



photos: Josh Goleman - translation: Jannet Wielinga

Since about 2012, Gilad Hekselman appeared as a guest performer in various line-ups at many familiar Dutch venues. After three successful performances at the North Sea Jazz festival 2019, he returned to Europe the following October with gHex, his trio with Rick Rosato on double bass and Jonathan Pinson on drums. Between-times he focused on answering some questions about himself and his music.

“An interview is like a skirt,” Hekselman says, while our coffee is being prepared. “Short enough to be interesting, long enough to cover the subject. Do you know that expression? No?” Then: “it’s actually what they say about solo’s.” He laughs out loud at his own joke. In an interview with Gilad Hekselman you have to stay on your toes. He knows how to talk, loves to make word jokes, and does not let you get away with an occasional rambling question.

At the same time he is friendly and polite, and takes time to form his answers. In his music he looks for extremes and makes music on a knife’s edge. In addition to a relentless drive and virtuosity, he also knows how to create tranquillity and space in his compositions.

FURTHER CHAOS

The six songs on his latest album *Further Chaos* (2019) showcase Hekselman’s broad orientation and proficiency as a jazz guitarist. His mastery stretches from firm fusion in *Seoul Crushing* – where he searches for the extremes in his sound – to dreamy interplay in *A Part of the View*, and again from wonderful themes in *Toe Stepping Waltz* and *The Hunting*, to beautiful, personal interpretations of the classics *Teen Town* (Jaco Pastorius) and *Body & Soul*. *Further Chaos* is the sequel to the CD *Ask for Chaos* from 2018. According to Hekselman he had enough songs left from the recording session to justify a second album. Both albums were recorded by two of Hekselman’s trios, *ZuperOktave* (with Kush Abadey on drums, Aaron Parks on keyboards and a guest Dayna Stephens on saxophone) and the previously mentioned *gHex*.

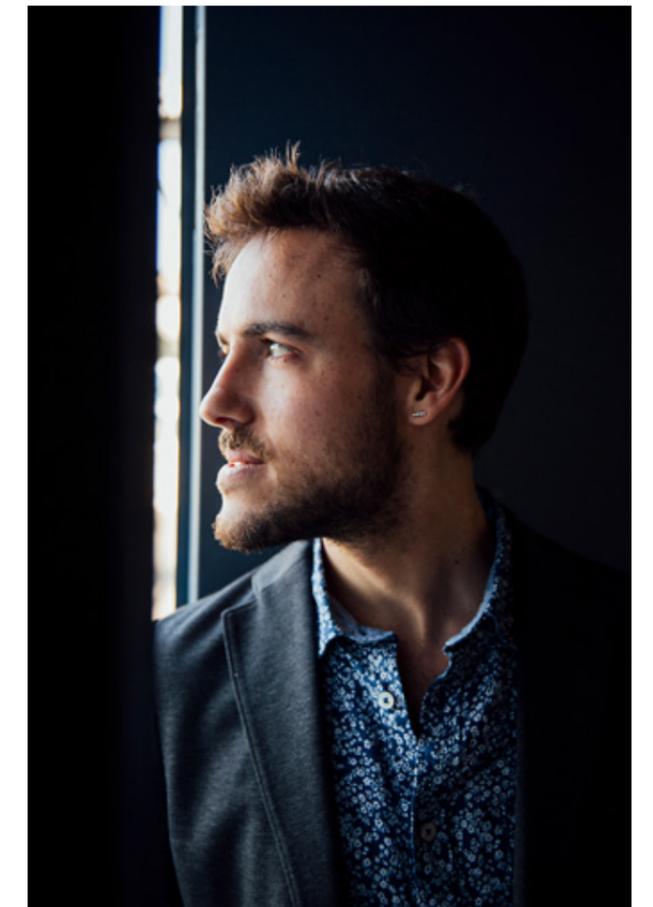
Chaos. Hekselman recommends it to everyone, because he believes you only get ahead through chaos. “Chaos is everywhere,” he explains when asked to elaborate. “You can’t ignore it, deny it, or try to control it. The only thing you can do, is channel it in some way or another. That is not negative; on the contrary, the beauty of human experience is in chaos. I had to learn that, because embracing chaos was not my natural instinct, to put it mildly. It also has to do with the fact that I never want to choose the easy way: not in music, and not in life in general. You need chaos to get ahead. Do not settle for what is comfortable.”

Fire

Hekselman (1983) spent his youth in Kfar Saba, a city twenty miles Northeast of Tel Aviv.” It was a quiet place to grow up,” he says. “Not a lot happened there. We hung out on the street, and had fun with whatever we ran into. I don’t think I was a difficult teenager. I got good grades; I did

not talk back to my parents. Though, we did do things that weren’t allowed. I remember we made fires with stuff we found. I still am fascinated by fire, but now a couple of candles are enough for me, ha-ha! My parents knew that we were up to no good, but as long as we kept it within certain limits, they let me do my own thing. I still am thankful for the trust they gave me.”

His first music lessons were on the piano. “But that just wasn’t my instrument, so when I was nine years old, I switched to the guitar. That doesn’t mean that I don’t still love the piano. You could even say that a big part of the way I play comes from the fact that I try to sound like a piano player.”





