

Yitzhak Yedid

A Composer Portrait



Adj Associate professor Yitzhak Yedid (PhD) is a composer, pianist and educator. Yedid's interest lies in composing and performing concert music. His composition folio contains orchestral, chamber and vocal music.

Yitzhak Yedid was born in Jerusalem in 1971 and raised in a musically inclined family. His father, an amateur cantor in synagogues, played a significant role in his upbringing, instilling in him the traditions of Aleppo Jewish liturgical chanting, with a specific emphasis on the traditional chants of Baqashot and Piyyutim. Yitzhak's family background includes a Syrian-Jewish father and an Iraqi-Jewish mother. While the young Yitzhak immersed himself in music rooted in the Mizrahi (Jewish-Arabic) tradition and the rendition of traditional Maqamat-based songs, his mother was insistent on exposing him to Western classical music and a Western instrument. At the tender age of seven he embarked on piano lessons with a private instructor. As his teenage years unfolded, his musical focus shifted to jazz piano, and by his twentieth year, he initiated performances of his original compositions with his own new-music ensemble.

Yitzhak Yedid's musical aesthetics, developed over the past three decades, find their roots in the music he immersed himself in during his formative years, primarily the Aleppo's tradition of chanting Piyyutim and Baqashot. His musical journey also draws inspiration from piano music and improvisation. In his compositions, Yedid seamlessly integrates various elements, including energies and dynamics, while introducing a distinctive aesthetic that departs from the conventional norms of classical stage traditions. This innovative approach adds a nuanced, at times even provocative, dimension to his musical creations.

Yedid's work generally centres on integrating two contrasting traditions: Western 20th-century new music including avant-garde improvisation (European and American), and maqamat-based liturgical music. Between 1999-2009, Yedid crafted a collection of nine large-scale works for various instrumentations, always featuring himself on the piano. These compositions combined fully notated music with free improvisational, including maqamat, and composed for a selection of individual players. The works were released on a series of eight solo albums on the record label 'Challenge Records' (The Netherlands). However, Yedid refuses to publish the hand-written scores of these works.

Yedid studied composition and piano in Jerusalem (Rubin Academy), Boston MA (New England Conservatory), and Melbourne (Monash University)

where he gained a PhD degree in 2012. His expertise as a composer is in the integration of non-European musical elements, including improvisation, with Western practice. His compositions explore new forms of integrating classical Arabic music, Arabic-influenced Jewish music and contemporary Western classical music. Yedid is an expert in Arabic music and *Maqamat* (the modal system of classical Arabic music).

Yedid is Azrieli Music Prize winners and a Sidney Myer Creative Fellow (2018- 2019). His awards include the top two prizes in Israel for composers and performers: the Prime Minister's Prize for Composers (2007) and the Landau Prize for Performing Arts (2009). In 2008 he was awarded the first composition prize for solo work for harp at the 17th International Harp contest which led to numerous performances of the piece worldwide and to two commercial recordings. Yedid has also been awarded a composer-in-residence position at the Judith Wright Centre (Brisbane, 2010) and at the Western Australian Academy of Performing arts (08). His latest album *Arabic violin Bass Piano Trio* was nominated for the 2012 Bell Awards.

Yedid not only absorbed the Arabic-influenced synagogue cantillation of his childhood but, unlike most of his peers exclusively trained in the Western tradition, fully integrated his ancestral foundation into his musical expression. As a pianist and improviser exploring a spectrum of styles—from Western avant-garde to Mizrahi art music and free improvisation—his compositions achieve a genuine synthesis, giving equal significance to these varied cultural influences and drawing inspiration from them. While his music is primarily staged on Western platforms, oriental musical elements play an essential and pivotal role in many of his works.

Musicologist Dr. Ronit Seter (Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University) writes about Dr. Yedid's composition style the following: For over three decades, Yedid has researched composition and performance for the new-music scene. He amalgamates in his music his ancestral Syrian- and Iraqi-Jewish cantillation, Israeli East-West encounters, and European and American avant-garde compositional techniques, all infused with his insights as a concert pianist and improviser, to create an experimental, highly expressive yet alluring modern style. Yedid's music is, therefore, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and consequently, transnational.

John David, former head of the Australia Music Centre, wrote about Yedid's style: Yitzhak Yedid is a significant composer of considerable capacity, whose works often deal with themes of inter and cross culturality. His status as an artist has been recognised by many awards, prizes and commissions, both in Australia, and internationally.

