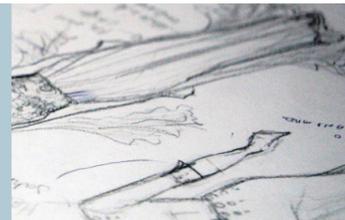


To learn the fine art of pencil drawing and oil painting. Artist and designer Jivan Hovhannisian (www.jivho.com) will be holding classes for basic to intermediate levels at Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre every Monday and Thursday from 7.00pm. Go to www.ductac.org for details or call 04 341 4777



'I sing about an idea of wanting to go back to your homeland and to a past that you haven't reconciled'

→ Jazz, continued from 1

"The new album that's coming out is a really interesting mix of Latin, flamenco and Arabic music, so I am excited about that," she says. "This was more of a Latin-Arabic album but the next is going to be much more Arabic because everybody wants me to sing in that language."

She will also perform songs from her previous body of work, including her tune *Ya Oud*, which she says was musically inspired by the vocals of Fairouz, the Lebanese chanteuse, and emotionally driven by her longing to be nearer to her family.

"I used this metaphor of wanting to go back to your homeland and to a past that you haven't really reconciled," she says. "It's a song about longing and it's also about being in a place that is safe and secure." *Ya Oud* is also innovative for its use of Arabic lyrics without using Arabic scales.

Ayoub employs none of these overtly traditional signifiers. Instead, Latin rhythms shimmy away behind her infectious vocals. Her songs may not fit into any specific category, but the music has an undeniably jazzy flavour.

In past festivals, Dubai audiences have been happy to hear variations on the theme of jazz, which is good news for Lisa Hugo. The Dubai-based singer-songwriter, who cites Sarah McLachlan as an influence, has performed all over Europe, filling cabarets with a mellow vocal sound that invites comparisons to the late Eva Cassidy.

Hugo was invited to attend last year's Dubai Jazz Festival, but declined in order to focus on her home life. Now, after putting her career on hold for a year to raise a family, she is delighted to get back on stage. For the last six months she has been working on her own music, preparing a new album, entitled *It's Time*. Hugo made a whirlwind recording in Belgium a few weeks ago and hopes to have a CD ready for her concert on Feb 24.

She plans a set predominantly made up of her most recent compositions, in which she will play the piano and sing. Hugo adds that these new songs are largely inspired by her family and motherhood. Her favourite, *Butterfly*, is a slick bossa nova song that profits hugely from the singer's signature three-octave vocals.

"My style is kind of mellow acoustic pop with jazz and soul influences," Hugo says. "The musicians I am working with are all jazz players, so they bring a lot of that nice influence with them."

Marwan Hawwa of the Dubai-based Marwan & the Mojos takes his cues from the opposite end of the musical spectrum. His band plays covers of rock songs rendered in a world-music style. The Mojos are also all about jamming, relying heavily on the work of both Pink Floyd and Steely Dan.

They will be the only group to perform every night of the seven-day Network Jazz Garden concert series. Hawwa, a 33-year-old Beirut native, came to Dubai six years ago to work on his music and has never looked back. He has performed at both the Dubai Jazz Festival and its sister event, the Abu Dhabi Jazz Festival, and is looking forward to this year's shows.

"We play the songs in our way, so it involves a lot of jamming and improvisation," he explains. "It's really interesting for people to see how musicians can jam together and come up with songs, tunes and melodies."

Hawwa adds that he and his band use such well-known musical arrangements as Sting's *Englishman in New York* and Steely Dan's *Josie* as a starting point and then let their imaginations run riot. "We do standards, but in our own



Clockwise from main picture: Elizabeth Ayoub, Judy Wexler, Gina Saputo, Lisa Hugo and Marwan & the Mojos. Courtesy Chill Out Productions

special way," he says. "My idea of having a band is based on giving musicians the chance to express their feelings."

The band has also been working on some new songs for the festival – specifically a jazzy rendition of

Time by Pink Floyd – and honing old favourites by artists including Eric Clapton and Carlos Santana.

As an added bonus, Hawwa will be performing with a different surprise guest each night, each of which will be a local musician.

"I've had the chance to play with most of the musicians in town," he says. "I had the idea of inviting the guys I play with usually to join me in this experience. We are going to have different artists joining us, including a sax player,

a keyboard player, a vocalist and a guitar player."

This approach is worlds away from the refined, Californian bebop of Judy Wexler, the most traditional jazz singer in this line-up. Wexler's most recent album, *Dreams & Shad-*

The details

All artists mentioned will be playing the Network Jazz Garden Stage.

Marwan & the Mojos play their jazzed-up classic rock sets every night, starting tonight and continuing until Tuesday, from 8.00pm to 9.00pm.

Elizabeth Ayoub sings her Latin and Arabian-tinged fusion songs tonight from 11.00pm to midnight.

The Amina Figarova Sextet will play piano-based post-bop compositions on Thursday from 11.00pm to midnight.

The Paris-based band Miliana will perform bluesy folk-pop chansons on Friday from 11.00pm to midnight.

The Hungarian quintet Djabe will bring its Central European-flavoured jazz and folk fusion to the stage on Saturday, from 11.00pm to midnight.

Gina Saputo will sing sultry torch songs on Sunday, from 11.00pm to midnight.

Judy Wexler is set to dazzle audiences with her bebop vocals on Monday, from 11.00pm to midnight.

Lisa Hugo performs her own adult contemporary-style tunes on Tuesday, from 11.00pm to midnight.

Sounds From Armenia will present a different Armenian band from 9.30pm to 10.30pm every night, starting tonight and continuing until Tuesday.

ows, is a collection of jazz standards. Her bubbly scatting is layered over the syncopated rhythms of such classics as *In Love In Vain*, a song penned by Jerome Kern and Leo Robin that was made popular by Nina Simone. There are also renditions of old favourites such as The Zombies' *Spooky Little Girl Like You* and *If I Only Had a Brain* from the *Wizard of Oz* soundtrack.

Wexler calls her music "straight-forward jazz with slightly obscure songs" and says that she is interested in interpreting classic jazz instrumentals, citing Sonny Rollins as a particular source of inspiration.

"It's going to be full of tunes that are off the beaten track," she says of her set. "There will maybe be one standard, but it will be a standard with a John Coltrane kind of vibe."

Originally a pianist, Wexler tickled the ivories from childhood through university but focused almost exclusively on classical compositions. "When I was growing up, we listened to Sarah Vaughan and Benny Goodman," she says. "Then I met my husband in San Francisco. He was a real jazz fan from Brooklyn who introduced me to Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Dexter Gordon." This discovery of jazz royalty and their work was a revelation for Wexler, and underground music clubs formed the backdrop for a large part of the couple's courtship.

After immersing herself in jazz culture, she decided to focus exclusively on singing. It was a good choice, since *Dreams & Shadows* has garnered high praise. Like several of the other musicians playing at the Network stage, Wexler is a fan of experimentation. She is keen to add that she has a concept album in its nascent stages. "I'm just trying to keep moving forward," she says.

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