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# Oded Tzur in "A" / As a musician and a person I try to find what connects people and cultures



## The great saxophonist in an exclusive interview he granted for AUGI

**O**ded Tzur was born in Israel where he studied jazz and classical music having chosen the saxophone as his instrument early on and then Indian classical music at a Dutch conservatory. For years now he has settled permanently in New York and now only comes to Europe for tours and to record his = four so far - records. This interview took place on the occasion of his appearance in Athens, on Sunday October 22 at the SNFCC Lighthouse. The next day there was a bloody attack by Hamas on Israel which started the very dangerous unrest in the wider area of the eastern Mediterranean. Whether prophetically or intuitively, however, the thirty-nine-year-old musician said some things that show his attitude towards

hundreds of thousands of lives would not have been unjustly lost.

**Do you feel more Israeli, American, or something in between and ultimately belong nowhere in particular but a citizen of the world?**

A difficult question, especially at this particular juncture. I usually try to find patterns, visible and invisible, that connect different cultures. Discovering such connections is what I believe in as a person and what I focus on as a musician.

**What did you get out of studying Indian music and how big a role did it play in shaping your musical vision ?**

Indian classical music is probably the most important part of my musical vision and way of thinking. When I was young, I was looking for my own "mother tongue" among so many musical possibilities and directions that existed around me and from which it was difficult to choose one. As Indian classical music is an ancient form that is 'mechanical', almost scientific, it connected me to this quest in a deep and fruitful way. Also, apart from a musical form, it is also a spiritual quest, much more perhaps than just another idiom , and I was looking for a space where I could explore this musical side of me. This is a process that started for me with free jazz, finding that musicians like Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy and John Coltrane were abandoning traditional shapes and aesthetics to go for something else and completely different.

**Is your main and strongest influence jazz or are you influenced and inspired by many different idioms from different parts of the world?**

My music is jazz. I loved her, I started out as a jazz musician and wanted to be a part of her tradition . Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Dexter Gordon, John Coltrane and many others were my idols . Simultaneously and perhaps paradoxically they also led me to discover Nikhil Banerjee, Zia Mohiuddin Dagar and other great Indian musicians. Among them was Hariprasad

**Your sound on the saxophone is unique, completely original and even sometimes it doesn't even resemble a saxophone. Was that because you pursued it, or did it just kind of come about and develop on its own?**

I developed my technique on the sax while studying with Hariprasad Chaurasia and was undoubtedly greatly influenced by the way he played the Indian bansuri instrument. Indian instruments also have microtonic intervals which allow what we call "slides", a possibility that western instruments do not have, or at least not in the same way. Exploring microtonicity turned out to be a very exciting process. I have always felt that the saxophone has a "voice" of its own, which we are still discovering and every moment has surprises in store for us.

**Would you say there have been any saxophonists who were not just idols or even influences, but role models for you?**

John Coltrane's dedication to his spiritual pursuit and musical integrity epitomizes the role model for me.

**What was the main source of inspiration for your last record, last year's "Isabela"?**

Isabela is my wife's name, the record is both a love letter to her and a portrait of her. While I was writing it I was trying to discover if a composition can be descriptive, maybe not in the way of a painting, certainly much more "abstract", but still faithful to its subject and accurate in terms of the emotions it evokes. It was definitely my furthest "journey" as a composer and the one I'm most proud of.

**What made you cover an old song that is now part of pop culture, Elvis Presley's "Can't help falling in love with you" in "Isabela"?**

Quite simply that it is a very beautiful song.

**What do you have to say about him and how do you feel about one of your closest collaborators not being American or anything like that but coming from a small country, not exactly famous for its jazz scene?**

Petros is special, I appreciate him very much as a musician and as a person. His ability to say and play only what is absolutely necessary is almost like a rock you can trust to never lose your balance. It is very interesting semiotically that his name is Peter (laughs). The calmness and elegance with which the double bass plays is a defining factor in us being able to play the way we do as a band.

**How do you feel about coming to Greece to play live?**

I'm excited about it and can't wait to share our music with the Greek audience!

**What are your upcoming plans , either for a personal record or a collaboration with others or maybe both?**

With my band we are soon going to start recording our next album which will be entitled "My Prophet" and we will present some excerpts of it at our appearance in Athens .

Therefore, those who go next Sunday to the SNFCC will have the opportunity to hear for the first time these and the rest of Oded Tzur's wonderful music.

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