

# Direct from Israel, Kutiman's audiovisual jazz irrupts into CJM

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In 1969, Miles Davis was all but exiled from the jazz world for daring to splice together recordings from two or more different sessions on his album "[In A Silent Way](#)." Jazz was all about improvisation — argued the critics — the camaraderie of a bunch of people in the same room playing off each other's ideas. To pick the best out of a bunch of tapes would be blasphemy.

Such purists would surely blanch at the sight of Kutiman's "offgrid," a 38-minute audiovisual composition that's coming to the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco on Thursday, July 20. Fully titled "[offgrid offline](#)," the exhibit by the well-known Israeli musician and composer is scheduled to run through June 24, 2018.

"offgrid" is made up of dozens of snippets of jazz music that Kutiman found on the internet, downloaded, edited and spliced together: teenage gearheads flexing their chops for the camera, wizened jazz cats running through standards and rare-instrument collectors showing off their fancy toys. There's even a bird in the mix.

Subtitled "Psychedelic Jazz From the Interweb, Collected by Kutiman," the mash-up will be displayed at the CJM on a dozen monitors that will turn on and off periodically — meaning the angle at which the sound comes at you will change without warning. Created by the artist in conjunction with the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in 2016, the piece will play continuously on a loop.

Kutiman, who was born Ophir Kutiel 35 years ago, garnered modest critical acclaim with his self-titled debut album in 2008: a sprawling collection of earthy funk jams in the style of Fela Kuti, a Nigerian bandleader.

But it was once Kutiman started getting his hands dirty in the digital world that he became something of an internet sensation. "Thru You" and its sequel, "Thru You Too," were sourced entirely from recordings of amateur musicians taken from the internet.

Kutiman also played a hand in creating a viral video hit featuring Princess Shaw, a New Orleans elder-care worker by day and singer-songwriter by night on her YouTube channel. (That led to the documentary "Presenting Princess Shaw," by Israeli filmmaker Ido Haar, which screened in last year's San Francisco Jewish Film Festival and will have its national broadcast premier on the PBS documentary series POV on Monday, July 17.)

In his "Thru You" series, using two and sometimes multiple images on the screen at once, Kutiman allowed us to see the original video clips so we knew what came from what — a piano line from a 10-year-old's recital, a vocal from some dorky kid dreaming of being the next Justin Bieber. The beats were challenging but funky, nothing that would overwhelm a stoned college sophomore browsing the depths of YouTube late at night.

The same can hardly be said about "offgrid." Often evoking the astral jazz of '60s Coltrane (John or Alice, take your pick), it's less about how its sources fit together than how they contrast.

For example, solos by two saxophonists who've never met bounce off each other and create either crystal-clear harmony or jarring dissonance. And the accompanying video, rather than making it clear who's playing what, blurs everyone together with psychedelic colors and ghostly filters.

It's disorienting and clearly *not* made with any intent to go viral, as "Thru You" and its sequel seemed to be. It's capital-A art. But if the idea of free jazz blasting at you unpredictably from all directions doesn't sound like your cup of energy drink, some of his "Thru You" and "Thru You Too" videos will be screened as part of the exhibit, as well.

The installation — which, alas, Kutiman is not scheduled to visit at this point — will be presented in the Yud gallery, where eccentrically angled walls and other geometric vibes will create a suitable environment for a state-of-the-art digital creation.

**“[offgrid offline](#),” at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, 736 Mission St., S.F. Viewing and listening is free with museum admission.**