



DANCE - PINDORAMA (Sammy Landweer)



## More dynamic than ever

*This year's Israel Festival pushes the envelope at every turn*

• By BARRY DAVIS

They say that a new broom sweeps clean, and Israel Festival CEO Eyal Sher is a prime example of the overhaul sweep ethos. Sher took up his position prior to the 2015 edition of the country's paramount cultural event and has been busy looking for new ways to challenge, inspire and entertain us ever since.

The lineup of this year's festival, which will take place in Jerusalem from June 1 to 18, spells diversity and envelope-pushing wherever you look. Take, for example, *Dance* (June 17 at 9 p.m.) by American postmodern dancer, choreographer and actress Lucinda Childs. While the work was first performed in 1979, it retains a cutting-edge feel, not least due to the fact that it was based on a cross-disciplinary collaboration with classical music composer Philip Glass, as well as Sol LeWitt, who provided a thought-provoking multi-layered video backdrop to the piece.

Moving along seamlessly, there is a rendition of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* by American avant-garde theater director Robert Wilson (June 5 and 6 at 8:30 p.m.). Wilson's reading of Beckett's 1958 work is a visual and aural delight that deftly walks the tightrope between precision and delicacy.

Sher says he is keen to venture into new territory and to reposition the Israel Festival as not only the financially best-padded cultural vehicle in the country but also a torchbearer for pioneering artistic endeavor.

"The festival became a very prestigious affair and gained international recognition; but over the years, a gap formed between the prestige and the audiences. The public no longer saw the festival as having the same major role as in the past," he says.

The challenge was, in effect, how to bring the brand together with revitalizing the festival and its importance and getting people to come to Jerusalem to see the shows and events."

Sher notes that more than half of the festival's patrons come from outside the capital. It was very much a matter of reorienting and rebranding and trying to pull in new culture consumer hinterlands.

"That entailed all sorts of things, but the main factor was the artistic program," he says. "That translates to works that are innovative and groundbreaking, that present new stage languages."

Sher realized that the old order of categorization had gone out of the entertainment window.

"These are things we discern around the world, which involves blurring of the lines between the various disciplines. There is no longer dance, music, theater, etc. You now see fusions of dance, theater, video, music, stages and stages," he says.

The CEO might have added the growing profusion of extraterritorial and peripatetic fare too, with the conventional stage-facing audience, fifth wall frontier arrangement giving way to more immediate, hands-on set-up.

Sound Charter, an Israeli-Polish

co-production led by renowned conductor Ilan Volkov (June 7 at 10 p.m.), is just such a left field offering. It is described as "a collective and individual musical journey of discovery into the unknown recesses of the Jerusalem Theatre."

It is not only an on-the-move experience but also appeals to various senses as the audience members make their way from the Sherover piazza at the front of the theater building and wend their way through various spaces until they end up in the Rebecca Crown Hall. En route, they will hear live performances of works from the Renaissance and Baroque eras, as well as contemporary classical pieces and even sound design items. The musicians will be located in various spots, from well-lit spaces to dark recesses, thus enhancing the sensory odyssey by encountering mixes of familiar sounds emanating from unfamiliar situations. The first part of Sound Charter is free and lasts an hour. The two-hour concert in the Rebecca Crown Hall requires the purchase of tickets.

There is more crossover fare on offer with the late-night Kiasmos project, on June 15 at 12:30 a.m. Icelandic BAFTA-winning multi-instrumentalist and producer Ólafur Arnalds and Janus Rasmussen from the Faroe Islands. Kiasmos will take the audience on an ethereal yet highly stimulating ride as the twosome interlace acoustic music with the sounds of dreamy synth-experimental-electro pop.

And there is plenty in the way of non-mainstream musical offerings as well. The Kiasmos DJ set will follow a show by award-winning Norwegian

TRANSFIGURATION  
(Didier Carluccio)

SARBAND ENSEMBLE (Sebastian Frank)

## festival

experimental guitarist Stian Westerhus, who will employ a wide range of techniques and hi-tech manipulatory devices to take his audience for a wild and woolly ride along the backwaters of sonic experiential dynamics.

Both of the above form part of the Night Shift lineup, which begins at 8 p.m. on June 15 and goes through to the wee hours. Other slots in the evening/night program include the emotive Transfiguration performance by French sculptor, painter and performer Olivier De Sagazan, who will sculpt clay onto his head, blanking out his own identity until he becomes a living work of art. Euripides Laskaridis will also engage in some eye-catching barrier-breaking endeavor as the Greek physical and anarchist theater performer uses all manner of objects to create a humorous act that feeds off cabaret, slapstick and vaudeville.

The thematic substructure for this year's festival is touted as addressing "the individual, personal identity, definitions and barriers," and there is no shortage of genre-fusing acts in the program. Swiss musician-theater director Tom Luz's *When I Die* – complemented by *A Ghost Story with Music* – which will be performed on June 5 and 6, creates a fantasy world. It is based on the true story of a woman who discovered some unknown works by composers such as Bach, Liszt and Beethoven and claimed to be in communication with the long deceased writers about their creations. Luz combines music with visual and theatrical elements to create a unique and hypnotic theatrical language. *When I Die* is performed in English, French and German with Hebrew subtitles.

Elsewhere there is more in the way of geographic frontier-leaping entertainment, such as the Turkish-German-Japanese Sarband Ensemble's *A la Turka - A la Franka* (June 16 at 2 p.m.) with a sumptuous mix of early Western music and the music of the East from across the Ottoman Empire. The June 2 *Colours of Cultures* concert by the Linz-based *Ars Antiqua Austria* octet offers more pan-imperial sounds, with musical dialogues between pieces by Viennese composers influenced by foreign musical styles, and pieces written by composers who came to Vienna from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

And a little closer to home, the June 7 Psalms concert is a voluminous affair featuring the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra and the Chamber Choir of the University of Music Franz Liszt from Weimar, Germany, as well as Israeli liturgical singer Rabbi Haim Louk. The Psalms repertoire takes in a Persian folk song based on Psalm 121; *The Song of Psalms* by Israel Prize laureate Zvi Avni; as well as

Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* and the Chichester Psalms by Leonard Bernstein.

There will also be the unfettered Distr(action) program from Musrara, the Naggar Multidisciplinary School of Art and Society, marking the school's 30th anniversary as students, teachers and graduates present a typically experimental, socially oriented and interdisciplinary venture.

The 56th edition of the Israel Festival kicks off with the Groove Party show at The Sultan's Pool, featuring a high-octane lineup that includes veteran pop band Teapacks, rockers Knessiyat Hasechel and Yemen Blues. And, as usual, there will be a slew of free events in Zion Square and elsewhere around town.

For tickets and more information: \*2561 and [www.israel-festival.org.il](http://www.israel-festival.org.il)

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# Hanna Senesh

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