

moment

GUIDE TO CULTURAL ARTS

THE BEST OF JEWISH MUSIC, ENTERTAINMENT AND CREATIVITY



“L’Orfeo” performed at the Opera La Scala, Milan, Italy.

SALAMONE ROSSI: OPERA'S JEWISH HERO

by James David Jacobs



In the early 1600s, Salamone Rossi, a resident of Italy’s Mantua ghetto, led the orchestra at the premiere of Claudio Monteverdi’s “L’Orfeo, Favola in Musica.” “L’Orfeo” was not the first opera, but it was the first operatic masterpiece, paving the way for opera’s future and four centuries of uninterrupted development. The unprecedented size of Rossi’s orches-

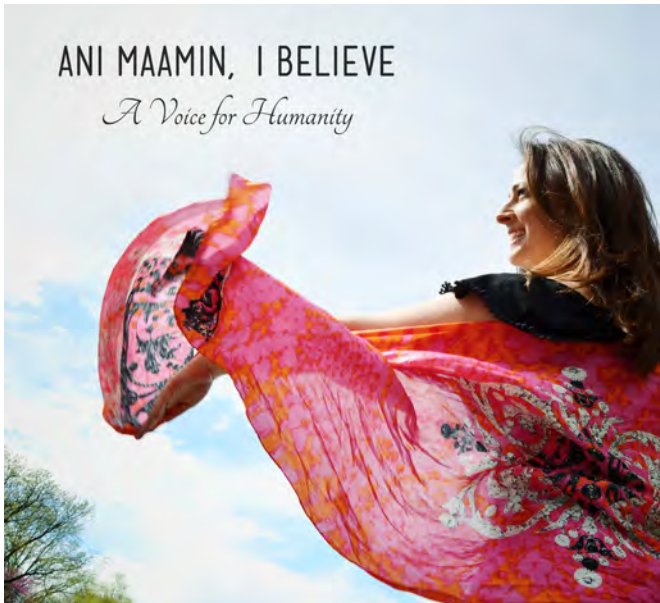
tra—around 30 musicians—gave him a pivotal role in this watershed event in musical history. As Matthew Lazar, a musician and composer who once organized a Rossi festival in 2002, told *The New York Times*, “The British have Purcell. Everyone has Bach. Who do Jewish musicians have? Rossi is really our first hero.”

At the time, Mantua was one of the best places to be a Jew in Europe. Ruled

by the unusually enlightened Gonzaga family, Mantua allowed Jews to (mostly) intermingle with the general population—as long as they wore their yellow badges—and (mostly) practice their chosen professions, including careers in the performing arts. Still, it is remarkable that a Jewish musician was able to gain such a secure position at a time when both physical movement

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CANTOR SHIRA LISSEK



Cantor Shira Lissek's recent release, *Ani Maamin, I Believe—A Voice for Humanity*, serves as a prayerful and reflective love poem to the human spirit. "I created the album for our Yom HaShoah commemoration at Park Avenue Synagogue," says Lissek. "This year, I wanted to share a second generation musical response to the Holocaust that reflects my deep pride and love for my heritage and family, combined with my overwhelming gratitude to upstanding bystanders who saved my grandmother, father and two uncles." Jewish Rock Radio's Joe Buchanan writes, "I just finished interviewing the incredible Cantor Shira Lissek for the next Emerging Artist Showcase. I cannot wait for you to hear it! She has created a truly beautiful album that lifts spirit and prayer right up... this is music we need."

Please visit shiralissek.com, shiralissek@gmail.com

ISRAEL FESTIVAL CALENDAR

56th Israel Festival

"Israel's premiere multi-disciplinary international festival."
June 1-17, 2017 / israel-festival.org

Jerusalem International Book Fair

The Jerusalem International Book Fair is a biennial literary festival that has been taking place since 1963.
June 11 - 15, 2017 / jbookfair.com/en

NATIONAL YIDDISH THEATRE FOLKSBIENE AT THE MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE



As this country grapples with questions related to immigration, assimilation and social freedoms, *Amerike—The Golden Land* brings to life the accounts of the men, women and children whose shared experiences met and overcame adversity to ultimately help shape the land of the free. In Yiddish with English and Russian supertitles.

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and commercial opportunities were extremely restricted for European Jews. And while Rossi is frequently cited as one of the most important Jewish composers, the qualifier “Jewish” (much like the moniker “Ebreo”—Hebrew—he was forced to attach to his name) underestimates his significance in music history.

Rossi's birth and death dates are unknown, but we know that he worked for the Gonzaga dukes, who ruled Mantua, from 1587 to 1628. It's likely that he was a teenager (albeit one who already had a wealth of professional experience) when he was hired. Rossi began his career as the composer for Università Israelitica, a well-regarded Jewish theater troupe which performed frequently at the court and toured in other cities. The troupe was renowned for its integration of drama, music and dance, and its popularity may have primed Mantua for opera—the new kind of music-theater hybrid being developed in Florence.

