

DMITRY BAEVSKY – BIOGRAPHY

The only child of a writer and a translator, Dmitry was born in St Petersburg, Russia. The town was called Leningrad at the time. He started piano lessons at the age of six and discovered his passion and seriousness for music as a teenager when he picked up an alto saxophone. Although he was not surrounded by professional musicians, his family was closely connected to music. His great grand-father, Moisei Beregovsky, was one of the most famous and respected Jewish ethnomusicologists who spent his life gathering melodies and words of Yiddish folk songs, as well as Eastern European Jewish dance melodies (klezmer music).

In 1991, he entered the Mussorgsky College of Music in St-Petersburg where he studied with the brilliant Russian jazz saxophonist Gennady Goldstein for four years. Throughout the nineties, he appeared in many jazz venues and international festivals throughout Russia.

Upon his arrival in USA at age 19, he was accepted into the Jazz Department at the New School University in New York on a full scholarship. After finishing college, Baevsky remained busy working within the New York jazz community and made the difficult but rewarding choice to settle in New York permanently.

He has performed and/or recorded with musicians such as Benny Green, Peter Washington, Willie Jones III, David Hazeltine, “Killer” Ray Appleton, David Williams, Peter Bernstein, Cedar Walton, Dennis Irwin, Jeremy Pelt, Joe Cohn, Steve Williams, Joe Magnarelli, Jesse Davis, Ryan Kisor, Gregory Hutchinson, Roger Kellaway, Leon Parker, Dena De Rose...

In 2016, Dmitry moved to Paris while maintaining a strong professional connection to New York. He is a Selmer and Vandoren endorsing artist.

ANOTHER INSIGHT INTO DMITRY’S BIOGRAPHY

Liner-notes by Dmitry Baevsky | Written for the album SOUNDTRACK

« You can’t take your saxophone with you. It has to stay in Russia. »

That's what the customs officer told me at the St Petersburg airport, and I felt the ground slipping beneath my feet... I was 19 years old, standing alone with my horn in one hand and a suitcase in the other, leaving for what was supposed to be a two week visit to the USA. Little did I know as I was boarding the plane without my instrument, I would not return to Russia for more than 15 years. Life is full of unexpected turns indeed...

As I take a quick look at my life so far, I see Saint Petersburg, New York City and Paris. Three big cities, three countries, three languages, three cultures - three distinct places

that I call home, all of which have left an enduring mark on the person I am and the music I play.

One can listen to the thirteen tracks presented here as if flipping through the pages of a photo album: the music I've chosen could be the soundtrack of my life and it's my hope that in listening, you just might catch a glimpse of my story.

SAINT PETERBURG

Let's start with the streets of my native city, Leningrad, as it was called when I was born... The frozen rivers and the banks of the Neva, the stately buildings and colorful Orthodox churches, the Ermitage museum, the Mariinski theater... The feeling that every centimeter of the city is steeped in deep culture and history... The White Nights of May through July, with never fading daylight and the midnight sun...

My first saxophone was from former Czechoslovakia. I entered a music school at age 14 and signed up for the big band. My original intention was to play guitar. But there was a shortage of saxophone players in the band and I was given an alto. I still remember the smell of the case... I grew up close to the subway station Baltiyskaya... My father was a poet and my mother a translator of French literature, and the walls of our apartment were covered from floor to ceiling with books... Many were the evenings I'd fall asleep in our crowded living room, listening to my parents and their friends talking, smoking, laughing, listening to music...

I grew up in the 1980s and began playing professionally in the early 1990s, a period of great change in Russia. The 1980s was still the Soviet era, a grey and dull time heavy with a common sentiment that nothing would ever change. During this time I was surrounded by adults - my parents and their friends, many of whom were artists; writers, poets, musicians, painters. They were young and hopeful, and they dealt with their reality by being honest and outspoken with each other and by keeping a razor sharp sense of humor.

