

# **Alon Nechushtan Crosses Boundaries to Find a Singular Music With His New *Venture Bound***

The pianist/composer assembles an international, all-star band for his sixth release as a leader. **Donny McCaslin, John Ellis, Duane Eubanks, Chris Lightcap, Adam Cruz, Rogério Boccato, and Brahim Fribgane** contribute to making Nechushtan's farthest-reaching record to date.

Alon Nechushtan is already known to savvy listeners for his deft piano playing and his work in klezmer (he leads the band Talat, which released a record on Tzadik's Radical Jewish Culture Series) and his various jazz ensembles, with releases on Ayler Records and Between the Lines as well as the unexpected moodiness of his superstar 12-tet Dark Forces, with a release on Creative Sources. Alon brings his various interests under one roof on *Venture Bound*. Born in Tel Aviv with familial roots in Russia, Hungary, Transylvania and Uzbekistan, he employs the pluralism of jazz to bring together a wealth of musical heritage. This record fuses a lot of my previous fascinations together and ties together a size one-size-fits-all package of my influences, styles and sound,” he says of the exciting new music he wrote for the standing unit. “Diversity is the key. Rather than following up previous efforts to get a predefined sound even before going to the studio, *Venture Bound* is an open ended experiment in bringing diversity in composition, instrumentation, approach and personnel, with various backgrounds, bringing guests from world/groove music like Brahim and Rogerio side by side with post boppers Donny, John, Chris and Adam.”

The album opens with the easy mid-tempo groove of “La Avventura,” giving us right off the bat a sampling of John Ellis's tasteful soloing. “Gratitude” places pirouetting, klezmer-tinged lines into a jazz framework. It's not the sort of klezmer-jazz we've heard from Alon in Talat or his roles in groups led by Frank London, Andy Statman, Alicia Svigals and Greg Wall. The tune opens with a gentle statement from the composer's piano before giving way to mellifluous solos by trumpeter Duane Eubanks before the horns come together to restate the theme variants with Alon. “Pomegrenades” ups the tempo for a spritely, modern bit of hard bop with Latin, Ashkenaz and modal leanings, building in an persistently rhythmic arc. “Dark Damsel” pulls back into a Sephardic ballad with Brahim Fribgane's rubbery oud lines bouncing off of florid piano lines.

The album's steady flow is brought to a head in the infectious penultimate track “FAQ,” which sounds like it could have been folded into the Monk/Coltrane songbook while touching on Joe Henderson's soloing. The sinuous closer “Serpentrails” resolves the album with gentle melodies and hints of blues and gospel, including an especially nice enunciation from Lightcap.

“I was thinking less conceptually when I was writing the material for this group,” Alon says. “Unlike *ritual fire*, which was a big-action painting sound suite, or the klezmer niche of Talat's *Growl. Words Beyond* found its inspiration in the melodies of Mendelssohn's songs without words, but with *Venture Bound* I was not fully conscious of what was guiding it conceptually. I think in a way this is one of my more communicative projects. It's definitely a personal statement.”

Perhaps the great achievement of *Venture Bound*, however, is that nothing about the album feels forced. The various sources meld together seamlessly into an album that is easy to listen to but

holds up under scrutiny. *Venture Bound* is a new adventure for Alon Nechushtan, a journey he's been on all along.

**Alon Nechushtan**'s music adventures has brought him to the Yokohama Festival Japan with his contemporary compositions, The Sao-Paolo Brazil Jewish Music Festival with his quintet Talat, Toronto and Montreal's Rex Hotel with his Jazz Trio and The Tel Aviv New Music Biennale with his Compositions for Large Ensemble. A resident of New York City, Alon has performed in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Central Park Summer Stage, The Blue Note Jazz Club and Joe's Pub frequently with his projects as a band leader of various groups or as an in demand sideman. *All About Jazz* magazine called him a fantastic pianist-composer with abundant chemistry and boundless eclecticism.

Saxophonist **Donny McCaslin** started playing tenor saxophone the age of 12, inspired by his pianist father, and quickly progressed, touring Europe and participating in the prestigious Monterey Jazz Festival's California All-Star band while in high school. After attending the Berklee College of Music in Boston, he joined Berklee professor Gary Burton's quintet, with whom he toured for four years. McCaslin moved to New York, in 1991, and was soon working with bassist Eddie Gomez. He started gaining notice in the acclaimed Maria Schneider Orchestra, where his performance on the 2004 album *Concert In The Garden* received a Grammy nomination for "Best Jazz Instrumental Solo" in 2004. He currently works with the quartet Lan Xang (which evolved from an experimental partnership with fellow New York saxist David Binney) and a quintet led by the widely lionized trumpeter Dave Douglas. Recent years have also seen him working with Danilo Perez, Luciana Souza, Tom Harrell, Brian Blade, John Pattitucci, The Mingus Band, and Pat Metheny.

