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Anat Cohen is making the clarinet cool

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supplied photo Reed Tem and weep: Jazz musician Anat Cohen is adept at tenor and soprano saxophones, as well as the clarinet.

As a good jazz musician, clarinetist and saxophonist Anat Cohen will introduce surprises into her performances -- a tune you didn't expect, an unusual phrase, a solo you'll talk about for a long time.

Or -- as when the Israeli-born, New York-based Cohen leads her quartet here in three concerts next month -- she'll add another musician to the mix: the harmonica player Grégoire Maret.

"It's not finalized what we'll play," Cohen says in a telephone interview from New York. "We'll see. I love the way he plays, the sound of harmonica with clarinet."

Cohen is on an extensive tour of North America and Europe with her quartet, featuring music from her latest CD, *ClaroScuro*, but Maret has been added to the lineup only for the Winnipeg shows, March 9 and 10, as part of the Izzy Asper

Jazz Performances series.

That unusual pairing of sounds just adds to the appeal of a show by the exuberant, skilled and innovative Cohen, who will perform here with pianist Jason Lindner, bassist Joe Martin and drummer Daniel Freedman.

On *ClaroScuro* (Anzic), her sixth album as a leader, Cohen combines buoyant dances and dark ballads; thus the title, which describes the play of light and shade in art. Playing clarinet, bass clarinet, tenor and soprano saxophones, she swings on an Artie Shaw tune, *Nightmare*, transports *La Vie En Rose* from Paris to New Orleans with the help of trombonist and vocalist Wycliffe Gordon and gets down and dirty with a Middle Eastern tinge on *And The World Weeps*, a Dr. Lonnie Smith blues.

So, if that isn't enough for her Asper concerts, she'll add Maret's harmonica and "hopefully, I'll have new material by then," she adds.

Cohen is adept on clarinet, tenor and soprano saxophones but is reluctant to pick a favourite. "It's a mix," she says. "It depends on the project."

When she performs with her brothers, trumpeter Avisahi and soprano saxophonist Yuval, as the 3 Cohens, as she has done recently in support of their album *Family*, she plays mostly tenor.

"In my band, the balance is more clarinet than tenor; with *ClaroScuro*, there is soprano, too," Cohen says.

The clarinet has a revered place in jazz history, but is played less as a solo instrument these days; it's more likely to show up in a big band.

But Cohen has raised the clarinet's image by playing it as a feature instrument. "A usual response (from audiences) is 'We didn't know the clarinet could sound like that.' For the most part, people who haven't heard me don't realize the clarinet is not just from one period -- it is a living voice in any music," she says.

"I'm helping people think the clarinet is cool."

Younger people don't get exposed to it, she adds, because of cutbacks in school music programs. "I don't know how young people will get any appreciation for musical instruments."

Cohen and her brothers don't get to perform together as much as they'd like -- Anat and Avisahi are based in New York while Yuval is based in Tel Aviv -- but they do manage a few times a year, she said.

Last year they had a three-week tour, which included the famed Newport Jazz Festival. This year their tour includes a Carnegie Hall performance. Cohen says she has performed there before, but 'this is my first time co-leading a band at Carnegie Hall."

Cohen's quartet will tour in Europe in March and May.

"I'd like to get more time in Europe," she says. "I like to play in Europe because there is a general appreciation for the art of jazz; they are enthusiastic."

The Anat Cohen Quartet performs Saturday, March 9, 8 p.m., and Sunday, March 10, 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., in the Berney Theatre at the Asper Jewish Community Campus. Tickets are \$38 at 204-477-7534 or online at www.radyjcc.com/ticketcentral.

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