

Sounds like Africa

• By BARRY DAVIS

Sangit has the whole world in his hand. Well, at least, quite a few musical lines and sensibilities. The 42-year-old percussionist and producer has just put out his debut album, *Librar*, which does the rounds of all kinds of cultures, with the accent definitely on the African side. On Tuesday (doors open 9 p.m., show starts 10 p.m.), Sangit – full name Sangit Segal, but he identifies by his adopted first name only – will unfurl some of the energies, rhythms, harmonies and intertwining melodic avenues that run through the multi-stratified record, at the HaEzor (The Zone) club in Tel Aviv.

Listening to *Librar*, I found, can evoke a broad sweep of emotions and reactions. It first made me smile, widely, and I quickly got an irresistible urge to shake a leg, and waggle several parts of my anatomy.

While the numbers meander through pretty generous sonic and stylistic terrain there is a sense of dynamic continuum throughout all 11 tracks, some of which are sung in English. The sense is that Sangit, as producer, knows exactly where he wants the project to go, shifting departures notwithstanding. If you spin the entire album you will find yourself wending your way through funky lines, Afrobeat, jazzy intent, lilting Ethiopian textures, percussive tribal-sounding punctuation and even some bluesy passages, particularly those tinted with Gnawa seasoning that hail from Morocco, and also some enchanting bluesy vibes from Mali.

Librar gives the impression of being a well-structured parcel, so it comes as some surprise to hear the producer say he does not make a habit of setting out on his creative ventures with a clear idea of what he wants to end up with. “I don’t like to decide, ahead of time, what is going to happen,” he observes. “The songs emerge, and I don’t decide on seven or five musicians, and they play throughout, and that’s what’s going to be on the album.”

That might be a result of the extend-



SANGIT photo by Zohar Ron

ed time frame Sangit took to get the job done. But he also likes to keep his options open, and to pursue a variety of alternatives until he settles on the sonic smorgasbord that suits his ear, brain and heart.

“I worked on the record for two years, at least,” he says. Part of that was down to simple logistics. “I actually had to go to Montreal to see whether these people actually existed.”

The musicians in question formed part of the raw material for another professional pursuit. “In the last few years I have also been working on making videos whereby I gather different singers and instrumentalists, and sample them, and put together video collages.”

In fact, Sangit headed for Canada for an entirely, more personal, purpose. “We went to Montreal a couple of years ago to visit my wife’s sister who lives there,” he explains. Prior to that Sangit had worked with a Canadian-resident vocalist in Israel, on a video project, and they reconnected during the trip. One thing led to another and Sangit found himself at a concert of Malian-born Canadian-resident singer Djely Tapa.

“SHE SANG traditional music and I knew, for sure, that I had to sample her,

to record her and to do a song with her.”

And so it came to pass on *Librar*. “We returned to Israel and I wrote a song for her and sent it to her,” says Sangit. That became “Child of War,” a stirring, evocative number that appears to reference the work of Ali Farka Toure, one of Mali’s most famous musicians, who died in 2006 at the age of 66.

Tapa is joined on the song by Canadian singer Ali Overing, who brings a very different energy and cultural sentiment to the proceedings. It makes for a compelling, oxymoronic pairing.

Sangit discovered Overing by serendipitous means. “When my wife and I were in Canada we saw Ali playing music with a friend in the Montreal subway. They were busking. I was a bit shy but my wife went up to her and spoke to her, and I ended up recording Ali and her bass player, for a different number. But Ali is also on the video with Djely.”

With that go-with-the-flow ethos, no wonder it took the producer over two years to complete the work on the album.

Sangit, which means “music” in Sanskrit – he adopted the name at the age of 19, when he was at an Oscho meditation retreat in Puna, India – describes himself as a green-eyed Ashkenazi, but

with an African heart.

“I got to Africa, not the physical continent but to the music, when I was 18 or 19. I got into playing the djembe and all kinds of African instruments. But, to begin with, it was less about the music and more about dance and rhythms.” That comes through loud and clear on *Librar*, which carves an unmistakable groove deep into black rhythmical climes.

He set out to get first-hand experience of as many cultures and their sounds as possible, spending time in India and Cuba before returning to Israel and setting up Kuluma along with Ethiopian-born jazz saxophonist Abate Berihun. That was back in 2003, and the seven-piece band has been delighting audiences up and down the country with its heady mix of Afrobeat, Afrofolk, jazz and Ethiopian sounds ever since.

The continental shift toward Africa followed some years after Sangit’s initial musical epiphany, at the age of 12. “I wanted to play the saxophone, because of Rikud Hamechona [by then leading Israel rock-pop group Mashina]” he recalls. “Avner Chodorov played that great sax solo,” he adds.

African music, of various stripes, gradually began to infiltrate the teenager’s consciousness. “I really got into African blues,” he notes. “That doesn’t really happen to me with American blues, but I was grabbed by Ali Farka Toure and Ry Cooder’s album [*Talking Timbuktu* which came out in 1994]. That is a great album. It has so much to it.”

The same could be said of *Librar*. Sangit brings plenty of musical baggage to the venture. “I spent a few months in Cuba learning to play percussion, but *Librar* is not just about Cuban music, nor just about African music. I like to mix things up.”

With an eight-piece band, and Congolese-born singer Natalie Wamba and stellar keyboardist Kutiman guesting, tomorrow’s HaEzor gig should be a multifaceted rhythmic feast for all.

For tickets and more information, phone 054-446-7240 and online at haezor.com/en.