

**Growing up in San Francisco, pop crooner Johnny Mathis would visit temple with his Jewish friends.** Years later at the height of his popularity, in 1958, he drew on his memories of cantorial singing when he recorded a spine-tingling interpretation of "Kol Nidre," one of the more sacred songs in the Jewish canon. As it turns out, he was not the only African-American musician to draw inspiration from Jewish music.

The sleuths at the Idelsohn Society for Musical Preservation, a volunteer organization dedicated to unearthing and reissuing lost classics of Jewish-American music, have turned up a CD's worth of Jewish songs covered by African-American artists for the eye-opening and totally delightful album *Black Sabbath*. The 17-song collection casts a wide stylistic net. It covers everything from Slim Gaillard's novelty song "Dunkin' Bagel" to Cannonball Adderley's jazz version of "Sabbath Prayer" (from *Fiddler on the Roof*) to Lena Horne's Civil Rights anthem, "Now!", set to the melody of "Hava Nagila." Each track on this beautifully curated release reveals another surprising aspect of the rich and complex relationship between African-American and Jewish music.

"When histories of American popular music focus on the relationships between Jewish Americans and African-Americans, they most often tell the stories of Jewish engagement with Black music," says Idelsohn Society member Josh Kun, a popular-music scholar who wrote the CD's detailed liner notes. "But we wanted to come at it from the opposite direction, to see what happened when Black artists engaged with Jewish music."

Sometimes the engagement is as simple as a singer recognizing a good song, such as Alberta Hunter's heartfelt version of the sad love song "Ich Hob Dich Tzupil Lieb." Other artists recognize social and political affinities. In "Where Can I Go?" singer Marlena Shaw finds a connection between anti-Semitism and prejudice against African-Americans. "Clearly Shaw is singing about African-American liberation," Kun notes. "The original song just happens to be a lament about Jewish marginalization and a longing for freedom and dignity." And speaking of liberation, Aretha Franklin liberates "Swanee" from the clutches of Al Jolson's black-face version with an overwhelmingly soulful version of her own.

"Each of the songs we picked has a powerful story to tell," Kun says. "There were many, many songs we could have included and we're streaming some of them on the Idelsohn Society's Web site [[www.idelsohnsociety.com](http://www.idelsohnsociety.com)]. For the CD, we picked songs we thought were fun or powerful or just great to listen to." —**Ed Hazell**



## Walden on Wheels

**Riding a bicycle, according to 35-year-old cornetist Taylor Ho Bynum, is a lot like playing creative music.** "It's harder to get where you're going, and it takes longer," he says with a laugh, "but in the end, the rewards are greater, too."

Between September 10th and 23rd, Bynum will demonstrate just how true this observation is. He will tour New England on bicycle, performing with local musicians and his own ensembles in settings that range from university concert halls to a farmer's market. He'll kick off the tour in his hometown of New Haven, Connecticut, with his latest sextet, featuring a new horn section with alto saxophonist Jim Hobbs and trombonist Bill Lowe along with bassist Ken Filiano and sextet regulars guitarist Mary Halvorson and drummer Tomas Fujiwara. The tour will climax in a duet concert with AACM legend Anthony Braxton — with whom Bynum has recorded and toured extensively during the past decade — at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. By tour's end, Bynum will have played in all six New England states. "Just like there's a local food movement in cooking," he says, "I'm thinking of this as part of a local cultural movement. It's a way to develop a sense of community with musicians and audiences all over New England."

Bynum thinks developing this sense of community is important for several reasons. "Part of it is survival," he says. "The model of flying off to Europe for a couple gigs may not work in 30 years, given the realities of energy consumption and the environment. This means we need to find new ways to support the music and audiences here in the U.S. And I think a good place to start is where you live. The avant-garde has always been important for promoting different ways of thinking. If I can generate a conversation about new ways of sustaining the environment and sustaining jazz, then I'll consider the tour a success."

Making connections between the social, artistic, and personal is a big motivating factor for a low-carbon footprint tour. "This need to connect with people is very human," Bynum says. "It's why I make music, to connect with people. Biking gives you a deeper connection to the communities and the landscape of an area than traveling by car or plane. Plus, I really love to do it. I do some of my best composing when I'm cycling. It's very peaceful. It's like my Walden Pond — Walden on wheels."

Bynum's complete tour schedule is available on his website ([www.taylorhobynum.com](http://www.taylorhobynum.com)). While on tour, he will also be blogging and posting music. —**Ed Hazell**