



The future of jazz is the future of music



Photo credit: Houssam Mchaimech

## On hearing Herbie

His influences are sporadic, his compositions unique (and award winning). Young Lebanese pianist **Tarek Yamani** speaks to *TOB* on shaping his own path in a country without a deep tradition in jazz

### What first connected you to jazz music?

Rhythm. Rhythm is so powerful that when it speaks to somebody, it can alter someone's life to the point of no return. The crucial point was when I was roaming in a record store in Hamra. I heard the vendor's voice asking: 'Do you know this?' There was nobody else, so he pumped up the volume, and there comes the piano voicings of Herbie Hancock. It was 'New York Minute' from Hancock's 'The New Standard'. How to put it? Organised complex rhythmic patterns lifted me up and slammed me down.

### The Middle East doesn't have a long history in jazz music. Was it a challenge going into jazz without any national references?

It's nobody's fault but the educational system. How could

all these young talents pursue their talent when music education is barely a marginal topic? On the other hand, social pressure plays a big role in the illusion that art is not profitable. Here I blame the artists who let go of their dreams and surrender to social pressure.

### As a self-taught pianist who's created his own jazz music education, how did you find your musical identity?

Now that was a challenge; the challenge of achieving something out of nothing while wanting everything. I took piano lessons as a child and learned the basics. Years later, I began diverging from the piano because I disliked the way music was taught. Four years later, jazz brought me back to the piano with a completely new approach. I feel lucky to have not found

a jazz teacher because instead I learned from the masters themselves. I think musical identity has a lot to do with how one is taught. When you're on your own, nobody influences you but the ones who speak to you directly.

### What was the high point of your experience at the UN International Jazz Day?

Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter are two of the masters who helped me understand jazz through their music. On Jazz Day, I was announced by the first master, and I shared the stage with the second. There is no higher point.

### You won the prestigious Thelonious Monk Jazz Composers Competition for 'Sama'i Yamani' in 2010; do you feel that opened doors?

Winning such a prestigious competition is of course very influential. The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz is in fact the reason behind my invitation to perform at the International Jazz Day. The composition is based on the Arabic rhythm 'sama'i', which is written in the meter of 10/8. The version I sent to the competition was sung beautifully by Syrian singer Rasha Rizk.

### What were your influences on 'Ashur'?

All sorts of classical music, from Gregorian to minimalism, rock, hip-op, Arabic, African, electronic, Indian, flamenco, samba, pop, blues and jazz. 'Ashur' is an atypical piano trio because it features the tuba. I have five compositions, two are based on Arabic rhythms. I have rearrangements of compositions by Bach, Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Brooks Bowman and the Korgis.

### Are you a jazz purist who likes to create new compositions within its roots, or are you interested in finding new ways to evolve and develop jazz?

The future of jazz for me is the future of music. I believe that with time every musician will want to express himself through jazz. Why keep playing the same piece of music forever when you can have the freedom to start with this piece and go somewhere different? Jazz is a black American creation that belongs to the world. I'm constantly looking for new ways to evolve as a musician and to better experience the mysterious essence of improvisation.

'Ashur' is available on Edict Records in selected stores, iTunes and Amazon MP3  
www.tarekyamani.com  
timeoutbeirut.com/music

