

# GILAD HEKSELMAN – PRESS EXCERPTS

## December 2009

Ben Ratliff  
New York Times

"The feeling in a small club quickly grows intense when GILAD HEKSELMAN, an Israeli jazz guitarist in his mid-20s, steps up to improvise. Since arriving in New York five years ago, Mr. Hekselman has set himself roughly up in the line of Pat Metheny and Kurt Rosenwinkel, with a warm and clean guitar tone, clear articulation, crazily extended improvisational ideas, speed when he needs it, an advanced understanding of harmony, and the flexibility to go wherever his bands want..."

## August 2009

Ben Ratliff  
New York Times

"...Mr. Hekselman, playing complex chords with extended harmony — the higher science of jazz academia, but done with passion — moved his solo toward a peak. About two minutes in, the audience began yelling."

## July 2009

By by Dan Adler  
Jazz Improv

Over the last few years, the Bar-Next-Door at "La Lanterna" ([lalanternacaffe.com](http://lalanternacaffe.com)) has become a focal point of some of the most innovative jazz in the downtown music scene. It all started as a weekly gig for guitar guru Jonathan Kreisberg, who later brought in Peter Mazza, another unique jazz guitar innovator, who soon convinced the owner to allow him to book seven days a week of first-tier jazz artists. With no piano, and barely enough space to seat 40 people, this warm and cozy room continues to host some of the most creative guitar trios led by Lage Lund, John Stowell, Jake Langley, Greg Skaff, Ben Monder, Yotam Silberstein, Ed Cherry, Rick Stone, Paul Meyers and many non-guitar trios led by giants like Eli Degibri, Grant Stewart and Joel Frahm, Hendrik Meurkens and others. And with a \$10 cover charge, great food and wine and a warm atmosphere of up-close-and- personal creativity, this may just be the best jazz deal in town.

On this rainy Friday night, I was lucky enough to catch the late two sets (11pm and 1am) with Israeli-born guitarist extraordinaire Gilad Hekselman leading a trio with Marcus Gilmore on drums and Orlando LeFleming on bass. There were also two early sets that night led by trumpeter Brandon Lee, and what I heard, at the end of their set, was also great and led me to seek out his new CD "From Within".

Hekselman's two sets turned out to be some of the most innovative and exciting jazz I have heard live in a long time. At age 26, with two CD's as a leader ("Split Life" and "Words Unspoken"), Hekselman has already taken a leadership role alongside some of the other guitar players mentioned above, in defining the new vocabulary of jazz guitar. His sound is deep, warm and inviting, and when he starts to play a ballad you might even mistake him for Jim Hall or Ed Bickert for a moment here and there, but as you listen deeper, you realize that his musical and improvisational language draws on many modern influences such as Pat Metheny, Allan Holdsworth, Ornette Coleman as well as his Israeli roots.

Hekselman's original "Suite for Sweets" opened with a beautiful haunting guitar statement of the melody, before it morphed into a light samba feel with Gilmore's brushes constantly reacting and anticipating his every move. Within minutes, the cool relaxed feel gave way to some super burning soloing before returning to the beautiful theme.

"New York Angels", another beautiful Hekselman original, started in a half time feel, giving Gilmore and LeFleming plenty of space to create beautiful rhythmic and harmonic counterpoint to the lovely slow-moving melody. Hekselman

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took his time building his solo with quotes from Ornette Coleman and Bud Powell and with some Holdsworth-inspired legato playing interspersed with bluesy riffs. As the excitement built up, he was drawing on every imaginable technique from jazz, blues and rock guitar – dazzling flurries of notes interspersed with jazzy chord punches, and then suddenly, back to the relaxed melody, and then into a back-beat for the outro. The range of stylistic influences that Hekselman can summon up within the space of a few minutes is truly awe-inspiring, and the depth of emotion and warmth he conveys in his playing is truly unique.

