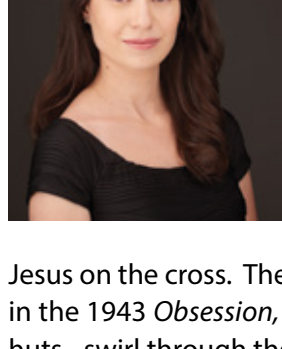


Gems from JAMD

Pamela Peled



Faculty Focus: Dr. Talia Amar

Dr. Amar is a JAMD graduate. She studied composition with the late Mark Kopytman, Ari ben Shabetai and Yinam Leaf. In New York she studied with Mario Davidovsky at Mannes and then did her Ph.D. at Brandeis. JAMD offered her a position while she was still working on her doctoral dissertation. "She is so bright and promising, we wanted her back before she was approached by other institutions," says President Leaf.

Obsessions and Other Ways to Have Fun

In 1943, as Europe burned, Marc Chagall produced a series of paintings depicting a Jewish Jesus on the cross. The crucified Jew, symbolizing the suffering of Chagall's race during the war, lies green and massive in the 1943 *Obsession*, as the artist's trademark fragments - his flying family, candelabras, ox-drawn carts and wooden huts - swirl through the vivid colours on the canvas.

Like Chagall, Dr. Talia Amar, Israeli award-winning composer, pianist and Faculty Member of JAMD, starts her creative process by focusing on a fragment. Although Amar is working in another century, in a country that Jews could only dream about during the Holocaust, her will to tell a story, to create a context, is the same as the painter from Vitebsk in Belarus. "Composing *Obsession* was like grasping the view that appears gradually when you are skiing," she explains, "piece by piece until it opens up into the whole picture." In this hugely acclaimed work, in which she references Chagall and his vibrant, tumultuous hues, Amar scrutinizes fragments - pitch D, pizzicato, or a percussive element - and only at the end does the first violin play the entire theme. The effect is hypnotic; the listener is drawn irresistibly into the music. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fh-B_cdOdKs

Amar, a petite young mother of two, grew up sitting under a piano and listening to her Parisian mom and granny teach others to play. Amar's parents made Aliya before she was born, but she often visited her musical grandparents who stayed in France. Her family encouraged her to learn another instrument - the violin, perhaps - but the ebony and ivory keyboard fascinated her from the start. At six she began lessons; at sixteen she momentarily considered studying medicine, but the pull of the music was too strong.

Her composing career nearly didn't happen: at fourteen her teacher asked her to write a song and "I just couldn't do it," recalls Amar, with a laugh. "My mother did the homework for me." But the composition teacher somehow spotted a spark; she sat the youngster down at the piano and told her to improvise. By the next year Amar was writing original music.

And winning prizes: the Prime Minister award 2018, The Acum award 2019, the Tel Aviv Rosenblum Prize for Promising Young Artist in 2016, the Klon Award for young composers granted by the Israeli Composers League, and more. At Brandeis University, where she earned her PhD, (and received the Sandy Fisher Prize for Exceptional Achievement in the Creative Arts), she was the recipient of the Irving G. Fine Fellowship in Music Composition for both 2016-17 and 2017-18. Her music is performed in countries around the world including France, Canada, Brussels, Norway, Australia, Philippines, Germany, USA, England, Greece, Italy and Israel.

Part of Amar's appeal is that she so perfectly harnesses "what oft was thought, / but ne'er so well expressed," as Alexander Pope defines 'true wit.' In other words she has the ability to make memorable that which everyone already knows to be true; her melodies resonate deep within our minds. In "Deus Ex Machina" her duo with Soprano and Phone a cell phone and a singer compete over who is the more 'complete.' The phone, held in the singer's hand, starts with a shushing sound - "shhhhhhhhhhh." This white noise is interrupted by the human trilling about things technology just can't replicate: weather, fire, giving birth (Amar was pregnant when she composed the piece.) The phone tries desperately to duplicate these living emotions, and fails, convincingly. It's music with a message, and more. It's fun, it's clever and it's melodic; it moves us and makes us smile. Take a listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U19rfJIXtkc>



