

## Mp3 Skist - Taking Something Somewhere



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On this 2nd release, rich acoustic percussion and warm analog drone work their way into Skist's entirely unique brand of electronica meets song. 8 MP3 Songs ELECTRONIC: Pop Crossover, POP: with Electronic Production Details: Skist is the experimental song unit of Samm Bennett and Haruna Ito. Their music addresses an expanded capacity of the ear and emotion, through a less linear use of sound, rhythm, melody and words than the conventional pop song: a bridge in an open-ended relationship between performer and listener. Bennett lays down an intricate, percolating rhythmic bed, as well as harmonic drones, to which Ito adds strangely organic digital feedback-based textures that crackle, whistle, buzz and hum. Through this rich fabric, Haruna's clear voice and nebulous poetry weaves as another thread, balancing against rhythm and texture rather than presenting itself as the music's focal point. These four elements, rhythm, texture, vocal melody and word, are the key components of Skist's sound: their goal is to continually rework and reconfigure them in ways that will be refreshing and challenging to themselves and to their listeners. Their performance methods are ever-changing, as they are keenly interested in exploring untried strategies in making music together, and adamant about not falling into easy patterns and systems. Their first release Ellipsis (2002) featured mostly programmed beats, but their latest release Taking Something Somewhere (Autumn 2006) shows a shift toward more live playing of electronic percussion (notably the Wavedrum) as well as an increasing use of acoustic percussion (such as talking drum, frame drums, bells, sanza, etc.) combined with their trademark translucent sonic textures and Haruna's airy vocals. INTERVIEW: By Lawrence English (Room 40) - September 2006 So tell us about the new album, Taking Something Somewhere. Samm: Taking Something Somewhere picks up where Ellipsis left off. Like Ellipsis, the new tunes don't employ song structure as that term is generally understood. They don't have chord changes, or verse/chorus/verse

formats. We basically work with melody, rhythm and sonic texture, and try to find a new dynamic between these elements for each piece. Our music has little to do with Western song-form and more in common with African or Asian music. One key difference with this new CD, though, is the character of the vocal. The voice is not treated and effected so dramatically as on Ellipsis. The vocals are really very straight-ahead, voice-in-front-of-a-mic recordings. There's also a lot more acoustic percussion this time around: the sound is definitely warmer and more varied. What are the sonic characteristics that sum up what Skist is about? Haruna: Skist is about rhythm, unusual aural experiences, and the singing human voice. There's no hierarchy here, they're all equal parts the Skist persona. One of our main desires is to further the pop song, and we do it this way because this, we think, is what could actually be an \*engaging\* listen to the human ear in 2006. There are African polyrhythms on non-African instruments, musical use of sonic artifacts of the behaviour of electricity, and the timeless element of the voice, which is still the nucleus of all human music. I don't think any of the songs are an \*easy\* listen-- they're not intended to be. I hope that they can each be an event that will interact with the listener's imagination, as pop songs should be. What are your feelings towards the music coming from out of Tokyo and broader Japan - is it an exciting scene there for electronic music and improvisation? Haruna: We generally like to maintain a very loose association with any given scene that is happening at the moment. Since the Skist sound and approach is such an idiosyncratic one, we've been lucky enough to be able to link simultaneously to different areas of music that ordinarily have little commerce between them. I continually find excitement in the scenes in Tokyo and the rest of Japan, mainly due to the fact that the audiences are generally so unprejudiced, and have keen ears and open minds. That's always gratifying, particularly if you're a musician trying to do something differently. You both work on solo projects right? What are they focused on? Haruna: I've been working carefully and meticulously on a solo record which is made up of collections of recorded feedback and field recordings. I focus on the role of noise, attempting to elicit a phantom nostalgia from largely inorganic sounds. Samm: I've been mostly focussing on writing and recording my own songs, which fall into a kind of "Americana without the guitars" sort of area. Haruna calls it "electronic folk". What is the Skist live experience like? What can people expect at your shows? Samm: In recording we focus on aural minutiae and micro-events, but that particular quality is not such a big element of our live performances. The only way to get as meticulous and microscopic in a live setting would be to get on stage and just press "play" on a sequencer. We don't want to do that, so the Skist live

experience is much more about unfolding the songs in a more improvisatory manner, with lots of live interplay of a less "programmed" manner going on. In order to have fun onstage, we need to surprise ourselves a little bit, to let something go where we haven't planned! When you started Skist, did you have an idea of what you wanted to achieve? Samm: We just wanted to make music that we would be happy doing and would be proud to present to the world. We wanted to do songs, to use the voice, but to do it in such a way that the voice would have the same "weight" as the other main elements of rhythm and sonic texture. We envisioned something where the vocals would be integrated into the total fabric of the music in a fresh way, in an organic way. That's one of the goals we're trying to achieve. How do the two of you go about constructing a piece? Is there much variation in the way you work? Samm: Some pieces on the new CD started with rhythm programming by Haruna, and some started with programming/recording by me. Sometimes we take a basic track (whatever that may be) and add a LOT of parts to it, rather quickly ("get this idea in there! Now put this rhythm down on it! OK, now where's the kazoo?"). Then when it's all real thick, we start stripping it down, and find the essence of the thing. Most of the lyrics are Haruna's, but I've contributed 1 song per album, and we've co-written lyrics on 1 or 2 other songs. Most vocal melodies are mine, with a little tweaking and rewriting done later as a group process. Do you think the human voice works well with electronic instrumentation? What are some of the challenges in trying to meld together these two ingredients? Samm: I think it can work well. In our humble opinion, Skist is doing it reasonably well. Hopefully others will agree! I don't think combining the human voice with electronic instruments is more challenging than with acoustic instruments, particularly. Skist may perhaps sound a bit strange to some folks who might not be expecting our particular brand of minimal electronica with voice, but I think that taken on its own terms Skist's music makes perfect sense. I understand that you use quite experimental techniques yet some of the music comes across as very much a song. Samm: Well, to us that's a good thing. To us they are most definitely songs. But it's interesting you should say that, because there is still an almost complete absence of what is generally termed "song form" in Skist songs. No verse/chorus structure, no use of repetitive stanzas or other rhythm-poetic devices, and no use of rhyme. And no chord changes either, and of course chord changes are employed in about 99 of all modern song. So the fact that you can discern and define these things as songs is, for us, a great compliment. It means we're doing what we've hoped to do: expand the definition of song, and take this whole "song" thing into a new area of possibility.

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