

Abraxas

Book of Angels



ABRAXAS: Shanir Ezra Blumenkranz steps out on his own to make one of the most primal and tribal installments in the 'Book of Angels' series. Drawing on his Sephardic roots, Shanir plays gimbri throughout, giving the music a primeval Moroccan edge. Featuring the intense guitar pyrotechnics of Eyal Maoz and Aram Bajakian (who recently has been tearing it up in Lou Reed's new band) and the atavistic drumming of Kenny Grohowski, this is Ritualistic Jewish Rock for the 21st century by a brilliant young lion from the East Village via Brooklyn/Israel!

Shanir Ezra Blumenkranz



Shanir Ezra Blumenkranz — acoustic bass, electric bass, oud, gimbri — was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1975 to Egyptian and Polish parents. He was given his first instruments, the pots and pans from the kitchen and a three string guitar at the age of two.

Shanir is featured on over 25 releases on John Zorn's Tzadik record label since 1999 - producing and arranging many of the bands he works with, including Rashanim "The Gathering", Edom "Hope And Destruction", and Pitom "Blasphemy And Other Serious Crimes".

In 2011, Shanir produced and arranged a new cd featuring Cyro Baptista's Banquet Of The Spirits, comprised of new compositions by John Zorn as part of the Masada "Book Of Angels" music series on Tzadik. Other cds by Cyro Baptista include the self titled debut of Banquet Of The Spirits and Infinito - with compositions and arrangements by Shanir.

Tzadik releases featuring Shanir include The Treatment, Workingman's Death, Notes on Marie Menken/Ray Bandar, Belle de Nature/The New Rijksmuseum, Filmworks Anthology 1986-2005, In Search Of The Miraculous, and Protocols of Zion (featuring Shanir on oud) - all composed by John Zorn. Tzadik releases featuring Shanir include special guests Marc Ribot, Mark Feldman, Erik Friedlander, Kenny Wollesen, Ben Perowsky, Rob Burger, Jamie Saft, Ikue Mori, John Medeski, John Zorn, as well as cds by Pharaohs Daughter and Satlah. Other cds include "Chinatown" featuring Daniel Carter, "Sextet 2003" featuring Anthony Braxton and Sonny Simmons, "Trio Tarana" Ravish Momin and Jason Kao Hwang, "Unbroken" featuring Louie Belogenis and Kenny Wollesen, Adam Rudolph's "Moving Pictures" featuring Hamid Drake and Ned Rothenberg, and Christina Courtin for Nonesuch Records.

Shanir has performed in concert halls and festival stages all over the world with Marty Ehrlich (Israel), Miho Hatori (Brazil, USA), Bill Frisell (USA), Cyro Baptista's Banquet Of The Spirits (Japan, USA, Mexico, EU), Uri Caine (USA), Eric Friedlander (USA), Charles Gayle (USA), Kasu Uchihashi (Japan), Michiyo Yagi (Japan), Makigami Koichi, (Japan, USA), Yoshida Tatsuya's Ruins (USA), Trey Spruance (EU), Dave Douglas (USA), Steve Coleman (USA), Sylvie Courvoisier (USA), Joey Baron (USA), Mark Feldman (USA), John Zorn's Masada, Masada Sextet, Electric Masada, Cobra, Masada String Trio (USA, EU), and a special concert with John Zorn for BBC radio (UK).

Shanir was featured in The Wire, Downbeat, Jazziz, Jazz Times, and the May 2000 issue of Bass Player Magazine.

Shanir is also a member of Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Project playing bass, oud, and gimbri and has toured extensively around the world with this ensemble. In this capacity, he arranged music for Yo-Yo Ma's upcoming release on Sony Records.

Aram Bajakian



Queens based guitarist Aram Bajakian started performing at the age of ten, emulating Jimmy Pages “Dazed and Confused” violin bow on guitar cacophony at the Fifth Grade talent show.

