

Mendilow mixes global reach, artistic depth

At age 26, Guy Mendilow has had his passport stamped so often even Kofi Annan could relate.

Now living in Jamaica Plain — “settled” sounds too permanent a description — the multi-instrumentalist and singer makes music that very much reflects his world citizenship.

Jazz/World

BOB YOUNG

“One way to say it is that I’m just a big cultural mix,” said Mendilow, who was born in Haifa, Israel, and calls his acoustic sound “world folk.”

“I started first grade in Israel, finished it in Los Angeles, started second grade in South Africa and finished it in Israel, third grade I began in California and fourth grade in New Jersey. That was the story for a while.

“So I haven’t grown up speaking only one language or listening to any one particular style or

playing any one instrument. My family accent is kind of a mix of all the places we’ve been. My music is naturally like that, too.”

Mendilow’s parents’ careers — his father is now a professor of political science at New Jersey’s Rider University, his mother a teacher in a Jewish community center in New Jersey — had him moving constantly during his early years. Three years touring internationally with the American Boychoir kept him on the road, followed by high school in New Jersey and studies at Ohio’s Oberlin College.

His own wanderlust took over from there. Stints in Mexico and Brazil helped him fine-tune his plans — and his music.

Which was no easy feat considering Mendilow’s instruments include the guitar, Brazilian berimbau and Indian sitar; his vocals are influenced by Ladysmith Black Mambazo’s a cappella harmonies and the guttural over-

tone singing perfected by the Throat Singers of Tuva; and his rhythms and melodies are inspired by Bahia, Hindustani improvisation and American and Israeli folk.

Mendilow lays it all out in concert tomorrow night at the Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center. Joining him will be bassist Giacomo Meregga, flutist and singer Yulia Van Doren, drummer Mark Nathanson and reedman-Jew’s harpist Andy Bergman.

With all the unlikely musical ingredients Mendilow mixes into his stew, it’s fair to wonder just how tasty it sounds. And is he merely dabbling in world music flavors or truly immersing himself in cultures and traditions?

Judging by the range of material on his 2001 debut CD, “Soar Away Home” (Earthen Groove), Mendilow isn’t simply dropping in a style here or there for effect. He has managed to subtly infuse his originals about relationships and travel with warm folkish in-



TRAVELIN’ MAN: Guy Mendilow has lived all over the world, soaking up musical inspiration as he goes along.

fluences from around the globe. It never feels like a reach.

Covers such as his pretty take on “Rain, Rain Beautiful Rain” by Ladysmith Black Mambazo come across as heartfelt interpretations.

“It’s not like putting 10 CDs in a 10-CD changer and just skipping around,” he said. “Even

though one piece may be in Hebrew and the next in Arabic or Portuguese, there’s a lot of commonality.”

As far as dabbling, Mendilow prides himself on doing just the opposite.

“That’s really important to me,” he said. “My way of dealing with it is study. For instance, in Brazil I worked intensely with Brazilian musicians and instrument builders. I learned bossa nova directly from one of Bahia’s best bossa nova musicians. And I studied sitar for more than six years with a traditional Indian musician.”

Mendilow has a new live album set for release shortly and a slew of workshops and concerts scheduled for the East Coast this spring. In the meantime, he said, he’s more than happy to be part of Boston’s vibrant music scene — at least for now.

“There’s a music inside me that I need to express,” he said. “Everything that I’m doing is to try to get closer to that. I don’t know that I’ve hit it yet and I don’t know that I ever will. When I hear the sound I’ll know I’ve found my musical home.”

Guy Mendilow performs tomorrow at 8 p.m. at the Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center. Tickets are \$10-\$12. Call 617-577-1400 or go to www.emacusa.org.