Rossi's immediate supervisor was Monteverdi, the court's music director. They were roughly the same age, and they both started publishing music while they were teenagers, though Rossi's earliest works were far more advanced. Tracking their progress as composers, one gets the impression that they were learning from each other's work. They are known to have collaborated on several projects; the only one that survives, incidental music to a play called “La Maddalena,” also includes music by other composers, but the prominent positions that Monteverdi and Rossi's contributions occupy within the work indicate that the two of them were considered almost equal in stature. Rossi was held in such high regard at the court that there were times he was permitted to appear without his yellow badge.

Rossi's individual compositions were also revolutionary. He is credited with inventing the trio sonata, which became the defining genre of Baroque instrumental music, paving the way for the 18th-century string quartet. He was also the first composer to set Hebrew texts with Western musical notation, in a 1623 collection he cheekily called *Songs of Solomon*—referring not to the biblical Song

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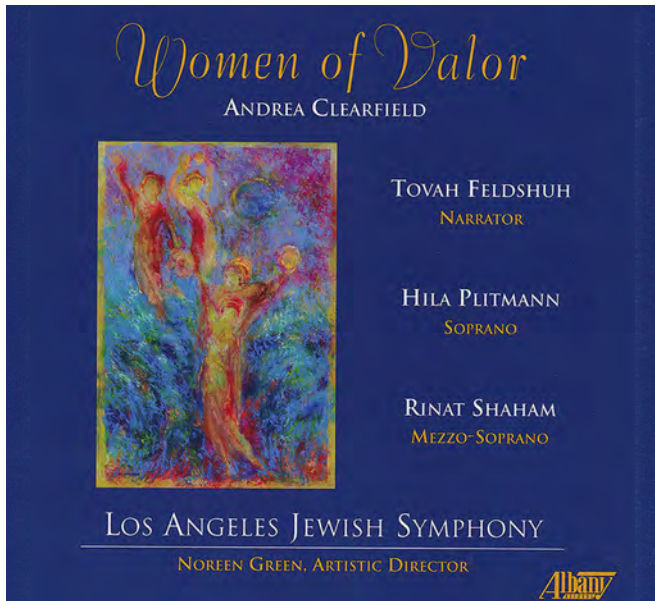
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ISRAEL FESTIVAL CALENDAR

Jerusalem Opera Festival

Giuseppe Verdi

June 21-June 22, 2017 / israel-opera.co.il/eng

9th International Festival of Lights in Jerusalem's Old City

Walk along the specially lit paths and enjoy the Old City.

June 28-July 6, 2017 / lightinjerusalem.org.il

34th Jerusalem Film Festival

July 13-23, 2017 / jff.org.il

KLEZKANADA



Every year, over 400 people gather in the beautiful Laurentian Mountains for KlezKanada, the internationally acclaimed festival of Jewish arts and culture. For over 20 years, KlezKanada has focused on tradition, innovation and continuity, connecting Jews of all ages with culture, history and community. The faculty and speakers are international leaders of Ashkenazic Jewish music, culture, language and beyond. The extensive program includes workshops in klezmer music and Yiddish song, traditional Yiddish dance, Yiddish language and theater. KlezKanada also features North America's only Jewish Poetry Retreat, an extensive series of talks and discussions, and a rich program for children. Intergenerational, interdenominational and interdisciplinary, KlezKanada has grown into North America's largest retreat for the study of Jewish arts and culture.

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of Songs, but to his own first name.

Rossi's sister, who got her start in the Università, also holds a prominent place in operatic history. The only professional Jewish female singer of her time, she became one of the first bona fide opera divas, and she even had a stage name: Madame Europa. She performed all over Europe and appeared in Monteverdi's later operas. Monteverdi likely heard her sing and may have visited one of Mantua's synagogues to hear the cantors. In the florid vocal lines Monteverdi

wrote for "L'Orfeo," there is a level of expressivity which sounds like cantorial *krechtsn* (sobbing) catching in the singer's throat, implying a parallel with that other legendary bard, King David.

Monteverdi moved to Venice in 1613. While Rossi kept his position at the court, conditions for Jews gradually deteriorated, and it is thought that our lack of information about either Rossi or his sister after 1630 indicates that they perished in the Austrian sack of the Mantuan ghetto that occurred that year.



Rossi's 1623 *Songs of Solomon* manuscript.

ISRAEL FESTIVAL CALENDAR

Akko Opera Festival

Giulio Cesare in Egitto
August 3-5, 2017 / israel-opera.co.il/eng

26th International Puppet Festival

Sponsored by the Train Theater with programs for both children and adults throughout the week.
August 6-10, 2017 / raintheater.co.il/en

JEWISH PEOPLE'S PHILHARMONIC CHORUS



Be part of the Yiddish renaissance! Hear the Jewish People's Philharmonic Chorus—the only chorus in New York with an all-Yiddish repertoire—in Symphony Space (95th and Broadway) at 4:30 p.m. on June 11. English translations are provided for "Yiddish and British on Broadway," a concert featuring new arrangements of Gebirtig standards, a surprising take on Gilbert and Sullivan hits, and beautiful Yiddish theater tunes including the tango "Ikh Hob Dikh Tsu Til Lib" (I Love You Much Too Much), popularized by Dean Martin, Neil Sedaka and other American pop singers. The JPPC, a vibrant intergenerational ensemble, has been praised by *The Jewish Week* for its "upbeat Broadway bounce."

For tickets, visit symphonyspace.org