Nadav Haber (or – as he likes to refer to his musical alter-ego – Avan Dozi) became fascinated with Blues and Swing, when still a teenager. In the late 1980s he acted as a co-editor of Blues Review. His exposure to Ethiopian musical concepts left a deep mark on his artistic endeavors. Although the Blues has never left him, his ingenious blend of East European, Middle Eastern and African rhythms and melodies has reached maturation in a timeless, cross-cultural sound. Free Jazz became his natural choice of expression and, when asked, he defines his unique style as ‘Free World Music.’

There are those moments when you stand in front of your CD rack and can’t decide what to listen to. Jazz would be too demanding, you don’t really have the blues and you are not into listening to strangers’ love laments in exotic languages that you don’t understand. You’re not particularly interested in being transported to places – not to urban jungles, to North African deserts or, to Levantine villages. Your tastes are too sophisticated for Bushman or Pygmy music, but it is their primacy that you are craving for. You are hungry for pure and functional music that can address your basic human drives, and not for Apollonian, culturally tainted esthetic stuff. Something neutral, that is, minimally subservient to style and difficult to ascribe to any genre. Primordial music, without lyrics, because what you want is older than language. You want to immerse in a world that only abstract figures carved in rock, Dionysiac dances and the rhythm that guides the dancers can evoke. A territory never before depicted on maps, but constantly renewing its soundscapes between our ears.

I’d recommend Avan Dozi’s Reunion for such moments. Despite being primal, the music in this collection is spiced with Ethiopian, African American, Oriental, North African and many other, unidentified flavors. However, these are not ‘concepts’ – they become crystalized only when the music demands them. The artist only obeys to the demand and lets the music invent itself.
1. **Undercurrents** starts as a reflection on a Tigrinya musician’s remark, namely, that Amhara artists restrict themselves to limited and short melodic lines when accompanying Tigrinya rhythms. Avan Dozi (AD), who is familiar with Ethiopian musical traditions, decided to make an experiment and create longer melodic lines that would overcome the limitations experienced by non-Tigrinya musicians. Without knowing it, he was overtaken by the emerging melody and, forgetting that he was only running an experiment, yielded to the sudden urge to hear how flute and clarinet would sound together. Having steadied the beat, melodic lines that were longer than those he was usually playing with Tigrinya rhythms materialized out of nowhere. After recording the melodies, AD recalls hearing an ascending and deafening spiral of notes that led to a tension that could not be tempered without introducing a second clarinet. After distributing the tension between the two instruments, it gradually gave way to a relaxed and melodic dialogue between them. So, from about 02:30, the music becomes ‘stabilized’ and the clarinets and flutes ‘ride’ the rhythm smoothly to conclusion.

2. **Dimensions** is also the outcome of an experiment. The artist remembers that, while listening to Australian Aboriginal music, the pentatonic scale sounded too elaborate. He thought that the music could be distilled to only 3 notes, which would confer it more substance. However, the pentatonic scale kept on returning, the spirit evoked by the music could not be ‘reigned in’. In order to appease it, an unrestricted melody line was let to emerge, which was captured with saxophones. The first saxophone solo is a response to the three-note melody and, the second, to the pentatonic melody. However, after this compromise, the music – or, rather, the spirit that was let out of the bottle – became demanding and planted the sound of a soprano in the musician’s mind which, in its turn, reset the experiment to a new beginning. For a promising outcome of this new beginning, the initial rhythmic setting had to be slightly altered, in order to accommodate the two, apparently antithetical parts of the song. However, there is an indestructible entanglement between the melodic lines, despite that they seem to be streaming from two parallel dimensions.
3. **That One Sound** is the artist’s most personal piece in this collection, which he finds bizarre, since the saxophone – his first instrument of choice – is absent. It all started with an innocent flute doodling. A melody began to slowly take shape, a melody that awoke the creative ‘Avan Dozi’, the musical alter-ego of the artist. The melody was laden with good vibes and he decided to capture the feeling by recording it, as heard in the opening line of this track. Wanting to enjoy the experience to the maximum, he devised a discrete rhythm line to fit the melody and added it. The combined force of rhythm and melody catapulted him into a different state of consciousness, one only known to the shamans of the old. As he remembers, he reached instinctively for his flute and waited for the emerging music to ask for its sound. When the moment arrived, he obeyed by playing random notes that just wanted to become materialized. The experience was trance-like and the notes that follow progressively build up ‘that one sound’, which you can hear taking shape at 2:30 and fading away at 3:42. From a state of potentiality, ‘that one sound’ collapses into an almost touchable physical reality. After the climax, the music itself comes back to our common state of consciousness and the melody offers a welcome rest after the intense experience. From my perspective, this track serves as the best example for ‘neutral’, that is stylistically non-aligned music, which comes from the world within, left unstained by the world without.

