

SHERVIN LAINIEZ



ANAT COHEN

BY ANDERS GRIFFEN

Anat Cohen is a clarinetist and saxophonist raised in Tel Aviv, Israel and living in New York for almost 20 years. She has toured the world, performing and recording with a range of musicians, including her brothers, trumpeter Avishai Cohen and saxophonist Yuval Cohen, as well as Paquito D’Rivera, Renee Rosnes, Jason Lindner, Ben Street, Cyro Baptista and Terri Lyne Carrington. Over the past 10 years she has received numerous awards and accolades from ASCAP, the Jazz Journalists Association and DownBeat’s Critics and Readers Polls. For the 2018 Grammy Awards she received two nominations: *Outra Coisa: The Music Of Moacir Santos* with Marcello Gonçalves in the Best Latin Jazz Album category and *Rosa Dos Ventos* with Trio Brasileiro in the Best World Music Album category. We managed to catch up just before she embarked on her February tour with Gonçalves.

The New York City Jazz Record: As I understand it, your personal discovery of Brazilian and AfroCuban music started when you attended Berklee in the ‘90s?

Anat Cohen: Pretty much. I started opening my eyes to world music by meeting students like me that came from other parts of the world and actually had personal interactions with other musicians and got to know music that people play. So, Berklee was a good launch for my world music exploration.

TNYCJR: Some of this music is perhaps more readily enjoyed by listeners than mastered by non-native musicians. Is this a challenge for you and do you continue to consider yourself a student of this music?

AC: Absolutely! It is a challenge and I think I’ve been fortunate that I was able to travel and to meet people, meet the source, basically. To get the accents of the music, I often have to be the only *gringa*, so I can actually get the flavor and see it’s not just the sound of the music. It’s the way people are, the way they relate to each other, the way they talk, the volume of their voices, the kind of casual way of the jokes, the humor. The whole way of being is all part of the music. So, you get the accent of the music together with getting to know the people, the culture. There’s so much, even within one country. Inside Brazil there’s not the same music from the north to the south. It’s just an endless, ongoing journey.

TNYCJR: You mention the humor and I think it’s evident in some of your music on the albums with Marcello Gonçalves and Trio Brasileiro, for example. Some of it is quite challenging, but there’s a lightness to it, humor and joy.

AC: If we’re talking specifically about *choro* music, through that music I met Marcello and Trio Brasileiro. It’s interesting because this music is basically informal and you sit out of a concert hall for the most part. The way the music started is just a casual, social gathering,

people around a table. Yet the music is so detailed it requires some serious concentration and skill on the instrument. So, it’s always a combination of being serious and having humor. You know, one of my idols, Paquito D’Rivera, is a person that takes the music very seriously. There’s nothing funny about it. But when the music stops, oh is he going to crack a joke and just be relaxed and acting like he’s in your living room? Yes, there are moments for humor, of course, and they may quote and be funny inside the music, but it’s very serious. Again, there’s something about this combination of who we are. Of course not every person is cracking jokes at every given moment, but you talk about the humor and I like a smile to connect people, to use smiles in order to bridge gaps. It could be just give a smile get a smile back. So, I communicate that way and I try to make the same effect through the music.

TNYCJR: On your recently released tentet album *Happy Song*, I noticed the Egberto Gismonti piece “Loro”, which I don’t think too many people have recorded. Was that your selection of that piece or the arranger’s?

AC: The arranger, my musical director, my business partner and music partner for many years is Oded Lev-Ari. He deserves so much credit for so much. Oded has been a New York resident for pretty much as long as I have. He was a composition student with Bob Brookmeyer, attended New England Conservatory, moved to New York and he’s just one of the most brilliant people that I’ve ever met. We went to high school together, so we’re friends for many, many years. We have a record label together; he’s the mastermind behind Anzic Records. He wears a lot of different hats, he can do so many things. He’s just a brilliant, wonderful person worth exploring. Oded did the arrangement for “Loro”. For the past 15 years or more I played with the great Duduka Da Fonseca—a wonderful drummer, part of Trio da Paz and played with Jobim. I suggested the song because I played it with Duduka.

TNYCJR: Can you comment briefly on the rhythm and character of that tune?

AC: The rhythm is technically from the northeast of Brazil called *baião*. For me it’s very much connected to the Middle Eastern rhythm, it’s not so far. It’s basically three over two, you have the feeling of the three and the two in the bass and comping, both exists and the accent...it’s just different flavors, different spices.

In the arrangement for the tentet we actually break it down for a moment of *fornó*, where just the accordion and the percussion are playing, a very common thing that you could hear, also from the northeast of Brazil, music called *fornó*. James Shipp on percussion and that’s where Vitor Gonçalves is wailing on the accordion.

