

BERKLEE BONDS: Bassist Shimon Ben-Shir, right, is among many Israeli jazz musicians who have graduated from Berklee College of Music.

MAKING SPLASH ON U.S. JAZZ SCENE

BOSTON PLAYS KEY ROLE FOR ISRAELI MUSICIANS

By **BOB YOUNG**

MUSIC

Boston has fast become the gateway to bigger things for Israeli jazz musicians. Credit Berklee College of Music with making the city a place where these players come to take their musical games to the next level.

"Boston is thought of as a great starting point in the U.S. for jazz musicians," bassist and Berklee student Daniel Ori wrote by e-mail prior to performing at Israel's Red Sea Festival. "Berklee has a great relationship with the Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music, which I attended, and this attracts many young jazz musicians to come to Boston. I knew quite a few musicians I had worked with before in Israel who were either studying or working in Boston."

Berklee-educated guitarist Ori Dakari travels regularly between the United States and Israel to perform. He recently moved to New York, where he shares an apartment with a fellow Berklee grad, saxophonist Uri Gurvich, who has appeared with Joe Lovano and Dave Liebman.

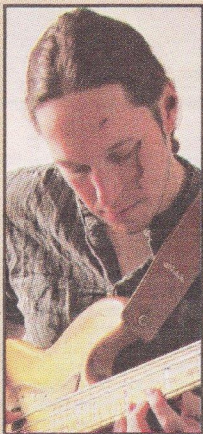
"I can't think of how my start in Boston would have looked without my Israeli friends," Dakari said in an e-mail from Israel, where he has been working with Gurvich in a Tel Aviv club. "Coming from the same place and going through the same experiences, like the army and life in Israel, helped shape my musical direction a lot."

It's an experience shared by other local musicians with Israeli roots, including guitarist Issi Rozen, pianist Gilad Barkan and bassist Shimon Ben-Shir. Their common background, Berklee grad Ben-Shir said, does influence their sound. "Style is very personal," said Ben-Shir,

who has a new CD, "Ways," out and upcoming performances at Amazing Things Arts Center in Framingham on Saturday and at the Acton Jazz Cafe on Aug. 24. "The fact that I wasn't born here makes my sound a hybrid of how my travels have had an influence on my playing and writing, expressing itself in the new term 'world jazz.' I hear it in other musicians, too. We bring our ethnic backgrounds to the table. We do not live in a box."

"The importance of Israel's multi-cultural society is key in my opinion," Ori said. "I believe there is a distinct sound, a rhythmic and harmonic subtlety, that Israeli jazz players create. Most importantly, because of Israel's relatively young age and the fusion of cultures this small piece of land contains, I feel this sound will gradually develop into something easier to recognize and define."

Dakari agrees: Something unique is starting to take shape. "Saying Israeli roots is quite difficult because Israel is a big gathering of Jews from all over the world," he said. "But I do believe that this is something fresh happening in the jazz world today. The Israeli sound is the joy of life, sometimes combined with the difficult life we have in Israel. It is a very intense sound, very emotional, and this is what makes it so good." — robertcyoung@comcast.net



DANIEL ORI



ORI DAKARI