Ellington's "Sophisticated Lady" allowed Hekselman to showcase the depth of his mastery of the standard jazz repertoire and the beautiful tone he extracts from his guitar. The solos again went from zero to sixty in no time, and by the end of the tune Hekselman was playing with feedback and dishing out musical ideas from every genre imaginable, and somehow

it all works together and he manages to turn every song into a masterpiece of spontaneous creation. Orlando LeFleming's bass playing meshed perfectly with Hekselman's approach, and his bass solos were truly inspired even on the most challenging tunes. It was evident that drummer Marcus Gilmore and Hekselman were particularly locked-in to the same groove and rhythmic conception. Gilmore is constantly creating complex poly-rhythms and it seemed like every time he chose to accent a particular off-beat Hekselman was right there with him and vice versa. Such was the case on Coltrane's "Countdown", which Hekselman arranged with rhythmic accents that are displaced an extra eighth note each bar and then displaced triplets, and he and Gilmore kept coming back to these accents throughout the solos.

Even though I was familiar with Hekselman's two CD's, as well as his work as a sideman with Anat Cohen, I can tell you that seeing the level of his creativity and intensity live at such a friendly venue and with such a supportive audience and trio was a whole other experience that left me feeling inspired for days.

## **November 2007**

by Laurel Gross

### **All About Jazz**

Not that long out of school, guitarist Gilad Hekselman has already begun to create a body of work possessing a distinctive lyricism and easily embraceable artfulness that seems to reach beyond his years. Born in 1983 and transplanted to the US from Israel, Hekselman's highly effective debut album - aptly named Splitlife - strides dual worlds, Middle East and West, old world and new, but it's his own personality as both assured player and composer that gives this recording its very personable voice. He is also worldly-wise in teaming with bassist Joe Martin and drummer Ari Hoenig, other New Yorkbased players who have well-stocked warehouses of spirit and technique for this elegant CD, recorded live at Fat Cat.

Hekselman has a pristine, crystalline sound and a bright playing style that seems as natural and sustaining as air and water. For a quick sampling of how everything goes right on these ten tracks, jump smack into the middle of things to track five - "Suite for Sweets", one of the guitarist's originals. Its sound is "sweet" indeed. But the overall effect created by all parties is transfixing, impressionistic and Immediate.

Fluid and multi-textured, the piece provides an aural snapshot of a fully realized moment in time but is never stagnant. Imagine a brightly lit day, sunlight on water - you are there. If Monet's waterlily studies were music this could be it.

Hoenig's cymbals shimmer, his brushes rustle like air through leaves, the pulse of his drums as natural as breathing, with sticks providing extra kick. A bassist of choice for accomplished guitarists Kurt Rosenwinkel and Ben Monder and many other fine players, Martin is entirely present, lending a depth charge of warm humanity and sure-fire musicality to this and any circumstance. Hekselman performs with a quiet assertiveness and expertise that is winning throughout.

While other originals like "The Summer of Laughs and Tears" and "Breathless" glow with steady incandescence, Hekselman has not neglected the Great American Songbook - "I Fall in Love Too Easily", "I Should Care" and "My Ideal" receive clever interpretations. "When Will the Blues Leave" pays apt tribute to Ornette Coleman.

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**May 2007**

Gilad Hekselman / SplitLife  
Smalls 15

Ticks me off, it does, that some people are so damned talented at so tender an age. Move over Scott LaFaro, Charlie Christian, and Jaco Pastorius for Gilad Hekselman. This Israeli-born New York-based guitarist has, on his debut as a leader, demonstrated to any discerning guitar-centric listener that there is indeed room for another mover and shaker. I don't think I can overestimate the 23-year old's (his age when this was recorded) talents: His hard-earned technique, his finesse and, most of all, his ability to express emotional force in a quiet setting.

Listening to this live club date, recorded at the Fat Cat in New York City, I was reminded of Jim Hall, Mick Goodrick, and Jim Raney, in terms of thematic, cerebral design. But Hekselman is a more promising composer, and there's something about his unpretentious earnestness that sets him apart from anyone else who might come to mind. Right off it's clear he plays softly but carries a big stick. His "Purim" is appropriately optimistic but tempered with caution, displaying as it does a formidable, restrained technique that signals an intellect of rapid ideas and fertile imagination. His treatment of the standard "My Ideal" is also ample proof this young man is in the business of making beautiful music.

