

KAUFMAN

Kaufman Center  
Merkin Concert Hall  
Lucy Moses School  
Special Music School

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Merkin Concert Hall at Kaufman Center  
*Presents the Series Opening Concert*  
CHAMBER JAZZ

Midwest Meets Mideast

\* \* WORLD PREMIERE of The Omer Avital Ensemble's *Song of A Land* \*\*

Ryan Cohan *One Sky: Tone Poems for Humanity*

Saturday, January 10, 2008 at 8:00pm

*"Omer Avital is one of the leading composers of his generation"*  
-Downbeat

*"[Cohan is] a potentially distinctive voice in jazz"*  
-The Chicago Tribune

December 11, 2008 – Kaufman Center's *Chamber Jazz* series opens with an adventurous synthesis of Midwest and Mideast that spans the globe. Israeli bassist Omer Avital's Ensemble will offer a sharply different perspective—a jazz synthesis drawing on elements as diverse as the Jewish/Arabic music of Spain and the European classical tradition. He will be premiering *Song of a Land*, a Middle Eastern Afro-Jewish musical suite. Chicago-based pianist Ryan Cohan and his band will present a selection of his strikingly original compositions steeped in swing from the "City of the Big Shoulders," entitled *One Sky: Tone Poems For Humanity*.

Hailed by the *LA Times* as "a pioneer in combining jazz with myriad world music elements," **Omer Avital** is best known as a fearless, inspired composer of everything from small jazz groups to world and orchestral music, a virtuosic bassist, an oud player and an active force on the world music scene for well over a decade. The *New York Times* says that "Mr. Avital and his group are producing some of the most original music being heard in New York." Avital started his formal musical training as a classical guitarist in Israel's Givataim Conservatory and later continued studying at Israel's acclaimed Thelma Yellin High School for the Arts, eventually embracing jazz as his major interest and the double bass as his main instrument. He moved to New York and quickly became part of the jazz scene, playing,

recording and touring with some of the world's finest jazz masters. Currently, Avital's output has extended beyond the jazz world, including classical pieces, Middle Eastern songs, rearrangements of Israeli folk tunes and oud playing with current musical ideas including Middle Eastern musicians, jazz improvisers and classically trained musicians all collaborating and sharing the same stage.

The **Omer Avital Ensemble** will perform the world premiere of Avital's *Song of a Land*, a Middle Eastern Afro-Jewish musical suite. The piece features 12 musicians ranging from a string quartet to an Israeli pianist, a Turkish clarinetist, Israeli saxophone and trumpet players, and Avital on bass and oud. Avital describes the piece as "sort of classical in that it has a formal structure. It is an evening of music—a collection of stories that are all connected, and which all represent my life." The piece reflects his journey as he has tried to connect the different aspects of his heritage, culture, upbringing and influences. Born and raised in Israel to parents of Yemenite and Moroccan descent, Avital was surrounded from early age by the diverse musical and cultural landscape of his native land. *Song of A Land* opens with an introduction followed by an Israeli-Jewish meditation on themes, a lamentation and various other "stories" before ending with a festive North African/Middle Eastern rhythm sequence he calls "tribal desert music." From Yemenite Jewish prayers, North African Andalusian music, early Israeli folk songs mixing Arabic melodies with Russian and German harmonies and Arabic music to jazz and gospel harmonies and with the aesthetics and structure of classical composition, the music flows seamlessly in and out of the various traditions and sounds and creates a unique artistic experience.

The Omer Avital Ensemble features **Omer Avital**, bass & oud; **Omer Klein**, piano; **Matan Chapnizka**, tenor saxophone; **Itamar Borochoy**, trumpet; **Hadar Noiberg**, flute; **Chris Karlic**, bass clarinet; **Ismail Lumanovski**, clarinet; **Carmel Raz**, first violin; **Guy Figer**, second violin; **Amelia Hollander**, viola; **Isabel Castellvi**, cello; **Itamar Doary**, percussion and **Matt Kilmer**, percussion.

