

## Joseph Tal: "How My Opera was Born"

One morning, about four years ago, as I was working in the electronic music laboratory of the Hebrew University, the telephone rang and an official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told me that Professor Rolf Lieberman, the director of the Hamburg City Opera, was in the country with a television crew making a documentary film. I was asked to prepare the laboratory for filming, because the next day I was to be interviewed in connection with my work. Exactly at the appointed hour, Professor Lieberman arrived. He was accompanied by his technical crew and our talk immediately began. After a short while, it was necessary to change a reel of tape in the sound track. The room also had

to be aired because the heat had become unbearable, due to the strong spotlights. Therefore, there was a short pause in the filming.

During that pause my opera was born. Professor Lieberman asked me if I would like to write an opera for his theatre. At first I thought that he was asking this question merely out of politeness so I did not react at all. However, during the talk he repeated his invitation, and I promised him, in principle, to accept it. There was not much time for conversation, because the filming had to continue. After a few weeks had gone by, I received an invitation to attend a congress in Venezuela. I made a stopover in Hamburg and there I officially undertook to write a full-length opera. I was given a free hand in the choice of a libretto.

It was clear to me that it was in Israel that I had to find the author for the libretto and that the material had to have a Jewish-Israeli content. I found the Jerusalem writer Israel Eliraz, who has a great deal of stage experience, and we immediately began a series of talks in which I clarified my attitude to opera in the twentieth century. We dealt with ideas and intentions and I suggested a tentative date for submitting the libretto. From that moment intensive work began with Israel Eliraz. It immediately became clear to me that I had found the ideal collaborator for my work. As the subject for the libretto we chose the Talmudic legend about Ashmedai and King Solomon. The story was freely adopted by Eliraz, so that the universal and timeless relationship between good and evil received a framework of political actuality. On the stage there was no preaching but the meaning of the play was quite clear in its shocking and sentimental elements, its tragic and comic tones all mingled together. Naturally, it is impossible today to write an opera with long arias. The libretto must be in tune with the language of modern music, with its most complex structure sound. The unconventional action on the stage requires unconventional musical sounds. The electronic music is therefore an integral part of the opera. All visual and acoustic factors have to constitute one unit and yet leave its dynamism unrestrained.

Acting on this premise, I tried to compose an opera, based on the operatic tradition, yet choosing new paths in accordance with the musical language of our times.