

## Arts

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### Global repertoire inspires international ensemble at iPalpiti Festival

BY RICK SCHULTZ

Among the pleasures of the summer music season is the annual iPalpiti Festival of International Laureates, now in its 15th year. iPalpiti (the name translates loosely as “the heartbeats”) is a string orchestra of 28 young professionals from Israel, Tatarstan, Azerbaijan, Norway and 14 other countries. Thirteen concerts are being performed in the Los Angeles area through July 29, but the grand finale at Walt Disney Concert Hall (July 28) has, over the years, become a much-anticipated gala-style affair.

Inspired by support from the great violinist Yehudi Menuhin, iPalpiti was founded in 1997 by the violinist, teacher and conductor Eduard Schmieder, along with his wife, Laura (also a violinist). The couple, formerly refuseniks—Jews living in the then-Soviet Union and not allowed to emigrate—finally made their way to America in 1979.

Eduard is a professor of violin and artistic director for strings at Temple University’s Boyer College of Music and Dance, and he programs and conducts the music for the Disney Hall concert, while Laura curates the chamber events.

During an interview at a coffee house in Westwood, it also became clear that Laura takes care of nearly everything else. Musicians from around the world were about to arrive. Her cell phone rang—a much-needed donor’s check was almost in hand. The printer of iPalpiti’s elaborate program book showed up with questions and a proofreading deadline. Throughout, Eduard maintained the calm focus of a charismatic and soulful old-world Russian Jew.

“It is not possible to be an internationalist without being proud of your own people first,” Eduard said. “Besides my family, two things are important: my Jewish heritage and classical music.”

The international aspect is the heart, as it were, of iPalpiti. Last year’s multicultural Disney Hall audience was delighted by Syrian-born composer Kareem Roustom’s whimsical “Three Klezmer Dances” for violin, tambourine and strings. And this year, the Schmieders are featuring the 23-year-old Arab-Israeli virtuoso flute player Maron Anis Khoury.

At 20, Khoury was the youngest player appointed to the second flute position of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra in New York. When Eduard asked him how he would like to be featured in the iPalpiti program book, Khoury, capturing the inclusive spirit of the orchestra, said, “I am an Arab, I am a Christian, and I want to be featured as an Israeli.”

“He is a spectacular talent,” Eduard said. “He is living proof that everyone is given an opportunity to succeed. He’s an Israeli citizen, but, more important, he feels it.”

Khoury has performed with Simon Rattle, James Levine and Christoph Eschenbach as well as with Daniel Barenboim’s West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, an ensemble of young Arab and Israeli musicians co-founded in 1999 by Barenboim and the late Palestinian-born literary scholar Edward Said.

“I grew up an Israeli,” Khoury, born in the small village of Tarshiha, said. “You didn’t feel left out. My friends, my music teachers—all of them were Jews. It’s a great culture, and I’ve learned so much.”

One work Khoury will be performing—on July 22 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art—is German-Danish composer Friedrich Kuhlau’s Flute Quintet No. 2. It’s a piece close to Laura Schmieder’s heart—she performed it in the 1980s with Julius Baker, one of the most highly regarded American orchestral flute players of his time.

Khoury said it’s a difficult four-movement score with exciting technical runs for the flute right from the start. “I had two weeks to learn it,” he said.

But Khoury’s most moving contribution to the string orchestra’s festival may come when he performs in the premiere of composer Sharon Farber’s “Only a Book,” six variations on a Jewish theme. The July 20 concert takes place at the Temple of the Arts at the Saban Theatre.

The first work commissioned by iPalpiti, with a matching grant from the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, “Only a Book” was inspired by the poem of an unknown author suggesting different periods of struggle in the history of the Jewish people.

Farber, who is music director of Temple of the Arts in Beverly Hills, has written for the Los Angeles Master Chorale and is also a film composer, with credits including the powerful score to the 2011 documentary about the persistence of anti-Semitism, “Unmasked: Judeophobia.”

The highly rhythmic fourth variation, “Rage and Reflection,” introduces Khoury on flute. “Can a flute express rage and confusion?” Farber asked. This variation, which also features a percussionist, becomes more reflective, leading into the next, “Rebirth.”

“I wanted to tell the story of the Jewish people,” the Israeli-born Farber said. “There is so much to tell. As an Israeli, you take your Judaism for granted. When you live somewhere else, you realize your heritage is so important. You become even more attached to your roots.”

Farber said she’s fortunate to have Eduard Schmieder conducting the score. A remarkably sensitive conductor who elicits honest emotion from his players, he is known for conjuring a golden string tone and finely blended sonorities.

Schmieder has carefully chosen the Disney Hall program, which includes works by Handel and Bach in imaginative orchestrations. There’s also Schoenberg’s “Transfigured Night,” which Schmieder calls “a great piece based on primitive poetry.” And a rarity: Paul Hindemith’s comic “Minimax,” a 1923 parody of marches, polkas and bad playing.

“It’s a criticism of militarism, with wrong notes and bad ensemble,” Schmieder said.

Fun aside, what matters most to Schmieder is heart. “If we do not move audiences emotionally, we will lose classical music. Great music is about love and humanism. That is in our heritage. It started with Torah. We are compelled to introduce justice to people. I try to do it through music as much as I can.”

For more information and tickets, call 310-205-0511 or visit [www.ipalpiti.org](http://www.ipalpiti.org). Disney Hall concert tickets are also available from Ticketmaster, with special deals Me+3 and 2 for 1.

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