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הודית החודשה של דרוזומיכאל הורשל - מנצח ומנהל אומנות - 48020						

Lest we forget
 NJK performs 'forgotten music' by Jewish composers



Forgotten music finds new life

Conductor Michael Hurshell and his New Jewish Chamber Philharmonic Dresden are here in Israel to perform the works of Jewish composers whose music careers – and often lives – were destroyed by the Nazis

• By BARRY DAVIS

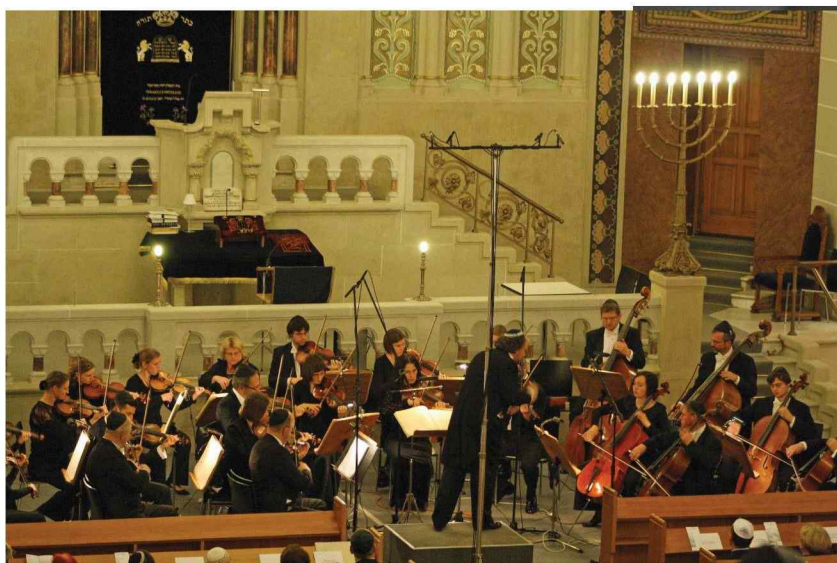
In addition to the astronomical loss of life and the immense cruelty which the Jewish people suffered during the Holocaust, the Nazi regime left the world bereft of the work of numerous Jewish artists, right across the disciplinary spectrum.

Michael Hurshell has, for some years now, been determined to do his bit to make the world aware of the work of Jewish composers who either perished or were persecuted in the Holocaust. To that end he founded the New Jewish Chamber Philharmonic Dresden – (NJK) which, as the ensemble's website puts it, sets out "to present to our audience works by Jewish composers, or composers of Jewish descent, who were persecuted, banned from performance, exiled or murdered in the camps by the Nazis. This forgotten cultural heritage contains many musical riches, works entirely neglected or at best very rarely performed on German concert stages. We wish to preserve these compositions and prevent their being completely forgotten."

The NJK came into existence in 2007 with the inaugural concert taking place at Dresden's New Synagogue, on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of its consecration. That was around three years after the idea for the orchestra first crystallized in Hurshell's mind.

"I was conducting a concert in Germany, it was the Bratislava [Slovak] Philharmonic, and we were playing some music written in the '30s and '40s by Jews who fled from Europe and landed in Hollywood and wound up working there," recalls Dresden resident Hurshell, who was born in Vienna to an American opera singer couple. "I noticed that the audience just had no idea who these people were. They didn't know the names – Franz Waxman and Max Steiner, and they vaguely knew who Korngold was, but not really."

The latter, Erich W. Korngold to give the Viennese composer his full titular due, features in the NJK's debut foray to this country which takes in concerts at the Jerusalem Music Centre (8 p.m., November 10) and the Israel Conservatory of Music in Tel Aviv (8:30 p.m., November 12). The Korngold work is Symphonic Serenade Op. 39, which will be performed for the first time in Israel. The rest of the program includes two movements from the Quartet in A major by Alexander Zemlinsky, the Israeli premiere of Miklos Rózsa's *Andante for String Orchestra* and Mendelssohn's Concerto for Violin in D minor, with Sergei Ostrovsky as soloist. Zemlinsky was born Catholic although the family later



THE NJK performing at Berlin's Great Synagogue. (K. Hirsch)

converted to Judaism – his maternal grandfather was a Sephardic Jew. He was working in Berlin when Hitler rose to power, initially fleeing to Vienna and, in 1938, to the United States. Sadly, his pre-war reputation in Germany and Austria did not count for much in his adopted country.

