



ALBUM REVIEWS

Tevet Sela: Live at The Rex



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By **Raul Da Gama**



Tevet Sela plays with great imagination and sculpts long inventions through his music

Theoretically virtually every musician can bring his or her own singular sound to the instrument.

Some, however, will sound more unique than others and the cultural topography that informs their music will have a large bearing on what their music sounds like, gestures and riffs notwithstanding. In the case of **Tevet Sela** this is somewhat more pronounced. A few bars into *Shabbaton*, the opening track of his outstanding album, you know from the high and lonesome Phrygian ululations of the melodic line, you have visions of a song piercing the pristine desert air somewhere in the Middle East – Israel, in the case of Mr Sela, for that is where he emigrated from to settle in Montréal, Québec, Canada.

However, Mr Sela's Middle Eastern background soon wears thin and, like that of many Canadian musicians playing contemporary music, he melds the music that first formed his artistic vision into the broader, more worldly-wise idiom of improvised music. This is not to say that the haunting rhythmic undulations of Mr Sela's music becomes like anything you're likely to hear floating out of a high street lounge. If

anything, you are drawn to the sound exactly because it is mysterious and beckoning even as its rippling funkified rhythms punctuate the originals you will hear on this outing, *Live at The Rex*.



Tevet Sela wowed his audience when he played Live at The Rex

Also, unlike much of the formulaic, production-

line original music that you hear from the vast majority of younger musicians who have broken through the proverbial sound barrier and cut their first [and sophomore] albums, Mr Sela's music is refreshingly different. He may fall into the temptation of ripping out fast-paced arpeggios up and down the register of his alto horn, but for the most part his own music gives new meaning to the word "original". The reason for this is Mr Sela is, first and foremost, a storyteller who forms musical narratives based on ideas rather than melodic hooks and gratuitous gestures.

For instance, a song like *Over the Mountain* provokes the listener to visualize not simply a large rock, but the Promethean prospect of scaling it and the excitement of tumbling down the other side into a great unknown. This takes imagination, something Mr Sela displays in spades. The intrigue of *Dream in Blue* is highly evocative; even trippy. And the angularity of *Lying Sun* is much more seductive than a hallucinogenic trip to our nearest star. Best of

all, the adventurous nature of the melodic lines and how interestingly they integrate into their vertical perspectives, not to mention the rhythmic propulsion that moves the music forward to its eventual dénouement makes them not simply listenable, but often quite riveting.

Through it all – whether he is soloing or playing in ensemble, Mr Sela displays great agility and a lustrous tone that is almost vocal-like in his articulation. Thus, he can make his song narratives more interesting as he can – and does – infuse even the simplest phrase with meaning. As a saxophonist he is unafraid to try and push his instrument not simply melodically, but as he is a fine technician, he is also able to undertake risky rhythmic leaps. This is what makes the interpretation of *Love for Sale* [for instance] impossible to resist even though you may have heard the **Cole Porter** tune many times before, or why you will be seduced by the leaping rhythm of *Smoken Blues*.

The saxophonist is joined on this gig by a wonderful ensemble of musicians who have fueled the Canadian music scene – both as journeymen and as bandleaders. Bassist **Mike Downes**, and drummers **Ethan Ardelli** and **Ernesto Cervini** are fully attuned to Mr Sela's artistic vision and bring to this recording deeply interiorised and idiomatic performances, as does the pianist **John Roney**, who with his long-limbed pianism also plays an important role in shaping the harmonic and rhythmic components of this wonderful music.

Meanwhile Mr Sela rings in the changes as he solos and sculpts his long inventions, leading the rest of the cast on quite an adventurous musical mission.

Deo gratis...

Music – 1: Shabbaton; 2: Omayya; 3: Over The Mountain; 4: Closer Horizon; 5: Dream in Blue; 6: Love for Sale; 7: Lying Sun; 8: Smoken Blues.

Musicians – **Tevet Sela**: alto saxophone; **John Roney**: piano; **Mike Downes**: contrabass;

Ethan Ardelli: drums [1, 2, 6]; **Ernesto Cervini:** drums [3 – 5, 7, 8].

Released – 2023

Label – Independent

Runtime – 1:04:44

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Raul Da Gama

Based in Canada, Raul is a poet, musician and accomplished critic whose profound analysis is reinforced by his deep understanding of music, technically as well as historically.