Remarkable is his clear, precise sound and beautiful use of dynamics, when he accompanies himself. Over time he developed his 'own' technique. "I use a combination of up-down, finger-style and sweep-technique. A bit of everything, actually. But technique never is a goal by itself. I was trying to sound like this or that guy, and that is how I found the most logical way to do it. Also, I had to learn to listen to my body. At some point my fingers could not keep up with the ideas in my head. Consequently I overused my right hand by putting too much pressure on it. That forced me to do more with my left hand, and that continues to influence the way I play."

As a teenager Hekselman was a real rock aficionado. "I was a fan of guitar players like Steve Vay and Kirk Hammett of Metallica. Later, in high school (he went to the Thelma Yellin High School of Arts) I discovered John McLaughlin

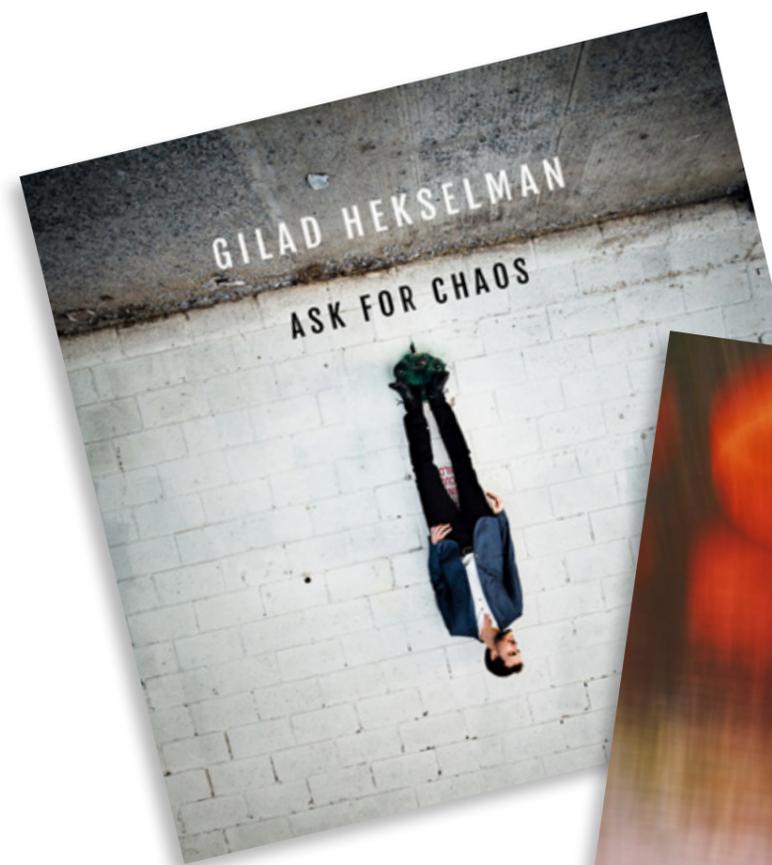
and Wes Montgomery. Unexpectedly, I found out that I felt much more when I listened to Bill Evans play the piano, than when only listening to guitar players. Until then I thought I had to listen just to guitar players, because I played the guitar, then I realized I didn't have to do that. That realization really opened up my ability to expand what the guitar can do."

PAT METHENY

Hekselman often gets compared to Pat Metheny. Even though he sees a lot of differences, he acknowledges the influence of the master. "Every contemporary guitar player is being influenced by Pat, it is impossible not to be. He invited me to his home one time. We jammed all afternoon and talked about all kinds of things. As a person and as a musician he really is an inspiration to me. He's really in touch with the scene. Some of the older jazz guitar players have lost contact with contemporary musicians. Not Pat, he knows everyone. He invites people to his home; he goes to performances. And besides that, he still is so incredibly productive. I mean, how many projects, CD's and performances has he done over the years? It's unbelievable!"

Two years ago Hekselman and his wife had a son. In honor of him he wrote the beautiful, It will get better on the album Ask for Chaos. On the question if they are the kind of parents that stimulate their kid to play an instrument at a very young age, Hekselman grabs his phone. He shows me a video of him playing the drums, with his son sitting in his lap. The little guy holds two drum sticks in his hands and beats the cymbals. He grins: "That says it all, doesn't it?" He lets the video run for a while. "Pretty good for a two-and-a-half year old, don't you think?" Then, more seriously: "We don't push him, you know. Sometimes he doesn't feel like playing the drums for weeks. Then, he shouts, 'No drums!' "

When I ask him where he sees himself in five years, he shrugs his shoulders. "I really have no idea. What I do now is great, so if I can keep doing that, and also get a little better, I'm happy."



The list of musicians, who have performed with Gilad Hekselman, is long and impressive, and includes Chris Potter, Mark Turner, Antonio Sanchez, Pat Metheny, Eric Harland, John Scofield, Anat Cohen, Ari Hoenig, Esperanza Spalding, Ferenc Nemeth, Sam Yahel, Jeff Ballard, Gretchen Parlato, Avashai Cohen, Thomas Enhco, Jeff 'Train' Watts, Tigran Hamasyan, Greg Hutchinson, Ben Wendel, Becca Stevens, Terri Lyne Carrington, Peter Bernstein, Danilo Perez and others. So far, he has released 7 albums.