4. **Preparations**, unlike the ‘neutral’ tracks in this album, starts with a recognizably Ethiopian rhythm that the artist could hear in his mind. After recording the drums, he felt that the rhythm was committing enough and decided to mold out of it a non-Ethiopian, but still fitting melody. Listening to the recording, he waited patiently until he heard with his inner ear the right progression. However, at 4:00 the melody exhausts itself and becomes carried away by the Ethiopian rhythm, to which it adapts naturally. In the remaining part of the track, the music reorients itself and becomes an almost traditional Amhara composition.
5. *A New Dawning* is the outcome of another flute doodling. This time, the flute tried to adjust to a simple but insistent beat. The artist remembers that a soundscape was slowly emerging and decided to record the rhythm while he kept on playing the melody on flute. The still flimsy soundscape begged for a rhythmic support, which was provided by bass and drums. Improvisations on the flute filled out the empty spaces but also elevated the music to a level above the potentials of a modest reed. This is when the tenor saxophone comes in and plays the sounds that couldn’t be covered by the flute. The tenor is providing such a rhythmic elasticity that, by becoming free from the initial scale, the saxophone explores the space between the notes which, in its turn, shifts the melody to the troughs between the peaks of the pulse. Such a polytonality led inevitably to a polyrhythm that heralds a ‘new dawning’, the birth of a parallel soundscape. At ‘dusk’, when all the acoustic potentials are exhausted, the original soundscape, already familiar from the opening notes of the track, returns and fades away.

6. *Morning Dew* took shape while the musician was fooling around – for fun’s sake – with a darbouka. Slowly, a well-defined rhythm started to evolve. It carried the promise of becoming an Oriental piece but adding Oriental scales to the rhythm flattened it out. A pentatonic flute melody seemed to match it better. The artist remembers feeling good with it for some three minutes, but he noticed that the traditional flute and tenor saxophone didn’t do justice to the demands of the music. He corrected this by spicing it with the sounds of a Bedouin shepherd’s metal pipe flute. The spicing begins at 3:50, as a modest rhythm that slowly grows to become a full-fledged but, without a bass, only a gossamer – light as the morning dew – melody. This carries the track to a natural conclusion, when it evaporates into thin air, again, like the morning dew.
7. **Calling** is the fruit of curiosity. Trying out a new clay whistle and enjoying its sound, the artist wondered about how could he place it in the ‘Avan Dozi soundscape’. This made him play the same notes on the whistle and the saxophone. To his disappointment, when compared to the clay whistle, the sax sounded plain and harsh. He went on probing the whistle, until an East African melody started to take shape as if, called in by the conjuring sounds of the instrument (which explains the title of the track). Although the WaGogo* melody was in a different range, the clay whistle accommodated it well within the empty spaces of its own scale. Once the melody became stabilized, the African scale took over. Interestingly, the echo of the clay whistle can still be heard, long after the instrument stops playing. The melody rides the mood created in the opening to conclusion, when the whistle makes a short comeback and reminds the listener that this musical adventure started as an exploration of its potentials.

8. **Reunion** is a musical experiment in tension release. The musician was at the time in a mood that only a dense soprano could express. However, as he recalls, this was only meant to introduce the tense feeling, with the hope that the causalities of music would resolve it. The soprano conjures up a physical sensation which is relentlessly emphasized by the rhythm. The flute follows the dense soprano solo and suspends the mood. The return of the soprano brings with it a sense of relief and the sounds gradually settle in their matching places. However, the tension may re-emerge at any moment – the apparent release at the end of the track is not a lasting state. The title of the track refers to this neutral emotional ground where the varied moods conjured up in this album meet and reach a compromise.

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* The artist’s fascination with the music of the WaGogo people is the guiding concept of one of his previous CDs, *WaGogo Suite*. 
9. *The Takeover* opens with a guitar line to which, once it becomes steady, bass and percussion are added. The bass evolves naturally and brings forth the sounds that respond to the demands of the still emerging melody. The flute enters with a few hesitant notes that regroup themselves and start echoing the guitar melody, to which they respond without effort. Here, the tenor takes over and stabilizes the sequences outlined by the flute. The melody is lifted to a higher level where it only resembles the line introduced by the flute. After the takeover, the sound of the tenor falls in line with the bluesy guitar. However, these are not the blue notes played on the banks of the Mississippi – instead, the artist takes us on a journey to another river, the Niger.

10. *Release* was recorded on a hot desert day, inspired by the *fata morgana* dancing on the horizon, where reality and fantasy become one. The musician remembers that he didn’t intend to use an Oriental scale. However, the opening saxophone riff invoked it and the mood slowly asserted itself. The instrumental support of the emerging melody is light and airy, like the clothes worn on such a day. Its vibes move the air and the music conjures up a cool breeze that, at the end of the track, brings release.

*The track-by-track notes above are based on the many interviews and e-mail exchanges that I was privileged to have with the artist. As a cognitive archaeologist, I am well-aware of the relationship between rock art and music – which, together with the first dancing steps and vocal utterances of our ancestors, were part of an ancient ritual behavior that conjured up the causal construct of reality that we inhabit. Music has the power to create parallel worlds, but it also offers the means to escape them. Music may alter our state of consciousness and help us navigate the soundscapes of worlds held together by unfamiliar causal orders. Avan Dozi, like a spirit of these hidden places, takes possession of the artist. The performer becomes the shaman who leads the ritual that guides the listener through the acoustic mazes of this parallel dimension.*

—George F. Steiner, CISENP

(International Commission on the Intellectual and Spiritual Expression of Non-literate Peoples)