

## Passing the baton: A conductor moves on

Over the years, the Israel Stage Orchestra-Holon has delighted the public with its theatrical approach to music. Now founder Roni Porat is handing over the reins.

• By HELEN KAYE

No way is the Israel Stage Orchestra - Holon (ISO-H) going to become "just another orchestra," declares its new music director and conductor Doron Salomon. On the contrary, "we'll continue with Roni's direction: concerts for the whole family."

And he cites the second concert of the 2005/06 season, called "Strong Women in Music" in which the musicians will play music Roni wrote for Yosefa Even-Shushan's powerful *The Virgin of Lodmir* and act out some scenes from the play.

Roni is Roni Porat, founder in 1992 at Kibbutz Tzora of what was then named the Yad Harif Orchestra. He was also its chief conductor, composer and guiding spirit. Music, he has always said, is more than just sound, and his 19 musicians, all from the former Soviet Union, rose nobly to the challenge and became actors as well, thus accounting for the "stage" part of the orchestra's name.

Over the years ISO-H has delighted the public with its iconoclastic and theatrical approach to the canon, presenting composers such as Mozart, Rossini, the Russian masters, and of course Porat's own music - most notably the piece that started it all, the 1999 "Report to the Academy" that premiered to ecstatic

reviews at that year's Israel Festival. It's based on Kafka's novel in which an ape taught to be a man finds the world an inhuman place.

Other adventures have included Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (2001), *Secrets from Rossini's Kitchen* (2002) in which the great Italian composer opens a restaurant, and at the 2004 Holon Festival, *The Last Melody*, set in a grim future in which melody is prohibited, but yes, it sneaks back.

*'I've been pigeonholed as a music maker for kids, but my talent is for adults too.'* - Roni Porat

ISO-H moved to Holon a few years back, "when the city made me an offer I couldn't refuse - a home and NIS 500,000," says Porat. But now "it's time to move on," to show what he can really do, "and maybe, just maybe, if the New York critics praise me, I'll get more recognition in my own country. I've been pigeonholed as a music maker for kids, but my talent is for adults too."

Not that he's abandoning ISO-H, but his involvement will be more behind the scenes. Indeed, "it's not conductor

comes, conductor goes," says Salomon. "We're still working very closely together. We want to expand the orchestra's activity. It will play at the Beit She'an Festival in a fall program dedicated to the music of the late Naomi Shemer, Uzi Hitman and Ehud Manor. It'll accompany Nitzza [Nitza Shaul] family program, *Sounds of Enchantment*, at the Israel Opera."

Additionally, at this year's Succot festival in Holon the orchestra and conductor Talia Ilan will do her program *Tza'atzua shel Concert* (A Cutie of a Concert) in which children from the audience play along with the musicians.

The funding crunch that has hit the country's orchestras means there'll only be three series of three concerts each rather than the planned six. In addition to "Strong Women" the programs feature music by Mendelssohn, Weisenberg, Mahler, Mozart and Schubert, among others.

Salomon, who has just been named music director of the Beersheba Sinfonietta as well, is himself a composer and guitarist, so the move to ISO-H suits him just fine. Moreover, he and Porat are good friends, so he regards the changeover "as simply a transfer of the baton."

ISO-H plays at the Holon Theater, at the Tel Aviv Museum and at the Jerusalem Theater.



RONI PORAT, founder in 1992 of what was once Kibbutz Tzora's Yad Harif Orchestra.



SINGER RICKY Martin meets consul Arye Mekel in New York on Saturday. (Israeli Consulate)

## Ricky in a sticky situation

After posing in a pro-Palestinian keffiyeh, pop star Ricky Martin is blaming a wardrobe malfunction

• By MIRIAM A. SHAVIV

It's easy enough to understand Latin superstar Ricky Martin's desire to get politically involved. The number of high-wattage celebrities publicizing their cause celebre is soaring... and understandably so. The press eats it up.

In recent headlines, actress Angelina Jolie has been hailed as a virtual Mother Theresa for her work with the UNHCR, singer Bono of U2 is hounded by politicians for his stamp of approval and glorified for his charitable work in AIDS-ravaged Africa, and the band Coldplay and musician Bob Geldof have attached their faces to the cause of fair trade. It's certainly a positive and laudable use of one's status.

But when Latino superstar Ricky Martin decided to help eradicate misperceptions about Arab youth - not two weeks after the deadly bombings in London - several onlookers questioned his choice. The decision looked

like a PR disaster in the making - and it didn't take more than five minutes for him to make his first official snafu.

"I promise I will become a spokesperson, if you allow me to," he announced to young Arab teens at a youth conference in Amman. "I will defend you and try to get rid of any stereotypes."

After announcing his mission as well as his empathy ("I have been a victim of stereotypes; I come from Latin America..."), he posed for photos with fans with a Palestinian keffiyeh over his shoulders. On it, an image of the Dome of the Rock appeared beneath an Arabic slogan: "Jerusalem is ours."

The image of Martin in this politically loaded keffiyeh quickly spread across the world, and had many thinking the pop star was living *la vida loco*.

As it turns out, Martin was just a victim of a "wardrobe malfunction." He met with Israel's consul general, Arye Mekel, in New York last week in an attempt to correct

(again) any misconceptions.

