

Atzmon Assesses

David Adler argues for a political assessment of my art ["Assessing Atzmon," Solo, Oct. 2005]. I am grateful for the attention and that he feels my music is not without some merit. Unfortunately, he chooses to attribute much to me that is inaccurate. I offer an open letter to David Adler and anyone else who may be interested in my general philosophical stand on art, jazz and politics.

David, you accuse me of being a Jew hater and wonder how the BBC Jazz Awards can reward a racist and anti-Semite. I too would be appalled if such a thing was to happen, but the simple truth is that I am neither of these things. I am however, an outspoken opponent of the Iraqi war and a fierce enemy of the global Zionist infrastructure. Perhaps as an ex-Jew who happens to be an ex-Israeli I have been the source of worry to the supporters of these causes and they feel the need to "silence me" by accusing me of racism, anti-Semitism and Jew hating. Each of these labels, as you are aware, is an extremely powerful accusation. You recycle these accusations and wonder how decent people could support me.

Indeed, my band is one of the most successful in Europe. The people who buy my records, vote for me in polls and come to see my band night after night simply refuse to buy your interpretation of my writings and my music. Should they happen to come across your column, they would probably laugh all the way through it, asking themselves, "How can Atzmon be a 'Jew hater' if four prominent members of his seven-piece ensemble are Jewish?" Perhaps they see more clearly what I stand for, and perhaps what I stand for is why so many nonregular jazz fans are attracted to my music.

In order to brand me a racist and anti-Zionist you must do better than quote Oliver Kamm, who as a Zionist and a supporter of the war in Iraq is naturally opposed to me. In case you didn't know, on this side of the Atlantic, far less people are enthusiastic about the killing of innocent Iraqis. In your piece you call for a rigorous appraisal of my work (indeed, you castigate some respected writers for failing to do this). However, you are guilty of less than rigorous research yourself. In fact, you have recycled misquotes of mine that are found on some Zion-centric, pro-war Web sites. Rather shamefully, you reveal your sources by using the exact wording they use. You have unwittingly (or perhaps deliberately) allowed yourself to become a spokesperson for those who seek to "silence me"



through slander and misquotation.

Unlike many Americans, I still regard jazz as a revolutionary art form and insist that jazz is freedom in its making. My music is all about freedom. As you may realize, my message appeals to people. It touches people's hearts. And, yes, many Zionists perceive me as a traitor, but my music is aimed at people rather than at any particular segregated community.

David, you end your piece quoting Lee Siegel who suggests that a distinction be made between the "political" and the "politicized" artist. According to Siegel, to be a political artist is to "enlighten the ambiguous." The "politicized," on the other hand, is the one who "invokes political categories and stays imprisoned within them." Suggesting such a dichotomy doesn't serve your cause. I understand that it is important for you to argue that I am a "politicized artist." But then, if this is what "politicized art" means, then Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Max Roach and Frank Sinatra were all nothing but "politicized artists"; they all took sides, they were all engaged in civil-rights political activity and they were all invoked in "political categories" rather than merely "enlightening a conflict."

And yet, as bizarre as it may sound to you, I myself do not fall into this prestigious category. I am not a politicized artist. I am not even affiliated with any political party, organization, institute or campaign. First, I am completely autonomous, but most important I think in philosophical and metaphysical categories instead of political ones. I do believe that the message of art is far more important than any political message. You see, David, for me it isn't about the

Americans but rather America. It isn't about the Jew or the Jews but rather the Jewish supremacist philosophy that I ridicule. It isn't the people who interest me but rather the condition of being in the world. This is something that every reader of my texts and every listener of my music realizes instantly. The fact that you fail to grasp this is not that surprising. Yet if you assess me fairly and do not agree with me, that is fine. Many who oppose my politics enjoy my art and many who support my politics find little value in my music, while many others appreciate both. It is allegedly a free world. But a word of caution: If your goal is to silence me, then your words alone will not do. You will have to travel over the ocean and break my reed.