Since then Bajakian has performed/recorded with rock legend Lou Reed, Grammy winners Diana Krall and Yusef Lateef, saxophonist John Zorn, guitarists Marc Ribot and Nels Cline, saxophone virtuoso James Carter, Rufus and Martha Wainwright, Sean Lennon, trumpeter Steven Bernstein, drummer Billy Martin, bass legend Jamaaladeen Tacuma, violist Mat Maneri, and the original Can Singer Malcolm Mooney. Bajakian and drummer Sean Noonan have performed together in various ensembles for 12 years and have a duo called CHIPS. Bajakian is also a member of bassist Shanir Blumenkranz’s group Abraxas, which is featured on Volume 19 of John Zorn’s Masada: Book of Angels series.

Drawing inspiration from a variety of musical cultures and styles, Bajakian’s study of music has brought him to West Africa, India and Morocco. He has performed in some of New York City’s greatest venues, including Carnegie Hall, Town Hall, Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center, Prospect Park Bandshell, the Stone, Joe’s Pub and the Living Room.

Bajakian leads several of his own groups, including Kef, a chamber string trio that plays arrangements of traditional Armenian Songs, “Beat Down”, an Afro Punk Ensemble, and “Killing Floor,” a blues/RnB Project. He also plays in the improvisatory power hardcore band, Pirates, with comedian Ethan Fixell on vocals, and Billy Delgiudice on drums.

Bajakian and vocalist Julia Ulehla have a group called Brno, which performs Moravian folk songs that Ulehla’s great-grandfather transcribed in Czechoslovakia in the early 20th Century.

Bajakian’s debut record, Aram Bajakian’s Kef, was released on Tzadik Records in July of 2011.

Eyal Maoz



Band leader, solo performer and composer Eyal Maoz leads a number of original music ensembles including Edom, Dimyon, and Crazy Slavic Band. He also co-leads the Maoz-Sirkis Duet, the Maoz-Masaoka Duet (with koto player Miya Masaoka) and Hypercolor (with Lukas Ligeti and James Ilgenfritz), and is a guest member of John Zorn's Cobra. Eyal's ensembles have performed at major music festivals worldwide such as the Montreal International Jazz Festival, NYC 2007 Winter JazzFest, Brooklyn BAM Next Festival, Verizon Jazz Festival, the New York Jewish Music and Heritage Festival, Florida Music Harvest, The Jewzapalooza Festival in NYC and many more. His music was featured in the movies Keepers Of Eden (by Yoram Porath), Israeli's Cinema History documentary (by Raphael Nadjari) as well as at the MTV show "Undress." WNYC/NPR recently interviewed him and dedicated a 90-minute program to his music.

Born in Israel, Eyal started to explore jazz, rock and avant-garde music at an early age. He led the highly celebrated Lemon Juice Quartet which performed regularly at the Red Sea International Jazz Festival, released three original CDs and was heralded for their CD "Peasant Songs," a raucous version of Bela Bartok and Eric Satie's music on Piadrum Records.

Eyal's collaboration with long-time childhood friend and in-demand UK drummer Asaf Sirkis, has resulted in two duo CDs; the most recent "Elementary Dialogues" was released in June 2009 by Ayler Records (France).

His Jewish music acoustic ensemble, Dimyon, has earned critical acclaim after performances in Israel and Italy. After a successful guitar solo tour in Austria, Eyal recently completed a guitar tour in China, playing solo as well as performing with local musicians from straight-ahead jazz aficionados to extreme avant-garde noisemakers.

"Hope and Destruction," his second CD on Tzadik Records with his ensemble "Edom" was released in 2006. The group's debut CD, featuring Maoz with John Medeski, Shanir Blumenkranz and Ben Perowsky, earned wide acclaim for its soulful, hard-rocking "ecstatic" music.

Kenny Grohowski



Brought up in a musical household in Miami, 29-year-old drummer, Kenny Grohowski has been performing since the age of 14. His rich musical background is demonstrated through the growing list of his collaborators and guest artists, including Vernon Reid, Corey Unger (of Blood Has Been Shed), Emeline Michel, Peter Cincotti, Jorge Sylvester, Bobby Sanabria, Bill T. Jones, Rory Stuart, Cassandra Wilson, Richie Ray & Bobby Cruz, Giovanni Hidalgo, John Benitez, Francis Mbappe, Domingo Quinones, and Bobby Valentin.