Martin said children had put the keffiyeh on his shoulders during a concert in Jordan, but that he hadn't realized what it represented. He insisted he was taken advantage of, and that as a special gesture he planned to play a concert in Israel on his next tour in spring. During their meeting Mekel suggested that Martin collaborate with Israeli artists, and Martin replied that he would be happy to do so.

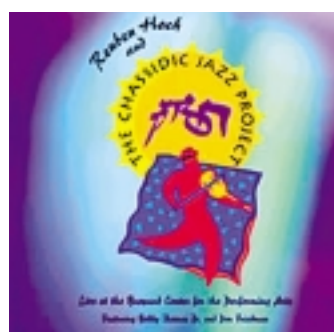
In an attempt to further patch up relations, Martin told Mekel that he learned several Hebrew words from his friends in Los Angeles. He then turned to Mekel and said "my dear" in Hebrew.

Mekel summed up the meeting by saying: "especially in these times when we are busy with issues like disengagement and the Shfaram murder, Martin's arrival in Israel is both a breath of fresh air for issues over and above the conflict, issues that we are interested in the media cover."

## New Jewish jazz

### JEWISH DISCS

• By BEN JACOBSON



The Chassidic Jazz Project Live at the Broward Center (RH Factor Records)

The connection between Judaism and jazz predates the current klezmer revival. For example, the first feature film with sound featured Al Jolson in blackface as a cantor's son who rebels to become *The Jazz Singer*.

With their *Live at the Broward Center* album, The Chassidic Jazz Project brings matters full circle, avoiding trendy klezmer cliché, and instead presenting straightforward *niggun* through the tried-and-true jazz idiom. Led by the furious, poly-accenting drummer Reuben Hoch, this recently released recording documents what the Florida frontman terms a "unity concert" held at a Fort Lauderdale in January 2001. Jazz talent of many ethnicities collaborated to create exactly what the title suggests. Especially noteworthy is the performance of hand percussionist Bobby Thomas Jr., whom Hoch credits with having

kept time, thereby enabling Hoch's improvisations.

On the opening "*Avinu Malkeinu*" (more on this melody below), a formless improvisation comes to life and takes on bossa nova flavors before fluctuating in and out of chaotic, sax-driven expeditions. The "*Adon Olam Medley*" starts off as an intimate classical guitar floater, but later lands in a furious groove. On "*Crackow Niggun*," Hoch tells a Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach story in the style of the traditional Hassidic storytellers, eventually breaking into an intense jam that morphs into Carlebach's original melody only at the end.

Most of the concert's lead parts are performed on sax, with piano taking over for several melodies. Drums are, of course, prominent in the mix and key to the overall feel. This band would probably sound great in the studio, but the label was wise to release this live album, since the heart of jazz is its improvisation, which comes off here as honest to the core.

David Chevan with the Afro-Semitic Experience *The Days of Awe* (Reckless DC Music)

The use of our traditional "*Avinu Malkeinu*" melody as a springboard for improvisational rock-outs is also not new. Uber jam band Phish premiered its punchy, edgy Middle Eastern version in the late Eighties, and bassist Mike Gordon told *The Jerusalem Report* in 1996 that the song is "an acknowledgment of my heritage."



Scottish post-rock act Mogwai's 20-minute version has been a staple of its live shows for at least five years now, with a mysteriously brooding, epic atmosphere. And now Connecticut's American Afro-Semitic Experience, fronted by upright bassist David Chevan, has weighed in with its own version. Authentic jazz mixed with traditional Judaism, this recording leads us from free-form picking on Middle Eastern scales ("And As For Me") to island flavors ("May Our Offering") to sparse cha-cha ("We All Believe") to noodly bass bends ("Remember Us") - all as explorations of High Holy Day *hazzanut* themes.

The early days of Av are traditionally times for introspection and attempts to mend mankind - themes which parallel those of the pre-High Holy Day month of Ellul, which is just around the corner once again. With its meditative approach and lack of festive vocals, *Days of Awe* (available at [www.cdaby.com/chevan3](http://www.cdaby.com/chevan3)) is clearly appropriate seasonal listening for those brave enough to want their ears opened.

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### DANCE REVIEW

Four choreographers presented their works as guests of Sally-Anne Friedland on August 8 as part of the Hot Dance festival. As organizer of the event, Friedland contributed with her small "Dance Drama Group" - the fifth and last work for that evening. "The Puzzle" had turned to be much like a plate of petit fours, composed of various sweet duets and trios that tickled the taste buds, leaving a pleasant aftertaste of promising talent.

The most impressive of the

Sally-Anne Friedland-Dance Drama Group *The Puzzle* Hot Dance Suzanne Dellal Center August 8

five was Adi Salant's "*Shakut*" (Transparent), a duet for percussion instruments set to Polynesian music, which inspired impressive and highly imaginative partnering. Each partner strengthened the other, charging the work with meaningful energy.

Har'el Kay with his expressive

hands was the perfect, virile mate for Shmirit Golan in their animalistic mating routine titled "The Birds and the Bees." "Untitled" by Friedland was a delicate and refreshing trio, and "Du-Oh" by Mira Rubinstein and Ilan Maman was well-executed - two dancers in perfect sync. Although not all the works carried the same weight, some of the guest choreographers were moving in the right direction, and I look forward to seeing them again.

• Ora Brafman