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Chanukah feature story

Fine-tuning Israeli operatic talent creates Catch 22

(WZPS) Over the last nine years, many of the world's famous opera singers have spent part of the summer in Tel Aviv at the Israel Vocal Arts Institute, grooming promising young opera stars-to-be. The only problem? With so few opportunities for opera singers in Israel, graduates of the opera workshop are applying (and being accepted) to major opera houses throughout the world.

By BONNIE ROCHMAN

Tall and lanky in a white T-shirt and a streamlined pair of khakis, Israeli Denis Sedov crouches behind a row of plastic chairs, waiting for the cue to unleash his powerful basso. It's late afternoon in steamy Tel Aviv and Sedov and a handful of other promising young opera stars-to-be are rehearsing "The Marriage of Figaro" under the watchful eye of charismatic Italian instructor Frederico Davia.

Sedov, 22, joins a talented cast of some 20 Israelis who are being groomed in the sweltering summer streets of Tel Aviv for the world's top opera houses as part of an annual summer opera clinic.

For the ninth year, the Israel Vocal Arts Institute is showering Israel with world-class opera performances, courtesy of internationally-renowned directors and instructors, as well as home-grown talent. This year, 40 Israeli students and 25 from places including Mexico, Puerto Rico, France and the U.S., are attending the five-week opera workshop where instructors such as Renata Scotto, Sherril Milnes, Nico Castel and William Woodruff mold the students' voices.

Long black hair cascading down her back, Miriam Sharoni rushes into the office of the Israel Music Conservatory. The 27-year-old has just finished rehearsing "The Secret of Susanna", in which she sings the title role.



Hopefully it will develop enough here so that I can return."

Hila Plitman, 23, pores over a musical score, internalizing the role of Monica in "The Medium". (Cont. on page B19. See "Fine-tuning".)

Famous Russian opera singer Luba Kasarnovskaya from the Metropolitan Opera in New York gives a master class at Israel's annual summer opera workshop. WZPS photo by Israel Sun.

Sharoni learned to love music through her parents, who were amateur musicians, although her family finds her interest in opera amusing. "My mom is Yemenite and my dad is Iraqi," she says. "Yemenites don't sing opera. They think it's funny." Indeed, when she was young, Sharoni dreamed of becoming the next Ofra Haza, an Israeli pop star who belts out songs with a distinctly Middle Eastern beat. "But I fell in love with opera," says Sharoni, simply, as she marks her seventh year at the summer institute. "Israelis are incredibly lucky that this workshop takes place here."

Nine years ago, Sharoni moved to Germany to learn the language, which is integral to opera, and to study voice development. Because Israel is so small, it is next to impossible to develop an opera career here, she says.

"But it is developing," she adds. "I want to have one leg in Israel and one leg abroad."

Chanukah feature story

A dual exercise in coexistence

(WZPS) CHAI, an acronym for Concern for Helping Animals in Israel, has for 10 years fostered animal protection legislation in Israel, educated adults and children on animal issues, and provided direct support for animal shelters.

By RUTH HEIGES

"The dog ate my homework" cannot serve as an excuse in a course where the dog may very well be

the homework.

Broadening its scope, CHAI, Concern for Helping Animals in Israel, has recently completed its first experimental program to



Jewish and Arab elementary school children care for animals at a shelter operated by the Israel Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. WZPS photo courtesy of CHAI.

promote pluralism among Jewish and Arab children. Through learning about animals and their care,

40 Jewish and Arab children. (Cont. on page B20. See "A dual exercise".)

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Fine-tuning Israeli talent, however, is a Catch 22. Nearly all of the exceptionally talented leave the country to refine their voices and join opera companies in Europe or the United States. Sedov, who moved to Israel in 1991 from his native St. Petersburg, is beginning his second year in the Met's celebrated training program. Designated for Americans, Sedov is only the fourth foreigner accepted to that opera house's Young Artists Program, and he will be singing small roles in six shows this year. "It's a shame that all this talent leaves Israel," says Zimmerman. "But all of the top people do. The goal of the program is to encourage voices in Israel... I suppose we're doing it too well."
- WZPS.