



NIR&

Nir Hermelin, aka Nir& came to the conclusion that his corporate job would not allow him to follow his passion for music. After earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Electronic Engineering and an MBA from the London Business School he worked as a consultant for ten years. Working with high profile companies such as Toyota and Virgin Media. After much soul searching Nir chose to follow his heart. Today is a new day as he makes the brave move to establish himself as a performer and composer.

Please tell me about your late father and your tribute composition “Abba’le” - Daddy.

My father was fun, witty, intelligent, hard working and caring - a gem of a man. In his mid-thirties, he was offered a one-year job contract. Seeing an opportunity for adventure and a better life, he took the family in 1985 from Israel to South Africa. We never returned.

So many of my good traits come from him. Including my passion for music. He is actually the reason I started playing the guitar. Why? Well, first, he always had “EMI’s 1967 Golden Guitar LP” and similar albums playing in the background, and second, he taught me my first few chords when I was eleven.

In March 2017, he went on a holiday in China with my mom. There was a sudden, unexpected stroke, a coma, and 2 days later he’s gone. Extremely difficult times which I won’t get into.

Interestingly, I had started dabbling with an open minor tuning melody the night before his stroke, and so from a musical sense, the timing was unfortunately perfect. Basically

I had, one could say, a semi-structured platform, a framework of a melody to build on and of course: a sore, confused, passionate & angry heart, which was ready to write music. The rest more or less flowed from there. The song is less about my father, and more about how I felt about his passing. Looking at the song in hindsight, it is an emotional journey conveyed with different musical techniques. A quiet somber intro (7-6-1 progression), some confusion and resignation (Chord progression from 4 down to 1), and some anger (tango played with powerful flamenco strumming influence). There is one more section that I’ve added since my initial upload in March, and this will be included on the EP Album release. That is the story of “Abba’le.” Abba means Dad in Hebrew.

I believe you said that you grew up in South Africa. Please tell me about your years there and your family.

South Africa is a very interesting place indeed - with friendly people, great weather, beautiful nature - mountains, rivers and oceans.

Of course, it has a rough & beautiful political story as well, which makes things quite unique. I specifically had a unique childhood even for a South African. I’ll explain: I grew up in the apartheid South Africa. For anyone who doesn’t know apartheid was a system of institutionalized racial discrimination and segregation. In short, until 1994 if you were non-white by law you didn’t have good healthcare, education, job opportunities, etc. It was terrible!

The funny, incredible and most interesting thing is that I didn’t know it existed. You see, I went to a private Jewish school, which

was really only fifty-one percent Jewish. Any non-white family, who had the means, would send their kids to a private school and the Jewish school was pretty good. So, my school was multi-racial & multi-cultured: both students and teachers. As a kid, you'd go from home, to school, then to a friend's home or to after school activities. We were sheltered from the reality of the country. To make things more interesting, especially considering that I now live in Tel Aviv, some of my best friends growing up were Muslim.

What took you to Tel Aviv and when did you move there?

I don't have a strong connection to a specific nationality. I do have a strong connection to my diverse heritage. My father is Egyptian-born, my mom is Ukraine. But both my parents moved to Israel at a very early age, which is where I was born, and lived until I was four. I grew up as a South African, but we spoke Hebrew at home and there was always Russian and French being spoken at family gatherings. Five years ago I decided that I wanted to connect more to my roots, and specifically with my "inner-child" you can call it. I guess if my parents were Norwegian, I would have returned to Norway, but I moved to Israel. It was the first big non-logic based decision I've made. It's been a fantastic roller-coaster ride ever since.

Please share with me what life is like in Tel Aviv.

Tel-Aviv is a passionate city that doesn't sleep. It has half a million people, but has the energy of Berlin, or Paris. It is a center for technology start-ups, so there is an entrepreneurial, risk-taking spirit here - it keeps the energy high. There is a multitude of mu-

seums, a great nightlife, plenty of music and dance theatre shows every night of the week. I really love it here.

