

## The music

**Nikki Yeoh's Café Oran** was formed to celebrate and perform the music of Algerian-Jewish pianist/composer Maurice El Médioni (1928-2024). Nikki was introduced to Médioni's music when she played two of his compositions at the launch of the Max Reinhart-edited autobiography *Maurice El Médioni – A Memoir: From Oran to Marseilles* in 2017. Médioni had made special arrangements of his compositions for the Trio, and they gave a full concert of his music at Ronnie Scott's International Piano Trio Festival in 2019.

El Médioni taught himself the piano at an early age and frequented Oran's bars in the 1940s. His big enthusiasms were for boogie-woogie and Cuban music, and his style's born of the fusion of these distinct influences with Arabic music. As Robin Denselow put it in a *Guardian* obituary earlier this year:

“He was a pianist who could play, and blend together, almost any musical style. His left hand might pump out stomping boogie rhythms while his right hand played Arabic or Andalusian styles. He could switch from French chanson and cabaret to Latin themes, and he played a key role in the development of the Algerian styles chaabi and raï.

When I met him in 2007, El Médioni described his early life in the Algerian port city of Oran as ‘playing in bars and at Arabic marriages or Jewish weddings or playing in a big chaabi orchestra for the Algiers radio station. I started out playing boogie-woogie that I learned from the Americans, then Latin music, flamenco and Andalusian music. I was one of the first to do that and brought it into Arabic music, and now they love it.’”

The Café Oran Trio interprets El Médioni's genre-blending aesthetic with the cello in the holding role, an orthodox drum kit, an assortment of other drums, and Nikki anchoring it all with her own inspirational piano playing.

“A piano trio, but not as you know it...cello plucked and bowed rather than bass; a sprawl of percussion rather than conventional kit: and fittingly, given the unusual small group format, there was a lot of beyond the blue horizon thinking too from pianist Nikki Yeoh.” *Stephen Graham Marlbank*

*Notes by Dick Ware*

## The artists

**Nikki Yeoh** *piano* **Demi Garcia Sabat** *drums, percussion*  
**Shirley Smart** *cello*

**Nikki Yeoh** is a creative free spirit who, although deeply rooted in the language of improvisation, is open to a range of music that leans as much to the popular as it does to high art. Since her emergence on the British jazz scene in the mid '90s, Nikki's proved to be a skilled improviser, composer and all-round adventurer, continually seeking to broaden her musical horizons. Accomplished soloist as she is, Nikki has also excelled as a composer and benefited from a number of significant commissions. Among her most notable recent works have been *Suite Of Seven Tunes*, based on the seven deadly sins, for the internationally renowned reeds virtuoso, John Surman; and *River Spirit*, written for the Oxford New College Boys' Choir following a commission from Oxford Contemporary Music. In 2017 she received The *Jazz FM* Instrumentalist of the Year Award.

In 2021 Nikki was commissioned by the National Youth Jazz Orchestra to write a new work dedicated to the trumpeter, composer, writer and educator Ian Carr (1933- 2009) with whom she'd studied for six years. *Nucleus* was premiered at the EFG London Jazz Festival in November 2023.

Based in London and originally from Barcelona, **Demi Garcia Sabat** studied at the London College of Music. He now works as a freelance drummer and percussionist, specializing in flamenco, jazz, arabic, latin and pop music.

Current collaborations include Alec Dankworth & Spanish Accents, Nova Trio, Nicolas Meier, Jorge Bravo, Tito Heredia, Shirley Smart Trio, Graciela Rodriguez Trio, Martin 'Youth' Glover, Ben Hillier, Mel C, Monica Guech, La Tipica Contemporary Flamenco Company, Maria Vega Dance Company, Melange, The Budapest Café Orchestra and Los Amigos Latin Band. He has toured all over Europe, North Africa and the USA.

Demi regularly teaches cajon and flamenco rhythms at Escuela Flamenco Londres.

**Shirley Smart** is recognised as one of the UK's most versatile and creative cellists – equally at home in jazz and Middle Eastern, as well as classical, music.

Originally trained under Raphael Wallfisch at the Guildhall School of Music, and Janos Starker in Paris, she subsequently moved to Jerusalem, where she remained for 10 years, studying and performing in a wide variety of musical traditions from North Africa, Turkey and the Middle East. She was also highly active on the jazz scene, working with artists including Avishai Cohen, Omer Avital and Yasmin Levy. Since returning to the UK, she has quickly become known as one of the most creative cellists on the music scene and has worked with many leading jazz and world musicians, including Antonio Forcione, Mulato Astatke, Gilad Atzmon, Neil Cowley, Julian Ferraretto, Robert Mitchell, Maya Youssef and Alice Zawadzki. She also leads her own trio, with John Crawford on piano, and Demi Garcia Sabat on drums, and her own band Melange.

Shirley is Professor of Musicianship and Improvisation at the Royal College of Music in London, and an Assistant Lecturer at Kent University. She also teaches at Trinity Laban Conservatoire, and RCM Junior Department, as well as being a visiting tutor for the National Youth Jazz Collective, and an in-demand workshop leader.

*instagram.com/nikkiyeoh*  
*facebook.com/demi.garciasabat*  
*shirleysmart.com*

Visit [www.little-missenden.org](http://www.little-missenden.org)

### Festival Patron: David Matthews

#### Grateful acknowledgements

We thank all those who have helped with the Festival or supported us financially and in other ways. Special thanks to the funding bodies, sponsors and supporters listed below, without whose generous help there would be no Festival.



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Piano: **Fazioli 228** from **Jaques Samuel**

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#### Next year's Festival

The 2025 Little Missenden Festival will run  
from Friday 3rd to Sunday 12th October.

#### Festival website [little-missenden.org](http://little-missenden.org)

- See the full **2024 Festival Programme**
- **Book Tickets** (or phone 0333 666 3366)
- Be added to our **Mailing List** for next year's brochure
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#### Booking Information

- Email: [tickets@little-missenden.org](mailto:tickets@little-missenden.org)
- Phone: 01494 958148 between 11am and 8pm

#### General Information

- Email: [contact@little-missenden.org](mailto:contact@little-missenden.org)

#### Little Missenden Festival Executive Committee

*Chair:* Dick Ware

*Committee:* Angela Bishop, Polly Buston, Martin  
Cunningham, John Glasson, Beth Neill,  
Liz Wager, Dick Wells, Rachel Wilcox

# Programme Notes

## NIKKI YEOH'S CAFÉ ORAN



**8pm, Saturday October 5th, 2024**  
**Little Missenden Church**

**64th Little Missenden Festival**