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Going for gold

The Israel Festival celebrates its 50th anniversary later this year, with no shortage of top-notch artists from home and abroad

By **Zipi Shohat**

This spring the annual Israel Festival will celebrate its 50th year running. Outstanding performers from both Israel and abroad, many of whom have appeared at the multidisciplinary arts festival in previous years, are set to grace the stage during the 10-day event.

Artists scheduled to perform at this year's Israel Festival – which will be held between May 23 and June 1 – include opera singer Dame Kiri Te Kanawa (of New Zealand), the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (United States), the Schaubuhne Theater company (Germany), the Vakhtangov Theater troupe (Russia), the Hagen Quartet (Austria), the Florilegium early music ensemble (England), Russian pianists Nikolai Petrov and Alexander Gindin, Panamanian American jazz drummer Billy Cobham, Israeli singer Achinoam Nini (also known as Noa) and Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin with

the Batsheva Dance Company – who will open the festival with a world premiere of a new dance piece.

Before the official opening, two dance performances for the general public will be given in Jerusalem's Zion Square and Safra Square; one by an extraordinary dance troupe from Australia called Strange Fruit, and the other by the Israel Ballet. The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra will also give a performance in Jerusalem's Sacher Park, joined by Israeli artists including singers Rita and David D'Or, the band Hadag Nahash, and the Vertigo and Hora Jerusalem dance troupes. And over in the city's Botanical Garden, a family event is set to take place around the pond – with dance, theater and music performances.

A special exhibition curated by Guy Raz will track the history of the festival in posters and video clips of past performances. There will also be an homage to stage photographers over the years, from Avraham Soskin

to Gadi Dagon.

This year also marks theater director Moshe Kaptan's debut as artistic director of the Israel Festival.

"At a time when popular culture is becoming more and more central to our lives, the role of the festival is becoming essential," says Kaptan. "Along with the popular culture industry – with all the respect due to it – it is also appropriate to give a platform to something that provides an alternative."

While most performances will take place in venues in Jerusalem, the festival will also head to halls in Dimona, Holon and Modi'in. And, for the first time, shows are also scheduled to take place at heritage sites: Tel Hai, Kinneret Courtyard and Kfar Yehoshua in the north; and Yad Mordechai and Gvulot in the south.

The festival budget has increased by 10 percent, as compared to previous years, to NIS 14 million. Funding is provided by the Culture and Sports Ministry (NIS 4 million), the Jerusa-

lem municipality (NIS 2 million), the Jerusalem Foundation (NIS 500,000), and foreign governments (including Germany, Britain, Poland, France and the United States – contributing a combined NIS 1 million). The remainder of the money is self-generated income from sponsorships and ticket sales.

At a press conference on Tuesday, festival director general Yossi Tal-Gan told reporters: "We have reached a point where now the best artists in the world are contacting us at their own initiative to take part in the Israel Festival – in stark contrast to the not-too-distant past, when we were the ones courting them. In its 50th year, the festival can take pride in its prestigious status not only in Israel, but also on the international scene. Despite the wealth of top-notch artists from Israel and abroad, this year – as in other years – we have kept ticket prices affordable."

Tickets to festival events range from NIS 45 to NIS 300.

Theater

Modern spins on old standards

Look out for Schaubuhne's production of 'Hamlet' and Vakhtangov's take on 'Uncle Vanya'

By **Zipi Shohat**

The theater programming set for this year's Israel Festival is indeed intriguing, including modern adaptations of classics alongside visual theater, movement theater and story theater. Still, it could have been possible to schedule productions by more than only three theaters from abroad.

The main attractions will be given by two well-known foreign companies: Germany's Schaubuhne Theater and Russia's Vakhtangov Theater. The former will arrive at the festival with a modern version of Shakespeare's "Hamlet," directed by Thomas Ostermeier; six actors play all of the roles in the production, which makes use of advanced stage technologies.

The famed Vakhtangov Theater is bringing to Israel its production of Anton Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya," directed by Rimas Tuminas; the show will feature Rus-

sian film and stage star Sergei Makovetsky.

An entirely different sort of performance will be presented by Chile's Teatro Cinema, making its very first visit to Israel. This inventive company, considered a trailblazer in the field of visual theater, will put on two productions: "Without Blood," about murder, survival and revenge; and the children's play "The Man Who Fed Butterflies."

The rest of the theater events are Israeli productions, also intriguing as they are outside the mainstream. The Clipa Theater group (a veteran guest at the Israel Festival) will premiere "The Flight of the Dove," based on Yuval Shimoni's book – which tells two stories that take place in parallel in Paris until they eventually meet.

