

An eclectic storm

Young Israeli trumpeter **Itamar Borocho**v is a master synthesist, making cross-cultural musical connections and winning admirers across the globe. **Selwyn Harris** spoke to this singular talent

Prior to our WhatsApp call, Itamar Borocho had spent the week in Jerusalem taking part in an all-night open air workshop performance with improvisers from all four corners of the globe. The kind of organic, cross-cultural musical connections they aimed for is key to the New York-based native Israeli trumpeter-composer's fourth quartet album *Arba*, newly released on Dave Douglas' Greenleaf Records.

Borocho's journey begins in the port city of Jaffa, one of the most ethnically-diverse regions in Israel.

"Music was always a big part of our lives," he says, speaking to me from the neighbouring metropolis of Tel Aviv. "I grew up in Israel and my father is a musician. Then there was the melodies

that were sung in the synagogue or on holidays and Shabbat dinners by the families. The background of my family is Bukharan [from Bukhara, the ancient city in Uzbekistan], often called Mizrahi Jews. We went to a Sephardic synagogue which was predominantly North African. At least musically, both of those were not even influences, but at the core of how I grew up.

"There was the music that my dad rehearsed in the house and that both my parents were listening to on the turntable and there was the music that was just around: on the street, on the radio. All of that was already quite diverse. So it's a lot of music from the greater Middle East, but also things like Prince and Edith Piaf that my parents both really loved. Weather Report, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan were

things I used to listen to all the time in my early childhood."

On *Arba*, Borocho has effectively synthesised jazz, other rock and world music influences with *Maqam*, a traditional Arabic modal music based on quarter tones. How and when did he start to draw these connections between east and west?

"That's a very good question," says Borocho, who was a co-founder in 2009 of the explosive east-west ensemble Yemen Blues. "I think it was extremely unplanned on my behalf. I never tried to create a hybrid. It was a very organic thing. I moved to New York when I was 21 years old and at the time I wasn't so interested in playing anything from my own background. I moved to New York to play jazz.

"I loved hard bop and bebop. I went to the New School and Barry Harris' workshop. Barry was my teacher. That was my focus really. I liked a lot of different types of music and I was interested as a composer in what people were doing but jazz was my focus. I think actually through jazz I understood that there's a certain point that you don't mimic anymore.

"You can only get so far by trying to play like somebody else. Like I could try to play

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Voyage of rediscovery

Flautist and saxophonist **Ed 'Tenderlonious' Cawthorne** has gone back to the late 1960s/early 70s and giants like Wayne Shorter and Clifford Jordan for inspiration on his latest album. It's a brave decision, one which **Jo Frost** applauds

Anyone already familiar with Tenderlonious, aka Ed Cawthorne, will know that this talented multi-instrumentalist possesses an innate musical curiosity. Whether it's his eclectic 22a label he launched a decade ago, his jazz fusion band Ruby Rushton or ongoing collaborations with the Pakistani quartet Jaubi (new album due out in 2024), Ed is clearly a man with broad musical tastes.

So his new release, *You Know I Care* [reviewed last issue], a "proper jazz album in the traditional sense," as he calls it, comes as somewhat of a surprise.

One of the reasons for this shift in musical direction is pictured on the cover, sat on the floor of a squash court. "I don't even play squash!" he laughs. "I rocked up with my son, brother-in-law and my alto that kind of looks like a squash racket in its case and nobody

like Freddie Hubbard or Lee Morgan or Clark Terry, or whoever I was into at the time, but they did it better. My interest was to play with the living masters, and I was lucky enough to do that to some extent. I was close to Curtis Fuller, and Nathan Davis and Junior Mance, they kind of directed me and said: 'Okay, great but what's *your* story?' Nathan Davis said, 'We want you to be you.'

"That happened as a composer first. I compose in a way that's very natural, music seems to just flow through me and at a certain point that music wasn't straight ahead jazz. I think hearing that from some people made me think, 'let's see what this composition is about.' *Maqamat* is a whole musical system and I know it instinctively very well and I sang this way. So I studied this music for a long time and that's where the line started to join in my head. I believe there are eternal principles in music and they manifest in different ways because of different cultures in different times. I see how Coltrane approaches music and this is so similar to the *Maqamat* way of thinking, focussing,

and I can talk about this in more technical terms, the way he focusses on different tetrachords or upper structures."


