

Violins of Hope in Romania

The Romanian Athenaeum, Apr 25th, 2017

The story

Sixteen violins found in Nazi concentration camps after World War II

For Jews enduring utter despair and unimaginable evil during the Holocaust, music offered haven and humanity. The strains of a beloved song supplied solace, even if only for a few moments. The chords also provided a vital reminder that even the most brutal regime could not rob them of their faith. No matter what, their souls could be free. In some cases, the ability to play the violin spared Jewish musicians from more grueling labors or even death.



Nearly 50 years ago, [Amnon Weinstein](#) (now 77) heard such a story from a customer who brought in an instrument for restoration. The customer survived the Holocaust because his job was to play the violin while Nazi soldiers marched others to their deaths. When Weinstein opened the violin's case, he saw ashes. He thought of his own relatives who had perished, and was overwhelmed. He could not bring himself to begin the project. One violin, for example, belonged to a boy who survived a German massacre in 1944 in Ukraine and afterwards joined a Jewish partisan group. He managed to smuggle explosives into a German officer's club in his violin case. The attack was successful, but the boy (called "Motele") was later caught and shot. The partisan commander took his violin to Israel where Amnon Weinstein came across it. After many years work, this instrument has now been restored.

By 1996, Weinstein was ready. He put out a call for violins from the Holocaust that he would restore in hopes that the instruments would sound again. Amnon Weinstein has spent the last two decades locating and restoring violins that were played by Jewish musicians during the Holocaust. He dedicates this important work to 400 relatives he never knew. These grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins stayed behind in Eastern Europe when Amnon's parents, Moshe and Golda, immigrated in 1938 to Palestine, where Moshe opened a violin shop.



After the war, Moshe learned that his entire family - 400 in all - had been murdered during the Holocaust. The pain of this discovery led to his first heart attack. Moshe never spoke of his family again. When young Amnon would ask Golda about their relatives, she would show him a book about the Holocaust. Pointing to the ghastly photos of the dead, she would say, "This is our family." She would break down in tears, unable to explain further.

After growing up to become one of the most respected violin makers in the world, Amnon became determined to reclaim his lost heritage. He started locating violins that were played by Jews in the camps and ghettos, painstakingly piecing them back together so they could be brought to life again on the concert stage. Although most of the musicians who originally played the instruments were silenced by the Holocaust, their voices and spirits live on through the violins that Amnon has lovingly restored. He calls these instruments the Violins of Hope. Almost all the instruments in this collection have been restored and can again be played. They have already been played at memorial concerts in Jerusalem, Paris, Madrid, London, New York, Rome, Oslo and many other places. On International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2015 on 27 January, they played at the Berlin Philharmonie by members of the Berliner Philharmoniker, conducted by Sir Simon Rattle.

[The Motele's Violin Story](#)

... Suddenly, he notices a German officer among the crowd listening to him. The officer signals to him with his baton. Motele gets up and follows him wordlessly. They reach a big building. Motele immediately realizes that this is where the German officers assemble before departing to, and upon returning from, the rapidly approaching front line. „You'll play here every evening, and there's the pianist who'll accompany you," the officer tells him. Every evening after his performance, Motele goes down to get a mess-tin of soup in the kitchen in the cellar... [\(read here the whole story\)](#)



And more about the Violins...

[Violins of Hope](#)

[Violins of Hope Cleveland Foundation](#)

[Berliner Philharmoniker Violins of Hope](#)

[Israeli luthier Amnon Weinstein receives German honour](#)

The Concert

The Romanian Athenaeum, Apr 25th, 2017, 19:00h

History has proven that art is one of the most powerful weapons against darkness and Violins of Hope make no exception.

This project is rooted in survival, perseverance and the mending of broken pieces. Beautifully restored violins – once belonging to holocaust victims – are nowadays the carriers of their owners' stories. And although each may bear its own personality, its own script, they all create, in unison, art and light.



The similarities to the story of the Jewish people are striking. It too has dealt with misfortunes and attempts of destruction along the centuries. However, against all odds, against all malice, it has survived, it has persevered and it continues to thrive.

As people of this world, it is our duty to remember history and to learn from it. But as Israelis, it is our mitzvah – our commandment – to also honor the ones who suffered in order for us to live in freedom today. Therefore, we thought a most opportune way to pay homage to this page of history, would be have the Violins of Hope concert coincide with the National Day of Israel reception, particularly this year, with the completion of Romania's chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

So please join us on this cultural endeavor and let us reflect and rejoice the power of art and belief!