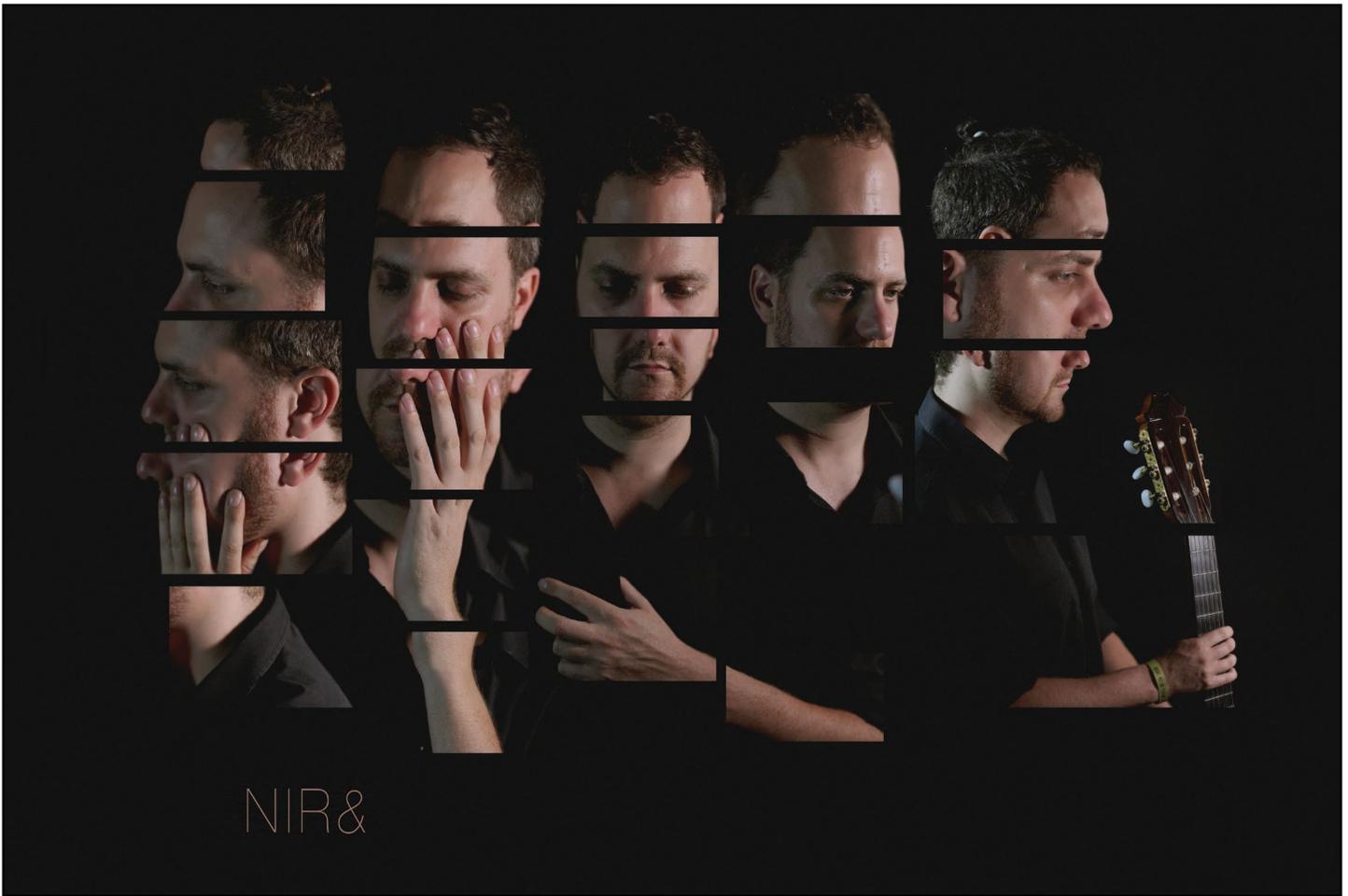
Saying that, I do want to say that it is a complete bubble. What I mean is: The people, the businesses, the politics, they're completely different from the rest of the country, and from the middle-east region in general.

What is the role of music and the guitar in your life?

Like many musicians, my music is an extension of my life. I have a mixed heritage, and so my upbringing and thinking is quite unique. I've spent many months traveling and exploring different cultures. I've lived and worked in six different countries. I've always been adventurous with a desire to learn and understand more. I have a zeal for life, and always ask more questions. Each question brings about a new beginning. My music embodies that. The styles are diverse and the moods are diverse. The stories in my music are thought provoking, a journey of the mind: To consider new things, ask new questions, and start with a new beginning. The guitar is my instrument, the tool that I use to explore these thoughts and questions. Playing and composing is as much my meditation and my grounding, as it is entertainment for me.

Which musicians and music has been an influence on you both as a player and composer?

In my younger days, I was largely inspired by sounds of Sting, Jamiroquai, Bach, Chopin & Queen. My life changed as a guitarist around 2001 when I heard Tuck Andress. He really made me realize the full potential of the



guitar. Much of my technique comes from countless hours working on his pieces.

In the last decade or so, my compositions have been influenced by a combination of artists. Tommy Emmanuel has been an influence both melodically and harmonically. You'll hear his influence in many of my songs. Surprisingly to many I've been influenced by electronic music, specifically Trance & Chill-out (genres of electronic music). I find many of my newer pieces also have hints of artists like Ott, Bluetech and Chicane. Continuous bass-lines and significant layers of themes can clearly be heard in my song "I sat down and the journey started" which can be found on my Facebook page.

What is the background of your musical training?