In the 1990s came the fall of the Soviet Union, an extremely exciting period during which people began to feel the possibility of freedom. Yet it was also a difficult period for many, when much intense poverty arose. I recall the empty stores, the lack of money, the shortages of essential staples... I recall hour long lines just to get a loaf of bread. I once participated in a classical music competition for which the prize I brought home was a package of frozen chicken. Luckily for me, I was completely immersed in my music at the time, and only truly noticed the turbulent goings on when it came to my struggles to buy reeds for my saxophone.

Now, how did I end up on a flight to the USA? Well, it started at the Jazz Philharmonic Hall in St Petersburg, still one of the city's main jazz venues to this day. That's where I made the fateful acquaintance of Ann and Bob Hamilton, an American couple who attended my concert and approached me afterwards. I was extremely shy at the time and barely spoke English, but the Hamiltons offered to help me go to the USA for a two week jazz workshop. I expressed interest and a year later, they were able to arrange a visa for me and offered to host me during my stay.

JFK, New York international airport... I remember walking out of security with just with my

suitcase, my mouthpiece and about fifty dollars in cash. No saxophone. I remember a mix of excitement and shock upon arrival in America, the feeling of being in a brand new world with a new language, new faces, new everything.

The short trip that I had planned ended up being extended to a six month stay with the Hamiltons. My hostess, who was well aware that my prospects in Russia were limited, became determined to help me stay in the USA, and mailed a recording of my saxophone playing to various music schools throughout the country. As a result, I was granted a full scholarship to the New School in New York City. I'll be forever grateful to the Hamiltons for their help and support - these people changed the entire course of my life.

NEW YORK...

This city is something else... For a 19 year old kid from Russia who only spoke broken English, New York brought an immense freedom paired with a distinct feeling of not knowing where to begin... Here was jazz of the very highest level... Musicians from all over the globe... Here was clubs like Smalls, Augie's, Smoke, Fat Cat... A stimulating jazz scene full of living legends playing, talking, hanging out...

I vividly recall the different neighborhoods I lived in - Harlem, Hell's Kitchen, Brooklyn, Inwood... The endless waits to catch the subway home in the early hours of the morning... The speakeasies, the wide avenues, Greenwich Village... Winter snow storms bringing back memories of Russia... New York is a city of great contrasts; welcoming and rewarding one day, cruel and lonely the next. I spent the longest part of my life there, and still think of myself as a New Yorker.

PARIS...

I'd become familiar with the city during the regular tours of Europe over the years, meeting French musicians and friends along the way. The beauty of Paris can take your breath away... Walking along the Seine with its bridges, the old entangled streets, the small cafés, the Louvre, Notre Dame... Clichéd as it may be to say, one simply never gets used to this... Paris is simply one of a kind... You can feel the depth of its history and heritage in countless streets, buildings and monuments throughout the city... And what a contrast coming from NYC!... The old world indeed...

I settled in Paris five years ago with my wife, a French native, as we awaited the birth of our son. Life was taking on a completely different meaning for me during this time but I'd be lying if I said I'd left New York without regrets. So once again I had to immerse myself in a new world. Once again I'd returned to square one, a stranger in town, understanding only half of what people were saying, and having to familiarize myself with an entirely new musical environment. I bought books of French grammar to work on at night while my son was sleeping. I met new people and played with local musicians. Time did its work and with a little help from friends and family, I slowly started to feel at home.

The idea for this album came about as I found myself adapting for a second time to a new life in a new city with a new scene. Moving to Paris made it even more clear to me just how much of my musical identity was forever tied to New York. But the move also brought back a lot of the feelings I'd experienced many years ago upon leaving my horn behind at the airport in St. Petersburg, along with my family and my life in Russia.

Though challenging, it has been these changes as much as anything that have solidified my understanding of who I am as a person and a musician, and how the two relate to one another. Common wisdom is that as a musician you can only “play who you are.” And in the end, what nurtures your creative tastes the most? Things like where you were born... the culture you grew up in... the people you’ve met along the way... the languages you speak... the music you were exposed to... the ups and downs of your life... We carry these things with us no matter where we are.

With all of this in mind, Soundtrack is the most personal album I’ve recorded so far. The songs included here are musical portraits of my life and an honest look at what I have to offer at this point in time. I sincerely hope that you enjoy the result!

Dmitry Baevsky