Program

Bruch – "Kol Nidrei" for cello, string quartet and piano

Avinu Malkeinu for violin, cello and piano (arranged by Cihat Askin)

Mendelssohn – String Octet op. 20 (*Allegro moderato ma con fuoco, Andante, Scherzo, allegro leggierissimo, Presto*)

Jerusalem of Gold

Musicians

Gil Sharon (The Netherlands) - violin

Evgenia Epshtein (Croatia) - violin

Sevil Ulucan-Weinstein (Turkey) - violin

Irina Simon-Renes (The Netherlands) - violin

Miriam Hartman-Beazley (Israel) - viola

Aida-Carmen Soanea (Germany) - viola

Hillel Zori (Israel) - cello

Teresa Beldi (Germany) - cello

Andrei Licaret (Romania) - piano

Organizers

[Embassy of Israel in Romania](#)

[The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation](#)

[Societatea Muzicala](#)

The Musicians

Gil Sharon (The Netherlands) - violin



The violinist Gil Sharon was born in Bucharest, Romania. There he began his musical studies and soon joined a chosen group of young musicians who performed frequently all over the country. In 1961 he emigrated with his parents to Israel. He continued his studies with Prof. Partos at the Rubin Academy of Music - Tel Aviv University, at the same time performing with various orchestras as well as giving recitals. He was one of the founders of the well-known "ISRAEL ARMY STRING QUARTET" which gave frequent concerts in all of the major cities and received the "David Award". In 1971 Gil Sharon won the first prize at the "International Emily Anderson Violin Competition" in London. Since 1969 Gil has been living in Holland. He is first concertmaster of the Symphony Orchestra of Maastricht, leader of the SHARON QUARTET and was guest concertmaster of the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra as well as the Israel Chamber Orchestra. Gil

Sharon's reputation as a soloist leads him to perform frequently with various orchestras and to give recitals in Europe, Israel, Canada and the United States. In October 1995 he performed together with the famous violinist Shlomo Mintz, Mozarts Sinfonia Concertante for violin and viola (on which occasion Shlomo Mintz played the viola) in Barcelona. In 1992 Gil Sharon founded the Amati Ensemble, a chamber music ensemble that performs at the highest possible level and in many different formations, from duo to full-scale chamber orchestra. The Amati Ensemble has released numerous CD's including works of Bach, Mozart, Spohr, Händel, Haydn, Clara Schumann, etc. and is currently involved in the recording of several television-productions. Since 1995 the Amati Ensemble features in its own chamber music series in the city of Maastricht - Holland. Since January 1997 Gil Sharon participates at the concerts in the well-known theatre at the Champs Elysées in connection with the series "Pablo Casals en Champs Elysées" of the Pablo Casals Festival in Prades (F). He is a frequent guest of this summer Festival, The Parry Sound Festival (Ontario, Canada) and the Ottawa Chamber Music Festival. Gil Sharon was invited to give masterclasses in March of 2001 at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, in 2003 in Fontainebleu and in 2004 in Valencia (Spain) and participated 14 times at the "Upper Galilee Chamber Music Days" in Kfar Blum-Israel. In 1997 Gil Sharon was honored with the Dutch Royal Award "Knight of the Order of Orange Nassau" by HM Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands for his outstanding merits in the domain of chamber music.



Evgenia Epshtein (Croatia) - violin

Evgenia Epshtein was born in Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinburg), Russia. She began her violin studies at age of six and completed the High school for Gifted Musicians with Vladimir Milshtein. Evgenia immigrated to Israel in 1990. There Evgenia Epshtein studied with Arthur Zisserman, Yair Kless and Irena Svetlova at the Tel Aviv Academy of Music and Benzion Shamir at the Rotterdam Royal Academy, where she received her Master Degree. During her studies at the Academy she won several prizes at the violin and chamber music competitions and took part in the masterclasses of Isaak Stern, Henry Mayer and Zakhar Bron. As co-founder of the "Aviv" string quartet, Evgenia Epshtein is a winner of the 3rd Melbourne International Chamber music competition (1999 Grand Prix and four special