'Arba' translates from Hebrew to 'four' and besides his NY-based quartet, it also references Borochoy's new custom-built Monette 4-valve quarter tone trumpet.

"I was playing quarter tones before on a regular trumpet and you need to bend notes, use false fingerings or manipulate your *embouchure*, but it's very limited and not actually in the nature of this music," he says. "Actually

quite the opposite, playing quarter tones is much closer to the natural harmonics of each note, the un-tempered scale basically. Having this horn it feels natural and I can play quarter tones anywhere on the scale. I just divide the octave into 24 equal parts."

Playing the Monette on a couple of recent strings-based commissions, Borochoy looks to further expand the instrumental palette he writes for in the future but never in a way that dilutes the essence of a composition.

"The core element of it all ultimately is expression," he says. "You can expand upon it but it has to touch that root for me and not get lost in the sauce. Again maybe Coltrane is a good example because he could play a 45-minute solo but he

has such a pure melodic sense that each three notes he plays can touch you so deeply. That's a deep understanding of melody." 

Itamar Borochoy plays at Pizza Express Jazz Club Soho, London, on 5 and 6 October



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asked any questions." The image, true to Ed's nickname, is a tender one of his young son, gazing up at his sax-playing father.

So the pragmatic reason why he's chosen this more classic trad-jazz route is fatherhood: "My son was born last February so I haven't had time to write new material," he explains, saying that his focus now is about learning how to be the best dad.

The other catalyst was a recently-purchased alto sax: "I sold my tenor a couple of years ago... but I yearned for that sound so I thought maybe I'll try alto. I found one that I really liked, an old Selmer from 1954, and I bought it for way too much money and then I thought, well I've got to make it pay now, so that's when I started looking into alto players." This led onto the discovery of Jackie McLean and "it just blew my mind," Ed recalls.

"Until I started playing alto sax, I didn't know about Jackie McLean... crazy! How did I not know this guy? In that way it's paid for itself ten times over because I discovered Jackie McLean, and that's changed my life, that's priceless!"

Ed cut his teeth in the music biz as a drum 'n' bass and house DJ, then progressing onto producing.

"A lot of the hip-hop I was listening to at the time - A Tribe Called Quest, Slum

Village - used jazz samples, and I wanted to emulate that so I knew I had to start this discovery of jazz."

It was around this time that Ed first acquired his nickname. While he was flying outside a club for one of his DJ nights, he came to the aid of a woman who'd had her bag nicked. "That night my friend started calling me 'Tender Ed.' I suppose I've always had this tender side, as I used to work with children with learning difficulties, so I guess my friend thought it was a good fit, and it kind of stuck."

The 'Lonious' part came later, when he started playing the sax. Ed was touring with the singer Katy B when their tour bus broke down and never missing an opportunity to practise, he started playing on the hard shoulder. This got Henry Wu, aka Kamaal Williams, who was on the same gig, shouting: "Tenderlonious, Tenderlonious!" - "probably because I studied jazz so much and Thelonious Monk was the first name that popped into his head"


Some have suspected the nickname might have Greek origins, as Ed did grow up in Cyprus but the 'Cawthorne' name comes from Yorkshire, where historically his family were farriers and then members of the Household Cavalry.

"I broke the army mould," Ed says. "My

father was a Gurkha and there was mention of me joining the SAS but I just had this love for music, so I wanted to pursue that."

There have been, admits Ed, a few bumps in the road along the way and in 2007 he had to "make some bold choices" about the direction his life was going. He was working as a cleaner and every morning he'd pass by a music shop where he spotted what he mistakenly thought was a clarinet in the window: He eventually ended up renting the soprano saxophone until a timely tax rebate meant he could buy it outright. So in many ways, the sax was instrumental in turning his life around.

It seems fitting then that as Ed is going through more life changes with another child on the way, he's chosen to showcase some of the players who have inspired him over the years.

"I'm not sure if it will pay for my alto sax or get me a ton of gigs, but it's been nice to rediscover this stuff, to shed light on some of these underrated guys who were sidemen, like Clifford Jordan or Jackie McLean, the guys who got overshadowed by so many other players... I really wanted to do something as a tribute to those guys and also as a tribute to my son." 

Tenderlonious plays at Oslo, Hackney in London on 15 November