In terms of technical ability one should note his contrapuntal lines incorporated into the aforementioned ballad, and his flawless, liquid delivery and clean, mid-range tone. In other words, this unassuming upstart seems to have it all. Bassist Joe Martin, known for his work with guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel, is there when you need him and then some. Drummer Ari Hoenig is a bit of a marvel in his own right, what with his telescopic brush and stick patterns that make up for any shortage of musical personnel. Between the two of them they're a mini-orchestra of inspiration and support. The title of the CD, "Splitlife," could well imply the two basic moods expressed within this pindrop- attentive club setting. The first half is more driving and riveting, witness Ornette Coleman's "When Will The Blues Leave." From there this twonight engagement is more subdued in its repertoire and approach, but no less captivating. So there you have it, a mature, young man with the best intentions and a warm heart big enough to slay any giant on the horizon. Who said nice guys finish last?

--Charles Winokoor

**Jazz Times By David Adler**  
December 2006

Gilad Hekselman  
SplitLife (Smalls)

Recorded live at New York's Fat Cat, sister club of Smalls, Gilad Hekselman's \_SplitLife\_ (Smalls Records) is everything one could hope for in a debut release. The Israeli-born guitarist shows maturity beyond his years, playing standards and originals with Joe Martin on bass and Ari Hoenig on drums. In terms of time feel, technique, tone projection and linear and chordal sophistication, Hekselman is clearly poised to reach the highest ranks on his instrument.

The first two cuts give one a good idea of Hekselman's range as a composer: "Purim" is lilting and boundlessly melodic, its train-like rhythm powered by Hoenig's fine brushwork; "Hello Who Is It" moves into harder-swinging territory with a complex head that brings to mind Metheny (via Ornette). Three more originals-"The Summer of Laughs and Tears," the samba-informed "Suite for Sweets" and a ballad called "Breathless"-also speak to Hekselman's formal inventiveness and tuneful clarity. With "My Ideal," "I Fall in Love Too Easily," "I Should Care" and Ornette Coleman's

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"When Will the Blues Leave," he articulates a playful and personal take on blues and standard repertoire. "My Second Childhood," by Israeli songwriter Matti Caspi, closes the set in minor-key reverie, expertly enhanced by Hoenig on mallets.

Roman St. James  
**jazzreview.com**

Split Life is the debut release from 23-year old Israeli-born jazz guitarist Gilad Hekselman. Hekselman's sound is the epitome of the word "warm", but with just enough bite to avoid it sounding overly sweet. However, as beautiful as his sound is, it wouldn't matter much if the recording were sub-par. A paradox exists in that the best place for a musician to be heard (and have their chops put to the test) is in a live setting, and yet a live setting is the most difficult to properly record. Split Life was recorded live at Fat Cat in New York city by producer Luke Kaven and the quality is simply amazing.

Joining Hekselman on this recording is Joe Martin on bass and Ari Hoenig on drums. Jazz heavyweights in their own right (having worked with the likes of Kenny Werner, Dave Liebman, Richard Bona, Mark Turner and Jane Monheit among others), Martin and Hoenig fuse with Hekselman on every level – technically, emotionally and spiritually – to create music that is very much in the moment. Flawless as it is, their feat is that much more impressive when you add to the equation the fact that it was recorded live – where nerves can interfere and where second takes are generally frowned upon.

Mixing standards such as "I Fall In Love Too Easily" and "I Should Care" with originals such as "Purim" and "The Summer Of Laughs And Tears", Hekselman & Co. show a sensitivity for the music that is always refreshing, especially from musicians with their kind of jaw-dropping chops. They never overplay – either the compositions or each other – and they display a very mature ability to incorporate space into their arrangements and solos that keeps it all sounding interesting and new throughout. It's said that with great musicians, the greatness lies not in the notes they play, but in the notes they don't play. Split Life is a textbook testament to the truth of that statement.