prizes), Bordeaux String quartet competition (2003), Charles Hennen Music competition (1999 Netherlands). Other top prizes include "Schubert and Modernity" competition (2003 Graz, Austria, 2nd prize and special Schubert prize) and Prague spring competition (1998 2nd prize). As a member of Aviv she also proclaimed as the " Best young ensemble" by the Culture Ministries of Germany and Israel (1999, 2000, 2003, 2008). As a soloist she performed with Reconsil Sinfoniegia Vienna, Bucharest philharmonic orchestra, Zadar chamber orchestra, Split Symphony Orchestra, Ashdod and Ramat Gan Symphony Orchestra. Evgenia Epshtein held recitals in all major Israeli venues and radio broadcasts. Stockholm, Paris, Toronto, Ottawa, Guadalajara, Lagos, Vienna, Zagreb, Varaždin, Split, Prague, London. Currently Evgenia Epshtein is a docent of Split academy of Arts, professor of violin and chamber music since 2011. and artistic director of Summer school " Summer Con Spirito" in Trogir - Croatia and Winter string school " Winter Con Spirito" in Vinkovci - Croatia. Before she taught as an assistant of violin professor Mr. Benzion Shamir at Rotterdam Royal academy. As a violinist and chamber music Evgenia is often giving masterclasses - Isa international summer academy, Prague music academy, " Keshet eilon" violin course, France, Croatia and others.



Sevil Ulucan-Weinstein (Turkey) - violin

Sevil Ulucan Weinstein considered being one of the leading Turkish violinist of her generation. Sevil started playing the violin at age of six with Vaselein SPIROV. She completed her studies at Istanbul University State Conservatory with Venyamin Varshawsky. Through the years she attended master-classes of: Shmuel Ashkenasi, Cihat Aşkın, Hagai Schacham, Haim Taub and Mikhail Khomitzer. Sevil has performed as soloist with various orchestras such as: Istanbul Chamber Orchestra; Presidential State Symphony Orchestra; Bursa State Symphony Orchestra; Adana-Cukurova State Symphony Orchestra; Antalya State Symphony Orchestra; Askin Ensemble; Philharmonia Istanbul and Istanbul University Academic Orchestra and Charlotte Philharmonic Orchestra. Her debut overseas concert was held at Berlin Konzerthaus in August 2006 at the Young-Euro-Classic Festival where her performance of S. Prokofiev's first Violin Concerto was well accepted by the local public and critics. Sevil Ulucan Weinstein has released her first solo album, *Sevdana*, in 2009, by Kalan. Besides solo and chamber music concerts Sevil has been participating as a faculty member in many CAKA International master-classes. Sevil Ulucan Weinstein is currently an Associated Professor at Istanbul University State Conservatory.



Irina Simon-Renes (The Netherlands) - violin

Romanian born violinist Irina Simon-Renes studied in Berlin with Thomas Zehetmair, Christoph Poppen and Antje Weithaas. Her career as an orchestra musician began in 1998 at the Academy of the Staatskapelle Berlin. Afterwards she accepted her first position as principal second violin with the Hamburg Philharmonic State Orchestra. From 2001 until 2009 she had the same position with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in Munich. Since 2010 Irina Simon-Renes has been Artistic Director of the International Chamber Music Festival Wassenaar. In 2012 she received the first Wassenaar Culture Prize in recognition of her efforts in music education. She regularly plays as a guest leader and guest principal with orchestras such as the Dutch Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the Bavarian State Orchestra. In 2013 she became a member of the prestigious Lucerne Festival Orchestra conducted by Claudio Abbado. Along with Lisa Batiashvili, Francois Leleux & Friends she performed in 2014 at the famous Prinsengracht concert in Amsterdam. Irina Simon-Renes plays a Nicolo Gagliano violin from 1768.



Miriam Hartman-Bezley (Israel) - viola

Miriam Hartman, B.A. Yale University cum laude, M.M. The Juilliard School, is the Principal Violist of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and a faculty member at the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music, Tel Aviv University. Ms. Hartman has performed at the Marlboro Music Festival, and was violist-in-residence at Bargemusic in Brooklyn, NY for two years. She has performed with Emanuel Ax, Yefim Bronfman, Yuja Wang, Nikolaj Znaider, Lynn Harrell, Fazil Say, Christian Tetzlaff, Gil Shaham, David Garrett, among others, and performed and taught at the Nordic Music Academy. Ms. Hartman has given Masterclasses in Brazil, Chile, Argentina, USA, Denmark, UK and Israel. Miriam Hartman has given solo performances with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in Israel and at the Salzburg Festival and with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. She has also performed with Pinchas Zukerman in Tel Aviv and with Itzhak Perlman and Yo-Yo Ma in Carnegie Hall. Ms. Hartman can be heard on the Koch, MII, RCA, and Decca labels.