Yedid has performed his compositions with many ensembles in festivals and venues across Europe, Canada, the USA (including the Lincoln Centre (New York), Jordan Hall (Boston) and Benaroya Hall (Seattle), Asia, and Africa. His work has been presented at many festivals: Munich Festival; Icebreaker Festival (Seattle, US); Sibiu Festival (Romania); Adis Ababa Arts Festival (Ethiopia); Tura New Music Festival; Melbourne International Jazz Festival; Guelph Jazz Festival (Canada); Vancouver Arts Festival; The Oud International Festival; Porgy & Bess Festival (Austria); Wiener Musik Galerie Festival; Frankfurt Arts Festival; and Copenhagen Jazz Festival.

Over 50 of Yedid's commissioned works have been premiered since 2005. On average, he completes two large-scale works and a few chamber works every year. Recent works include *Delusions of War*, an orchestral work commissioned by Divertimenti Ensemble (QLD) and the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, and *The Crying Souls an a cappella* work, commissioned by the Australian Voices. Future commissions include violin (Arabic violin) concerto and a Piano Concerto commissioned by the Tel Aviv Soloist to be premiered at their gala opening season concerts in September 2016.

Yedid music is published by IMI and represented in Australia by the Australian Music Centre. Twelve CDs of Yedid's compositions have been released by prestigious international publishers and distributors including Challenge Records International, Sony, Naxos, -btl-, Muse, MCI and Kaleidos, and numerous reviews of them have been published in the international music media.

Yitzhak Yedid's music, a unique narrative of pictures, textures and colours that is characterised by a spectacular mix of styles, is a direct outcome of his inspiration through philosophical matters and mysticism, religious rituals and religious conflicts. For over a decade Yedid has researched composition and performance that integrates Western classic music traditions and Arabic music traditions, and composed, without subscribing or adhering to any particular system, a body of over 30 works that deal with this integration. "Musically, Yedid writes with detail and foreknowledge of the sounds anticipated, a highly developed feature. His music innovative and traditional, a combination that is not easy to achieve" (Kim Cunio, 2013).

Yedid writes "Looking for new compositional approaches and challenging musical conventions through the synthesis of a wide spectrum of contemporary and ancient styles is what motivated my work. Intellectual conflicts such as the confrontation with philosophical matters and religious and political aspects have always been of interest, and also underlie and motivated my work. I have been influenced in particular by Béla Bartók and Arnold Schoenberg to develop a personal vision

as a composer." This words by Yedid are inline with what the critics write about his music: John Shand from the Sydney Morning Herald wrote in 2014 about Yedid's 'Myth of the Cave' "a vividly expansive composition"; Noam Ben-Zeav (Haaretz) wrote in 2013 that "Yedid music is an authentic expression of new music which incorporates a wide spectrum of contemporary and ancient styles"; and Ake Holmquist (NorraSkåne, Sweden) wrote in 2004 that "Yedid integrates specific stylistic influences into a personal created unity. The manner in which he describes folkloristic influences and melancholic specific themes can remind of Béla Bartók; improvisatory float of hovering à la Keith Jarret".

One great achievement of Yedid is the many performances and recordings of his work both as a composer and pianist. Thus far, Yedid has put out 12 CDs under his own name through some prestigious international record labels and distributors (Challenge Records International, Sony, Naxos, -btl-, Muse, MCI and Kaleidos) and has collaborated in a slew of other interdisciplinary synergies, including an intriguing confluence with Ethiopian-born saxophonist and vocalist Abate Berihun, as the Ras-Deshen ensemble.

Yedid's works for strings - 'Visions, Fantasies and Dances' for string quartet (2006-9) and 'Delusions of War' for string orchestra (2014), "show sophisticated and idiomatic writing for the strings - both individually and as an ensemble. These works are impressive in their scope and colour and variety of instrumental technique. It's also inventive throughout." (Stuart Greenbaum, 2013). Yedid incorporate improvisatory sections and describe in detailed instructions for the players.

Yedid's compositions 'Oud Bass Piano Trio' (2006) and 'Arabic Violin Bass Piano Trio' (2008) are works that combines a classical Arabic instrument with Western instruments. Randal McIlroy, Coda Magazine (Canada) wrote "Pianist/composer Yitzhak Yedid's Oud Bass Piano Trio conveys terrific tension, aggravation and release. It's a stunner. Minimising the distinction between composition and improvisation, the music is entrusted to supple hands.", and jazz journalist Alain Drouot wrote for the prestigious Downbeat Magazine (US) that "Yedid's trio explores a wide range of emotions and tones, even if a dark and mournful mood prevails. The musicians' vivid interpretations produce a positive flow of energy that keeps the music alert and compelling, and Yedid is capable of striking lyricism. Jazz musicians often describe their art as storytelling. Yedid embodies this."

