

From the depths

The songs on Shlomo Bar's latest album are basalt slabs, not precious stones, and even at 67 his art is stubborn, uncompromising and untamed

By Ben Shalev

“Besod Tefilat Arar.” There couldn’t be a better title for this album by Shlomo Bar and Habreira Hativeet. Especially the last word, *arar*. Not only because its meaning reflects Bar’s unique place in Israeli culture. (Arar, juniper, grows alone in desolate places; it is also *irur*, a challenge to the status quo.) Its sound also suits Bar’s personality and voice. “Arar.” With its double “ayin,” is there

groups such as Balkan Beat Box and The Apples invite Bar to be a guest artist at their performances. The developing branch of Israeli music that places the beat at the forefront owes a huge debt to the leader of Habreira Hativeet. (The Apples will appear with the group at the launch of “Besod Tefilat Arar” (“In a Secret of Solitary Prayer”) at the Shuni Amphitheatre in Binyamina on Thursday. Other guests include Kobi Aflalo, Liora Yitzhak and Berry Sakharof, whose music reflects the influence

who perhaps drew inspiration from Bar but opted for the light and pleasant side of the world music spectrum), this excellent album could have been called “Mima’amakim” (“From the Depths”).

The exceptional depth and weight of the album could have made listening to “Besod Tefilat Arar” an overly challenging, perhaps even exhausting, experience. But Bar and Ilan Ben-Ami, Habreira Hativeet’s guitarist, who contributed to the arrangements on and production of the album, made wise choices. The album starts with relatively light (or, more precisely, not overly heavy) material. Songs such as “Brakha,” “Kmo Haruah,” and “Ani, At Vehu” are not exactly pop hits. They have unusual melodies and asymmetric beats. (“My heart favors asymmetric beats, the sounds of nature,” writes Bar in the liner notes for the CD.) But despite this they have the feel of a steady and energetic beat and simple melodic statements. They are interesting and engaging and play wonderfully without being overly demanding.

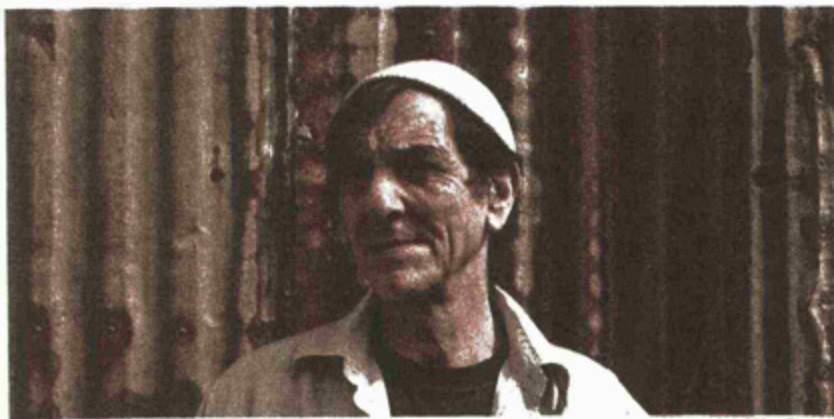
The watershed track is the seventh, “Vekakha Anashkekh.” Here, in Bar’s speech-like melody to the dense, dark text of Ehud Ben Ezer, begins the dark and heavy side of the album. The faint of heart are likely to leave, in favor of more immediate pleasures, but courageous, advanced listeners will be glad to discover, after “Vekakha Anashkekh,” two long and beautiful pieces in which the harsh words of Natan Alterman (“Shir Le’eshet Ne’urim”) and Ibn Gabirol (“Shahar Avakeshka”) meet slow and meditative tunes by Bar, wonderful influences from Indian music and the rich tone of Habreira Hativeet (Menashe Sasson on santur; Nir Sarussi on violin; Ilan Aviv on bass guitar; Yael Offenbach on tabla; and, of course, Bar and Ben-Ami).

In addition to the seven songs by Bar there are four familiar songs. And not just any songs. Even when it comes

to covering the songs of others, Bar goes for the hard stuff: Arik Einstein’s “Ima Adama,” Yehuda Poliker’s “Yesh Dvarim Sheratziti Lomar,” “Slihot” by Yehudit Ravitz and “Halila” by Erez Halevy. One or two would have been enough for me. “Halila” (featuring the amazing Liora Yitzhak) is beautiful and moving, and the racing darbuka near the end of “Ima Adama” may even justify the decision, always problematic, to take on an Arik Einstein song. But in “Devarim Sheratziti Lomar” and “Slihot,” an uncomfortable feeling surfaces. Bar’s singing is infinitely expressive, but the attempt to intensify the emotional impact only serves to blunt it. Really, there is no need to redo these two songs.

A final word about “Giveret Rita.” It is a protest song against what Yael Offenbach, who wrote the lyrics, perceives as the overuse of Ritalin. I know nothing about this subject, but there is something grating in the claim that every mother who decides to give her child Ritalin is guilty of neglect. (“On the ladder you ascend all the rungs are reinforced, the weakened ones we’ll toss aside to the land of shadows.”) Besides, what about the fathers? Why is all the anger directed at the mothers? “I call for the creation of stricter guidelines for prescribing the drugs and an end to digging in the souls of very energetic children,” writes Bar in the liner notes. “These ‘special’ [children] will grow up to be society’s innovators.” The last sentence is pure truth, and perhaps the song’s extreme one-dimensionality is needed to spark public discussion, but it is a bit hard to believe that this will happen in a society that itself has a serious attention deficit disorder and tends not to listen to Habreira Hativeet’s deeper, uncompromising sort of art.

Shlomo Bar and Habreira Hativeet, “Besod Tefilat Arar,” Hed Arzi



Ariel Von Startan

Bar. Has there been a more guttural singer in Israel in the last 30 years?

a more guttural word in the Hebrew language? Has there been a deeper-throated voice than Bar’s in the Israeli music scene of the past 30 years?

In a certain sense, Bar won. The new sounds that he introduced in the late 1970s, the wild beat, the pride in being Mizrahi, have all become part of the lexicon of local music. What then seemed foreign, different, even off-putting (at least in the eyes of a young boy who watched Bar on television as he lost himself in the darbuka drum – the sweaty face, the closed eyes, the crooked teeth) is now an inseparable part of the Israeli soundtrack. It is no wonder that young, contemporary

of Habreira Hativeet.

Bar’s pioneering music never gained him a mass following, but no one disputes his important creative contribution. At the age of 67, he could afford to rest on his laurels, to create a softer, milder version of himself. But then he wouldn’t be Shlomo Bar. It is unsurprising to discover that he has rejected the soft option outright, favoring the juniper over the laurel, and nevertheless it is fascinating to see the extent to which his art has remained tough, uncompromising, heavy and untamed. His new songs are not precious stones, they are basalt slabs. Had the name not already been taken (by a young artist