Pianist/composer **Ryan Cohan** has been called "an extraordinary pianist" by the *Rochester City Newspaper*. He has performed with Freddie Hubbard, Milt Hinton, Jon Faddis and Curtis Fuller among others. Cohan has worked with NEA Jazz Master Ramsey Lewis and composed the theme song to *The Legends Of Jazz* TV program. Cohan's diverse resume includes a substantial list of commercial studio performing credits, performing with the Chicago Chamber Musicians, arranging for the Grant Park Symphony Orchestra with Otis Clay and recently completing his first feature length film score for *Tapioca* starring Ben Vereen. As an educator, Cohan has been on the faculty of the Skidmore Jazz Institute in New York and the Bloom School of Jazz in Chicago, and he continues to work independently as a clinician with students throughout the country. Chamber Music America awarded him their highly competitive *New Works: Creation and Presentation* grant in 2005 and their Encore Grant in 2008 for this performance and Merkin Concert Hall. Cohan has also received fellowships for composition from the Illinois Arts Council (2000, 2007) and the city of Chicago (2006, 2007). The Ryan Cohan Quartet was chosen by a panel led by Wynton Marsalis for the 2008 *Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad* program. He has

released three critically acclaimed CDs: *Real World* (1997), *Here and Now* (2001, Sirocco Jazz) and *One Sky* (2007, Motema).

About the featured work, *One Sky: Tone Poems for Humanity*, Cohan explains, "We are a world society under one sky. More than ever, to look ahead requires greater empathy and a proactive consciousness of the human connections between different cultures, races, and ideologies rather than of the fundamentals dividing them. In his book, *Who Is Man?*, Abraham J. Heschel wrote, 'The truth of human being is the love of being alive.' This poetic insight resonated deeply with me, challenged me, and guided me to examine humanity from a musical point of view in *One Sky: Tone Poems For Humanity*." Each suite's movements can be described as follows: *Into Being*: A life, an idea, a commitment to the moment, a potential, optimism. *Wonder & Response*: The notion of something beyond our senses and how we react to that perception. *Awe*: The way of comprehending the intuition of something greater than our finite selves. "Being human is a surprise, not a forgone conclusion." (A.J. Heschel). *Hope*: Light out of darkness, possibility, faith, energy.

Cohan will perform with **Bob Sheppard**, tenor and soprano saxophones, flute; **Geof Bradfield**, tenor and soprano saxophones, bass clarinet; **Tito Carrillo**, trumpet and flugelhorn; **Lorin Cohen**, acoustic bass and **Kobie Watkins**, drums.

This concert is partially underwritten by Chamber Music America as part of its New Works: Encore Program.

Chamber Music America

Listings Information:

Merkin Concert Hall at Kaufman Center presents  
CHAMBER JAZZ

**Midwest meets Mideast:**

**Ryan Cohan / The Omer Avital Ensemble**

Saturday, January 10, 2008 at 8:00pm

129 West 67th Street (between Broadway and Amsterdam)

Tickets at 212 501 3330 or [www.kaufman-center.org](http://www.kaufman-center.org)

Single tickets are \$30 (members \$20)

EDITORS: Please refer to the series by its name, **MUSICALLY SPEAKING...**

and its location, Merkin Concert Hall at Kaufman Center

Press Only: Hi-res photos for download at <http://kaufman-center.org/press/image-library>

About Merkin Concert Hall

Renowned for its acoustics, accessibility and innovative programming, the recently renovated Merkin Concert Hall is the recipient of multiple awards for adventurous programming, most recently from ASCAP/Chamber Music America in 2002–03. The Hall is a division of Kaufman Center, which also includes Lucy Moses School (a community arts school) and Special Music School (a New York City public school for musically gifted children). A not-for-profit organization founded in 1952, Kaufman Center occupies its own facility, the award-winning Goodman House, located in Manhattan's Lincoln Square arts district. The Center is an unsurpassed cultural resource where people of all ages can experience the joy of artistic creation, expression and appreciation.

Kaufman Center's presentations in Merkin Concert Hall are made possible, in part, by support from The Amphion Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, the Edward T. Cone Foundation, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, the Barbara Bell Cumming Foundation, The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation, The Herman Goldman Foundation, Joint Industry Board of the Electrical Industry, The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, Inc., and Steffens 21<sup>st</sup> Century Foundation II.

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