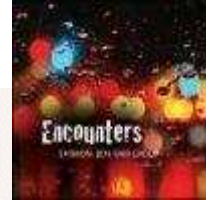


Encounters 2011



Music & Opinion for the 21st Century - IMPROVIJAZZATION NATION magazine

Shimon Ben-Shir – ENCOUNTERS:

It was way back in issue # 77 that I first reviewed Shimon's high-energy jazz; fast-forward a few years (from 2007) and he sends me this new one... I was impressed then because of the vigor and taste for life that Shimon's group displayed... just scope out "I Like It" to hear why I like this great group so much! Shimon's solid approach to the music he and his group play make for the kind of solid & enduring jazz that first gave the genre its reputation. I just loved the creepin' back-alleycat feel of "Missing Link", & have no doubt you will too (this is my favorite track on the CD, by the way). For an all-round enjoyable excursion through 9 great jazz tunes, this gets a MOST HIGHLY RECOMMENDED from me, with an "EQ" (energy quotient) rating of 4.96.

Chris Spector Midwest Record: SHIMON BEN-SHIR GROUP/Encounters. First class sitting down jazz that doesn't always take you where you expect it to,

Ben-Shir and his long standing crew know what to do and how to get you there. Not exactly jazz to kick back to, you can easily switch between background and foreground music here and find it fits the mood either way. Nicely woven textures and themes move gracefully and altogether offer a great sonic getaway from the grind. A solid bet when you want something done right that's out of the ordinary.

Jazz Times - 06/17/11 • Albums • By Edward Blanco

Israeli-born bassist and guitarist Shimon Ben-Shir unveils his third album with the brisk and spicy Encounters performed by a core quintet of players he calls the Ben-Shir Group.

Though he grew up with the music of the Middle East, this projects projects none of that and a great deal of swinging post bop magic that's all jazz.

The Ben-Shir Group features a two-sax attack with Diane Wernick and Duncan Martin manning the tenor and soprano accompanied by Amir Milstein on the flute. Diana Fischer takes care of the rhythms on keyboards while the drum duties are shared by Jody Bregler, Dani Danor and Ricardo Nhuch. The talented Ben Shir is heard on bass and guitars.

There are nine delicious tracks, all originals from the bassist and members of the band. "Transition" is the album opener and happens to be one of the more gentler pieces quite unlike the piece that follows, "I Like It" featuring one of the saxophonist laying down a swinging line. Saxophonist Martin contributes "Tyler's Tune," dedicated to wood sculptor Tyler Aspin, another swinging piece, this one brings out keyboardist Fischer on a nice solo and of course highlights the sax chops of Martin along with teasing bass work by the leader.

Ben-Shir makes his mark on the humble "Aunt Clara," the theme from the movie "Doda Clara" with soft bass lines on perhaps the only light ballad of the album. Diane

Wernick's composition "What's It Gonna' Be" is the center-piece of the disc containing a rich melody and perky play from the group, one of the saxophonists, as the liner notes do not indicate, and firm drumming from Bregler

The finale tune and title piece features Ben-Shir on the guitar accompanied by flautist Milstein on a beautiful but brief delicate number capping a seriously fine session of music from an unheralded group of players that have truly enjoyed their encounter in the making of this Encounters.

O's Notes:

Encounters is the third release from the Ben-Shir Group. Leader Shimon Ben-Shir plays bass and guitar and composed six of the nine selections. They swing on "I Like It" and "Tyler's Tune" before settling into a lazy blues on "Missing Link". Our favorite is the festive "What's It Gonna' Be". Diane Wernick and Duncan Martin do a fine job on sax with Diana Fischer (keyboards), Amir Milstein (fl) and drum duty divided between Jody Bregler, Dani Daniel and Ricardo Nhuch.

D. Oscar Groomes

O's Place Jazz Magazine

WAYS 2007



Jim Santella, Cadence Magazine review

Shimon Ben-Shir Combines Smooth Jazz with the exotic sounds of the Middle East on **WAYS**, the second album from his ensemble. Melancholy air and comfortable grooves mix together, as the bassist takes his band through a program of original song. The ensemble based in New England. Since the bassist grew up in Israel, his music contains many reflections from distant lands. **We've come a long way since Juan Tizol's "Caravan,"** now employing hand drums and electric instruments in addition to the usual band sounds. Ben-Shir prefers the light sound of flute, alto, and soprano saxophone for this session, giving his music an open and carefree texture. His electric bass provides a consistent wall of fluid energy that maintains the session's flow, while solo features from his woodwind players carry each impression to its conclusion. Like a traveling band of troubadours that seeks to entertain with sonorous activity and encouragement for dance, the Shimon Ben-Shir Group provides a lovely team outing that appeals to a broad audience.

