

# Mp3 Neil Blumofe - Moses' Muses



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A jazz telling of the life and death of Moses, steeped in the flavors of traditional Jewish cantorial music and the streets of New Orleans. 7 MP3 Songs WORLD: Judaica, JAZZ: World Fusion Details: MUSIC FOR THE WILDERNESS This is music for the journey of Moses, a tested and vigorous leader of the people becoming Israel. Moses scythes nomadic paths in the wilderness, leading his people after the band is triumphant in crossing through the split Red Sea. He brokers a revelation at Mt. Sinai -- an event that transforms slaves into freedmen. Approaching God's Promised Land and ultimately denied entry into the land he seeks, Moses ascends Mt. Nebo anticipating his final encounter and consolation with God. These junctures in the life of Moses are chronicled here through the voices of Jewish sacred music tradition. These songs speak the language of hard-scrabbled experience. In the melodies, one hears generations of commitment, ancient voices searching and coming together, to puzzle out the received directions of God. In Moses' humanity, we hear the larger story of a newly freed people, born into slavery, who struggle to live with the echoing music of a sanctified relationship and commanded direction the Nothingness-of-the-Divine in the wilderness. In this telling, we present this sacred tale in the American vernacular the pulse of jazz. Connecting the sacred chants of the synagogue to the identity of jazz is a natural union. Improvisation is the bedrock of both jazz and hazzanut (vocal rendering of traditional synagogal chants) and taps directly into the quest for God that is at the heart of what Yusef Lateef calls autopsiopsychic music, religion calls the prophetic tradition and mystics call the cleaving or the ecstasy. Drawing on the examples of Charles Mingus, John Coltrane and Yusef Lateef, the conscious exploration of diverse sounds emanating directly from the soul brings the music and its performance into natural harmony. In the wake of the attempted extermination of 20th century Jewry and after the near- complete severing of the musical chords of these venerable European traditions, Moses Muses seeks to revitalize

the fragments of ancient Jewish prayer modes and the seasonal synagogue songs in America. This requires a recasting of sound patterns in people's psyches, a change of expectations, a rethinking of ideals and a careful reconstruction of positivism in the face of doubt and disquietude. What is demanded is music for the wilderness. Jazz is a uniquely American music. The Jewish experience in this new century is tied to the offerings of the American soundscape. When sacred synagogue chants bound up in the riches of jazz are heard, it further strengthens, diversifies and liberates our American musical republic. These sounds too are part of a foundation, an American experience, where they may rub against and ease an exile. Unfulfilled in entering the Promised Land, wandering in America, Moses does not walk alone. His is a life tested, responding to a constant audience with God and the bounteous wellspring of material resources provided along his journey. With a redemptive stride, Moses inspires prodigious hope when encountering the tribulations of making a life within the responsibilities of sweet freedom.

QUIETISM Hastening to the fevered pitch of unexpected freedom, the Israelites make a mad dash to the shores of the Red Sea with the Egyptians in pursuance. Here occurs a miracle: the sides of the sea rise up and part, allowing for the slaves to pass through and be washed in the waters of liberty. They emerge on the other side of the sea, a redeemed band anxious about the undertow of their future and the long sojourn ahead. But that is for later. Now they party, proclaiming the majesty of God. After initial hesitancy at this chance for freedom captured in the repeating bass line, the vamping of Maurice Browns excellent trumpeting outlines what occurs later -- the ancient Sephardi melody of The Song of the Sea (Shirat haYam), the song of redemption, a song signifying promise and hope, played in unison by the reeds. The tempo gains increasingly to be broken by the whistle-as-shofar. The assembled band is at the brink -- they can go no farther -- Egyptians in furious pursuit, a wall of rushing water ahead. Steeplechase regroups the disparate elements of the camp, attentive and aware. There is a miracle. A breakthrough as the slaves sidestep the torrents at a standstill and emerge in the second melody (the Ashkenazi Shirat haYam), drunk with freedom. However, things are not the same. Overlaid onto these freedom songs, Samir Zarifs introspective baritone saxophone brings in another synagogal melody, this of atonement (Vidui) as the new people realize that for true freedom, they must atone in their resolute life with scouring self-knowledge and a hard drink of honesty in everyday action. Down go the oppressors, but now the foil of the Other is gone. The newly won freedom brings responsibility to encounter others softly, not shrink from one's foibles and to give praise to God. Exodus 15, the Song of the Sea is sung: "I will sing to the

