

# MUSIC FROM THE PROMISED LAND

**Duo Mantar**

**Jacob Reuven, Mandolin • Adam Levin, Guitar**



MUSIC FROM THE PROMISED LAND
Israeli Music for Mandolin and Guitar

Marc LAVRY (1903–1967)		Yehezkel BRAUN (1922–2014)	
3 Jewish Dances, Op. 192 (1945) (arr. Gregg Nestor [b. 1954] for mandolin and guitar, 2017)		Sonata for Mandolin and Guitar (2004)	
1	No. 1. Jewish Wedding Dance – Sher: Allegro molto	9	I. Fantasia
2	No. 2. Yemenite Wedding Dance: Andante	10	II. Aria
3	No. 3. Hora: Allegro vivo	11	III. Variazione
Paul BEN-HAIM (1897–1984)		Josef BARDANASHVILI (b. 1948)	
3 Songs Without Words (1952) (arr. Gregg Nestor for mandolin and guitar, 2019)		The Memories (2017)	
		Oren LOK (b. 1988)	
		Ahava (2018)	
		Ittai ROSENBAUM (b. 1966)	
4	I. Arioso	Duet for Mandolin and Guitar (2006) (originally for mandolin and piano, arr. Gregg Nestor, 2019)	
5	II. Ballad		
6	III. Sephardic Melody		
Jan FREIDLIN (b. 1944)		Total Timing	
7 Oriental Pantomime (2018)			
8 Mist Over the Lake (1985) (version for mandolin and guitar, 2018)			

This recording paints a portrait of the beautiful Land of Israel through the sonic medium of two plucked instruments. This music has roots in Hebrew. It is a cultural gathering of Jewish diasporas from around the world whose arteries carry a collective memory of thousands of years.

We were brought together through our respective passions for the mandolin and guitar, a curiosity for the uncharted horizons of newly commissioned works, and through the meticulous musical arrangement of masterpieces for violin and piano to plucked instruments.

From our first meeting, Duo Mantar was born, a name which suggests musical exploration: ‘MAN’ (man) coupled with the Hebrew word ‘TAR’, which means touring, reviewing, and searching. Together the name ‘Duo Mantar’ appears, a title that sounds like ‘mantra’, taken from the philosophical world in Buddhist meditation.

On this album, the listener joins us for a balloon ride, travels to the diaspora of Babylonian Jewry in the distant desert, and continues the musical journey into the magical

world of European klezmer music and Balkan Ladino songs. Furthermore, we hear inferences of American culture, with a smattering of jazz and country styles.

The same flying carpet, on which we have placed the listener’s ear, is embroidered with a common silk thread that forms the musical weave of this illustrious group of Israeli composers.

Jacob Reuven and Adam Levin

We would like to thank the Israel Composers’ League and the Israel Music Institute for generously sponsoring this recording project. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the session producer and sound engineer Norbert Kraft for his tireless work and Gregg Nestor for his meticulous arrangements.

This recording is dedicated to Dr David Levin who brought this duo together.

Several works that Duo Mantar commissioned me to adapt for mandolin and guitar presented unique technical challenges! In particular the *Duet for Mandolin and Guitar* (Ittai Rosenbaum) constantly shifts between different keys and tonalities that can be technically more restrictive due to a loss of open strings and by that is made more challenging. Add to that the dynamic and agile tempos required and you have the makings of a difficult jigsaw

Music from the Promised Land

Presenting works by seven composers of different backgrounds and periods, this album presents a wonderful collage of various origins and styles.

Composer Marc Lavry (1903–1967) worked in Germany conducting and composing film music until the rise of the Nazis. In Palestine, he conducted the Eretz Israel Orchestra (later the Israel Philharmonic) and composed symphonic music, oratorios, operas, concertos, chamber music and songs.

Composer, pianist and conductor Paul Ben-Haim (1897–1984) (born Paul Frankenburger), Israel’s forefather of the Mediterranean style, held a prosperous career in Germany before immigrating to Palestine in 1933.

The field of folk song was flourishing at the time, and both composers used these melodies in their pieces, first with piano and later as thematic material for symphonic works. Their familiarity with folk song was made possible through the Yemenite singer and Jerusalem native, Bracha Zephira, who writes: ‘On weekdays, I rejoiced in love songs and romances in Ladino language sang by women cleaning windows or embroidering by the window.’ This was the basis of Ben-Haim’s *Sephardic Melody* and Lavry’s *Yemenite Wedding Dance*. As Max Brod writes: ‘Composers Ben-Haim ... Lavry ... and others laid the groundwork for fertile and powerfully flowing Western music originating in the Jewish East. Bracha Zephira is in fact the first to recognise this synthesis as a real necessity of life.’

A decade after immigrating to Israel, Lavry composed *3 Jewish Dances*, which features the movements *Sher* – a Jewish-Chassidic-style dance inspired by the music of his childhood; *Yemenite Wedding Dance* – the Yemenite

puzzle to successfully succeed sonically and musically.

