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ITTAI BINNUN: 'All our music comes from and filters through Jerusalem.'

• By BARRY DAVIS

Choosing a catchy name for your band may help to keep your (hopefully) adoring public guessing: Ittai Binnun obviously has no qualms about his quintet's title, AndraLaMoussia, which translates to mean something along the lines of "bedlam". Considering the band's self-titled debut CD smoothly ebbs and flows between evocative Middle Eastern sounds, insouciant klezmer rhythms, and passionate rock-infused Yemenite numbers, the name appears to fit.

Naturally, Binnun refutes any claim of intentional market-oriented packaging or, indeed, any disharmony in the fivesome's output. All the music, he says, flows through a single point of

reference. "I know there's lots of world music out there, and lots of bands that putting out a wide range of ethnic music," says the 33-year-old ney (Persian flute) player, clarinetist, saxophonist and vocalist from Mevasseret Zion. "What makes what we do special is that all our music comes from and filters through Jerusalem. As far as we are concerned, this is the center of everything."

Our Jerusalem interview locale – Confederation House, which overlooks the Old City walls – added aesthetic and cultural weight to the band leader's observation. Binnun says he finds himself at the epicenter of a multicultural maelstrom. While that provides him and the members of AndraLaMoussia with a rich inspira-

tional vantage point, it can also lead to cultural overdose. Binnun found at least one way to evade the eclectic whirlwind. "I wrote the liner notes in English and only after that took parts of them and translated them into Hebrew," he says. "It's also not a direct translation. Most of the liner notes are English. That allowed me to look at the music we'd created and the culture here from the outside, and take some kind of impartial position. Also, we are primarily aiming the album at the world outside Israel."

While many of his professional colleagues profess a distinct dislike of the term "world music" to describe what they do, preferring the epithet "ethnic", Binnun begs to differ.

"I don't think the term 'ethnic' fits what I do. Ethnic can describe anything. Isn't Mozart's music ethnic German music? And rock is a sort of ethnic blues-based genre. 'Ethnic' certainly doesn't suit musical fusions, which is what I do. I don't write or play pure traditional music, if such a thing exists today at all. I think the claims of purists that we have to preserve traditional music are a new phenomenon."

But, surely, before the era of modern communication and in times past when there were no trade links between countries, there were limited reciprocal influences between various cultures.

Binnun thinks otherwise.

"I believe there were always influences between countries and cultures," he states. "Look at Turkey and klezmer music, for example. There's always been give and take there. There were always gypsies, Jews and others who took their

music with them around the world, both influencing and being influenced by local cultures. They giggered together and picked things up from each other."

Klezmer is actually a musical form that is very close to Binnun's heart. He says he grew up listening to rock, pop – the Beatles included – and klezmer. All of that and more is to be found in the group's new album. "It may be a sort of contradiction in terms, but I am trying to create a modern tradition with AndraLaMoussia," he continues. "Traditions are always changing. That's their nature."

Binnun takes his work very seriously. "I try to research all the cultures I glean from," he notes. "I study all the traditions I use, but I've never considered myself a true practitioner of, for example, classical Persian music. For me that would be pretentious. I'm more interested non-classical music. I don't want to play music that's been played before. I want to create something new."

Binnun's efforts to cull something from the nucleus of all the genres he uses naturally impacts on his choice of musicians. While drummer Uriel Sverdin and guitarist Danny Dromi add some rock to the brew, percussionist Lev Elman and bass player Victor Azus add other elements. The end product is enhanced by guest oud player Nizar Rohana. AndraLaMoussia is a heady mix which should appeal to music lovers from the widest cultural spectrum.

*AndraLaMoussia will perform on May 17 at the Tmuna Theater in Tel Aviv at 10:30 p.m.; at Jerusalem's Bet Shmuel on May 27 at 9 p.m.; and at the Inbal Center in Tel Aviv on June 8 at 8:30 p.m.*