GILAD ATZMON
VIA E-MAIL

I read David Adler's October column "Assessing Atzmon" with interest, and I think Gilad Atzmon deserves far more scrutiny for his politics than he has yet received from the music press. However, I take issue with the claim that Elliott Simon was "entirely hoodwinked" in his review of *Exile* for AllAboutJazz.com.

Adler misquotes the review and takes it out of context, making it seem like Simon views Atzmon as some sort of neutral spokesman for peace. The correct, full-length quote reads thus: "Part plea for understanding among Israelis and Palestinians and part indictment of Zionist oppression..." And from this text it's pretty obvious that Simon knows what side of the issue Atzmon is on. Hardly hoodwinked, I would say.

NILS JACOBSON
MANAGING EDITOR
ALL ABOUT JAZZ

David Adler replies:

In my column I explicitly endorsed Atzmon's right to free expression. I even encouraged readers to visit his website (gilad.co.uk). I'll leave it for them to decide whether someone who believes that "the Jewish people are trying to control the world" is fairly described as anti-Semitic. The ethnic identity of Atzmon's bandmates is irrelevant, although I shouldn't be surprised that Atzmon stoops to the level of "some of my best friends are Jews."

Atzmon hides behind the banner of justice for Palestine, but the truth is that principled anti-Zionists want nothing to do with him. Some of the phrases in his letter ("Jewish supremacist," "global Zionist infrastructure") have the stink of neo-Nazi jargon. This should tell readers all they need to know. But I'll briefly elaborate: Atzmon has closely aligned himself with Israel Shamir (real name: Jöran Jermas), a far-rightist of Rus-

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sian origin who has openly declared his sympathy for the neo-Nazi National Alliance. "Shamir" has written: "The Jews are forever fighting Christ and the Church; there is no chance for peace in the Holy Land unless the position of the Synagogue is undermined and the Jews saved by the Church." Atzmon doesn't merely defend Shamir; he hoses Shamir's critics with contempt.

Nils Jacobson is right: I should have provided the full quotation from Elliott Simon's review. My characterization of Simon as "entirely hoodwinked" was unduly harsh. I still maintain, however, that it is naïve and in fact wrong to describe Atzmon's message as a "plea for understanding" in any respect.

For readers who wish to learn more

about anti-Semitism in anti-Zionist politics, I recommend the work of Engage (www.engageonline.org.uk), a coalition of progressive British academics who have studied the situation closely.

Motian Sickness

According to Todd Barkan ["The House That Jazz Built," Oct. 2005], patrons and staff were dismissive of Paul Motian's performance with Joe Lovano at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, saying, "Why did you get this guy? He doesn't swing." How unfortunate that such naiveté and narrow-mindedness can get in the way of appreciating one of jazz's most swinging drummers. His playing is certainly unconventional by conservative standards, but when he plays time the feel and touch come wailing at us straight from an earlier era, branded with absolute authenticity.

It is beautiful that Motian (74 years young) can still offend the sensibility of the timid. He should be proud to know that his high style and fully committed modernism can still shock—despite playing this way since at least 1964!

THE BAD PLUS
(REID ANDERSON, ETHAN IVERSON, DAVID KING)
VIA E-MAIL

Jarrett Sounds

Just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed Mike Quinn's interview with Keith Jarrett ["A/V Files," Oct. 2005]. It seems as though talking audio brought out a side of Jarrett that was more of a down-to-earth musician. I've always loved his playing and his music, and being a musician and audio enthusiast myself made the piece a very informative and fun read. Jarrett gets it!

Please do more articles like this so that musicians will become aware of what can be achieved sound-wise in the comfort of their own homes by investing in some good-quality equipment. I know of several well-known musicians who have gotten into high-performance audio and would never go back to lo-fi, mass-market stuff.

BILLY DRUMMOND
VIA E-MAIL

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