

Governors, Guests, and Gourmet Delights for Both Body and Soul: JAMD BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING: May 2019

Pamela Peled

There's a tipping point familiar to every safari-goer: you're in the jeep, eyes peeled for a lioness and her cub, or a leopard lurking in an Acacia tree. And suddenly something clicks: you never want to go home. You long to chill under the hot African sun forever; drinking sundowners as the veld darkens beyond the camp, rising at dawn to feast the eyes once more.

Donors and Friends hit that safari-moment pretty early at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance's annual Board of Governors Meeting in May, although the Big Five don't roam Israel's capital. Our feast was one of bone-chillingly beautiful music and movement, played and danced against the backdrop of the most

thrilling and contentious city in the world. At the inaugural Welcome Reception at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as Governors and guests were briefed on Israel's cultural diplomacy, the unique sounds of a Bach violin sonata rang out on a JAMD student's mandolin. The opening bars of three days of endless food (and wine) for body and soul slammed everyone between the eyes; this party should go on for the rest of our lives.

From the private tour of the Shrine of the Book, where Professor Michael Melzer, considered the father of artistic recorder playing in Israel, and Yael Shimshoni-Melzer dazzled with variations and duets (at one point playing on two recorders in one mouth!), to the festive dinner and opening ceremony with the joyous Joshua Tuttnauer Ankor Choir and Madrasa Andalusian Music Ensemble, the first day flew by on the wings

of a song. JAMD awarded Adv. Hillel Ashkenazi an Honorary Trusteeship; Maestro Pinchas Zukerman, Author David Grossman, and Composer Betty Olivero received Honorary Fellow Awards; and Nevenka Gritz was inscribed in the Academy's Golden Book for her generosity.



photo: Dina Polivkin



photo: Dina Polivkin

Everything intersects in the Holy City; music and dance, too, crescendo into the complex cadences of Jerusalem. Nevenka, living in Paris, had never heard of JAMD until her only son came to study philosophy in Jerusalem. David, who was twenty-four, was a gifted violinist; when he was tragically murdered in a terrorist attack in the Hebrew University cafeteria his parents donated his violin to the Academy. That was the beginning of a close and enduring friendship.

Monday morning began with coffee with the Deans (and sticky buns, in case of lingering hunger after a King David breakfast.) Speaker David Grossman, in measured tones, banged on our brains as he intertwined engaging anecdotes with hard-hitting messages. Mass-media, he claimed, turns people into a mass, transforming us into thinking alike with similar feelings. Books demand personal attention; it's creativity that keeps humans human. Israel is awash in human creativity in all fields.



photo: Dina Polivkin

Grossman shared the pain of losing a son in battle; such tragedies leave one paralyzed. Slowly one has to learn to live again; writing (and reading) books can help you feel happy, once more, to be part of the world. Books, like music, have a melody; they demand personal attention and touch the infinite human potential.



photo: Ziv Hadash

Awash in deep contemplation, the group floated onto a bus for a breathtaking trip through the hills of Jerusalem to the village of Abu Gosh. There, in the Church of Our Lady of the Ark, a most strange and wonderful miracle: unexpectedly the angels adorning the ceiling opened their mouths; in the voices of crystals clarifying sang Mendelssohn to us. Conducted by JAMD's own Maestro, Stanley Sperber. The divine sounds were finally traced to JAMD's Chamber Choir, who hypnotized us with A Cappella Liturgical magic, and even a bit of Bernstein. As always, there's the eternal note of people botching up beauty: the almost-impossibly gorgeous "Sing to the Lord," was written by Hugo Distler, a German non-Jewish composer who, forced to join the Nazi party, committed suicide in 1942. One wonders if he still believed that the Lord "has done marvelous things."

Entranced with the music and the musings, the audience drifted outside to a mythological picnic, set out under ancient olive and pine trees, framing a view straight from heaven on a hill.