TNYCJR: Do you any plans to travel back to Brazil in the near future?

AC: I try to go once a year, every two years. If I get to work there, great. If not, I just go to get some inspiration from one of my favorite places in the world, Rio de Janeiro. There’s some feeling I get that’s very hard to explain. I don’t have any roots in Brazil, no Brazilians in my immediate family and, yet, something about the music, something about Rio makes me feel longing for something that is part of me, but I can’t explain why. It’s absolutely a feeling.

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STEINWAY & SONS

(INTERVIEW CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

TNYCJR: When this article is published in March you will have completed a tour with Marcello Gonçalves in Italy and...

AC: ...and we'll be post-Grammys, so we'll know if we won, since we've been nominated for two albums. It's amazing. Hopefully we'll get the Tentet album to be nominated next year. And we'll have some shows coming up with the Tentet. Oh! And I have a duo album coming out with Fred Hersch and hopefully it will be ready for our dates in March on the West Coast.

TNYCJR: That's a lot of ongoing projects. Looking at your website, I see you're almost booked solid through July. How are you able to work with all of these projects and keep a schedule like that? Is there time to get the music organized and rehearse?

AC: Not always. Sometimes things happen last minute. Sometimes there is time. If there's an ongoing project then we end up building over an existing repertoire and it's easier to just add things as we go. Sometimes I've done stuff where you start with the same repertoire and every day or two of a tour you add a song and you work on it and then you add another song and then by the end of the tour you have new repertoire. And I love experimenting with things live because sometimes you rehearse a song and you think, "that's the way I want to play it" and then something is missing when it comes to playing it live. You want to know what excites the music, what makes it go in a certain trajectory. We need the live shows in order to let the music be what it wants to be. I want people to keep coming out and supporting live music. There are some things that cannot be worked out unless we try them on people, unless we play for people, unless we feel how people react to it and feel what it does. The music is a dialogue with the artist and the audience so just keep coming out to support live music.

TNYCJR: I'm sure this is the process with Hersch.

AC: Absolutely! With Fred it's very unknown because the music is really open. Even though we could play a standard, we could play a song, it can come out differently every time and that's part of the reason I like to play in duos. It makes the music much more flexible and elastic as opposed to...I mean it can become flexible with a quartet as well, but there's something about only two people making a decision at the same time. It's enough if one wants to go a certain way and the other just lets it be, then the music just goes there. There's much more back and forth when there's a few more people involved.

TNYCJR: Also coming up in March is the Woman to Woman All-Star Band performance at 92nd Street Y.

AC: Oh! Amazing. I love this band so much. I think we have a new name for the band. It's called Artemis, but that will have to be confirmed with our musical director [pianist] Renee Rosnes. We did a tour this past summer for three weeks. It was just such an incredible experience. Amazing musicianship, great spirit, great souls, just powerful people, happen to be women, but that's really not the main point. It's just a great way to make music with sensitive musicians and it was just such a joyful, positive experience that we decided to try and do it again.

TNYCJR: How much have you worked with those individual artists separate from this band?

AC: I've toured with Renee in the past, we went to Japan together. I worked with [trumpeter] Ingrid Jensen; I played with [vocalist] Cécile McLorin Salvant

a few times. I've been friends with [saxophonist] Melissa [Aldana]... Yeah, I know all of them. I worked with [drummer] Allison Miller before. I went to Berklee College of Music with Noriko [Ueda], the bass player, so I know her for a long time. Yeah, I know everybody in the band for a long time.

TNYCJR: I spoke to Terri Lyne Carrington a while back and I think she said something similar to you when she was getting a lot of attention for an all-woman project. It just happened to be a group of amazing artists and she didn't really put the emphasis on the fact that it was an all-women band. She said the point was not to make a women's band but just to make a band.

AC: Yeah. I mean, we will get to a point where it's not going to matter. You know, when it's an all-guys band nobody asks, "why decide to put all guys in the band?" [laughs] But when it's all girls they ask, "why did you decide to put all girls?" Well, I like the way they all play and I want to play with them. You know, when it comes time to make music you think about personalities and musical fit and sometimes people are aware of it, but you don't necessarily think about gender or race or age. It's not the first thing that comes to my mind when I want to put a band together. I think about what the music wants. The music just wants to be played the best way it can be played and you have to find the people that are going to make...you know, I want to play with people that help me feel that I can be me and let me be free. When you can find that, the rest doesn't matter. ❖

For more information, visit anatcohen.com. Cohen is at 92nd Street Y Mar. 2nd as part of the Woman to Woman band and Jazz at Kitano Mar. 30th-31st with Martin Wind. See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Five Play – ...Plus (Arbors, 2004)
- Waverly 7 – Yo! Bobby (Anzic, 2006)
- Anat Cohen – Clarinetwork: Live at the Village Vanguard (Anzic, 2009)
- Anat Cohen – Claroscuro (Anzic, 2011)
- 3 Cohens – Tightrope (Anzic, 2013)
- Anat Cohen Tentet – Happy Song (Anzic, 2016)

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To find more than door money for the band he'd just invented, Gastaut said, "I like the idea of this trio, you like it too, let's do a recording session and I'll start a label to release it!"

