

## CD REVIEWS

# BEGUILING GULAZA

JULY 1, 2016 | NATHALIE FRESON | [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

*Gulaza - Gulaza (Gulaza Music, 2015)*

Gulaza – a word that conjures images of longing and despair under a scorching desert sun.

The first time I went to listen to this fairly newly formed band, I went out of intrigue. I came out mesmerized. I never expected them to have such an impact on me. With Igal Mizrahi on vocals, Ben Aylon on djeli n’goni and percussion, Ian Aylon on guitar and Hilla Epstein on cello, Gulaza takes you on a journey deep between Yemen and Africa as it tackles a (hopefully first) collection of centuries-old Yemenite songs, originally transmitted orally from mother to daughter. The album, which bears the same name as the group, includes a hypnotic set of five songs, which are sung for the first time by a man.

Throughout the album, Igal stamps his personality on his sources; his voice being almost erotic as it suddenly drops in range. Whether on the album, or on stage, he brings a fiery passion to these ancient texts, making them sound like poems.

Although unfamiliar with the language, I do not believe the songs’ lyrics are very elaborate. They are simple, yet full of colors, and they often include a repetitive chorus, like the beat of the heart. It is, however, the melodies, unrivalled in grace and sorrow, and the combination of instruments used on each piece which make the album so appealing. The band’s instrumental multitudes, which are cleverly combined together from an indigenous instrument like the djeli n’goni, to the cello and guitar, make these timeless songs, which are raw in nature, suddenly sound contemporary and urgent.

Whether through the djeli n’goni’s gentle or crisp and rapid melodies, the cello’s poignant use of vibrato and pizzicato, the mellow and sensuous guitar or the trance-inducing beat of the percussion, each song’s individual feel is captured. Whether it is the magical and soulful “Al’Chaiba”, the hauntingly beautiful “Salam Ya’bint”, the lyrical and playful “Pisaila”, the uplifting and more modern “Ganantani” or even the warm and soothing “Ayini Bakat”; they all convey images of longing,

despair, but hope too.

With each melody, you can imagine nature's elements veiling distant parched, sand-covered lands and through Igal Mizrahi's soaring voice, the songs become laments for freedom and yearning for love.

Gulaza – a real little gem of an album and a name to watch out for. You will simply be beguiled by it.



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