Talia Amar

photo: Florin Galin

In "Muta-Morphosis" Amar draws on Turkish/British artist Murat Germen's hauntingly beautiful series of compressed cities, floating over mountains and perched on river banks. Try staring at these lyrical pictures to find a single perspective; due to the reducing of panoramic images on one axis it's an impossible task. The multiplicity of perspectives springs from how "the city seems to collapse and partially to liquefy: skyscrapers and bridges are bent out of shape, become soft and amorphous," according to Stephan Berg, the director of the Kunstmuseum in Bonn. Amar's composition has a flute playing the part of the small buildings; electronic music booms in to represent the big. The relationship between the different urban spaces is sometimes clear - a cadenza where the flute plays alone - but mostly blur into each other just as they do in Germen's amorphous works. On the one hand magical, on the other demanding hard work of the listener: it urges us to think about universal issues like existence itself. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZSsdz4vnDs>

Amar's own existence is pretty hectic at the moment: Corona captivity has allowed her creativity to fly. She's currently collaborating with Israeli writer Eshkol Nevo on a political piece - setting his repetitive chant about the weekly Saturday night demonstrations to a musical dialogue with a piano. Since April she's composed a mind-boggling seven pieces, including an orchestral piece for the Jerusalem Symphony, a Piano composition for a client in New York, and a commission for the Ensemble Mendelssohn in Brussels. In between she finds time to be a mother to her daughters (four and fifteen months), a wife to her musician/high tech husband, teach composition at JAMD, and practice her own piano playing.

Which, by the way, does she enjoy more - being a pianist, or composing? - "It's like asking do you love your mother or your father more," Amar replies, flashing a gorgeous smile.

Talia Amar - another JAMD gem. Watch this space for more!

Spreading the Word: JAMD Institute for External Studies

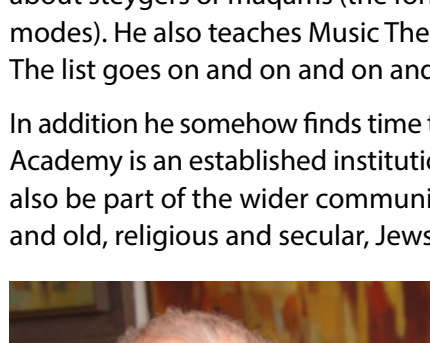
"Ooops," texted Dr. Avi Bar-Eitan, an hour or so before our scheduled Zoom. "My wife seems to be going into labour. Not sure I'll be able to chat about the External Courses today."

"Go, go, go," I replied. "We'll reschedule or scrap the newsletter. All is good."

I didn't yet know Dr. Bar-Eitan. Two hours later he called. "Home," he announced. "False alarm but we're on high alert. Let's do the interview now; I'll be busy next week."

We fired up our laptops and met on our screens; he - totally focused and to the point, me - feeling as if I was having contractions every two minutes. Maybe that ability to be so present at all times and at such short notice is what allows Bar-Eitan to manage the multitudinous items on his daily agenda: he's simultaneously a composer, arranger, conductor, researcher, and lecturer. An expert on musicology and ethnomusicology, he can clarify any questions you might always have had about steygers or maqams (the former a very early mode of Eastern European music; the latter traditional Arab musical modes). He also teaches Music Theory, Harmony, Counterpoint, Acoustics, Israeli Popular Music, and Music Technology. The list goes on and on and on and on.

In addition he somehow finds time to head the Institute of External Studies at JAMD. "Look," he says, "our Music and Dance Academy is an established institution that has educated generations of composers and performers, but it's important to also be part of the wider community: Jerusalem, Israel, the world. We are trying to convey culture to everyone: young and old, religious and secular, Jews, Muslims and Christians - and now through Zoom our reach has expanded."

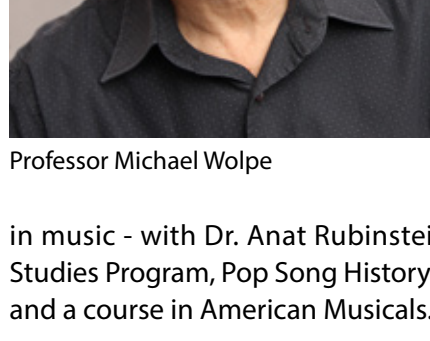


Professor Michael Wolpe

Professor Michael Wolpe, acclaimed composer and fabled lecturer who serves as the advisor of the Institute's program, emphasizes this connection with the general population: his frontal lectures on the history of music, biographies of great composers, the art of listening to music and ideas behind the melodies draw grandparents, grandchildren, and everyone in between. Some external students are so excited by what they learn that they go on to complete full degrees at the Academy.

