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## Review

by Michael G. Nastos

For his sixth recording, Turkish born pianist Fahir Atakoglu has gone retro, recalling the '80s contemporary New York City/Seventh Avenue South neo-bop, skunk funk, and fusion of the Brecker Brothers and Steps/Steps Ahead. Playing exclusively acoustic and not electric piano, he also employs the quite different sounding electric guitarists Mike Stern or Wayne Krantz on alternating tracks, adding Michael Brecker disciple Bob Franceschini, electric bass guitar pioneer Anthony Jackson, and the dynamic drummer Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez. Atakoglu attains the sound he seeks quite easily, a bit derivative, but exciting and refreshingly done some 25 years after the fact. Of course the twist is the folkloric Turkish nuances, rhythm and elements he incorporates, and that he has added on from his 2005 breakthrough CD "If," which concentrated on his trio with Jackson and Hernandez. The result is more jaw dropping music from this most awesome, brilliant, death-defying pianist who deserves a ton of wider recognition and admiration. On the more electrified side, urged on by Stern's characteristic high-pitched guitar, "Fuse On" kicks off the CD with an unmistakable Brecker/Steps Big Apple Broadway swagger and strut, while a staggered choppy staccato accent identifies, but does not update "Sync-Op." In the pocket American style, the hip and contemporary "Aheste" has Stern at his most resonant, a ringing endorsement of Atakoglu's attempt to drag this music into the now. Krantz is a more subdued, but still substantial player, and he stokes a distinct Turkish fire with embers instead of flames as on the 7/8 beat of "Black Sea" a heavy Mid-Eastern dialect paced by Atakoglu's cascading piano lines, and on the dervish like 10/8 measures of "Trapped" with an industrial guitar woven through the pianists probing inventions. Combining the different influences, the outstanding "ESS" is a minimalist tune fronted by Franceschini's lurid tenor lines, a more balanced timbre between all the instruments, and an out and out rock and roll bridge. It cannot be overemphasized that Jackson and Hernandez together are killin', and are about as unstoppable a tandem as there can be going in modern jazz or fusion musics – period! If you go back to the first recordings of Steps when Michael Brecker was with them, the similarities are quite clear, but they didn't have a pianist as formidable as Atakoglu. There's a lot to enjoy on this recording from a contemporary and historical standpoint, and as listeners should definitely own a copy of "If," this one shows a willingness to expand, employ different styles, and bodes well for Atakoglu's next adventurous excursion.