

THE JERUSALEM POST

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THE FOCUS of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra's end-of-season concert, conducted by David Shallon, was Yosef Tal's

Symphony No 6, in its first local performance.

The abounding contrasts in the work are created not only by diverse instruments and their sonorities, but also by extremes of dynamics, varying sound combinations and continual abrupt changes in all the imaginable parameters of composition.

In spite of all these multifaceted diversities, or perhaps because of them, the work creates an impression of coherence through its sequence of highly imaginative, unpredictable musical ideas.

Jerusalem Theater, July 12.

Ury Eppstein

An impressive tour de force; [Daily Edition]

Ury Eppstein. Jerusalem Post. Jerusalem: Oct 16, 2000. pg. 07

Abstract (Summary)

In celebration of the 90th birthday of senior Israeli composer [JOSEF TAL], two of his works were performed by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by [GARY BERTINI]: his Symphony No.6 (1991) and the concert-opera Saul at Ein-Dor (1955).

Mezzo-soprano Edna Prochnik, tenor Neil Jenkins, baritone Noah Brieger, narrator Noah Zebbah, conductor Gary Bertini and the IPO performed a veritable labour of love in reviving this immensely deserving work.

The concert season's opening of the Chamber Music Series at the Jerusalem Music Center, Mishkenot Sha'ananim, featured the Huberman Quartet (Yehonatan Berick, Guy Braunstein, Gilad Karni, Zvi Plesser).

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Full Text (490 words)

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Concert Reviews

CONCERT IPO HOMAGE

TO JOSEF TAL,

GARY BERTINI-CONDUCTOR

Jerusalem Theatre

October 4

In celebration of the 90th birthday of senior Israeli composer Josef Tal, two of his works were performed by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Gary Bertini: his Symphony No.6 (1991) and the concert-opera Saul at Ein-Dor (1955).

The Sixth Symphony is a feast of sound colors involving the whole orchestral spectrum - contrasting, interchanging, juxtaposing and fusing. Moreover, it focuses on a constant building up of tremendous energies and their release.

Always inventive and unconventional, though never deliberately provocative, the work holds the listener under its spell from its first note through its abundant transformations, until its ultimate fade out.

The chamber opera Saul at Ein-Dor, which sounded highly innovative, touchingly human, and straightforwardly impressive when first performed in 1955, has lost nothing of its freshness and poignancy today. This test of

time is, perhaps, the most convincing proof of the validity and value of a composer's work.

Mezzo-soprano Edna Prochnik, tenor Neil Jenkins, baritone Noah Brieger, narrator Noah Zebbah, conductor Gary Bertini and the IPO performed a veritable labour of love in reviving this immensely deserving work.

New Works and Old In a Mix by Mehta

ISRAEL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA. Zubiri Mehta, conductor. Works by Josef Tal, Bela Bartok, and Richard Strauss. Tilles Center. Seen Thursday night.

AFTER TWO NIGHTS of mostly standard fare at Carnegie Hall, Zubin Mehta and his touring «Israel Philharmonic» began their Tilles Center concert with the Symphony No. 6 of a contemporary Israeli composer named Josef Tal. An odd programming move, one might think, given the generally conservative musical tastes of Long Islanders, but it, nevertheless, seemed to work.

Actually, despite Tal's strong interest in avant-garde music, this substantial curtain raiser is quite accessible. His compositional style incorporates faint hints of Jewish folk elements into a decidedly modern, though comprehensible, rhythmic and harmonic framework.

Tal is most successful at delineating form; he begins the work with solemn muted brass and builds the orchestra section by section, as if playing with blocks.

The two virtuoso warhorses that formed the core of the program - Bartk's Miraculous Mandarin Suite and Strauss' Ein Heldenleben - also showed Mehta's programming prowess. As a young man, Bartk counted Strauss among his strongest influences and even fashioned Heldenleben into a virtuoso piano transcription, but by the time he penned the Mandarin, he had all but abandoned the style of his early years. Hearing these two pieces side by side provided a provocative juxtaposition.