Grohowski has been a member of bassist Lonnie Plaxico's band since 2003, and a member of Andy Milne's Dapp Theory since 2006, having come back from a successful US/Canada tour with Dapp Theory, with Highlight shows in Vancouver opening for Jazz and Bass legend, Stanley Clarke, and performed in the 2007 Latin Grammy Awards Live from Madison Square Garden with the award winning group RBD. He has appeared on several recordings, including Plaxico's hit "So Alive" [Sony, Japan]. As of 2009, Grohowski has become a new member of acclaimed Haitian singer/cultural figure Emeline Michel's Accoustic Quintet, and has also performed at the Museum of Modern Art with the Ze Luis Quartet as part of their Live Art performances. Grohowski has also toured across the United States, South America, and Europe, as well as in Australia and China with New Classical Composer Daniel Bernard Roumain (a.k.a. DBR). Kenny has also performed regularly with acclaimed bassist Felix Pastorius and his group since 2010, performing regularly at such New York City venues as Zinc Bar and The 55 Bar. Recently, Grohowski has written and recorded for Grammy Award winning Producer and Arranger Victor "Papo" Ortiz on the album "Eres Santo".

Grohowski is also a composer and member of the Orchestra of St. Luke's Young Composers Symposium Development Program, who premiered his string quartet in 2005. The New York Times praised the piece as "insightfully combined dark Shostakovich-like harmonies with an edgy rhythmic drive."

As of 2012, Grohowski has recorded on several full length albums. At the time of this writing, Grohowski has recorded on the next full length album for Andy Milne's Dapp Theory with Jimmy Haslip, Founding member of the Yellow Jackets as well as Allan Holdsworth new bassist, as producer. He has also recorded on Shanir Blumenkranz's ABRAXAS, featuring the music of John Zorn. Also, Grohowski will be recording a brand new full length album for Violin-Metaller's Resolution 15. Coming out later in the year, Progressive Metal act Hung will be releasing their first full length album through The End Records on May 8th, 2012, as well as a brand new double CD for prolific composer Jorge Sylvester and his Afro-Caribbean Experimental Collective, both of which prominently feature Grohowski's versatility and technique. Grohowski has become an affiliated member of Felix Pastorius' Group, The Hipster Assassins, the newly inducted bass player of the yellow jackets and son of legendary bassist Jaco Pastorius. Grohowski has also become a touring member of Trey Spruance's (of Mr Bungle/Faith No More fame) Secret Chiefs 3, having appeared all over Europe in 2012 with the group.

Press Quotes

Picture a Sephardic Jimi Hendrix on holiday in Fez. ABRAXAS is showcase for Blumenkranz. Here he exclusively plays the deep toned Gimbri, a 3-stringed Moroccan instrument, in the context of compositions featuring the twin 6 string assault of Eyal Maoz and Aram Bajakian against the slamming backbeats of drummer Kenny Growhowski.

- Bill Milkowski

Downbeat Magazine - June 2013

Een van de meest gedreven en hardst rockende platen uit het tweede Masada-boek - een gelegenheid om kennis te maken met de nieuwe generatie kopstukken.

One of the most passionate and hardest rocking plates from the second Masada book - an opportunity to get acquainted with the new generation of leaders.

- Guy Peters

enola.be

The Tzadik website describes it well as the "most primal and tribal installments in the Book of Angels series." ABRAXAS devilishly mixes the dark klezmer melodies and rhythms with full on free-punk-jazz energy. Full of energy and urgency, there is a wonderful contrast between the delicately melodic and thrillingly thrashing.

- Paul Acquaro

freejazzblog.org

These are Zorn pieces given to an extraordinary talent to perform, re-imagine, or demolish, and Shanir Ezra Blumenkranz has done all three with his batch of songs. ABRAXAS will appeal to progressive ears new and old.

- Scott Morrow

alarm-magazine.com/

ABRAXAS is the most high-powered, vivacious, and at times frighteningly dynamic entry in the series - managing to achieve something that hadn't quite been explored yet. As if I were riding atop a massive, speeding tidal wave of Masada awesomeness.

- Griffin Vacheron

uki-sutori.com