Lord, for God has triumphed gloriously/Horse and driver God has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and might/God is my deliverance. This is my God whom I will enshrine. The God of my father whom I will exalt. the Lord, the Warrior, The Lord is God's name...The Lord reigns for ever and ever." The jubilant vocals set Moses on a sobering journey -- to lead the people from conditioned slavery, through rambling restlessness, to the beautiful freedom of a God-determined life. God speaks and motions for Moses to follow. Up the hill on Mt. Sinai, the Utterances of God are given to the assembled throng. Down below there is an orgy of disregard. Hardened into commandments by the coarse people, the moment of revelation, of receiving God, is awkward and ill-conceived. Representing this grass-roots decadence is a melody in an Ottoman style (Constantinople, circa 1900), which reflects this cosmopolitan depth of these urges and emotions. There is seducing disorientation, advanced by the countermelody climaxing suddenly into an interrupted flow. Alex Coke, Derek Douget and Ben Saffer manage both the melody and countermelody, in a passion. Things accelerate and then abruptly end. Down from the mountain, the Tablets of the Law melt before the shaming frustration of the molten Golden Calf. Brought so very low, out of the depths, Moses builds 15 Stairs, (corresponding to the fifteen Shir haMa'alot or Ascent Psalms), each reaching up to the Ideal of a Tabernacle (Tent) for All of God's Creations. The Psalms, represented here by Psalm 130, are sung to evoke immediate meaning. Psalm 130 is sung in a supplicatory mode (Mi Sheberach, also called Ukranian Dorian) for individual introspection within the community of the synagogue. 15 Stairs opens with a poem from the closing service (Ne'ilah) of Yom Kippur, P'tach Lanu Sha'ar (Open the Gates for Us). A dialogue between vocals and the ensemble is initiated now, cleansing in its partnership and refining in its quest for spiritualism. Through the voicings of each solo instrument, there are singular, soulful dimensions. In the paths of life, God is Supreme. A Song of Ascents. From the depths I called You, Lord. My Lord, hear my voice, may Your ears be attentive to the sound of my pleas. If You preserve iniquities, O God, my Lord, who could survive? For with You is forgiveness, that You may be awed. I put confidence in the Lord, my soul put confidence, and I hoped for God's word. I yearn for my Lord among those longing for the dawn, those longing for the dawn. Let Israel hope for the Lord, for with God is kindness and with God is abundant redemption. And God shall redeem Israel from all iniquities. The shortest prayer in the Hebrew Bible, El Nah, Rfah Na Lah Please God, Heal Her, is improvised over the skeleton chart written in the moment, (2:15 am) at The Elephant Room, a local jazz club in Austin, TX. This is a classic case of being in the mode which represent significant yet accustomed musical changes

in Jewish synagogal prayer. The Quail represents the vital center of hazzanut and brings ears to the moment, erasing the synthetic in favor of the always possible. The evening inspired this composition, much like a synagogue service would inspire the deep wellsprings of chanting. This is a prayer for healing, recited by Moses for Miriam and for the crowd assembled for the live music as well. There is a leap from a page; there is no history, there is no tomorrow, there is only the exigency of now. We have a choice to make in the moment -- to choose life or death. Blessings and Curses has a traditional, soulful New Orleans feel (a shuffling major) coupled with a countermelodic and angular Jewish modality (souped-up minor). Introducing Maurice Brown's trumpet lead over the folk songs, Now Let Me Fly, and Oh Wasnt That A Wide River? and then combining Ben Saffers bass clarinet in a composed improvisation creates a dialectic ending in Roland Guerins determined bass which decision is the clear winner are blessings or curses chosen? Moses here is struggling to keep things together when presented these grave choices how to live life when at the waters edge. The Third Stream is inspired by the chanting of Sholom Katz, a hazzan (sacred singer in the synagogue) who survived the horrors of the death camps, due to the beauty of his voice. The piece begins in the Magen Avot mode (minor with the reciting tone of the 5) and is set as a liturgical piece. The text incorporates the last words of Moses before his death: Listen heaven, I will speak! Earth, hear the words of my mouth! My teachings will drop like rain, my sayings shall flow down like the dew like a downpour on the flower, like a shower on the grass. When I proclaim Gods name, praise God for greatness. And then the image of passing before God in final judgment, from the Unetane Tokef prayer, for the High Holydays: As a shepherd inspects his flock, making his sheep pass under his rod, so do you cause to pass, count, number, and review the soul of every living being, determining the life-span of every creature and You record the decree of their judgment. We have come to the end of the world. There is a story told of Sholom Katz, a sacred synagogue singer (hazzan), who lived by the whimsy of a Nazi guard. Singled out for death, Katz asked to sing a final prayer a prayer for the dead. This proved to be a saving grace by gunpoint the Nazi guard, moved by his interpretation, spared his life. We mark the fragility of this world -- times that have hosted the horrors of industrialized extermination, the global immediacy of slaughter and military reciprocity, times that have universalized plague, acts of God and moral failings and has made the world ours, possessed, only a click or a channel away. But too, there is so much beauty. We gain momentous thought and reflection as we listen to the deep intelligence of Fred Sanders piano and in the texts and

