

No Compromising on Classical Music

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Most of the lessons and concerts at the annual Tel Hai Master Classes are free and open to the public.



PHOTO: COURTESY

The annual Tel Hai International Piano Master Classes, which bear the name of its co-founder, the late pianist Marina Bondarenko, take place at Ben-Gurion University in the Negev from August 5 – 24. Featuring individual lessons, open master classes and student concerts and several competitions, the rich program culminates with the traditional gala concert at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art (August 23).

“I’ve taken upon myself the mission of bringing classical music to the wider audiences in the US, where I spend most of my time,” says Alon Goldstein, one of the teachers at the Tel Hai Master Classes.

One of the finest and most successful Israeli pianists, Goldstein is living in Washington, D.C., and has an impressive globe-trotting career but never misses an opportunity to perform or to teach in Israel. A veteran faculty

member of the course, he speaks to The Jerusalem Post by phone from France, where he is participating in another summer course for young proteges.

“Just as we eat bread and drink water every day, so classical music is food for our soul,” says Goldstein, “I often perform at schools, hospitals and retirement homes. Amazingly enough, I find that in the places where there is awareness of music and of culture, the society is far more pleasant, developed, interesting and, yes, simply more clever.”

So who is “afraid” of classical music?

There is a common belief that classical music is elitist and that in order to reach wider audiences, it needs to ‘go down’ a level. This results in all kinds of “concerts in jeans” concerts with a cigarette and a glass of beer, and I find it hard to accept. Music, classical music, is beyond day-to-day matters. It is not elevator music. It took geniuses to create something that has survived for hundreds of years. So it requires special concentration. It is like reading a book – you leave the here and now, the reality that is full of noise, and are taken to another reality. Music is spiritual.

How can one find one’s way into the world of classics?

I totally agree that for modern man this is quite difficult. While on TV the pictures are changing every second, to sit in a concert hall and look for half an hour at a pianist who almost does not move is a challenge. We seem to have lost our ability to concentrate. Yet there are so many lecture concerts, especially in Israel, for every taste and for every level.

People who present them, such as Astrit Balzan, Gil Shohat or Orit Wolf, are extremely clever. They are looking for the ways to bring music to people without compromising.

They don’t offer beer and don’t try to be funny but rather impart important knowledge to the audience. It is always good to go with a friend with whom you can share your emotional experience.

Coming here to the Tel Hai Master Classes, what do you want to give to the students?

I try to teach them to teach themselves, to ask questions, to shift the subconscious

to the conscious.

They often say that it's impossible to explain music by words, but I still demand explanations from my students. Not 'I like this and I don't like that,' but I want them to be specific and aware of what they are doing. I try to give them the tools that allow them to conduct a dialogue with the piece and with the composer.

*The Tel Hai Master Classes take place August 5-22. Most of the activities are free and open to the public. For more information and a full program:
www.masterclasses.org.il*

Alon Goldstein joins the course on August 13. He will give a special concert with the Israel Chamber Orchestra at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art on August 22.