Shimon Ben-Shir Group - Ways

Shimon is a bassist and the composer of most of the eight tracks on this release. He is a well above average bassist and a good songwriter to boot. He injects the songs with a great groove and brings on the melody and the rhythm depending on the need. Each track has a story to tell and with Shimon's expressive bass and the occasional brass or woodwind solo the feelings flow through. I would say that he is a disciple of the Jaco style of bass playing and his band does a great job blending along. This one of the best jazz releases I've received this year, primarily due to the

excellent bass playing.

Grog Mutant - The ChickenFish Reviews (2007)

O's Notes: 3/3 stars Bassist, composer and producer Ben-Shir gives us eight new compositions for his sophomore effort. The music has a friendly neobop swagger that is inoffensive but not too simple. We liked "Do It" with Duncan Martin (Tenor sax) and Diane Wernick (soprano sax) combining for a bouncy melody. Shimon gives his colleagues lots of solo opportunities but he steps up frequently as on his dashing bass line on "Gliding" and his solo on "Orange Sky".

D. Oscar Grooms O's Place Jazz Newsletter

Great Ways by Bruce Von Stiers - BVS Reviews

Ways has been called world class and decisive. I would add things like thoroughly entertaining and worthy of a spot in any top drawer jazz collection. The Shimon Ben-Shir Group brings the listener a wonderful listening experience with Ways.

AMG Review

Ways is based in the jazz realm, but takes grooves and cues from here and there in the world music spectrum as well. The album opens up with a hint of flamenco before turning to a jazz number only very slightly Latin. Jochebed adds some different tones to the proceedings, but the interesting part here is the deep bend in the bassline that comes in and out during the song. The tone turns again to something closer to smooth jazz before a great bit of post-bop courtesy of tenor saxman Duncan Martin's composition Four Score. The album grooves, and slinks, and thumps, and strolls its way through the rest of the tracks, never quite settling on a style or a theme but keeping the tone suitable for an afternoon at a gallery — this isn't the most rousing jazz ever created, but it serves a creative purpose other than sheer exhilaration. It's thought-provoking without becoming cerebral, ambient without becoming moody. The bass is the most adventurous instrument here, holding an odd leadership role in the ensemble despite the limitations in range. Worth a spin for a glance at some contemporary stylings from what is essentially a jazz artists collective, a singer-songwriter community of sorts (but without the singing).

by Adam Greenberg

September issue of Improvijazzation Nation.

This CD is pure joy to listen to, whether you're a hard-core jazz fan, or only a casual passer-by. The brilliant splashes of color on the CD jacket give you an indicator of the life contained in the music, but once you pop it in the tray & begin spinning the title track (which opens the experience), you'll find yourself fully engaged & enchanted. Ben-Shir's bass (and guitar) talents are fully revealed on the second cut, "Jochebed"... it's a bit hard to describe, as there are solid rhythmic foundations in the Middle East, but then John Frazee's horn kicks in, & you feel like you're in th' middle of the Caribbean somewhere. Itemizing each of the pieces would be like "giving the secret away", and you wouldn't want that - it would be like telling the end of a movie... and, that's what this beautiful musical experience reminds me of... a well-crafted tale that invokes memories seated deep in your psyche, bringing each of the emotions you experienced back in new ways. Absolutely stunning jazz, nothing pretentious, & very enjoyable. I especially enjoyed the highly energetic "Four Score", the "deepest" jazz cut on the album. I've no doubt that listening to these folks in a live setting would make you come away ready to overcome all the evil in the universe. I give it a MOST HIGHLY RECOMMEND

It's always nice to begin things with the unexpected. The title track of the Shimon Ben-Shir Group's album *Ways* starts with a whistle and a shout of "Flamenco!" And while the beat that follows is Latin in nature, the song doesn't exactly sound like traditional flamenco, at least none that I'm familiar with. Instead, the band launches into a diverse smooth jazz fusion which travels the world over in its influences. From there the band moves into even more exotic territory, borrowing and blending a host of sounds, rhythms and styles from every corner of the planet. The great thing is that it's a fun exploration that avoids getting bogged down in pretentious jazz over-indulgence. The band is tight and skilled, but they don't have to go out of their way to prove it.