ensemble we have a chance to unwind and return to singing our lifesong at the end. Here, Moses comes to terms with his death we too must never let its immediacy depart from us and live determinedly, on. Mt. Nebo mourns and then celebrates the death of Moses. Psalm 23 is wailed on a funereal contrafact, the traditional song, Flee as a Bird. My Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He lies me down in green pastures. He lead me beside the still water. He guides me on paths of righteousness, He revives my soul for the sake of His glory. Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no harm, for You are with me. Your staff and Your rod do comfort me. You set a table in sight of mine enemies; You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall abide in the house of the Lord forever. In the end is the beginning, honoring New Orleans funeral traditions as well as the oral and living traditions of Jewish sacred music. The album brings us back around as Moses gets us through the narrow opening of the parted sea and then parts from us leaving us to celebrate our lives of meaning, well-lived. The expert and versatile drumming of Jason Marsalis transitioning into the second line is an authentic response to the imperiousness of lifes end. Preparing to enter the Promised Land, Lcha Dodi is the text: Come my beloved to meet the bride, brings us into unity the coming about of the Sabbath and the traditions embodied by Moses we may step forward, unafraid. The middle section has Mizrakhi (Near Eastern) influences as well as traditional European hazzanut, inspired by my teachers teacher, Moshe Ganchoff, representing his incredible spirit in shaping American cantorial music. Timeless melodies and jazz -- this is a sound instilled with the hope and the verve of America -- traditions are made sacred and the inspiration is told, through music, example and in love. I am grateful for the excellence and the unique contributions of the assembled musicians, taking on this project with determination and elegance. Their confident playing has breathed life into the hopes of the melodies, allowing the pieces to bellow outwards in the possibility of achieving something new and majestic. Jazz is a vital music, informing the realism of the American experience, each note a lesson, the collective music, swinging us forward. Jazz is deep enough to question, wide enough for us to adhere together. There is no overdub. Neil Blumofe Bio: Neil Blumofe is a sacred singer, composer and teacher. A classically-trained pianist, schooled in jazz saxophone in New Orleans, Blumofe was trained in the vocal cantorial arts at the Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York City. He has studied voice with Spiro Malas and was nominated as best male vocalist in Austin by the Austin Critics' Circle. Hazzan Blumofe has recently released, Piety and Desire, (2006: Horeb Records) a project of original

compositions that bring together the sounds of jazz and hazzanut (Jewish liturgical music), in the recreation of a traditional Jewish wedding. This music joins Moses Muses (2004; Horeb Records). Both projects feature Jason Marsalis, Roland Guerin, Maurice Brown and Alex Coke. In 2002, Blumofe brought out Root Music, vol. 1, a survey of Jewish synagogue and folk music. At Congregation Agudas Achim, where he has served as Hazzan since 1998, Hazzan Blumofe enjoys leading the community in inspiring and participatory prayer, teaching students of all ages, pastoring to the community's diverse membership and participating in all aspects of this growing vibrant and welcoming community. He has established a reputation as a creative leader of worship and transmitter of Jewish musical traditions, ancient to modern. He is known as a discerning improviser in prayer, concerned with caring for and uplifting a congregation. In 2005, Hazzan Blumofe was an invited participant in the University of Texas Humanities Institute symposium. In 1999, Blumofe was invited to be a speaker and performer in the Sacred Music Conference of the Magreb, in Fes, Morocco. In Austin he currently is a Board Member of Austin Public Radio (KUT 90.5 FM), is on the National Advisory Board of the Journal of Synagogue Music. Additionally Hazzan Blumofe has worked extensively both with the Islamic Dialogue Student Association at the University of Texas and the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

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