**September 2007**

**JazzReview.com**

Bruce Pulver, A jazz trio's canvas is the absence of sound in an empty space. The trio's challenge is to become a "team of one" and use this space to foster an individual and collective playing style that produces a musical "ear painting" for the listener. One measure of success is how well the trio uses the canvas to create an intensely-focused adherence to loose conformity. The trio members must know where they are going while traveling with egoless confidence staying the course throughout the journey. In this setting, the trip matters much more than the destination. If the artists can create this musical setting for themselves while capturing and holding the audience, a remarkable experience emerges for all. Gilad Hekselman's "Splitlife" delivers an explosively, invigorating musical adventure with great sights and sounds along the way. Jump on and enjoy.

Joining Mr. Hekselman is drummer, Ari Hoenig who is always where he should be, but never where you expect him. His listening gifts flow effortlessly through his instrument, resulting in a never ending compliment to his surroundings. He offers a platter of ideas for the soloist, and is a steady source of uplifting support.

Joe Martin's bass playing contradicts the old saying that we all recall as children. Think back to family functions as a youngster. Do you remember the one adult saying: "children should be seen but not heard?"

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The captivating bass playing on this recording is "heard but not seen", splendidly delivered, with clarity and grace. Mr. Martin is always present but never overly noticed. For a different experience, give this recording a special listen and pay attention exclusively to what is being played at the bottom end. Wonderful musicianship!

Five standards and five originals compositions provide balance to the theme of "Splitlife". Each standard gets the respect deserved with the passionate attention mandated for any tune that has earned a place in the "standard" category.

Spend a little time with Ornette Coleman's "When Will the Blues Leave", great interaction. Make sure you have "I Should Care" on your set list for a romantic dinner at home with someone special. This tune starts with an unassuming introduction of the melody and develops with slow intensity, each turn adding a bit more tension to the playing which releases about mid way and then brings us back to where it all started. It goes out with a little kick. I suggest candles and a glass of your favorite cabernet.

With the start of each original composition, the active listener will sense the bubbling of a developing itch that must be scratched. The original songs from Mr. Hekselman grant us insight into his compositional spirit. He writes nimbly for the trio setting and allows everyone room to stretch out. Quite nice indeed! If lucky, we have only heard the first of much more original material that will come.

Rarely is more than one artist's signature on a painting. Great trios use their individual talents and experiences to blend into one sound. This young trio definitely plays as one. "Splitlife" delivers spectacular trio artistry. Listen for yourself and experience the journey.

### **Guitar One Magazine**

Feb, 2007

#### **In Our Systems**

Gilad Hekselman / SplitLife (Smalls)

Who needs a second guitarist when you have fingers like these?

Hekselman, a young Israeli jazz phenom who cites piano players as his main influence, has fused comping and single-note soloing into one flawless style. This disk, his debut, was recorded live with bassist Joe Martin and drummer Ari Hoening;

the simple trio setting makes the lack of seams between Hekselman's chording and his busy lead lines all the more inspiring. Standout tracks include Ornette Coleman's "When Will The Blues Leave," the classic ballad "I Should Care," and the original composition "Purim."

#### **MOMENT OF TRUTH:**

"I Fall In Love Too Easily"

(0:01-1:09) Hekselman's solo on this standard showcases his speed, meticulous picking, and ability to sustain notes from one passage as he moves on to the next.

-- Bob Keelaghan

### **The Philadelphia Inquirer**

September 21, 2006

GILAD HEKSELMAN: "SplitLife" (Smalls 3 stars)

Guitarist Gilad Hekselman lays down some stirring lines on this trio recording with Philly native and drummer Ari Hoening.

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A 23-year-old Israeli, Hekselman followed several of his jazz-playing countrymen in becoming a frequent performer at the New York jazz club Smalls. He also won the 2005 Gibson Montreux International Guitarist Competition at the Montreux Jazz Festival.

