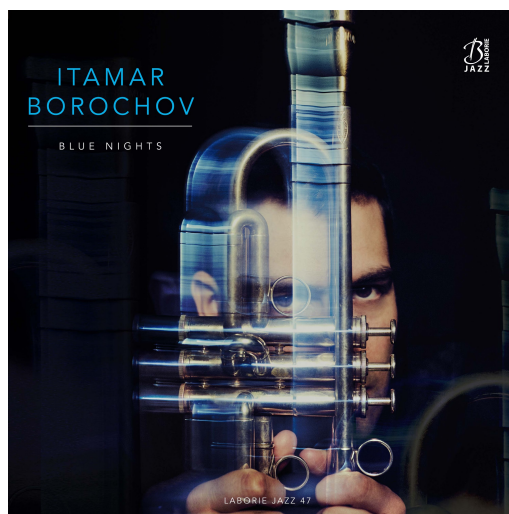


**ITAMAR BOROCHOV is Inspired by North African, Near Eastern,  
Jewish Ashkenazi & Mizrahi Traditions on  
*BLUE NIGHTS*,  
The Trumpeter-Composer's Second Album for Laborie Jazz**

**Featuring Moroccan Breakout Artists INNOV GNAWA on "Motherlands"  
Out February 1, 2019**



“On this record, I’m just telling stories,” **Itamar Borochov** says of his third album. The Brooklyn-based trumpeter, 34, born and raised in **Jaffa** and **Tel Aviv**, spins out nine of them in a virtuosic, highly personalized style that synthesizes his experiences in bebop, post-bop, and elemental rock, with the various **North African** and **Near Eastern** dialects that permeated his consciousness during formative years in Israel’s cultural melting pot, and the **Mizrahi** and **Ashkenazi** musical flavors that are his birthright.

Borochov observes that comments on his 2016 debut for **Laborie Records**, *Boomerang*, “talked about what my style is, and how that mix came about.” *Blue Nights*, on the other hand, “isn’t about my fusing of musical styles. At this point, my style just is; it’s not a choice for me to play this way. This is who I am.”

He elaborates: “At a certain point, I intentionally started to play maqams—scales from the greater Middle-East, notes that have quarter tones. The trumpet is a chromatic instrument, and I needed to find the notes between the chromatic notes. You have to bend them with your embouchure [the way you put your mouth on the mouthpiece and alter it slightly to get different timbres and differences in pitch]. But the music was already in me. After I learned to do it, I went to a synagogue in Israel, and realized I’d been singing this way my whole life.”

The core window into Borochov’s musical identity, he says, is found in the final selection, “**Kol Ha’Olam Kulo (Take Me to The Bridge)**.” The melody, from which Borochov shapes an ascendant arc with elegance, forcefulness and a golden tone, was composed by **Rabbi Baruch Chait** in response to a turn-of-the-19th century homily by **Rabbi Nachman of Breslov** that “The whole world is a very narrow bridge, and the essence is to not fear at all.” To Borochov, that bridge represents not only overcoming different aspects of fear, but serving as “a bridge between cultures—that is, me.”

“What interests me is how similar things are,” he says. “To me, so many things from that part of the world are similar to the blues, for instance. I hear harmonic similarities in different cultures —people say that traditional Arabic music or Bukharian music [Jewish music from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan] doesn’t have harmony, but that’s not exactly true. There are no chords, but there is harmony. There’s also the way different swing feels around the world relate. I’ve pictured that maybe at one point we were all one people. What was the music of that people?”

On each track of *Blue Nights*, Borochov and his ensemble seek a plausible response to that impossible-to-answer question. As an example, consider the title track, a pensive, mellow refrain with an arpeggiated melody that the leader describes as “like an Arabic pop song” evoking “a typical Jaffa night at a hookah lounge.” After a while the flow transitions from jazz ballad treatment to a groove evocative of the debka dance of the Levant, propelling Borochov into an ascendant, impeccably executed solo that displays his well-calibrated maqam chops. They transition to “a full rock quarter note vibe” and finally explode back to the main melody, which Borochov articulates with a full-toned upper register voice.

On “Motherlands” the quartet collaborates with vocalist **Maalem Hassan Ben Jaafer** and the **Moroccan group, Innov Gnawa** (made up of NY-based musicians including **Amino Belyammani** from **Dawn of Midi**). Ben Jaafer is one of the last practitioners of the **sebityin** gnawa repertoire that was played when Jews and Gnawas still coexisted in North African states like Morocco, Algeria and Libya. Borochov remains in the Gnawa sonic space with “**Maalem**” (“**the one who knows**”), on which Chicago-based pianist **Rob Clearfield** starts with a piano figure, based on the Gnawa pentatonic scale, reminiscent of Randy Weston’s “Blue Moses.” Borochov first performed “Motherlands” with Innov Gnawa at the 2018 Winter Jazz Festival in New York City.

“I’d already written ‘**Motherlands**’—the groove, the North African beat made it a good song to do for that collaboration,” Borochov says. “When they started to sing the sebityin repertoire over it, I got teary-eyed, as I recognized some of the words. After that experience I wrote ‘**Maalem**.’”

Himself of Uzbeki-Afghani and East European Ashkenazic descent, Borochov absorbed these sounds from a Yemenite synagogue in his Jaffa neighborhood, “super hardcore, super small, no air-conditioning, no one there under the age of 80.”

In 2007, Borochov followed in the footsteps of those luminaries by relocating to New York to matriculate at the **New School**, where **Arnie Lawrence**, “my mentor, a guiding light,” had established the jazz program during the 1980s before emigrating to Israel. Via the ministrations of Lawrence and other teachers, Borochov arrived in the U.S. thoroughly grounded in bebop, with the intention of “being part of that culture.” He burnished those skills via interactions with iconic hardbop trombonist **Curtis Fuller** as part of **Betty Carter’s Jazz Ahead at the Kennedy Center** and lessons with octogenarian pianist **Barry Harris**. While attending the **Jazz Ahead program**, the late saxophonist-educator **Nathan Davis** imparted an important life lesson. “He looked me in the eye and said, ‘We want you to be you,’” Borochov recalls. The statement resonated. “Bebop is part of who I am, I adopted that culture, but there are other parts of me. At first I was actually just trying to play bebop. But as I developed, I started to write the music that’s in my head. Sometimes it’s like an Arabic pop song; sometimes it’s another thing—I just go with it.”

It should be noted that *Blue Nights* is very much a collective accomplishment, on which Borochov’s partners fully support his intentions while projecting their own individuality. On his drummer **Jay Sawyer**’s recommendation, Borochov retained the services of Clearfield, who has led four impressive albums since 2009. “My piano chair is demanding,” Borochov says. Clearfield’s pithy solo on the penultimate track, the changes-rich “**Revolutionizing**,” features authoritative counterpoint and voice-leading. That declamation follows elegant, orotund solo variations by bassist **Avri Borochov, Itamar’s older brother**, who sculpts a succession of well-wrought, centered grooves and vamps from beginning to end.

“I’m very influenced by non-trumpeters,” Borochov adds. “A lot of what I do, playing and sound-wise, comes from the tenor saxophone—Ben Webster. In the lower register, I’m going for an airy, woody quality—more of a cello thing, or even dadouk, or nai.”

It’s a distinctive, organically trans-cultural way of hearing, one that Borochov, who has been playing music since he was first able to speak, actualizes with complete control of his materials from beginning to end of this cohesive, inspired album. The bridge he’s constructed is real and well-built, ready for repeated crossings.

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