The various works on this album treat both artists as equal and essential collaborators. They both enjoy thinking ‘out of the box’ and exploring and expanding new avenues for their combined instruments, which is a testament to their separate and combined artistry.

Gregg Nestor

bride’s dance is gentle and serene, performed in small steps and with soft, round hand gestures; and *Hora* – the sweeping dance in quadruple metre (brought to Israel by Romanian and Balkan Jews), first used by Lavry in his work *Emek* (1937), which reflects the modal folk sounds and syncopated rhythms of which the people of the working settlement danced passionately to at the end of their work day.

Ben-Haim composed *3 Songs Without Words* in 1952, adding a short introduction:

‘Anyone whose imagination needs the assistance of another commentary can imagine in the breathtaking *Melody (Arioso)* the oppressive heat of summer in the Judean mountains, and in *Ballad* the monotonous murmur of the Oriental storyteller. The last song is based on a traditional folk melody of the Sephardic Jews – a real gem, to which I have attached only an arrangement.’

According to Zephira, ‘The composers who received a Jewish education while in exile delved deeper into the arrangements of the melodies, sometimes not perceived in the nature of the songs, but instilled their own truth into them, out of inspiration and out of their affinity to the Hebrew word.’<sup>1</sup>

Jan Freidlin was born in 1944 in Southern Siberia and lived in Odessa (Ukraine) before immigrating to Israel in 1990. His compositions have won numerous prizes in the USSR, Bulgaria, Israel and the US, and are recorded on albums in various countries by prominent musicians and

groups such as the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. Freidlin writes:

'The title, *Oriental Pantomime*, intends to imitate an Oriental dance figure. It is my first piece for such an unusual combination, sharing a similar range, which offered me the opportunity to explore all the new and creative possibilities.

Inspired by a miraculous place with a mist over a small hidden forest lake surrounded by pine trees, *Mist Over the Lake* has become a popular piece of mine. Nevertheless, making an arrangement for the duo was challenging. The main difficulty was the choice of the soloist and so-called accompaniment function. The performers here supported each other, and have created a great atmosphere and feel for both pieces.'

**Yehezkel Braun** (1922–2014) immigrated to Israel at the age of two. He was a graduate of Tel Aviv University in music and classical studies and his main academic interests focused on a comparative study of traditional Jewish melos and plainsong.

As we can hear in the *Sonata*, Braun's music highlights melodic-modal elements rather than pure harmony; the harmony is for the most part an outcome of the melodic lines and voice leading.

Yehezkel Braun writes:

'I wrote the piece in 2004 for a German duo. Beyond the fact that this is a sonata and it has three movements – I do not have much to say. The music is supposed to speak for itself. Nevertheless, I must note that in this music I feel a breeze from the 17th century; this is especially evident in the third movement, which is nothing but a series of variations in the form of a passacaglia.'

Georgian-Israeli composer **Josef Bardanashvili** was born in 1948 in Batumi, Georgia, where he directed the Music College and later served as Culture Vice-Minister in

Adjara. He settled in Israel in 1995, served as composer-in-residence of prominent orchestras and became a prolific educator and composer of various genres, including operas, concertos, works for film, theatre and solo works, among them *Sola* for guitar solo (2006), a piece based on a Ladino song.

Josef Bardanashvili writes:

'*The Memories* – duo for mandolin and guitar – is a dialogue in a variety of settings: dialogue between two instruments, dialogue with the past, retaining and reviving facts, events and impressions encoded, stored and retrieved in our memories. In the work, the author turns to the form of free variations and, accordingly, uses a wide range of performing possibilities on the mandolin and guitar.'

**Oren Lok** was born in Israel in 1988. He studied piano and composition in Israel and the US and writes for films, multimedia, and classical music groups.

Oren Lok writes:

'*Ahava* is based on the A–E–B–E sounds. Chronologically in Latin alphabetical order they are arranged 1–5–2–5, and in Hebrew letters 'A–H–B–H' (אהבה). It is based on 'love' throughout.

I avoided using the tremolo technique in the mandolin. I was more interested in exploring its bare and short sustain as well as hearing a refined guitar sound to contain that mandolin's sound, but not trample it. I wrote extended sounds, which in my imagination decay very slowly to the quietest dynamic range. I wanted to hear the moment in which the sound disappears completely while sustaining the intimacy between these instruments to the end of the work.'

**Ittai Rosenbaum** (b. 1966) is a Berlin-based composer, classical and jazz pianist and educator. Born in Jerusalem, he later completed his studies in Israel and the US. He has engaged in pedagogical projects and produced, arranged and led ensembles of jazz, pop, Ladino and Kurdish songs.

Ittai Rosenbaum writes:

'After having worked with Jacob on a mandolin quartet, I wanted to further explore the possibilities of a duet for mandolin and a harmonic instrument. It was originally composed for mandolin and piano, and I was interested in gestures that juxtapose percussive and sustained sounds. As with the present partner, the guitar, one must rely on repetition in order to create the effect of undecaying sounds.