The group's first meeting resulted in *Pourtant les cimes des arbres*, the first Dark Tree release and one that would distinguish any label associated with improvised music, from its striking Rorschach blot cover with its colored spheres (Marie Gastaut does all the Dark Tree design work), the epigram from the traveller-poet Basho and, most of all, the music, work of elemental power in which Lazro's baritone summons up granite blocks of sound amid Duboc's bowed and plucked foundations and the rattle and hum of Lasserre's snare and cymbals.

Since then the team of Bertrand, Marie and her husband Emmanuel have presented 90 concerts in the jazz@home series (jazzathome.fr) and Dark Tree has become a significant label. The name, taken from a composition by Horace Tapscott, commemorates Gastaut hearing the California pianist at a 1995 concert: "I didn't know anything about him at that time, but Tapscott blew my mind, I'd seen the light! At the same time, I discovered the music of Bobby Bradford and John Carter. That's how I started being interested in the L.A. avant garde jazz scene. So now, you can imagine how happy I am to be able to put out the Dark

Tree Roots Series with unreleased recordings from that scene."

The second CD to appear in the Roots Series is the Vinny Golia Wind Quintet's *Live at the Century City Playhouse, Los Angeles 1979*, a striking foray into chamber music with Golia's extensive woodwinds and complex compositions joined by Bradford, Carter and trombonist Glenn Ferris.

It was a significant moment early in Golia's career. He recalls, "before the gig we couldn't all rehearse together, I did one rehearsal in the afternoon with John and Glenn and then one with Bobby. I was a bit nervous because this was a new setting for me, but I love chamber music settings... Bertrand came to LA a couple of times, saw Bob and I play, so we talked a lot about the musicians and the fact that many of us on the entire West Coast have been often overlooked when it comes to playing festivals and such. I mentioned the wind quartet, so he asked if he could hear it and he liked it. Checked with me about everything, very easy to work with. I do have to say that I did not listen to any of the music until I got the CDs. I am delighted that a label has taken an interest in the scene out here. It's still very vibrant, fertile in fact. The history out here is amazing and growing. That quartet was a big step for me, thinking about how to compose for more delicate situations. John, Bobby and Glenn are masters of nuance so I was learning quite a bit from them just by listening. John, Bobby and Horace Tapscott were like beacons of light showing us a pathway to what our music could become if we stayed on it."

For Gastaut to record a band, "they have to be singular, to touch my soul, to give me goosebumps! When I listened for the first time to *Sens Radiants* [the second album by Lazro, Duboc and Lasserre], I had tears in my eyes, so I had no doubt."

While the music on Dark Tree is mostly improvised, there's no house style: one unifying feature might be the presence of Duboc on five of the nine CDs, but the three trios of which he's a member inhabit very different 'zones' of free improvisation. Duboc feels that, "Bertrand is like me, he thinks that music is a story of relationship, between human beings and the world. My dear wife thinks that 'music is the way to make love with the world.' I agree."

The trio Tournesol with guitarist Julien Desprez and percussionist Julien Loutelier often focuses on sustained sounds, sometimes abrasive, sometimes with isolated bass rumbles and slow percussion, the result an intense and unpredictable meditation on time stretching toward the horizon. The trio En Corps (with two CDs, the first eponymous, the second *Generation*, see review on pg. 15) with pianist Eve Risser and drummer Edward Perraud is a radical extension of the piano trio in which it is reimaged as a kind of percussion orchestra, an astonishing dance of mutating particles.

For Risser, "In this trio each player can play bass, percussion, highs, so it makes a non-soloistic jazz piano trio. It's very magical when we don't even recognize who does what, even while playing ourselves. At the same time, each member likes to navigate between these beautiful possibilities and the proper role of being a bass, a piano or drums in a jazz piano trio. This movement in the instruments' timbres and registers gives us joyfulness and warm interaction."

For Duboc, "Each trio has its own music, its texture. It depends on our stories, about what is possible together. The choice is maybe to be where we have to be, to be at the right place in the right moment. But, for me, the most important thing is to share the present, to share the air! They all are fantastic musicians, there is never fighting, just love. We trust each other and this is the deal, the beginning. This is maybe the identity of the label and maybe the reason for the high quality." ❖

For more information, visit darktree-records.com