MISH MASH Mandate: Jazz Crusaders

With a hot bass player leading the way, this crew jumps into their second set of internationally flavored jazz that swings and sets the paces nicely. Transplanting from Israel to Boston in the 90's to go to music school, Ben-Shir comes by his international chops honestly and organically as he grew up around a crucible of world sounds. Mixing it with bop moves, this contemporary jazz outing takes you to places you ears will dig. (BenShir Music) **Midwest Record**

Great music, played for the sake of beautiful jazz unity John Book, Music For America The bio for *Ways* (Ben-Shir Music) says the album is like encountering a friend you haven't seen for a while. While I had never heard of The Shimon Ben-Shir Group before, their brand of laid back jazz does sound familiar and warm, but not too lazy to where it becomes smooth jazz. The core of the music is Ben-Shir's bass work, where he goes back and forth between fretless and fretted, and he surrounds himself with an incredible range of musicians who fortunately know what they're doing. A piece such as "Jochebed" shows how diverse his music can be, where the meat of the song (the melody) sounds beautiful like a Pat Metheny song, but the soloists add their own flavor, especially trumpeter John Frazee. When he plays, he adds a bit of color to an already vibrant portrait, and in a way sets himself from the rest for about a minute before moving away and allowing everyone else to play. Everything on this album is fairly mellow, nothing excessive or out of the ordinary. While some of these songs could appeal to smooth jazz fans, there's a bit more going on than the usual. One can say that *Ways* is jazz on cruise control, moving the seat back and letting things come as they may, but Ben-Shir pushes himself and everyone to do their best, and they all play for the sake of beautiful jazz unity.

"Ways", the title track opens up with the elegant voice of Milstein's flute backed up by strong bass line work from Ben-Shir and supported by Wernick's sax phrasings in an obviously worldly but beautiful tune. The leader introduces the following track, "Jochebed," later engaged by trumpeter John Frazee in a rather melancholy Middle Eastern-tinged sounding number. The tunes "Do It," "Gliding," and "Orange Sky," while very different in melodic styles, all seem to fall within the world jazz theme of the album. There are two tracks however that break from the theme and can be considered straight jazz. "Four Score," is a burner of a track showcasing an outstanding performance from Duncan Martin on the alto and Fischer on the piano. Ben-Shir saves the best for last in the melodic-rich Latin style rhythms of "Circle," containing a stylish Ben-Shir bass solo, Martin's tenor phrasings, and a lively percussive beat provided by Jody Bregler on the drums. The conclusion, The Shimon Ben-Shir Group delivers a world-class performance in a compelling session of world jazz rhythms that will appeal to the jazz aficionado and average jazz audience alike. A definite thumbs up from this jazz critic. **Edward Blanco, Ejazz News.**

The main template of the group is rooted in Jazz (Bebop to be more specific). They tend eschew the more fringe elements of Bebop though and stick close to head arrangements and melodies. The rhythms keep on the fluid side without losing the groove. The groups love and understanding of Latin and Middle Eastern music is also evident and give the sound a very pleasing yet interesting tone. This keeps the music dynamic without sounding to "out there" for some people's ears. Although more easy-listening than some may prefer for their Jazz diet, the Shimon Ben-Shir is certainly does not come across as background wallpaper but rather as a nice way to unwind from a hard-working day. **Cameron Blades -WORLD RHYTHM WEBZIN**

Shades 2002



"A joining of jazz and Jewish Music" The Boston Globe, By Steve Greenlee

"The music of Ben-Shir, whose material is rooted directly in bop. But even though Shimon find himself aligned with mainstream jazz, he says it would be unnatural for him not to fold in music of the Middle East – or that of Latin America."

"In Ben-Shir's music, the influence is subtle. Tunes on his album "Shades" are not recognizable as derivative of Middle East until you pay close attention to melodies and chord changes."

"Shades" CD Review Brookline Tab! "Bassist-composer Shimon Ben-Shir must not have be... "Bassist-composer Shimon Ben-Shir must not have been paying attention the day it was explained that his instrument was a member of the rhythm section. Because even though saxophonist Duncan Martin take care of the most playful melodies here and both pianist Nicholas Mustelin and guitarist Mark Michaels have their turns at melodic soloing, it's Ben-Shir who, when not driving the beat with his precisionist, fluidly take over the lead, sometime alone sometime in unison with another band-mate. Most of the original tunes are from the straight ahead or softly swinging school of jazz. The composition "Oasis" sticking out like a pretty middle eastern flower, a little reminiscent of Yusuf Lateef's version of "Love Theme from Spartacus." The guitar-filled "One of us" provides a lovely flight of fancy."

"Shimon Praise" The Boston Globe, Go! Wednesday "We decided to listen to the disc and determined t... "We decided to listen to the disc and determined that it is indeed worthy of praise, if you on the hunt for some silky, Latin-tinged jazz"