Shahar Pinhas and Shir Goldberg will present "My Father is not a Bird," an adaptation of Bruno Schulz's book "The Cinnamon Shops." The plot is set in Poland, dur-



"Uncle Vanya" being performed by the Vakhtangov Theater company.

ing the period between the two world wars, and tells the story of a boy who becomes insane and turns into a bird.

The Jerusalem Theater will put on "Oedipus 2011," an adaptation of the classic tragedy, and the result of a collaboration between director Yagil Eliraz and compos-

er Iddo Aharony; the show includes five actors, five singers and nine instrumentalists.

The Dimona Theater Lab will present the premiere of "The Cabbage Child," inspired by Jonathan Geffen's book.

All of the above produc-

tions will be performed at the Jerusalem Theater.

For children, look for the performance of the classic show "The Wizard of Oz," a joint production by the Mediatheque and the Beit Lessin Theater, adapted by Daniel Efrat and directed by Gilad Kimchi.



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Classical

Strings attached

Baroque ensembles, a Mahler marathon and a quartet of mostly siblings are part of this summer's crop of classical music picks at the Israel Festival

By Hagai Hitron

The main classical music attraction at the Israel Festival this year will be a chamber concert by the Hagen Quartet from Austria, a veteran ensemble considered to be among the best in the world.

The members of the Hagen will perform a program of Haydn and Bartok – and a sweeping piano quintet by Brahms for the grand finale. For this work they will be joined by pianist Kirill Gerstein, a first prize winner in the Rubinstein competition.

According to the details published thus far about the concert – and this is most peculiar – the string instrumentalists of the Hagen only will perform the first four fugues from Bach's "The Art of the Fugue."

Three of the four members of the Hagen Quartet are siblings – the first violinist Lukas Hagen, violist sister Veronika Hagen and cellist Clemens Hagen. The apples of the Hagen family did not fall far from the tree. Their father was first violinist at the Mozarteum Orchestra in Salzburg.

When they founded the quartet at the start of the 1980s, Clemens was only about 15 years old and the second violin was played by Angelika – another sister, who later left the music business.

For years now the second violin in

the quartet has been played by German violinist Rainer Schmidt. The quartet's concert with Kirill Gerstein will be held on May 24 at the Henry Crown auditorium in Jerusalem.

Another top-notch performance at festival will be the Florilegium ensemble from England, which played the Israel Festival in 2004 to rave reviews.

This is a small baroque group (flute, violin, cello, viola da gamba) directed by flutist Ashley Solomon; at his side are a Croatian violinist, an American cellist, an English harpsichordist and a Japanese violist.

They will participate in a vocal-instrumental concert – performing with them will be Canadian soprano Gillian Keith, who is also an artist well-known to and well-appreciated by the Israeli audience from her performance at the Felicja Blumental Festival here in 2001.

Keith will sing Bach's Cantata 82 ("I Have Enough"), which is usually sung by a bass, and also Pergolesi's "Salve Regina."

The ensemble alone, with its director as soloist, will perform Vivaldi's concerto for flute known as "The Great Mogul."

Also on the program is Bach's Fifth Brandenburg Concerto. The concert will be held on June 5 in the Henry Crown Auditorium.

Another baroque group appearing

in the festival is Finland-based Helsinki Baroque Orchestra, which features two harpsichordists. The two will perform on May 27 at the Eden Tamir (Targ) Center in Ein Karem; the whole ensemble will perform four Bach concerti on May 28 at the Henry Crown Auditorium.

Veteran British-Kiwi singer Kiri Te Kanawa is making a return appearance at the festival (she performed here in 2001) and like then she will be performing in a varied program, this

time accompanied by a piano rather than an orchestra on June 4.

Te Kanawa, 66, was for many years a top soprano, with a wonderful lyric voice, both soft and piercing. Scheduling her recital for the gigantic hall at Binyanei Hauma has presumably been done out of economic considerations but certainly from the artistic perspective this huge space is liable to challenge her.

Also in the festival: A Mahler marathon on June 3 in Henry Crown, an event led by Gil Shohat (as moderator, pianist and adapter), with the participation of singers Bracha Kol and Sharon Rostorf and Israeli instrumentalists.

The YMCA will host recitals on June 4 by pianists from among the winners at the upcoming international Rubinstein competition to be held in Tel Aviv right before the festival and another piano event with the Russian piano duo Nikolai Petrov and Alexander Gindin on May 30 at the Henry Crown.

Other festival events include a special, long, multicultural performance combining extracts from Handel's oratorio, "Israel in Egypt" and eastern music on the same theme composed by Yair Dallal, with the participation of instrumentalists from abroad playing Western instruments and Israeli musicians on Eastern instruments.



Pianist Nikolai Petrov