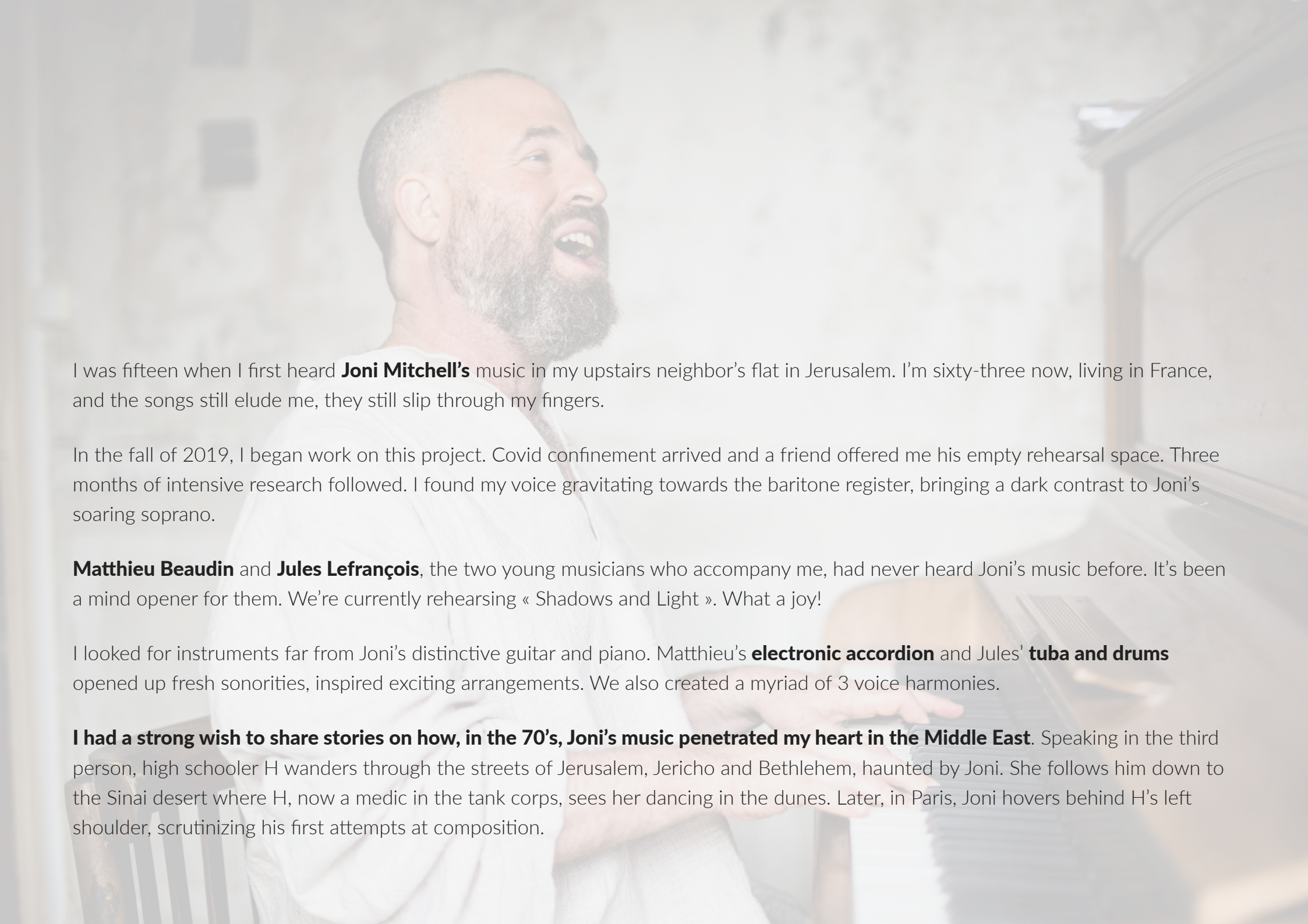




# Joni Mitchell in Jerusalem

Haim Isaacs sings and tells tales



A man with a beard and a white shirt is shown from the chest up, sitting at a piano. He is looking upwards and to the right with a joyful expression, his mouth open as if singing or speaking. His hands are on the piano keys. The background is a softly blurred interior space with a window and some architectural details.

I was fifteen when I first heard **Joni Mitchell's** music in my upstairs neighbor's flat in Jerusalem. I'm sixty-three now, living in France, and the songs still elude me, they still slip through my fingers.

In the fall of 2019, I began work on this project. Covid confinement arrived and a friend offered me his empty rehearsal space. Three months of intensive research followed. I found my voice gravitating towards the baritone register, bringing a dark contrast to Joni's soaring soprano.

**Matthieu Beaudin** and **Jules Lefrançois**, the two young musicians who accompany me, had never heard Joni's music before. It's been a mind opener for them. We're currently rehearsing « Shadows and Light ». What a joy!

I looked for instruments far from Joni's distinctive guitar and piano. Matthieu's **electronic accordion** and Jules' **tuba and drums** opened up fresh sonorities, inspired exciting arrangements. We also created a myriad of 3 voice harmonies.

**I had a strong wish to share stories on how, in the 70's, Joni's music penetrated my heart in the Middle East.** Speaking in the third person, high schooler H wanders through the streets of Jerusalem, Jericho and Bethlehem, haunted by Joni. She follows him down to the Sinai desert where H, now a medic in the tank corps, sees her dancing in the dunes. Later, in Paris, Joni hovers behind H's left shoulder, scrutinizing his first attempts at composition.