Aida-Carmen Soanea (Germany) - viola

Aida-Carmen Soanea, an eclectic and charismatic violist, is born in Romania into a family of opera singers. In 2005 she won the 1st Prize of the Valentino Bucchi Competition in Rome - and in 2000 the 2nd Prize at the Bashmet Viola Competition in Moscow. She had previously won the 1st Prize with distinction at the age of 17 in the German national competition Jugend Musiziert and had been then admitted in the class of Barbara Westphal, at the Lübeck Musikhochschule. Aida-Carmen Soanea has also been graduated with distinction at the Hanns Eisler Hochschule (Berlin) in the class of Kim Kashkashian and at the Conservatoire Supérieur de Paris with Gérard Caussé. She has been influenced and received big musical inputs from Juri Bashmet during several masterclasses at the Accademia

Chigiana di Siena, from Ivan Fischer who invited her on the position of solo viola of the Budapest Festival Orchestra (2004 to 2008) and especially from Claudio Abbado, whom she encountered regularly as a member of Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra and later, of the Lucerne Festival Orchestra. As a soloist, Aida-Carmen has appeared in music festivals such as the Internationale Osterfestspiele Luzern, Rheingau Musikfestival, Musikfestspiele Sanssouci, Musikfestival Mecklenburg Vorpommern and she performed with different ensemble formations, including the Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra, the English Youth Orchestra, the European Chamber Orchestra and the Berliner Symphoniker. She shared the stage together with violist Tabea Zimmermann at the Cité de la Musique of Paris, with violinist Renaud Capuçon at the Lucerne Spring Festival, with the violinist Tanja Becker-Bender for her debut in the big hall of the Berlin Philharmonie and with the violinist Tasmin Little by performing the Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante throughout England. An avid chamber musician, Aida-Carmen regularly performs with the pianists José Gallardo and Andrej Jussow, she performed with Natalia Gutman and Kolja Blacher as well with Reiner Kussmaul, with whom she appeared several times at the Berliner Festwochen. Aida-Carmen also has been a guest of many European festivals, where she collaborated with musicians as the Alissa Margulis, Alfredo Perl, Alexander Melnikov, Jean-Quilhem Queyras, Adrian Brendel... From 2007 to 2015 Aida-Carmen was a founding member of the delian quartet. In that chamber music formation, she appeared at Schleswig-Holstein Musikfestival, the Ludwigsburger Festspiele, the Schwetzingen Festspiele and many others. The quartet performed in the Vienna Musikverein, the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, the Essen and Berlin Philharmonie, the Hessischer Rundfunk Frankfurt and in many other major concert venues throughout Europe, enjoying a great success and releasing a notable discography for the label Oehms Classics. Aida-Carmen's relation with the contemporary music is for her essential; her regular participation in the Ensemble Modern of Frankfurt being an important part of it. After many years of researches, she publishes in 2016 her first solo CD for the label Challenge Records with Norbert von Hannenheim's (1898-1945) works who had been a pupil of Arnold Schönberg at the Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin and died after the end of the 2nd World War in a mental institution near Berlin. Also in 2016, she has been performing Berlioz's Harold in Italy during a long tour in Romania, started collaborating with the fortepiano player Antonio Piricone and founded the Vesna Ensemble together with the violonist Nathalia Prishepenko and the cellist Romain Garioud.



Andrei Licaret (Romania) - piano

Since his debut in 1993 with the „Jeunesses Musicales” Orchestra, Andrei Licaret has developed a wide repertoire from baroque to contemporary music. He has performed in numerous recitals and concerts together with renowned orchestras from Romania and from abroad, directed by famous conductors such as Cristian Mandeal, Horia Andreescu, Jin Wang, Arnold Ostman and Arie Vardi. Starting with the year of 2000, Andrei Licaret had recitals in Prague, Berlin, Madrid, Istanbul, Thessaloniki and Paris. From an early stage Andrei Licaret showed certain musical attainments, beginning to study piano under the careful guidance of his father, the renowned pianist and organist Nicolae Licaret. Andrei Licaret continued to study alongside prestigious professors as Viciniu Moroianu, Dan

Dediu (composition) at the National University of Music from Bucharest, Jacques Rouvier at the Conservatory of Paris and Berlin, Dmitri Bashkirov at the Summer Academy Mozarteum from Salzburg, Leon Fleisher at the Peabody Conservatory of Baltimore. Andrei Licaret has recorded in various occasions for radio and television stations from within Romania. His appearances in the concert halls in Romania and abroad have made him known both to the public and to the specialized critics who have showed their appreciation for his art in an elegiac manner and have pictured him as one of the glorious and valuable pianists of his generation.



