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Monday, 31 October 2011

Three Cohens. Three Cheers. (Family, 2011, Anzic Records)

Written by [Andrea Canter](#), Contributing Editor
Monday, 31 October 2011

"Through music, we share an emotional and spiritual connection that goes beyond our familial ties. It is beyond words and the imagination." -Anat Cohen



Avishai, Anat and Yuval Cohen (photo by Osnat Rom)

Just listening to the music on *Family*, you can easily imagine an American household in the 1980-90s where parents' love of music filters into the ears and hearts of their offspring. Soon the kids are taking lessons, playing in school bands, well on their respective ways to becoming some of the finest purveyors of America's indigenous art form. For the "3 Cohens," this story is only partly true. Anat, Avishai and Yuval Cohen were indeed encouraged by their parents to pursue music; they discovered jazz and played in their school and conservatory ensembles. And they are already identified as among their generation's best practitioners of the genre.

But this is not an All American family tale. The 3 Cohens grew up in Tel Aviv, part of a growing wave of Israeli jazz artists who have come to the U.S. for advanced studies and are now shaping the future of American music. Each is a star in his or her own right, Yuval on soprano and alto saxophone, Anat on clarinet and soprano and tenor saxes, Avishai on trumpet. But they can trace their collaborations back to bop experiments in the family living room, a history and bond few working bands can claim. Celebrating the release of *Family*, The 3 Cohens will perform at the Village Vanguard in Manhattan, November 1-6, with pianist Aaron Goldberg, bassist Omer Avital and drummer Johnathan Blake.

The 3 Cohens

"We never pushed them," says mother Bilha Cohen. But she found herself driving the kids to lessons at the Jaffa Conservatory three times per week. And of course, listening to the budding musicians practice. "Can you imagine hearing different wind instruments playing in our house at the same time?" Bilha says. "It was crazy." But in a good way.

Oldest brother and alto/soprano saxophonist **Yuval Cohen** toured Europe and Israel as a soloist during his teens. After serving as a soloist, arranger and co-conductor at the Israel Defense Forces Orchestra, he started the family tradition of attending the Berklee College of Music. Back in his homeland, he won Israel's Landau Prize for Jazz Performance and earned a Master's Degree in composition from the Rubin Academy of Music and Dance in Jerusalem, where he is currently on the faculty. In addition to his work with his siblings, Yuval has played or recorded with Lee Konitz, Lew Soloff, Omer Avital, Eric Harland, Aaron Goldberg, Jason Lindner, Matt Penman, Greg Hutchinson, Aaron Parks, Shai Maestro and more.

Over the past decade, the Berklee-trained, New York-based **Anat Cohen** has transformed the clarinet and its repertoire from its roots in Dixieland and Swing to a fully modern and leading voice on today's jazz scene. She played clarinet in the Jaffa Conservatory Dixieland Band and later played tenor sax in the Israeli Air Force Band. Perennial winner of "Rising Star" polls among critics, Anat's trajectory surpassed "up and coming" status with her "Benny Goodman and Beyond" project, recorded live at the Village Vanguard in



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Anat Cohen©Andrea Canter

summer 2009 and released as *Clarinetwork: Live at the Village Vanguard* (Anzic). She was named clarinetist of the year for 2010 by Downbeat Readers and the Jazz Journalists Association.

Youngest sibling, trumpeter *Avishai Cohen* toured the world with the Young Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra, becoming a first-call player for diverse band, studio and television projects. He attended Berklee in Boston and placed third in the Thelonious Monk International Trumpet Competition in 1997. Now

based in New York, Avishai has developed a unique sound drawing on Middle East, Latin, African and American jazz traditions, using an open and muted trumpet as well as electronic effects. "When I play effects, I play a different instrument," he says. "The whole concept changes." Among his many projects, he performs with the current edition of the SF Jazz Collective and coleads a funk band with M'shell Ndegeocello.

"Family" (Anzic, 2011)

Recorded in Brooklyn, the Three Cohens' latest release follows *One* (2004) and *Braid* (2007), and features a stellar New York rhythm section of pianist Aaron Goldberg, bassist Matt Penman and drummer Gregory Hutchinson. Legendary vocalist Jon Hendricks appears on two tracks. "The idea of recording with the great Jon Hendricks came to us after we met him in Brazil in 2010, where Jon sat in with our band. The connection felt magical and we all agreed we must record together." The set includes original compositions from Yuval and Avishai, Anat's arrangement of "Tiger Rag," and exciting covers, with Hendricks joining the sextet on "On the Sunny Side of the Street" and the closing "Roll 'Em Pete."



Family

Avishai's compositions include the opening "Shufra de Shufra" which swings like a big band chart filtered through a Mingus workshop session, the trumpeter shining with a crisp and tart attack extended by sinewy soloing from Yuval and Anat. More direct reference to Mingus follows on Avishai's "With the Soul of the Greatest of Them All (Dedicated to Charles Mingus)," introduced appropriately by Matt Penman's haunting basslines before Yuval calls his siblings to worship at the alter of creative improvisation. Lines of spiraling bird calls alternate with sublime harmonic passages in apt tribute to Mingus's compositional signatures. Avishai also contributes the sweetly shimmering title track in honor of his family, the rhythm section—particularly Goldberg-- providing idyllic support of sibling revelry.

Yuval, who spends more time in his homeland, elegantly captures the spirit of American blues on his "Blues for Dandi's Orange Bull Chasing an Orange Sack" (if that title doesn't suggest Mingus...). As much a swaying playground for Goldberg, Penman and Hutchinson as for the sibling horn section, "Blues..." gives each Cohen space to toss and tumble. Hutchinson's punctuations are especially effective in driving the ensemble forward. Yuval's "Rhapsody in Blake" (named for frequent cohort Johnathan Blake?) has a Monkish thrust and driving percussion pulse, Goldberg tearing through the first chorus before the horns launch their relentless debate.

Anat arranged "Tiger Rag" as a feisty sonic circus honoring its New Orleans origins while infusing her own inventive voice on clarinet, while Yuval also nods to the Crescent City with his harmonically glorious arrangement of "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans." Anat's tenor, often overlooked in the shadow of her pioneering clarinet, gives this track an amber glow, while Goldberg's solo is both delicate and swinging. Ellington's

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“The Mooch” is updated just enough to give Duke’s splendid harmonies a modern feel, Anat’s clarinet soaring, Avishai’s trumpet teasing over Penman’s steady walk, but it’s the three horns together that provide the real magic.

And magic prevails on the two tracks with Jon Hendricks: At 90, his voice may lack its earlier power, but there’s no loss of interpretive skill and his intonation is surprisingly intact. His scat on “On the Sunnyside of the Street” provides a 4th horn element, and the Cohens clearly enjoy the exchange. The closing “Roll ‘Em Pete” celebrates a cross-generational energy, the young horn artists giving Hendricks wide berth to display his tireless charm, responding in turn with their own. It’s a fitting finale for artists who so clearly respect tradition, and family, while eagerly displaying their own voices and joyful collaboration.

The 3 Cohens, with Aaron Goldberg, Omer Avital and Johnathan Blake, celebrate Family at the Village Vanguard, November 1-6; www.villagevanguard.com. They play at Scullers in Boston on November 10th.

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