The harp to survive by Julia Rovinsky

Even for the harp - the most royal instrument in Israel - the last months have been difficult. Cultural life has ceased to exist, the sounds of music have gone silent.

With the concerts cancelled, contests and festivals stopped, all that has been left to musicians is music itself. Just pure music - nobody to play for and with nobody to appreciate your ability to express it.

Sometimes a long tete-a-tete with the love of your life can be quite a challenge.

Finally I got the time I never had before to play for myself, to pursue a new approach and to think of what I had been doing all my life. I started to work on new arrangements, learned new pieces which had not even been intended to be played on the harp and made several new recordings.

The teaching became a nightmare. Teaching music online is absurd, a contradiction in itself. With all my respect for new technologies, the quality of sound in Zoom, Skype, etc. is a disaster.

You can't hear the nuances and dynamics of the sounds; you have to ask your students to record the piece and send it to you; then to listen to it carefully several times trying to articulate every note and send it back with your remarks; then again to return to online dialogues… The lessons are not a pleasure any more, they take much more time and suck out your energy, and the results are obscure.

In mid May the iron curtain of our quarantine started to lift and we were allowed to teach face to face. At the end of June, the concerts were renewed and for three delightful weeks we were allowed to play for the public. But with the second wave of the pandemic in Israel, our life came to a standstill once again; nobody knows for how long.

So I started to find consolation in reminiscences. What a great time we had last November! In my Israel Philharmonic Orchestra together with our educational program “The Keynote” we held Harp Day during which all the harpists of the country from youngest students to professional musicians took part in the concerts. You could have heard 80 harps in one day. It started in the morning with the concerts in the foyer, proceeded to the bigger concerts on several stages, solos and ensembles. And culminated in the great event of the day: The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra playing the first pmovement of Hendel’s concerto with fifty harps on the main stage! Can you imagine this? Fifty harps and The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra!

Of course we had been preparing for this for a long time. The teachers adapted versions for their students according to their level. They had rehearsed in small groups in different towns and then finally all together - the teachers and the students - on the big stage together! And after that, still full of the excitement of performing, they came down and joined the audience and enjoyed the gala concert of one of the best orchestras in the world. Among the soloists were not only the prominent musicians from Israel but also the winner of The 19th International Harp Contest in Israel, Youing Chen, who came from China to share her talent with our audience.

We performed the Bach Concert with 4 harps (instead of 4 fortepianos), Concert for Harp and Flute by Mozart; we played "The Ball" from Symphonie Fantastique by Berlioz with 6 harps and the Orchestra; and finished the festival by performing “Baroque Flamenco” by Deborah Henson- Conant. How happy we were on that day!

Now we are preparing for a new event: the 4th national Contest and Festival for young Israeli harpists will be, hopefully, held in December. This time there will be 4 different categories:

1.Up to the age of 18 - lever harps

2.Up to the age of 18 - pedal harps

3.Up to the age of 25 – advanced students on pedal harps

4. “The World music with the harp” - without any limitations of age, style, harp models, solos or ensembles, with dancing or singing, video art …..

During the Festival there will be concerts, master classes, lectures, exhibition of music instruments and the joy of music!

We need harp to survive. Music has to survive. For us music means harp.



