

*Animi*, the title of the new Berthold Records album from Israel-born, Paris-based saxophonist **Shauli Einav**, derives from a Latin word signifying what we might call soul, life force, mettle or heart. It's an apt descriptor for Einav's profoundly expressive music, which ranges from heartrending to exhilarating, and for the deeply empathetic rapport that defines his quintet.

But *Animi* could also refer to the courage required of so many gifted rising jazz musicians who must inevitably choose between two paths: the inspiring but often hardscrabble existence of a fulltime artist; or the cushier yet far less compelling environs of a working life in education. Einav faced that predicament in 2017, when a renowned institution in South Korea offered the saxophonist a comfortable long-term position. After receiving the offer, he contemplated it and then played a gig; between the thrill of performance and the warmth of musicianly camaraderie, Einav felt reborn as a player and composer. He picked the music and hasn't looked back.

Upon hearing *Animi*, jazz fans will be thankful for his decision. Throughout, Einav's improvising, writing and bandleading reveal a fresh voice working in jazz's edgy, modern mainstream. His language is fiercely personal, built upon influences that demonstrate both exceptional taste and a willingness to look toward the margins of jazz's well-trodden history. In his playing you'll hear underrated heroes like Harold Land, Charlie Rouse, Booker Ervin and Arnie Lawrence, the lattermost "an important, pivotal figure" Einav studied with in Jerusalem.

His signature approach to composing and arranging is culled from diverse sources, including the modal explorations of George Russell; the bracing close voicings that Jason Lindner employed in his powerful big band; and the polyrhythmic wizardry of bassist Avishai Cohen, or, as Einav puts it, "the illusion that he gives to rhythm. You can sing it and you can dance it, but you can never guess the meter." But more than anything, *Animi*'s vocabulary seems to harken back to the inside/outside aesthetic of Blue Note Records during its heady mid-to-late-'60s period, evoking classic LPs like Eric Dolphy's *Out to Lunch!*, Bobby Hutcherson's *Components*, Grachan Moncur III's *Evolution* and Andrew Hill's *Point of Departure*—adventurous albums on which jazz tradition and innovation are held in perfect balance.

In addition to Einav on tenor and soprano saxophones, *Animi* features the leader's longtime collaborator Andy Hunter, a trombonist whose credits include the Mingus Big Band and Snarky Puppy, and who is currently a staple of the acclaimed WDR Big Band; vibraphonist Tim Collins, whose own recordings have featured luminaries like Charlie Hunter, Ingrid Jensen and Aaron Parks; Israel's Yoni Zelnik, the most trusted bassist on the Parisian scene and a go-to anchor for trumpeter Avishai Cohen; and the celebrated young rhythmist Guilhem Flouzat, the result of Einav's quest to find "a French drummer that would sound like New York," he says, chuckling.

It's an ideal unit—nimble, versatile, responsive—to tackle such dynamic repertoire. *Animi* storms out the gate via the "alarm call," to borrow Einav's phrase, that is "Premonition." With sax, vibes and trombone rollicking through the urgent theme, it's easy to hear why Einav was attracted to this band format; he feels like he's arranging for four or five horns—"a little big band," he says—but with "a sonority that isn't overwhelming and gives you a lot of options." "Dodo" takes its changes from Lucky Thompson's "Slam's Mishap," and its melody comes from an improvisation that Dodo Marmarosa recorded on Thompson's tune in the '40s.

Other highlights include "Hasela Ha'adom," Einav's gorgeously lyrical take on an Israeli pop standard of sorts; a story-song once deemed controversial, it fictionalizes an old rite of passage that saw young men risk their lives to journey from Israel to Petra, Jordan, and back. "One Step Up" spotlights a guest, the brilliant oud player Fayçal Salhi, and allows Einav to utilize a timbre that was ubiquitous throughout his upbringing in Israel. "Kumzits" too alludes to

Einav's youth, with a melody redolent of Israeli folk. "Circadian Mishap," a tune rooted in a composition by Walt Weiskopf, Einav's mentor at the Eastman School of Music, cleverly nods to the sleep deprivation that comes with parenthood. "Healer Sue" is the saxophonist's heartfelt tribute to Susan Presberg-Greene, a friend and academic whose family looked after Einav during his time at Eastman in Rochester, N.Y. Her father held regular jam sessions that allowed Einav to learn the American Songbook from players who grew up with its gems. "They knew all the words," Einav remembers, still impressed. "You would play a ballad and you would hear five guys singing along."

Throughout his development, Einav has immersed himself in musical and cultural history, laying down the bedrock to support his distinctive albeit inviting sound. Born into a musical family in the Israeli countryside in 1982, he began playing violin at age 4, moved on to the piano and settled into the saxophone in his early teens. During his adolescence he also danced with his family in a traditional Israeli troupe, which exposed him to the global spectrum of Jewish folk styles. In his mid-teens he was discovered by Arnie Lawrence, the Brooklyn-born saxophonist who numbered among jazz education's monumental figures, first in New York and then in Israel.

Lawrence was an unforgettable presence, fun and larger than life yet absolutely serious about his teachings. For his Israeli students, Lawrence facilitated clinics by legends like Max Roach and James Moody, and he drew from his own deep well of stories and anecdotes; Einav calls him the "the link to New York for us guys in Jerusalem." After earning his bachelor's at Jerusalem Academy and his master's from Eastman, Einav spent more than half a decade cutting his teeth in New York. In a 2011 profile, *DownBeat* called his release *Opus One* "a smartly played, swinging and evocative jazz album." Equally effusive praise met his 2016 release, the adventurous quartet date *Beam Me Up*, and *Animi* has already begun to garner accolades. "Shauli has put together a very interesting recording," says the saxophonist, educator and NEA Jazz Master Dave Liebman. "[It's] challenging but accessible, [and] performed by a wonderful band of young and talented artists."

Today Einav lives with his wife and young son in Paris, where he performs and teaches. He's extremely grateful for his time in New York, though he adores Paris' rich jazz and world-music communities, and the welcome room to breathe that the city has afforded him. After turning down the education job in South Korea, Einav found Paris to be an ideal environment in which to recommit himself to his art—a place to take stock of his influences and his life in music. "I wanted to go back to the source," he says. "I wanted to play again the music that I love."