

OBLIQ SOUND™
ALON YAVNAI
= Biography =

Israeli pianist **Alon Yavnai** defies easy categorization. A free agent after six years with **Paquito D’Rivera**’s various bands, and about to release *Travel Notes*, his debut album on ObliqSound, the pianist is one of the most eclectically accomplished players working today. His work with D’Rivera illustrates the vast range of musical styles and languages in which Yavnai is fluent – in 2006, he, D’Rivera, and cellist Mark Summer were nominated for the Best Classical Crossover Grammy for their album, *The Jazz Chamber Trio*, and just this year, he won a Grammy as a member of the Paquito D’Rivera Quintet for Best Latin Jazz Album for *Funk Tango*, on which Yavnai composed the title track.

Born to an Argentinean mother and Israeli father, Alon Yavnai began to play piano when he was just four years old. By the age of 14, he was already performing professionally in Israel while attending the Thelma Yalin High School of the Arts and the Givatayim Conservatory. That early grounding in both classical and popular music was enhanced by the music he was exposed to at home, from Israeli artists such as Matti Caspi, Arik Einstein, Sasha Argov and Shlomo Gronich, and Brazilian artists like Gal Costa, Joao Bosco, and Beth Calvalho as well as jazz greats such as Oscar Peterson and Keith Jarrett.

Following his obligatory stint in the Israeli army, Yavnai moved to Costa Rica, which marked the start of a peripatetic lifestyle that would ultimately serve his musical career very well. His next move was to Boston, to study at Berklee College of Music. Yavnai’s relationship with Paquito D’Rivera began at a concert in Costa Rica and was cemented in Boston at a Berklee Performance Center Clinic.

By 2001, he joined D’Rivera, as an integral member of his Latin Jazz Quintet, his Jazz Chamber Trio, and in duet performances worldwide. Their musical adventures took them from the Canary Islands to Japan, and from Argentina to Switzerland. Their repertoire has included classical music, such as Brahms’ Clarinet Trio which Yavnai and D’Rivera performed at Carnegie Hall with cellist Yo-Yo Ma; the music of Ignacio Cervantes, a 19th century Cuban composer; and much, much more, as exhibited on the 2008 Grammy winner, *Funk Tango*, with its tango, bebop, post-bop, Afro-Cuban and Brazilian selections. It’s no wonder that D’Rivera says that “among all the pianists I’ve worked with, Alon Yavnai is the most versatile musician.”

Throughout his years as a sideman, Yavnai has also continued to expand his own musical horizons. He has an ongoing relationship with the NDR Bigband in Hamburg, for whom he has composed, arranged and recorded multiple times on special commission for broadcast throughout Germany and Europe. Yavnai has also been a featured guest artist in concerts on numerous occasions with NDR Bigband. Additionally, in October of 2007, he performed as a soloist with the Zurich Symphony Orchestra at Tonhalle Concert Hall in Zurich, Switzerland, under the direction of Christof Escher.

Among the artists with whom he has performed and recorded are Freddie Hubbard, Joe Lovano, Nancy Wilson, Rosa Passos, Leni Andrade, Louis Hayes, Bob Moses, Ravi Coltrane, Romero Lubambo, Claudio Roditi, Rufus Reid, Jim Chapin, George Gazone, Leon “Ndugu” Chanler, the New York Voices, and Ramiro Mendes (producer for the great Cape Verdian singer Cesaria Evora) whom Yavnai accompanied on a 40-day tour of Guinee-Bissau, Angola, Cape Verde and Portugal. Yavnai has also performed on the soundtracks for several films and television programs, including the ALMA Award-winning film *The Blue Dinner*, Miramax’s *Next Stop Wonderland*, and “Houdini,” an episode of the PBS series, *The American Experience*.

Now, with the release of *Travel Notes*, his first recording on ObliqSound, Yavnai continues to explore new musical terrain, incorporating rhythms from Cape Verde, Peru and Morocco with Brazilian

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harmonic influences and his solid grounding in both classical and jazz composition. *Travel Notes* features improvisations inspired by Israeli melodies, as well as the pianist's rendition of composer Shlomo Gronich's "Shir Ahava Tari (Fresh Love Song)", and eight original compositions, all performed as either solo piano pieces or as trio collaborations with bassist Omer Avital and percussionist Jamey Haddad. The album's title, *Travel Notes*, is a double entendre, Yavnai says, as it can refer to the music notes that always accompany him throughout his trips, and also can be taken as a travel diary.

When not traveling the world, Yavnai resides in Brooklyn with his wife Julie and their son Yonatan.