In a way, both works address the idea of a climax, with all the different meanings that the word can carry. Bartk takes this notion to its carnal extreme, and the ending of the Mandarin Suite, in which the Chinese official is enraptured by the prostitute, is one of the great moments of expressionist machismo. By contrast, the musical climaxes in the Strauss after intermission seemed almost inconsequential.

As is often the case, Mehta conducted the Strauss and Bartk from memory, and this amazing talent always seems like a double-edged sword. Mehta possesses preternatural musical gifts, but there is often a lingering sense that he is going through the motions rather than seeking musical answers in a more organic fashion. This was most true in the Strauss, in which a sense of routine clipped some of the work's passion, not to mention its nuance.

Nonetheless, Mehta and his forces played the entire evening with solid technique and with palpable enthusiasm. While some may consider the «Israel Philharmonic» a second-tier orchestra, it was on the top of its game for this concert, and it sounded quite wonderful.

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Daniel Schlosberg. Daniel Schlosberg is a freelance writer., New Works and Old In a Mix by Mehta, 01-19-2002, pp B08.

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Spirited, sensual playing by Israel Philharmonic

[David Patrick Stearns](#). [Philadelphia Inquirer](#). Philadelphia, Pa.: [Jan 18, 2002](#). pg. F.17

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MUSIC REVIEW

This first collection of strangers was the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra under Zubin Mehta, and they immediately inspired gratitude in two ways. Most important, they arrived here. If American orchestras feel unsafe touring after Sept. 11, consider what it must be like for the Israel Philharmonic, which is a target of ideological fanatics in the quietest of times. On this tour, security has been so tight at some dates, such as Carnegie Hall earlier this week, that one octogenarian I know had her cane temporarily confiscated.

This is a courageous orchestra. Ditto for Mehta, who has been the chief conductor of players who are said to be so strong-minded that Leonard Bernstein once wrote a poem titled "The Israel Philharmonic Blues."

On a selfish level, the Israelis must also be lauded for trying out what appears to be a promising new configuration in the ongoing experimentation with the hall's acoustics. The canopy over the stage was lower than I'd ever seen it (between the second and third tiers), and it gave a more focused sound. The low-grade ensemble problems that have so far marred the Philadelphia Orchestra weren't to be heard with the Israel Philharmonic, suggesting that the players might be hearing one another more clearly.

In addition, the Israelis displayed subtle gradations in string tone that I've never heard from them elsewhere. In the past, you had to love the Israel Philharmonic for its spirited amalgamation of German and Russian string playing, not for anything sensual. In this performance, you had both.

Finding other things to love took a bit more effort. Mehta exerted his customary skill at keeping a trio of hectic, eventful scores working efficiently. The Symphony No. 6 by the 91-year-old Polish-born, Berlin-trained, Israel-based **Josef Tal** is a find. It's a tough, uncompromising work, dating from 1991, that exploits the sections of the orchestra one by one with dark, contrapuntal abstraction and elemental gravity. It was also a good program companion to the bleak vision of the ballet suite *The Miraculous Mandarin*, a product of Bla Bartk's thorny middle period.

That piece - a hectic evocation of car horns and seedy streets in a scenario about a badly beaten mandarin who falls in love with a prostitute and can die only when that love is returned - was presented by Mehta in a smartly delineated, layered orchestration. Even if you don't like the work (and I do),

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you could at least understand it.

Those same virtues also benefited Richard Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Life), an easy piece to admire but a hard one to like, with its grandiose scenario about the composer as a hero coping with his critics, making war, and declaring peace, all conveyed in melodies more worthy of a TV show's closing credits than the concert stage. Even with concertmaster Ilia Konovalov's welcomingly un sentimental reading of the violin solos, the final 10 minutes flagged, as they almost always do.

Nonetheless, the audience gave the orchestra a standing ovation curiously devoid of clapping. It was maybe the quietest ovation I've ever witnessed. What could that have been about? Maybe Mehta's way of scowling at the audience in ways that dare you to like him?

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The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam appears at the Kimmel Center Feb. 7. Information: 215-893-1999 or www.kimmelcenter.org.

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