Hekselman is a subtle player who holds the spotlight with tasteful runs. He seeks out transcendental lines and often finds them.

Some of his tunes are upscale pretty, such as "The Summer of Laughs and Tears." So, too, is his sensitive rendering of the standard "I Should Care."

Hoenig, a craftsman, fashions some simpatico dialogues with the leader and bassist Joe Martin, a regular collaborator with Philly" uber-guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel.

Hekselman doesn't clamor for attention. His playing, though, is quietly persuasive.

- Karl Stark

### **All Music Guide**

Gilad Hekselman / SplitLife (\*\*\*\*) four stars

Review by Scott Yanow

The debut recording by guitarist Gilad Hekselman has the youth displaying a mature sound, the ability to think fast, and an inventive use of space. While he names his main influences as pianists Bill Evans and Ahmad Jamal, one thinks of Jim Hall when hearing Hekselman solo in the sparse guitar-bass-drums setting. He performs four standards on Splitlife, including Ornette Coleman's "When Will the Blues Leave," plus six often-lyrical originals of his own. While Hekselman sees this group (which features bassist Joe Martin and drummer Ari Hoenig) as a co-op, he is the first among equals and shows that he clearly has a potentially significant future. Recommended.

### **IAJRC Journal - Vol. 40, No 3, August 2007 - P.102**

-- Stuart Kremsky

Israeli guitarist Gilad Hekselman is one of a sizeable number of players who've made the move from the Middle East to New York. SplitLife, new from Smalls Records, puts him in front of an audience with his trio. It's a lovely disc, as Hekselman displays a smooth and unpretentious style on a program that includes originals alongside a few pop standards and Ornette Coleman's "When Will the Blues Leave." His clean guitar sound is crisply articulated, and his guild rhythms are engaging and welcoming. Bassist Joe Martin and drummer Ari Hoenig are so simpatico in following the guitarists's twists and turns that you'd think they'd been playing together for years instead of the barely two months that they had under their belt when this was taped. Hekselman's "Suite For Sweets" really flies, but there's not really a dud here. Recommended.

### **Haaretz - Gallery**

Playing Matti Caspi in New York,

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by Ben Shalev  
February 22, 2007 in Music.

Matti Caspi does not know this, but many of his songs are being played at New York Jazz clubs. There are three reasons for this: First, several dozen young Israeli jazz musicians have become active in New York, growing in number and status. Second, an Israeli jazz musician aged 20 to 40 who hasn't grown up on Caspi's music and doesn't admire the singer-songwriter is yet to be found. Third, there is something about the New York experience that makes recently arrived artists want to connect to their roots more deeply than ever.

And the result: "Binyamina Days," "Eternal Covenant" and "Shalom Aleichem" are being heard at clubs like Fat Cat, the Jazz Gallery and Smalls.

"Only in New York did I realize how much I love Caspi and how much playing his songs, which I listened to as a child, makes me happy," says guitarist Gilad Hekselman, 24, who has been in New York for two and half years. "When you are in a place where they don't play those songs on the radio, you are hit by how beautiful they are, by how much they are a part of your roots. And when I play them at a club in New York, I feel it interests American jazz fans," he says. Caspi's "My Second Childhood" is the final number on Hekselman's debut disc "SplitLife," which was recently released by the New York-based Smalls Records.

"A young person who moves to a place like New York, where there are so many stimuli, has two alternatives: He can either mix in or turn inward. With me, the latter happened," says pianist Omer Klein, also 24, who has been active in New York for a few months, following a year of study in Boston. Klein often plays Caspi's songs at performances, along with songs by Boaz Sharabi and Zohar Argov.

He recently performed "Alone" with bassist Omer Avital. The Israeli song for which he has received the warmest reactions from a non-Israeli audience, adds Klein, is Mordecai Zeira's "Two Lilies," which won him and bassist Haggai Cohen-Milo first prize in a prestigious competition in Belgium last year.