At the young age of six I started classical piano lessons. Five years pass and I'm a pretty good pianist. I really enjoy piano, but fortunately, I had a very strict Russian teacher that made me quit. I say fortunate because it made space for the guitar. At 14, I was lucky enough to have a teacher who said he'd only teach me electric guitar if I also learn classical. He taught me music theory and classical guitar using materials from Trinity College London. He also taught me Electric guitar using books from Berklee College of Music. I had no idea what an amazing job he was doing at the time. I'm still grateful to this day.

I also sang in several choirs until quite recently. The training you get from learning sheet music, having to sing with others, dealing with fact that sometimes your part isn't beautiful when sung alone. All this has given me many different perspectives to music.

After high school, I completed one year of a music degree in South Africa. I didn't think it was serious enough so I moved to the Electronic Engineering department - so I could get a "real job."

A few years later, I was offered a partial scholarship to Berklee School of Music. But since the dollar was so much higher than the South African rand at the time, I couldn't support myself at Boston during that time.

Tell me what inspires you as a composer and about the typical writing process if there is one.

You know, until recently, I never saw myself as a composer. I always assumed that if you play the guitar you also write music for guitar (ha-ha). I can't say that I have a process. I usually need one unique trigger for the creativity to start. Something such as an interesting rhythm, mood or theme. Once I've got that initial trigger, the melody and bass lines just come to me. I'm quite lucky.

For example, I was recently playing my own chord progression over a unique rhythm of a Dave Matthews song - this triggered a new song. In another instance, I tried to play a theme from Chicane, "Offshore," an electronic tune, and a song flowed from that. Luckily, I also have quite a bit classical and jazz theory. So if I'm stuck I try different things I've learned.

Stylistically how would you describe your music?

My music is always melodically themed and always phrased like a story. You'll find hints of Bossa-Nova, Flamenco, Rock, classical music, and quite a bit of African sounds. But,

recently there is an underlying Electro-chill-out feel to it, just without the Electro part. This is why I call my shows "sit-down-journeys": Where you sit and your mind journeys.

Do you teach?

I used to teach a variety of students, but I find that there are great teachers out there, especially for beginners. So now I focus on relatively advanced students: doing one-on-one meetings on technique & creativity, as well as small-group master-classes. I do this at times over Skype, so people are welcome to reach-out to me.

Tell me about using NIR& and your goals as a musician?

While having a unique name has its benefits (I'm the only one on Facebook), I want to be more than just "Nir Hermelin" the fingerstyle guitarist. I chose the name NIR& (pronounced 'near and') as a constant reminder to embrace new things into my life and music: whether it be additional instruments, different platforms or different ways of doing things. For example the nylon-string guitar, people love it but even I find it difficult to listen to an hour of solo guitar and I really love the guitar. My vision is to make the nylon string guitar more accessible by including percussion, cello and non-lyrical voice. I want to bring it more to the forefront of music. My next album, which I'm already working on, will be a guitar-focused album but will include these other elements.

Another thing I'm doing: I've developed a short TED.com type talk called, *How To Listen To Guitar Music Like a Guitarist*. I analyze and breakdown Tommy Emmanuel's song "Angelina" with the audience and then I perform it.

The idea is similar to analyzing a poem in order to fully understand it. I've had amazing feedback from the audience about how much the talk enriched their understanding of the song and guitar music in general. I plan on doing this within my shows, perhaps for corporate-talks.

Besides that, my goals are relatively simple. I want to compose and write more music and hopefully inspire people around the world with my guitar. I'm starting to plan a EU tour. I still need help in the USA. I hope that will happen with a percussionist. As soon as my new album is ready I'll be working to book guitar, jazz and World-Music festivals. In many ways I prefer festivals, as I love listening to music as well. I'm also going to focus on truly connecting with fans and getting feedback using social media, specifically using models like Patreon.com.

We all have our strengths and weaknesses. What do you feel your strengths are and in what areas do you wish to grow as a musician?

I feel a little like I'm in a job interview now (ha-ha). In terms of weaknesses, I think it is that I'm too pedantic, too much of a perfectionist. I spend forever on things, and this slows down my creativity. My understanding is that most of the greatest musicians have great songs, largely because they have written so many pieces. I need to up my game on creating music.

I also don't like to admit, but I have heavy ring-finger on my right hand: I'm sometimes a little louder than I would like with that finger; but the more I perform and specifically record, the better I get at making it work for me.

I am lucky to have music in my bones. I love to sing and I love to dance tango, lindy hop and swing. I love anything that is rhythmic and melodic. This gives me a natural way of telling stories through music. Added to this I have the required tools: A solid classical guitar background and an abundance of practical music theory. Finally, I think that in today's world a musician needs to understand their audience & how to reach them. I have a Business Masters Degree and over a decade in business consulting experience. While the music industry is new to me I'm hoping that my business knowledge will help me find the right opportunities to perform, explore with more musicians and earn a decent living.

<http://www.nirhermelin.com/>