Saxophonist and New Orleans native **John Ellis** worked in his hometown with Jason Marsalis and Roland Guerin before implanting himself in the New York scene under the employ of guitar wizard Charlie Hunter, playing on four of his albums, and with R&B sensation Bilal Oliver. His album *Roots, Branches, and Leaves* included arrangements of folk songs sung from his childhood with appearances by Nicholas Payton, Jason Marsalis, Roland Guerin, Aaron Goldberg, and Bilal. John has had the chance to work with a wide variety of musicians including Norah Jones, Mos Def, Theryl DeClouet, Kurt Elling, Steven Chopek, Chris Lovejoy, Jans Ingber, Dean Bowman, Curtis Fowlkes, Johnny Vidakovich, Terreon Gully, Gregoire Maret, Alan Ferber, Ron Miles, Josh Roseman, Sam Newsome, and Derrek Phillips.

Philadelphia native and trumpeter **Duane Eubanks** has performed everywhere from the Hollywood Bowl to Birdland to the Kennedy Center, in addition to touring throughout Europe and Japan. He has worked with the Dave Holland Big Band, Frank Foster Loud Minority Big Band, Roy Hargrove Big Band, Oliver Lake Big Band, Next Legacy Orchestra, Jason Lindner Big Band, and Lionel Hampton Big Band. Outside of the jazz world, Duane has been feature with The Temptations, Alicia Keys, Talib Kweli, Mos Def, Wu Tang Clan, Freedom Williams, and Kirk Franklin, among others. Duane teaches at the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music and has previously taught at Oberlin College in Ohio.

Bassist **Chris Lightcap** has worked with Marc Ribot, Regina Carter, Craig Taborn, John Medeski, Tomasz Stanko, Paul Motian, John Scofield, Dave Liebman, Paquito D'Rivera, Joe Morris, Sheila Jordan, James Carter, Butch Morris, Ben Monder and many others. He has appeared on over 50 albums. His quartet with Tony Malaby, Bill McHenry and Gerald Cleaver released two records which both made CMJ's top 10 radio charts and were acclaimed in the *New York Times*, *Jazztimes*, *Cadence*, *the Village Voice* and *All About Jazz*.

Drummer **Adam Cruz** is a longtime member of pianist Danilo Perez's trio and has close associations with David Sanchez, Steve Wilson and the Mingus Big Band. Born in New York City, Cruz is the son of Ray Cruz, a timbalero who played with Mongo Santamaria, Richie Ray and Bobby Cruz and used to sit in on his gigs when I was still young. Cruz played drums throughout his youth and was exposed early on to jazz, Latin music and other styles. He attended the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University from 1988 to 1990 where he studied piano with Kenny Barron. He then transferred to Manhattan's New School, studying with teachers such as Kenny Washington, Joe Chambers, Louis Nash, Portinho, Maria Schneider and Victor Lewis (who recommended Cruz for the Mingus Big Band job). His time at the school was "a challenge," says Cruz, as his career was taking off, while he was getting calls from Paquito D'Rivera, Charlie Sepulveda and the late pianist Hilton Ruiz. Nevertheless, he received his BFA in 1993.

Brazilian percussionist **Rogério Boccato** plays in projects led by Danilo Perez, John Patitucci, Edward Simon, David Binney, Ben Allison, Paul Bollenback, Jon Gordon, and Mike Holober. He has also collaborated with top-ranking Brazilian artists, such as Toninho Horta, Dori Caymmi, Moacir Santos, and Vinicius Cantuária. He is featured on two Grammy-nominated albums: Kenny Garrett's "Beyond The Wall" and John Patitucci's release *Remembrance* alongside Joe Lovano and Brian Blade.

As a longtime member of the *Orquestra Jazz Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo*, he has played with Antonio Carlos Jobim, Hermeto Pascoal, Milton Nascimento, Egberto Gismonti, João Bosco, Joe Zawinul, among many others. Boccato has been faculty member of the Percussion department of The Hartt School (University of Hartford) teaching Brazilian Percussion and Ritmica, and recently joined the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music and Montclair State University.

The Moroccan oud player **Brahim Fribgane** has had the privilege of performing with such amazing artists as Dr. L. Subramaniam, Leni Stern, Vishal Vaid, Club d'Elf, Sami Yusuf, Hassan Hakmoun, Will Calhoun, Adam Rudolph, Zakir Hussein, Giovanni Hidalgo, Malika Zarra, Hamid Drake, Selva Ganesh, Steve Gorn, Larry Coryell, Reggie Workman, Hubert Laws, Corey Segal, Adam Deitch, Pete Seeger, Amit Chatterjee, Medeski Martin & Wood, to name a few. Some of the recent venues at which he has performed include the 2010 World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar, Senegal, Joe's Pub and BAM Cafe. He has recorded with Harry Belafonte, Paula Cole, Club d'Elf, Jamsheid Shari?, Leni Stern, DJ Logic, Malika Zarra, Morphine, among other talented artists. He currently makes his home in New York City.