core group (Storrs, Klobas, Hundemer) sounds more focused on the bass- and sequencer-driven grooves of *An Hour of Now*.

There's not such a great distance between Storrs' techno experiments and the fully improvised downtempo electronica of Portland's **Surrounded by Ninjas**, a promising turntable and synth duo that played Eugene several times this year. *Realtime Modify* amalgamates a rich variety of live loops, live and sampled percussion, tabla and other strange sounds into surprisingly tuneful, frequently mesmerizing (though occasionally overextended) soundscapes.

Since he moved to Eugene three years ago, **Thomas Mapfumo**, one of Africa's greatest musicians, has rebuilt his band **The Blacks Unlimited** (including horn players from here), relied more on his own compositions, and made some of the best recorded music of his career. One of the world's most revered musicians, the 60-year old Lion of Zimbabwe still makes irresistible, danceable pop music with a fiery message and tours the world. His patented mixture of guitar, mbira, South African jazz, West African grooves, and American R horn charts is as ear-catching as ever, and the anger that was once directed at Rhodesia's apartheid government has fueled an intense new batch of songs decrying the corruption of Zimbabwe's longtime president, Robert Mugabe. *Toi Toi* is one of the best world music records of 2003, and Mapfumo's band has been rehearsing a new batch at his south Eugene house for a 2004 release. **EW**

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