Klein and Hekselman are now on a visit to Israel, where they are promoting their new albums. This evening at 9 P.M., they are scheduled to appear at Tel Aviv's Levontin 7 Club, where they will play several pieces they wrote, and no doubt a song or two by Matti Caspi. "This will be our first time playing together outside a jam session," says Klein. At a later performance at the club, Hekselman will present numbers from his new album with bassist Gilad Abro and drummer Daniel Freedman.

Klein will give two additional duet performances later in the week. He is scheduled to appear with Alon Olearchick in Binyamina's Shuni Fortress on Thursday, and with saxophonist Daniel Zamir on Saturday night at the Lab in Jerusalem. Olearchick attended a number of Klein's performances three years ago, and invited him to join him in performing and recording an album.

"This was, of course, a huge compliment," says Klein. "Alon was one of the first musicians I discovered as a child. My parents say that at the age of 3 or 4, I would go around the house singing 'Please don't go, Miriam.'"

Soft landing

Hekselman and Klein would not have won recognition in New York had they not been excellent musicians (and also determined people unafraid to phone famous New York jazz musicians and offer to play with them), but they are the first to admit that their landing was softer than that of Israelis who came before them. When Omer Avital, bassist Avishai Cohen and trombonist Avi Leibovitch arrived in New York about 15 years ago, there was no one to help them

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get into the local scene. Their impressive success created a good reputation for Israeli jazz and encouraged more musicians to try their luck in New York.

And thus, when Hekselman came to the city, saxophonist Anat Cohen immediately took him under her wing. Cohen, one of the pillars of the Israeli jazz community in New York, invited him to play with her in performances and introduced him to local musicians. When Klein and Cohen-Milo proposed their album to the record company, she phoned the company's owner and showered compliments on the two young musicians.

Can the word "community" really describe the group of Israeli jazz musicians in New York? Hekselman and Klein are not sure how to respond. "The Israeli musicians go to each other's performances, but there is a certain degree of myth to the claim that this is a community. It would be more accurate to say that there are several small groups of friends," says Klein.

Hekselman says, "Alongside a kind of communality, there is also a withdrawn individualism. This is good. It's important that there be a community, but it is no less important to leave it. I didn't come to New York in order to play with Israelis."

Hekselman, who is now in his third year of studies at the New School, says being in New York has changed his playing. "The moment I arrived in the city, my playing was transformed, and I was aware of this. New York jazz has a sound of its own. Something in the rhythm pushes forward, in a reflection of the lifestyle here, the extremity of the place. It can be very energetic or very melancholic, very collective or very independent."

Similar but different

But despite the clear New York influence, Hekselman says the Israeli musicians are unique. "The New York sound tends to be dark, gray, a bit cold. I think that in our playing, despite the great differences among us as individuals, there is a kind of warmth that speaks to the hearts of the listeners."

Hekselman and Klein are an excellent example of the differences among the musicians. Hekselman has grown closer to his musical roots, but he draws mainly from the jazz tradition; in contrast, Klein's playing is planted deeply in Israeli, Arab and North African music.

In Israel, Klein was a member of the Street Players trio along with Cohen-Milo and drummer Mark Mosheyev. In the summer of 2005, after a failed performance at the Jazz Festival in Eilat that marked the end of the trio, Klein and Cohen-Milo flew to Boston to study at the New England Conservatory. A few months ago, Klein left his studies in Boston, with the encouragement of some of his teachers, and moved to New York. There he lives with his girlfriend, opera singer Alma Moshonov, leads a trio of his own, plays with others and is studying with pianist Fred Hirsch. The aim, he says, is to develop an international career that will enable him to live in Israel and perform abroad.

One of the reasons Klein wants to return to Israel at some stage is his desire to sing, which he does occasionally with the Moira group (performing this Wednesday and next Monday at the Tmuna Theater, Tel Aviv).

Hekselman also mentions another reason. In the next few years he will probably stay in New York, he says, "but when I have a family, I will come back to Israel." All the jazz musicians are in agreement about this: New York is the best place to develop and earn a living as a jazz musician, but it is a bad place to raise children.

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