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By [BARRY DAVIS](#) \ 05/14/2016

Ittai Binnun and his musical partner Ivan Ceresnjes make magic with wind instruments and percussion.



ITTAI BINNUN: I try to take the tradition, to dust it off, and to see how to make it relevant to the here and now. (photo credit:Courtesy)

Ittai Binnun makes no bones about it: he wants to have a good time. "I have always wanted to enjoy my own music," he states, adding that does not mean just spending the day doing whatever pops into his mind with no regard for the quality of the outcome. "It has always been important to me to make good music, but I also need to be interested. If I came up with a project that was a smash hit, that would be great, but I wouldn't be capable of performing the same music, however successful, day after day. That's not for me."

That makes perfect sense, as well as attesting to artistic integrity, and Binnun's track record over the past 20 or so years indicates he is a man of his word. He first came to notice as the leader of the *AndraLaMoussia* world music-fusion band which put out a couple of albums and toured the country extensively.

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He has performed in various crossover lineups, including providing instrumental and compositional support for the satirical theatrical show *Mishteh* (The Feast), which had an unexpectedly wildly successful long national run back in the 1990s.

Since his artistically satisfying stint as head of the *AndraLaMoussia* sextet Binnun has gradually pared down his leadership duties to a minimum. His latest vehicle of creative expression is whimsically called *Ittai and The Toys*, with the Ethno Digital Music subtitle giving much of the ethos game away. Binnun's partner in musical-envelope pushing is percussionist Ivan Ceresnjes and, together, they have put together a new CD which will be officially launched at a concert at Bet Hayotser in Tel Aviv on May 23 (9 p.m.).

The titular plaything element reflects the expansive room for sonic maneuver that Binnun allows himself in sculpting and melding the sounds he and Ceresnjes put out. The 40-something Jerusalemite plays a bunch of more or less conventional stringed and wind instruments, including clarinet, ney – a wooden flute popular in Persian, Turkish and Arabic music – an electric version of the longnecked Turkish saz and EWI – aka electric wind instrument – while Ceresnjes plays various percussion instruments and a Jew's harp.

But then high-tech kicks in, in a big way.

The duo's live performances are very a dynamic affair, whereby the instrumental sounds are fed into a computer and sampled.

The different lines are layered and intertwined into stratified textures, and augmented by prerecorded loops. Add to that an ongoing offering of spontaneous improvisation and you end up with a sound that is far greater than the sum of its human operator parts.

At first look, that may appear a mite dissonant.

Yes, world music has been around for over 20 years now, and the sphere has allowed a multitude of artists from all sorts of disciplines and cultures to produce headily spiced brews of all kinds, but Binnun says that, for him, it is not a matter of just combining sounds and colors from different parts of the globe. He says that he has always kept his feet firmly rooted while taking flight to explore more stratospheric realms.

"I see *the Toys* project as part of a sort of line which has always run through my work," he states. "I have always engaged in tradition.

That can be traditional music, and I have also referenced the Bible and theatrical works, but the substance has always been tradition, and the idea was to update it.”

That philosophy has been an integral part of the way Binnun has gone about his business for some time.

“I try to take the tradition, to dust it off, and to see how to make it relevant to the here and now,” he explains. “To begin with I played ney, and was into sort of shanti [spiritual] stuff, but back then it was new. That was around 18 years ago.”

That was around the time that New Age made it over here, and the creation and subsequent proliferation of large-scale festivals such as Shantipi and Beresheet.

“The ney players you had here were, basically, me, Amir Shahasar and three Arab musicians,” Binnun continues. “Today, there are loads of them. And there are some excellent players among them. That’s great.”

That may be a positive development on the local cultural-musical scene, but Binnun has always been keen to move on and to seek out new pastures. That, for him, means fusing his accrued musical baggage into the warp and woof of his evolving art, including such seminal pop and rock acts as The Beatles, Led Zeppelin and Canadian rockers Rush. Bob Dylan also informs Binnun’s approach to his craft and Ittai and The Toys includes a beguiling rendition of Dylan’s “Master of War.” Binnun opens on electric saz and the sonic backdrop builds and thickens as the number progresses, with Ceresnjes enriching the proceedings on darbouka while Binnun works his magic with high technology.

The closing track, “Do Not Despair,” is possibly the most emotive of the seven cuts, all of which, except for the Dylan song, are Binnun originals. It is based on Charlie Chaplin’s unforgettable words, in the closing speech of his monumental 1940s movie *The Great Dictator*, as the Jewish barber who is originally mistaken for the Hitleresque character Adenoid Hynkel. In the Binnun number Chaplin’s address is seasoned with exhilarating ney lines as the percussion and computer-enhanced stuff kicks in and provides a worthy summation for a fun, moving and exciting album. It is a pretty good indication of where forward-looking Israeli ethnically-fueled musical endeavor is going.

At the end of the day Binnun wants to offer something that is vibrant.

“At the back of my mind there is always this fear of being drawn into going to playback sounds,” he says. “That is the last thing I want to do. I want to create, to improvise and to keep the music relevant and alive.”

For tickets and more information: <http://www.ittaibinnun.com>