# SETLIST

Little Green  
Blue Motel Room  
Dreamland  
All I Want  
Blue  
Slouching Towards  
Bethlehem  
Both Sides Now  
Amelia  
Shadows and Light  
The Dry Cleaner from Des  
Moines  
Black Crow  
A Case of You



In interviews, Joni often speaks of her childhood fascination with Rachmaninoff. One day, I put on a recording of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 and heard Blue Motel Room wafting through it.



**Haim Isaacs - Blue Motel Room (video)**





## **Haim Isaacs** - Voice

A red swing in a back yard... a kid singing his lungs out... up in the clouds with Mary Poppins... twirling atop the Austrian Alps with Maria Von Trappe. In New York, my family boards a boat, furniture and all, and lands in Israel. All I can say in Hebrew is: Hello... my name is Haim... how are you? That doesn't go far in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. I daydream my way through History, Bible, Geometry, Chemistry. Language as abstract sound. Then Jerusalem Experimental High School: hippie territory: the process is what matters, not the result. Then the army: just get there! we don't give a fuck how! Then a one-way ticket to San Francisco: harmony, counterpoint, piano, voice. Digging under the skins and into the mouths of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Ella Fitzgerald. Then the Iron Curtain: Hungary, I want to move there, but stop off in Jerusalem and find Barry and the Roy Hart Theater passing through. Kaya, Akhmatova. Crazy wild voice work: screaming, shouting, soprano, basso, industrial squeaks. I follow their trail to the south of France and spend 4 years in a French kibbutz. Great. Terrific. Then Paris; teaching voice, singing, recording Jewish songs in Poland (Isaac Bashevis Singer's Krochmalna Street gutted and pockmarked). Then 17 years of composition: putting together groups, making records. Then improvising: voice, buto, clowning, tchatch. We're getting closer to now: NazzazzaN Quartet. Wild skydivers doing concerts in swimming pools and circus tents. And now: Joni Mitchell: queen of queens. My brother says I was born the day I first heard her. He's usually right.

<http://haimisaacs.com>





**Jules Lefrançois** - tuba, percussions, senza, backup vocals

As a young boy, Jules delved into both music and acrobatics. He immediately knew that these two passions would be his life. Since graduating from the National Superior Conservatory of Paris as a trombonist, Jules performs freelance in orchestras throughout France.

As an acrobat and clown, he has trained in France and China and performs with multiple companies mixing music and circus.



**Matthieu Beaudin** - electronic accordion, back-up vocals

While studying piano Matthieu stumbled onto theater. While studying theater Matthieu stumbled onto clowning. While studying clowning Matthieu stumbled amongst musicians, singers, actors and dancers. He is now a sought-after artist who collaborates with multi-disciplinary projects throughout France.

Haim and Matthieu continue their collaboration after four years performing in **NazzazzaN** Quartet.

<http://nazzazzan.com>





## Little Green

High school's out for the day. H walks up the valley of Lifta and jumps on the first passing bus. It's January, 1974, Jerusalem. H sits down on the back seat and leans his head against the window. It's cold. His left hand covers his mouth. He looks outside and starts to sing. The bus inches down Jaffa Street, stops at *Makhane Yehuda*, the big open market. Old Moroccan men, old Iraqi women, climb up, toting sacks of fruit and vegetables and cackling chickens.

The bus takes a right on King George Street and stops in front of *Hamashbir*, Jerusalem's one and only department store. A soldier gets on. Short and skinny. Yemenite. He sits down next to H and squeezes his M-16 between his thighs.

It's dark outside as the last passenger gets off the bus. The driver stares through the rear-view mirror at H, still seated in the back. He stares at the boy's closed eyes; at his head leaning against the window. H's lips are moving. He's thinking of her, Joni, growing up under Canadian snow; a young girl losing herself in the listening booth at the local record shop: Rachmaninoff over and over.

## Slouching Towards Bethlehem To Be Born

Christmas Eve, 1975. It's snowing in Bethlehem. At the edge of town, in a youth hostel, H and his classmates are fast asleep. Midnight church bells ring. H gets up, puts on his long, burnt-orange woolen coat and walks the empty streets.

A man passes by. "*Salaam Aleikum. Aïd milad majid.* Young man, I wish you a merry, merry Christmas."

The Church of the Nativity is covered in snow. Christmas lights... tourist buses... TV crews... cops everywhere. Fifteen years to the day, H was also born. In another country, on another continent. A group of black-shawled, Greek grand-mothers cross the square. H falls in behind them and enters the church, his nostrils tickling from the sugary incense.

H walks back to the youth hostel and lies down on his bed, the long, burnt-orange coat still on his back. Bought in Bethlehem's flea market that morning, the coat has already warmed another body in this city. The wool's rough, a button's missing, the inner lining is worn. H falls sleep, happy.

## Upcoming concerts

**La Pomme d'Eve**  
**1 rue Laplace, 75005 Paris**

every Monday at **21h** from **Oct 4** to **18** and from **Nov 8** to **Dec 13**

Price: 15euros/10euros

Reservation by email : [projet.joni.mitchell@gmail.com](mailto:projet.joni.mitchell@gmail.com)

Payment in cash on the evening of the concert.

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Contact : Haim Isaacs

[haim@haimisaacs.com](mailto:haim@haimisaacs.com)

<http://haimisaacs.com>

00 33 6 16 19 88 72