It was a Hatikva-moment deluxe.



photo: Dina Polivkin

And then, just when it would be safe to say that life cannot get any better, Maestro Pinchas Zukerman shared his teaching skills with the masses in a Master Class with three blissful JAMD violin students. Armed with a new appreciation for the tiniest touch of the bow, and fortified with yet another festive dinner (this time in the famed Grill Room of the KD), we were ready for the Wowest of the Wows – a Gala concert (and family affair) with Zukerman on Violin, wife Amanda Forsyth on Cello, and daughter, Soprano Arianna Zukerman with the JAMD Chamber Orchestra at the Henry Crown Symphony Hall. Offenbach, Mozart, and Vivaldi almost sneaked into the selfies Forsyth snapped on stage.



photo: Avi Elbaz

Day 3 was divided between Governors and Guests. While Governors gathered at the Academy to attend to business and strategic discussions, guests got a brief rundown of the last seventeen thousand years or so of our history. The Rockefeller Museum, housed in a classic colonial structure that transports the visitor straight into elegant times of awe, provided more breathless moments. Professor Uzi Dahari talked us through the history of the building itself; quite as fascinating as the exhibits. A skull from 13 000 years ago provides evidence of brain surgery! Remnants of El-Aksa Mosque, destroyed in the earthquake of 1929, reveal that cedar wood from 5th Century Christian churches was used as lintels in the mosque – one side extolls Jesus; flip the board and Muhammad is the go-to God.

Earthquakes have unexpected consequences: that of 747 C.E. ironically preserved some fine art. The curvaceous nearly-nudes of Hirsham's Palace, built when Islam was young, would surely have been hacked to pieces by latter-day extremists. At least the earthquake left some body-parts intact.

And then, in a graceful courtyard, leaning against walls pockmarked from bullets fired between Israeli paratroopers and Jordanian troops in 1967, Mor Karbasi and Yaara Beeri rocked us right into a smoky casaba in Morocco. Karbasi, a striking Jerusalemite with Persian and Moroccan roots, sings in Ladino, Haketiah, Spanish, Hebrew, Moroccan Arabic and the Berber language, accompanied by Beeri on the Kemenche. Paradise by an Ottoman-looking pool.



photo: The Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance

Reluctantly we wrenched ourselves away, travelling across time and the city to a private tour of Anna Ticho's House and a rousing concert by the JAMD Arab Music Ensemble. This Oriental Music Division has produced a very significant proportion of Israel's finest performers/interpreters of Arab music: we got a sampling of the Qanun and Buzouk and the Oud and more before yet another sumptuous lunch.



photo: Hadar Alfasi

The YMCA Building, designed by Empire State Building architect Arthur Harmon, was the site of the Dance component of the day. To the soundtrack of inhabitants of Jerusalem discussing whether or not they feel safe in their city ("Of course I do!" / "Not always..."), dancers spun across the courtyard, and motioned us to follow them into the bowels of the hotel. There, in the now-defunct first swimming pool in the city, dancers brought seven original works to life, all inspired by the diverse communities and narratives of Jerusalem.

A JAMD / Kahn Theatre Co-Production of Natan Alterman's songs at the iconic Ottoman Turkish Khan Theatre rounded off the beautiful day with a cheeky-but-loving look at the burgeoning Israeli character from the Tel-Aviv Bauhaus period and beyond: the joy, the style, the wars, the grief and the ebullience that makes Israel and its music so unique.



photo: Ziv Hadash

And as the moon rose over Jerusalem: one last bash beneath David's Citadel and the stoned city walls. By now, feeling much like Roman gods, we vacuumed up another gourmet feast, accompanied by a Jazz Ensemble that jammed us right up over the ramparts, like Autumn Leaves. A surprise appearance by youngsters looking smaller than the saxophones they were blowing blew us back to reality and goodbyes. Donors and Friends departed, tired but happily humming a heartfelt refrain: Next Year, (Again), in Jerusalem.