The structure is a dialogue between sustained, recitative style and ostinato. The ostinato consists of rhythmic counterpoint of somewhat funky lines and a clear beat, and thus, the continuity and sustained effect is achieved through contrast.

The middle section tends towards a more open rhythmic texture. There, the guitar produces forlorn harmonic and melodic lines with chords, indeed

decaying, but stretched vertically, while the mandolin might be heard as calling in the desert, lacking the previous ostinato continuity. When the two instruments lock together, it is often within an unsettling pulse. The return to the steady beat happens by surrendering to Romantic-style pathos, and finally back into ostinato, now less sophisticated yet more exuberant.'

This vibrant and jazzy piece concludes the album and your musical journey with Duo Mantar.

**Dr Ron Merhavi**

<sup>1</sup> All Zephira quotes taken from ZEPHIRA, Bracha: *Kolot Rabbim ('Many Voices'): Oriental Jewish Hymns and Songs, Collected and Explained, with an Introduction* (Massada, 1978)

## Duo Mantar

Formed in 2017, Duo Mantar comprises American classical guitarist Adam Levin and Israeli mandolinist Jacob Reuven. Both musicians share a passion for Israeli music and Hebrew and Jewish songs, and are committed to expanding the repertoire available for mandolin and guitar by actively commissioning contemporary composers. In 2018 and 2019 the duo toured across the US and Israel. Jacob Reuven's broad musical horizons encompass everything from Baroque to newly commissioned contemporary music. He has mastered the interpretation of solo violin repertoire, consequently becoming the first mandolin player ever to perform violin repertoire on a mandolin with an Israeli orchestra. He has performed under the baton of eminent conductors such as Zubin Mehta, Mstislav Rostropovitch and Omer Meir Wellber. Reuven performs on mandolins built by luthier Arik Kerman. Award-winning classical guitarist Adam Levin has received both national and international prizes in performance, and has been honoured as a Fulbright Scholar, Program for Cultural Cooperation Fellow and Kate Neal Kinley Fellow, researching contemporary Spanish repertoire in Spain. Levin has commissioned and recorded over 30 solo and chamber guitar works by Spanish composers for Naxos, and his discography spans nine albums. Levin is on the faculties of the University of Rhode Island and the University of Massachusetts Boston, a founder of the Kithara Project, a guitar education non-profit organisation, and the artistic director of the University of Rhode Island Guitar Festival and Rhode Island Guitar Guild. He is endorsed by Augustine Strings and performs on guitars by Stephan Connor and Dominique Field.

[www.jacobreuven.com](http://www.jacobreuven.com) • [www.adamlevinguitar.com](http://www.adamlevinguitar.com)

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This selection of pieces for mandolin and guitar represents the rich variety of music from Israel. Styles range from the diaspora of Babylonian Jewry through European klezmer traditions, and Balkan Ladino songs, to contemporary influences from America. Paul Ben-Haim and Marc Lavry pioneered the use of music originating in the Jewish East, and Jan Freidlin continues the tradition, employing Oriental dance figures in his music. Oren Lok's *Ahava* is an homage to love, while Ittai Rosenbaum's *Duet* offers a vibrant and jazzy conclusion to this wide-ranging conspectus.

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|---|--|
| <b>Marc LAVRY (1903–1967)</b>                   | <b>Yehezkel BRAUN (1922–2014)</b>                          |
| <b>1–3 3 Jewish Dances, Op. 192</b>             | <b>9–11 Sonata for Mandolin and Guitar (2004)</b>          |
| (1945, arr. 2017)** <b>8:49</b>                 | <b>13:54</b>   |
| <b>Paul BEN-HAIM (1897–1984)</b>                | <b>Josef BARDANASHVILI (b. 1948)</b>                       |
| <b>4–6 3 Songs Without Words</b>                | <b>12 The Memories (2017)*</b>                             |
| (1952, arr. 2019)** <b>9:31</b>                 | <b>11:00</b>   |
| <b>Jan FREIDLIN (b. 1944)</b>                   | <b>Oren LOK (b. 1988)</b>                                  |
| <b>7 Oriental Pantomime (2018)*</b>             | <b>13 Ahava (2018)*</b>                                    |
| <b>5:41</b>                                     | <b>8:42</b>  |
| <b>8 Mist Over the Lake (1985, arr. 2018)**</b> | <b>Ittai ROSENBAUM (b. 1966)</b>                           |
| <b>4:23</b>                                     | <b>14 Duet for Mandolin and Guitar (2006, arr. 2019)**</b> |
|   | <b>10:47</b>   |

A detailed track list can be found on page 2 of the booklet

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FOR MANDOLIN AND GUITAR

**ISRAEL COMPOSERS' LEAGUE**  
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ISRAEL MUSIC INSTITUTE  
מכון למוסיקה ישראלית

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Guitar by Stephan Connor, USA • Mandolin by Arik Kerman, Israel • Cover photo © Bogdan Urma  
This recording is dedicated to Dr David Levin who brought this duo together.



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Playing Time  
73:02



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