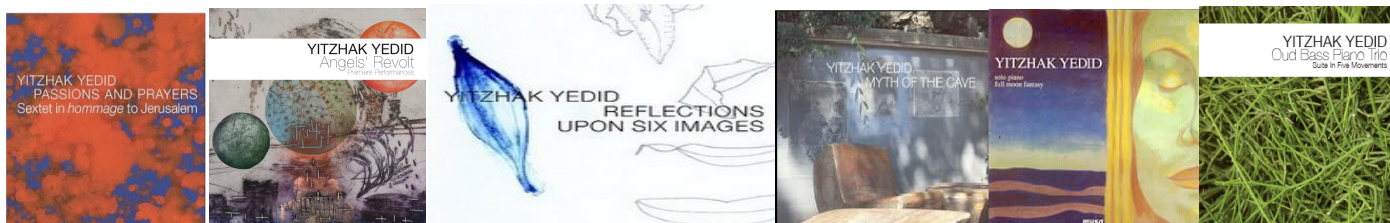
Musically, Yedid create a confluence between the Maqamat (Arabic music modal system), heterophonic textures of ancient genres, and compositional approaches of contemporary Western classical music, to produce an original sound. Yedid introduces microtonality in his works in a range of different ways. He examined ways of using microtonal

pitches that in Arabic music function as ornamentation and as part of improvisational gestures. He has extended the use of traditional ornamentation to compose microtonal sounds with microtonal qualities that unfold at different tempi without a definite pitch. This can be seen in many of his works. In his string quartet *Visions, Fantasies and Dances*, the microtonal intervals function in the context of diatonic and chromatic intervals and the method of a tension-and-release for intervals of a quarter-tone and three-quarter-tones have been employed.

Yitzhak Yedid also writes “my work could be viewed as the beginning of my research of integrating classical Arabic music, Arabic-influenced Jewish music and contemporary Western classical music. There are areas that need further exploration in different contexts. These include examining the possibilities in compositions with different types and combinations of instruments. The possibilities drawn in my works should be examined with these instruments and with the new challenges associated with its performance practice. Large ensemble works and the integration of various instrumental combinations of performers from Group A and Group B are other aspects that merit exploration. This includes examining how traditional Arabic instruments can be integrated into Western ensemble as a soloist (perhaps in a concerto format), and also how mixed ensembles of various performers including traditional instruments could be integrated.”

Yedid have shown a new direction/subject in his later works and courage to make a commentary on international current political/religious problems that continue to find no resolution. The *Crying Souls* (commissioned by the Australian Voices) and *Delusions of War* (commissioned by the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra) are both anti-war works. The *Crying Souls* was written as a response to the chemical weapons attacks that happened in August 2013 in Damascus when more than 1,300 innocent civilian including children were massacred. Yedid writes “This work expresses my endless sadness to the death of innocent people”. In the notes on *Delusions of War* he writes “The music aims to make the listeners “feel” the human suffering that the war causes, and, without assuming to have answers, to encourage them to pause for a moment and to envisage better ways than force to resolve crises. The music captures emotions of anger and fear, and feelings of sorrow, tragedy and righteousness.”

International Discography



PRESS REVIEWS



PRESS CLIP

“Every sound in this performance flew straight into the soul, including the sound of the drops of sweat that fell from Yedid's hair and landed on the piano keys.” **Ben Shalev, Haaretz**

“...Pianist/composer Yitzhak Yedid’s Oud Bass Piano Trio conveys terrific tension, aggravation and release. It’s a stunner. Minimizing the distinction between composition and improvisation, the music is entrusted to supple hands.” **Randal McIlroy, Coda Magazine**

“The music is very powerful, almost relentless in its expressiveness. Moving through many sonorities, densities and dynamics, the three players can be heard, individually and as a group, changing roles from improvisers to interpreters and back again” **Budd Kopman, All About Jazz**

“Yedid's musicality resides on a higher plane while offering bountiful panoramas for the mind's eye” **Glenn Astarita, All About Jazz.**

“To hear such a young man as you feeling the music so deeply is a very pleasant experience.” **Lee Konitz**

“Yedid’s trio explores a wide range of emotions and tones, even if a dark and mournful mood prevails. The musicians’ vivid interpretations produce a positive flow of energy that keeps the music alert and compelling, and Yedid is capable of striking lyricism. Jazz musicians often describe their art as storytelling. Yedid embodies this. **Alain Drouot, Downbeat Magazine.**

“Yedid's masterful musical storytelling is directly engaging, with forms that continually shift and mutate, but which also move inexorably forward. Complex, seemingly chaotic sections are juxtaposed against beautiful hymn-like melodies. The music might descend to the depths sounding like a boiling compressed cauldron, only to open up the next moment, expanding into the clouds” **Budd Kopman, All About Jazz**