The External Studies Program has a very rich syllabus: core studies include Theory, Solfege, Harmony, Composition and Arrangement and Improvisation in the Baroque style. Dr. Arnon Palti's popular Jazz and Jazz Harmony lectures are scheduled for next semester. Other frontal lectures include Viva la Diva - Women and Feminism in music - with Dr. Anat Rubinstein, the Activities Coordinator of the External Studies Program, Pop Song History from Elvis to Radiohead with Gittit Perlmutter and a course in American Musicals.

Most teachers are faculty of the Academy, although guest lecturers are also welcome, especially women and young professionals who can jumpstart their careers through this forum. And not all lectures are frontal: practical workshops include Yaki Levi's Blues course and improvisations in Jazz, a Klezmer bring-your-own-instrument happening, and a Baroque session where participants play recorders and cellos.



Yaki Levi

In addition private lessons with JAMD teachers and high level students are available at any level - you can take your first piano lesson or practice for Carnegie Hall. The musically named Ronit Banit normally conducts the Cantus Choir; sadly this is one of the casualties of Corona as it's challenging to sync sixty singers on Zoom.

In addition the 'Katedra' for Interdisciplinary Music offers JAMD students free lessons from their peers and Jerusalem High School students can also log in and earn credits. Solfege marathons, the Shofar in music, Kol Nidrei, Hebrew songs that reflect the themes of the High Holidays, and a series connected to the Jewish cycle, are additional novel ways to lure in even the most knowledgeable music aficionados to study some more.

At the moment all lectures are in Hebrew, but English and Russian courses are already in the pipeline and will hopefully start soon. As accessibility is the aim, costs are kept as low as possible and just cover the overheads. Ten frontal lessons of three academic hours each cost 500 shekel - a total of 16 shekel an hour, which everyone would agree is a pretty good price. Core courses - 14 double lessons per semester - cost 1,450 shekel a pop; all participants get a certificate of participation ... and with no tests or homework this has to be the best deal in town!

For more details and to sign up today please visit: <https://www.jamd.ac.il/external-studies>

And the baby ...? He came smiling into the world soon after our interview; a fourth beautiful child for Bar-Eitan who, amazingly, has all the time in the world to cuddle him too.

Student Spotlight: Iphigenie Worbes

It seems as if a musical prodigy is the way to go - like Talia Amar, Iphigenie Worbes, 28, one of JAMD's star students and recipient of the JAMD President Prize (2019-20), also started piano lessons with her church musician grandmother in Leipzig, Germany. Although Worbes initially wanted to be an actress, her voice teacher noticed her talent and pushed her hard to sing; at 19 she switched tracks.

Parallel to her newly discovered love of singing Worbes was falling in love with Israel; after High School a Gap program in Jerusalem volunteering at Yad Vashem and in the Old City, she participated in an exchange program here, which turned into a B.Mus. in Classical Singing at JAMD. "I planned to go home after my first degree, but when I won a competition run by the Jerusalem Opera which gave me the chance to participate in professional opera productions I stayed for my M.Mus. here too," she explains. Under the tutelage of voice teacher Efrat Ben Nun and coach Dr. Ido Ariel, she thrived in the Academy. Even a war in Gaza and the "Knifing Intifada" didn't change her plans, "although my family back home was certainly worried."

Corona has hit singers hard: it's difficult to sync with a piano on Zoom, and impossible to practice with an orchestra. When the Vocals teacher catches Covid on top of everything else, what's a singer to do? While practicing for a role in 'Don Giovanni' for the Vienna Opera Festival she simply sang the orchestra's part leading up to her entry, just to be sure when to start hitting the high notes. "It was good exercise," she says, with a smile.

Worbes, who has an Acting Certificate from the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute in New York and who speaks English, Hebrew, German and some Arabic (and is working on more languages), enjoys combining her passions for acting and singing in Operatic roles. At present she is preparing to audition for Opera Studios and Young Artist Programs all over Europe.

But Israel's sun, beach, and warm, special people have crept into the singer's heart. She will be back, wowing us on the stage, before too long.



Dr. Avi Bar-Eitan

photo: Tali Kazurin



Dr. Anat Rubinstein

photo: Shani Datali



Iphigenie Worbes

photo: Noam Tabib

photo: Jonathan Dor

photo: Peter Vit