

## PRESS REVIEW - BUZZ AYAZ

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## World David Honigmann



Deeper, grittier: Buzz' Ayaz — Michalis Demetriades



### Buzz' Ayaz

Buzz' Ayaz  
Glitterbeat  
★★★★☆

For years, the Cypriot musician Antonis Antoniou has been bringing together the musics of the eastern Mediterranean. Both with his bands, Monsieur Doumani and Trio Tekke, and as a solo artist, he has focused particularly on the currents than run through his hometown, the divided city of Nicosia.

His new project, Buzz' Ayaz, is a deeper, grittier, more defiantly urban and

less folkloric journey through the same territory. On their self-titled album, Antoniou plays the lute-like tsouras, a Cypriot version of the bouzouki, as usual, while his three bandmates bring new colourations.

Briton Will Scott anchors the lower end of the sound on electric clarinet, giving the album something of the feel of Herbie Hancock's *Head Hunters*. Manos Stratis doubles and jousts with the clarinet on bass synth and also plays organ, adding little baroque flourishes on "Fysa" that mark brief moments of respite from the relentlessness of Ulaş Ögüç's drumming and Antoniou's love of the wah-wah pedal.

The opening track, "Buzzi Ayazi", contains multitudes: a sour opening Anatolian riff on the tsouras, dubby stabbing chords on the

organ, galloping drums and chanted a cappella vocals that phase and shift.

"Running, we go look at the vines," recounts Antoniou in the song. "In my sleep I dress in their branches/The ones we planted with sorrow and laughter/And they spur me on to a flaming dance."

The Cypriot glam of "Efdji" is intoxicating and insistent. "Arkos" is told in the voice of an August wildfire, its smouldering, fidgety rhythms building to an incendiary close.

"Meres", meanwhile, has a late-summer listlessness, with sounds like buzzing flies matching its opening image of overripe citrus fruit left to rot on the branches.

It works its way through to teetering keyboard dances and a promise of "new days . . . full of drunkenness and kissing".

## Global Ear: Cyprus

### Psych rockers Buzz'Ayaz connect the Greek and Turkish sides of the island, along with its divided city of Nicosia

By Robert Rigney

It is early July in the hilltop village of Lefkara, the prettiest spot in South Cyprus, according to Greek Cypriot folk-psych rocker Antonis Antoniou, whose band Buzz'Ayaz kicks off the annual Afrobanana festival.

Buzz'Ayaz are one of only three bi-communal Greek-Turkish bands on the island. Their name has a Greek connotation (mountain breeze), a Turkish lilt (buz means ice in Turkish), and an English association (denoting distortion, hype and the state of being high). All of which is fine with Antoniou. Moreover, he's delighted when I pick up on Buzz'Ayaz's vaguely Turkish sounding name. This is exactly what he is striving for, positioning himself and his band somewhere along the lines of Dutch-Turkish psych rockers Altın Gün, and Istanbul based musicians like singer Gaye Su Akyol and psychedelic underground band Baba Zula, whose leader Murat Ertel Antoniou sees as a mentor and collaborator.

When they take to the stage at Afrobanana – happening inside a hillside football stadium, with Cyprus's capital Nicosia visible in the distance – it takes a while for the audience to warm up. They are somewhat standoffish at first, as Antoniou plucks his custom made electric cigar-box zouras with added frets. But 30 minutes into the show, Buzz'Ayaz – still an unknown quantity for many – begin to work their magic. As dark and introspective as they can sometimes be, it's often just a prelude for the explosive flashes to come. One moment Antoniou appears to be tapering off to nothingness – the next, he's rising to totally euphoric heights.

"The people here need this darkness because it grounds them," he explains to me after the show, "keeping their feet on the ground and promising the emotion and exuberance to come, which could only be appreciated in juxtaposition with its opposite. You could say it is mystical."

Buzz'Ayaz's Greek-Turkish roots make them perfect guides for navigating Cyprus – a divided island consisting of Turkish northern Cyprus and Greek Cyprus in the south. The Turkish side – a republic only recognised by Turkey – in some ways appears similar to the Turkish mainland, from the ubiquitous stray dogs and cats to the shared minibus taxis (dolmuş) with no bus stops per se, and where fares are handed from passenger to passenger until they reach the driver.

Elsewhere, in both the north and south, there are echoes of the days when Cyprus was a British colony: people drive on the left, the plugs are English three-pin style, and there are off licences selling alcohol everywhere,

and even a small Pakistani-run hotel in an Olde English style catering to UK tourists.

Notwithstanding Mitrovica in Kosovo (where Serbs and Albanians are kept at arm's length by United Nations peacekeeping forces), Nicosia is one of the last divided cities in Europe. Disembarking from the ferry from Turkey, and taking a dolmuş from port town Kyrenia in North Cyprus to Nicosia, a couple of things strike the first-time visitor: the huge Turkish Cypriot flag emblazoning a Turkish hillside overlooking Nicosia – to ensure no one forgets the Turks are here to stay; the profusion of Atatürk statues and patriotic slogans such as "Ne mutlu Türküm diyene", translating as "How happy is the one who says: I am a Turk". These are sometimes reminiscent of the Eastern Bloc at the peak of Stalinism. Finally, there is the super abundance of billboards advertising all sorts of hard liquor.

Setting up a meeting with Antoniou from a Turkish baklava joint on the north side clearly geared at border-crossing Greek Cypriots, I proceeded to cross over to the south at the Ledra checkpoint, opened in 2003 after the easing of border restrictions. Having had my passport cheerfully stamped by both Turkish and Greek Cypriot border guards, I find Antoniou, who has pulled up in his two-door and together we drive to Lefkosa (as the south is often called) where Buzz' Ayaz are scheduled to perform at 10pm.

An hour before soundcheck, we meet up with the rest of the band and order coffee at a slightly touristy joint. "Would you like Cypriot

coffee?" the waitress asks. In the north they say "Turkish coffee". As with baklava, there is a North-South debate as to whether the Greeks invented it or the Turks. The term Cypriot coffee seems to be an appeal for neutrality. Also to be diplomatic, Ulaş Ögüç, the group's Turkish drummer, orders instant coffee, "but with cold milk".

In addition to Antoniou's unique knack for marketing, Buzz'Ayaz's success owes something to the group's charismatic and whipper-thin Turkish drummer (and film actor) Ögüç, who explains, "In North Cyprus it's a little different than where we are now. The situation is different. And worse, in my case, because North Cyprus is isolated. Only Turkey recognises it. And if you want to do anything, you have two options: either you are going to Istanbul or you are going to cross the border and go to South Cyprus and then the world. And so it is very challenging for Turkish Cypriot musicians."

Their festival concert, however, was a success, though the arena was only half full, it being a Thursday night. The next day I took a taxi together with an Italian journalist from Istanbul, who, like me, had come out to Lefkosa specifically to see Buzz'Ayaz play. It's about a 45 minute drive to Nicosia. Again, I find myself at the Ledra checkpoint, having my passport stamped by casual border guards. It makes you wonder if the guards on either side of the border have any faith in what seems to be holding up the political divisions on this island – divisions Antoniou and Ögüç and Buzz'Ayaz would like to see abolished forever. ●



Buzz'Ayaz in Nicosia, Cyprus: (from left) Ulaş Ögüç, Will Scott, Antonis Antoniou, Manos Stratis



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**BUZZ' AYAZ**  
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