



## From Israel

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### **Wagner not so controversial in Tel Aviv**

A one-day seminar on Richard Wagner and an evening concert of some of his chamber music performed by Tel Aviv University students aroused little controversy in Tel Aviv. This was in contrast to the furore generated when Daniel Barenboim played an encore of the anti-Semitic composer's music in Jerusalem at the Israel Festival in the summer of 2001. The Conference, co-sponsored by Tel Aviv University and the Goethe Institute was not intended to promote the playing of Wagner's music, but was simply educational, said the Conference chairman Moshe Zuckermann. To understand Wagner and his influence, it is essential to hear his music, maintained Zuckermann. Wagner's influence can be seen to the present day, not only

as Hitler's favourite composer. Wagner's music has been featured in films, and has influenced Hanoach Levin, the Israeli playwright. The Conference, initially scheduled for a small room in the university, had to be relocated to a larger venue due to the number of participants.

### **Arab-Israeli harmony**

Musical education is seen to be an important key in improving standards in Israel's Arab schools. Waffa Unis, although frustrated by government inaction, is setting up Galilee's first music conservatory, one of only four in the Arab communities, in new premises. Encouraged by her family and others, she is also producing a new songbook to replace the one in use for almost thirty-five years. The current enrollment of 30 students is

expected to rise as students benefit from new resources.

### **What is Jewish music?**

Conducting from outside the country wasn't the only problem facing organizers of a concert in Israel. Selecting the music itself proved difficult. Just how to define what constitutes Jewish music was a major problem. The strict definition is music used in Jewish religious services, but this is far too limited. The category could reasonably be extended to include music written by Jewish composers such as Gustav Mahler. However, that would exclude many pieces reminiscent of Jewish eastern-European tradition composed by non-Jews, as well as *Kol Nidrei*, written by Max Bruch, so that definition is not entirely satisfactory either. On the other hand, George Gershwin is only

one of many Jewish composers who wrote popular music not usually identified as *Jewish*. Conductor Alvaro Cassuto, who directed the orchestra via phone from Portugal, believes that a special definition for Jewish music has to be found. Even Israeli Jews have different cultural backgrounds, so perhaps the common factor is Jewish spirituality, and that leads into yet another complex of definitions. On the other hand, it might be best to forget definitions altogether—just enjoy the music!

### **No concert in Ramallah**

Although strongly criticized by some for his unscheduled conducting of a composition by anti-Semitic composer Richard Wagner last year, Daniel Barenboim continued to arouse controversy by planning a concert in Ramallah where Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat has his headquarters. Barenboim, who has helped to organize joint Jewish-Arab music projects in Germany, had hoped to "start a cultural dialogue" with the concert, but because of continuing terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, security officials

informed him that as an Israeli citizen it was not permitted for him to go to the West Bank. However, Barenboim did play in Jerusalem and those who were fortunate enough to attend that concert were privileged to hear not just a virtuoso pianist, but a consummate, mature artist play Beethoven's last three Piano Sonatas.

### **Only the beginning**

Two groups of young musicians, one Arab, the other Jewish, have joined to form the Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra, Jeunesses Musicales Israel, head Dr Meir Weisel announced. The fifteen members of the orchestra, all aged between 14 and 19 years, play both Western and Eastern instruments, and perform Israeli and Arab music and original compositions. The orchestra is conducted by Wissam Jubran, from Nazareth. As well as playing throughout Israel, the orchestra wants to promote cooperation between Arabs and Jews. They have made a good start.

### **Music in the marketplace**

The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra played to a packed audience in an unusual venue

when they performed in the parking lot of the Mahaneh Yehuda market. The wide appeal of the concert was evident in the number of three-generation families in the audience, with as many religious as secular in attendance.

### **From Russia with love**

The Moscow Jewish Choir was originally formed as a liturgical choir in the main Moscow synagogue. They rapidly expanded their repertoire to include secular music. Sponsored by the Russian government, the choir tours extensively. While in Israel in May 2002, they sang in eight languages and many different musical styles.

### **Bridging the gap**

Drawing on a wide range of ethnic and folk music, Diane Kaplan and Ada Moriel find that their performances have bridged ethnic gaps. Playing Arabic songs in Arab villages in Galilee encourages a sense of connection that transcends different political standpoints.