

The here and now

Renowned Swiss musician Ernesto Molinari performs some complex contemporary pieces for clarinet and ensemble

• By MAXIM REIDER

“What’s the difference between a classical clarinet player and one who performs a contemporary repertoire?” asks renowned Swiss musician Ernesto Molinari, who returns to Israel to perform with the Israel Contemporary Players Ensemble, this time as a part of Culturescapes – the season of Swiss culture in Israel. “When the former comes on stage, everybody in the concert hall knows him, while the latter knows everybody in the hall!”

Despite the sad truth behind the joke, Molinari has never hesitated to perform contemporary music for clarinet, which he adores for its possibilities. “In fact, the instrument, which the general public recognizes as the clarinet, is just a member of a large clarinet family, which includes contrabass clarinet, bass clarinet, basset horn and others, and that is the wonderful thing about it. The sound of the clarinet is rich and flexible, which allows you to express yourself in a variety of genres – classical, jazz, modern, folk, klezmer, whatever,” he says.

“There is a rich and beautiful classical repertoire for clarinet,” he continues, “and I always enjoy performing it, but all this music was written long ago. Yet as a musician and just as a person, I want to be involved into something that happens here and now. Performing music written by a contemporary composer is a totally different experience. You can discuss it, to realize how he or she really wants the piece to sound and also, together you can research the expressive possibilities of the instrument, to create new things.”

Molinari certainly knows what he’s talking about. For many years he was a member of one of the leading contemporary music ensembles, The Klangforum Wien Chamber Orchestra. As such, he performed many world premieres of the pieces, often



classical music

composed especially for him.

“It was a nice time,” he recollects. “Almost every concert was a premiere. Playing contemporary music is about trying to be a musician in the real world.”

But back to the opening joke – the audiences is not always enthusiastic about contemporary music. Why so?

“Granted, for the public it is far more difficult to understand contemporary music because it is new and unfamiliar. It is not like going to a regular concert, where you can come and relax. With contemporary music, you really have to listen if you want to enjoy it. It is like a new food – to learn to enjoy it, you first need to try it, and quite often people are too skeptical to even try it.”

Molinari reveals that on the eve of his performance in Israel, he received numerous e-mails urging him not to come here, for political reasons. “I think this is an absurd. I totally disagree with the idea of a cultural boycott,” says Molinari. “Music is one of very few things that can unite people.”

In Israel, Molinari will perform *La chute d'Icare* for clarinet and ensemble, and *Time and Motion*, a study for bass clarinet solo, both by British composer Brian Ferneyhough, “one of the fathers of complexity, which really is a new language,” he says.

The program also features pieces by Tzvi Avni and John Adams.

November 5 at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and November 6 at Mishkenot Sha'ananim in Jerusalem. For more information: www.ensemble21.org.il. For reservations: (03) 682-2403