music

Mystical Music

**THINK KABBALAH DOESN'T COME IN
MUSIC FORM? THINK AGAIN.** BY ADAM DAVIS

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL SIERADSKI

WE HEAR A LOT THESE DAYS ABOUT the common roots, beliefs, and music of Jews and Arabs. When applied to music, these code words are usually set against the backdrop of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, fueled by political intent and are loaded with a "can't we all just get along?" sensibility. It's so overdone (and obviously true) that it's gotten quite boring.

Boring it is not, however, when the music of Jews and Arabs is sampled, then fused with beats to create ambient trance music. That's the essence of the self-titled release by Zohar (Ark 21 Records), an album so wickedly good I want to leave it on heavy rotation and turn my living room into a hookah bar.

Zohar is led by Erran Baron Cohen (older brother to Sacha, aka Ali G.) and Andrew Kremer, two London DJ's that became interested in sampling Jewish music, albeit independently of one another. The sound is something that only could have emanated from the pulsing, ethnic melting pot of London's dance clubs.

Inspired by famous DJ's like Steinski (another Yid) and ColdCut, the two found one another in 1997 while working on an album of tracks with Middle Eastern dance grooves. They began sampling records of *muezzin* (Muslim prayer leaders) and *chazzanim* (Jewish cantors) and carefully framed particular words and phrases with an astute blend of original composition and thumping dance beats to further highlight their beauty. The duo cut a single, "*Elokeinu*," and shortly after its release, it became massively popular due to steady play in famous London underground clubs like Megatropolis, China White, and Momo. The demand for more spawned an entire album of organic, sometimes jazz-touched ambient tracks.

You don't have to be into Jewish music to appreciate this album, as evidenced by its wild popularity in the United Kingdom. The brilliant, spare arrangements and emotional power of the tracks will do all the work for you.

The track "*Onethreeseven*" captures