Teresa Beldi (Germany) - cello

Teresa Beldi was born in 1993 in Hamburg, Germany. She won many prizes including first prizes at the national “Jugend musiziert” competition, “The Young ClassX” soloists’s prize and the first prize at the Buchmann-Mehta String Competition. She was a long-term scholarship holder of the “Jugend Kammermusikinitiative Hamburg”, which granted her intensive chamber music coaching in different ensembles. From 2011-2016 Teresa was studying with Prof. Hillel Zori at the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music Tel-Aviv and frequently participated in projects with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. Teresa has participated in masterclasses with Frans Helmerson, David Geringas, Jens Peter Maintz, Arto Noras, Peter Wiley, Uzi Wiesel, Amit Peled and Alisa Weilerstein.

Recent soloists performances include Haydn’s Cello Concerto in D Major in Timisoara (Romania) with the “Banatul Timisoara Symphony Orchestra” under conductor Gheorghe Costin, Shostakovich’ Cello Concerto No. 1 in Craiova (Romania) with the “Oltenia Craiova Symphony Orchestra” under conductor Theo Wolters and in Plovdiv (Bulgaria) with the Plovdiv State Philharmonic under conductor Luciano di Martino. In January 2016 she performed as a soloist Haydn’s Cello Concerto in C Major under Maestro Zubin Mehta in the Charles Bronfman Auditorium Tel Aviv (main auditorium). Since September 2016 Teresa is an Artist Diploma student at the Barenboim-Said Academy in Berlin with Prof. Frans Helmerson.



Hillel Zori (Israel) - cello

One of today's prominent virtuosos, cellist Hillel Zori has distinguished himself as the gold medal winner of the 1986 Maria Canals International competition, and by winning top prizes at the Whitaker competition, the Premio–Stradivari in Italy, the Geneva CIEM, the Dutilleux prize at the Rostropovich competition and the Jackson Award at Tanglewood. Since his debut with the Israel Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta, Zori has been featured as a soloist with the BBC Scottish Symphony, the Düsseldorf Symphony, the Philadelphia Chamber Orchestra, the Jerusalem Symphony, the Israel Chamber Orchestra and the Bremen Kammerphilharmonie to name a few. He has toured the globe extensively being guest to festivals such as the Marlboro, Dartington, Berlin and Israel festivals, as

well as in major venues such as the Amsterdam Concertgebouw chamber hall, The Wigmore Hall, the Zankell Carnegie Hall and the *UN assembly Hall* in New York, performing Bruch Kol Nidrei with *Zubin Mehta* for the 2009 International Holocaust Memorial Day. Zori’s *Cello Classics* CD, *Inspirales* – a unique anthology of cellists-composers, was the BBC January 2014 “*CD of the Week*”. A winner of the America Israel Cultural Foundation annual awards, Hillel completed his studies with Prof. Uzi Wiesel at the Tel Aviv Rubin Academy and continued at the New England Conservatory with Bernard Greenhouse. A most sought after pedagogue, Hillel Zori has been on the faculty of Keshet Eilon Summer Seminar, the faculty of the Jerusalem Music Center, a jury member for the Isang Yun International Competition in S. Korea, and he is a Professor at the Tel Aviv University – the Buchmann–Mehta School of Music serving as head of strings.

Amnon Weinstein



Amnon Weinstein, now 70, is an Israeli luthier. He has spent the last two decades locating and restoring violins that were played by Jewish musicians during the Holocaust. Amnon Weinstein dedicates this important work to 400 relatives he never knew. These grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins stayed behind in Eastern Europe when Amnon Weinstein's parents, Moshe and Golda, immigrated in 1938 to Palestine, where Moshe opened a violin shop. After the war, Moshe learned that his entire family, more than 400 in all, had been murdered during the Holocaust. The pain of this discovery led to his first heart attack. Moshe never spoke of his family again. When young, Amnon would ask Golda about

their relatives, she would show him a book about the Holocaust. Pointing to the ghastly photos of the dead, she would say, "This is our family!" She would break down in tears, unable to explain further...

After growing up to become one of the most respected violin makers in the world, Amnon Weinstein became determined to reclaim his lost heritage. He started locating violins that were played by Jews in the camps and ghettos, painstakingly piecing them back together so they could be brought to life again on the concert stage. Although most of the musicians who originally played the instruments were silenced by the Holocaust, their voices and spirits live on through the violins that Amnon Weinstein has lovingly restored. He calls these instruments the Violins of Hope.