Meanwhile, Hungarian-born German-educated Rózsa, whose mother was Jewish, happened to be working in France when the Nazis took over in Germany, and he subsequently made a living writing movie soundtracks, initially in Britain and later in Hollywood. And while, of course, Jewish-born Mendelssohn died long before the Holocaust, and was also baptized at the age of seven, his works were banned by the Nazi regime.

While the likes of Steiner and Rózsa did pretty well for themselves over in Tinsel Town – Steiner was the first recipient of the Golden Globe Award for Best Original Score and Rózsa garnered no less than three Oscar Awards, including for the soundtrack for 1959 blockbuster *Ben Hur* – Hurshell wanted their more serious, symphonic, work to also get a decent airing.

"I decided it was time to do something about getting these composers' better known, not so much for the film music but for the concert hall music which these composers wrote, and kept on writing, and was completely forgotten after they were outlawed [by the Nazis]."

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'I DECIDED it was time to do something about getting these composers better known, not so much for the film music but for the concert hall music which these composers wrote, and kept on writing, and was completely forgotten after they were outlawed [by the Nazis],' says German conductor Michael Hurshell. (Steffen Giersch)

Three years went by before Hurshell could put his plan into tangible, audible, form.

"We got a group of musicians together and we have been trying to do these works as often as we can," he says, adding that the time lapse between conception and implementation of the idea was not only down to financial considerations.

"Even musicians from first-rate orchestras, if you put music in front of them that they've played or heard, or really heard of the person who wrote it, you can't just prepare a concert of music like that as if, for example, you were playing Schubert. It takes quite a long preparation and work."

Naturally, one might expect Jewish musicians to be more amenable to the idea of working with Hurshell's programming but it seems they weren't that easy to come by.

"I wanted to see if there were enough professionally trained orchestra musicians, somewhere in the Jewish communities, but there weren't," he notes. "When the Jews came from the Soviet Union, in the 90s, those who were professionally trained musicians mostly went to places like Berlin or Frankfurt, so there was no professional basis of musicians to build up this orchestra."

But help eventually came from outside the fold.

"Mostly it was the [non-Jewish] German musicians who really became interested in playing this music and they kept on coming back to do another project, and now we have played close to 60 concerts of this music - the forgotten music."

There are some odd compromises along the way.

"We also play Mendelssohn because you want the audience to recognize one name, at least."

Today the NJK includes three German Jews and two

Israelis out of a full complement of 23 players.

Hurshell says he is particularly delighted to include the Korngold work in the Israeli concert repertoire.

"I have found out, because I talked to someone at Korngold's publisher in Germany, and they told me that the Symphonic Serenade has never been played in Israel. I feel a little bit like we are bringing this music home."

Incidentally, the work was written in 1948.

The conductor notes that Korngold's fall from grace was solely a result of anti-Semitism.

"He never thought his music would be played again because, in the 1940s and early 1950s, everything in the concert world was more toward avant garde. But, today, audiences really love the emotional content and qualities of the music. And they don't get much of an opportunity to hear this stuff."

Hurshell wants the world to stand up and appreciate the quality of these forgotten composers' pre-war works.

"They were basically punished twice," he explains. "They first had to flee for their lives, from Europe, and then after the war they were condemned for the 'inferior work' they did in Hollywood, which they did in order to make a living. That is one of the saddest things. Korngold tried to return to Vienna and continue his work there, but it was a complete fiasco. It happened to Waxman and others too. They should have been praised because they were so well trained that, when they started writing Hollywood music in the '30s and '40s, it raised the level of film music to very great heights. But the opposite happened. They were looked down on."

Hopefully, the NJK's concerts here will help to give the composers their due in Israel, and lead to more appearances by the Dresden-based ensemble over here.

For tickets and more information: Jerusalem Music Centre - (02) 624-1041, Israel Conservatory of Music in Tel Aviv - (03) 546-6228.