“Yitzhak Yedid is the quintessential cross-genre artist. He is a wonderful storyteller, his compositions can be challenging and require the listener to sit up and take stock of what is evolving.” **Barry Bavis, Downbeat Magazine**

“Composer and pianist Yitzhak Yedid's new composition is an impressive attempt to weave current and traditional styles and influences into a cohesive contemporary work. In this five part suite, premiered at the Oud Festival in Jerusalem in November 2005 and recorded nine months later, there are references and retentions from a wide spectrum of sources, including Jewish and Christian prayers and benedictions, Arabic folk music, modern Western music and avant-garde jazz—all fused through Yedid's optimistic belief that these varied cultures can co-exist peacefully.” **Eyal Hareuveni, All About Jazz.**

“Yedid created a work with a heady high concept that's still eminently musical. His composed suite with improvised passages avoids falling into the usual jazz trappings. It suggests classicism without wading into pretension” **Kurt Gottschalk, The New York City Jazz Record** (formerly known as *AAJ-New York*)

“Thoughtfulness and a healthy sense of adventure are both major assets on this excellent disc” **Alex Henderson, All Music Guide**

“Yedid’s trio consists of several elements drawn from Judaic and Christian tradition and meditations on multiple modes of silence, including the ‘non-believer’s silence’, and the prayers of priests and kabbalists as well as a Palestinian Bride and repeats of a motif entitled ‘Imaginary ritual belly dance’.” **Stuart Broomer.**

“This stands out as a rich album, full of powerful emotive force and passion for storytelling.” **Tom Sekowski, gaz-eta.**

“Yedid integrated specific stylistic influences into a personal created unity. The manner in which he describes folkloristic influences and melancholic specific themes can remind of Bela Bartok; improvisatory float of hovering à la Keith Jarrett”. **Åke Holmquist, Norra Skåne (Sweden)**

SELECTED COMPOSITIONS

“*Out to infinity*” Solo Harp. Commissioned by the 17th International Harp Contest, 2008. Premiere performance as the compulsory piece by all 36 contestants at the contest, Israel, October 2009.

"Visions, Fantasies and Dances" String quartet. Commissioned by Etnachta Concert Series, 2008. Premier Performance: Jerusalem Concert Hall, February 2008.

"Nine images for Violin Cello and Piano" Piano trio. Commissioned by IBA music, 2006. Premier performance: Jerusalem Concert Hall, March 2007.

"Chagall Project" (2006) Solo Piano pieces inspired by Marc Chagall. Commissioned by Jerusalem Jewish Music Festival, 2006. Premier performance: September, 2007.

"Since my Soul Loved"(2005) Piano Quintet, in four movements. Commissioned by Etnachta Concert Series, 2004. CD Release with the Between The Lines, May 2009. Premier Performance: Jerusalem Concert Hall, November, 2006.

"Oud-Bass-Piano Trio" (2005) Commissioned by the Oud International Festival, 2005. CD release with Between the Lines March 2008. Premier Performance: Sibiu Festival, May 2005, Romania.

"Psalms" (2004) Three Singers, Ethiopian folk Dancer, Alto, Bass and Piano. Commissioned by Confederation House. Premier Performance: Confederation House December, 2004.

"Reflections Upon Six Images" (2004) Quartet for Clarinet, Viola, Double Bass and Piano. In six parts. Commissioned by Vienna Music Gallery Festival, Austria 2004 CD released by Between the Lines, Dec. 2006.

"Passions & Prayers, Sextet in Homage to Jerusalem" (2003) Sextet for, Horn, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet, Trombone, Viola, Double Bass and Piano. In Five Movements Commissioned by Between the Lines, Germany, 2003. CD released by Between the Lines 2005. Premier Performance: The Israel Festival, 2004.



"Myth of the Cave" (2002) Trio for Clarinet, Double Bass and Piano. In Five Movements. Commissioned by Between the Lines Germany, 2002. CD released by Between the lines, 2003. Premier Performance, May 2003, Frankfurt, Germany .

"Ras Deshen" (2002) For Voice, Krar and Piano. Commissioned by MCI 2003. CD released in 2003 for MCI records. Premiere Performance, Tel Aviv Festival, February, 2001

"Tachanun" (2001) Trio for Piano, Double Bass and Percussion. Suite In one movement. Commissioned by Vienna music Gallery, Austria 2003. Premier Performance: Vienna Music Gallery, September 2002, Austria.

"Tachanun"- Solo Piano version (2000) Suite in one movement. Commissioned by Vienna Music Gallery, Austria 2003 Premier Performance: Chamber Music Festival, Israel.

Yitzhak Yedid "Full Moon Fantasy" (1998) Solo Piano compositions. Commissioned by Musa records 1999 CD released in 1999 for Musa records CD re printed in April 2005