

Ofer Pelz in search of interactions

An interview introduced, transcribed and edited by Jonathan Goldman

Jonathan Goldman & Ofer Pelz*

22 January 2015

Published in: *Peimot Review* vol. 3, Tel Aviv: 2016. Resling

Ofer Pelz was born in Haifa (Israel) in 1978 and lives in Montreal. He is one of several Israeli composers of his generation who are extremely comfortable circulating in international new music circles, and has received many international prizes including two ACUM awards and the Ernst Von Siemens Grant. His music is played regularly in Europe, USA, Canada and Israel in festivals such as La Biennale di Venezia, MATA Festival, Nuova Consonanza, and Heidelberger Biennale für Neue Musik, as well as at the Israel Festival, Kol Hamusica in the upper Galilee, and the Fontys Danse Festival. International ensembles such as the Cairn Ensemble (France), Ardeo String Quartet (France), Le Nouvelle Ensemble Moderne (Canada) and Architek Percussion (Canada) are among the ensembles that have played Pelz's music, and he is also regularly performed by the Israeli ensemble Meitar as well as the Israel Contemporary Players. Pelz has collaborated with several film creators and dance choreographers, among them the French choreographer François Raffinot in his recent work *Leçons de Ténèbres*.

This interview took place in Montreal, where Ofer Pelz is completing a Doctorate in composition at the Université de Montréal, on 22 January 2015. The conversation took place in English.

Tell us about your musical training: what were your first formative musical experiences?

I started as a classical pianist, and my piano studies were at the Rubín Conservatory in Haifa, my home town, with Rachel Arad. Then I went on to the Re'ut middle school for the Arts, and then to the Wizo High School for Art and Design, where I studied music. At Wizo, which was the greatest formative musical experience of my life, I had the same teachers that I would later have at the Academy in Jerusalem - Yinam Leef, and Haim Permont.

Did you already study composition in high school?

Yes, at Wizo we had group composition classes in addition to basic music courses in ear training and harmony. Each year, the composition classes were offered by a different instructor. The first year was with Danny Akiva, the second with Haim Permont, the third with Yinam Leef, and each instructor had a different approach. Also at Wizo, Danny Akiva led group improvisation classes, which was one of the best classes I attended. I learnt things in that class that remain with me; I still incorporate improvisatory elements into my works today, and into the creative process in general. Wizo gave me my first taste of composition. Well, not technically the very first, since I had already been exposed to composition at Re'ut, with Ruth Apel, which

*Faculté de musique de l'Université de Montréal.

was where I composed my very first piece, when I was 14. It was a Rondo for piano, and I composed it just after having played Schoenberg's Five Small Piano Pieces, op. 19, and I remember that Ruth Apel was very shocked by my (abundant) use of dissonances! It's true that I've always been very attracted by these kinds of sounds. My musical education came from all over. There was Bach, and Beethoven, all of that, but also Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Schoenberg... It was a big mixture, but I remember one common thread was my fascination with the tension created by dissonances - it wasn't something that made me feel uncomfortable, but just the opposite. I've always been enthusiastic about these kinds of sounds, so that in my mind, there has never been a sharp distinction between modern music and 'the rest'.

What were the first musical pieces that made a strong impression on you as a young person (besides Schoenberg's Opus 19 that you just mentioned)?

Rachel Arad, my piano teacher from the age of 7, had been working for many years (throughout the years I was studying with her) on a doctorate in musicology. She took a lot of time on it, and completed it very recently, with a dissertation on the music of Ligeti as it relates to Husserl's conception of time. So through Rachel Arad, I was exposed to a lot of contemporary music and I owe her a debt of gratitude for the fact that modern music was never a 'stranger' to me. Naturally, I discovered Ligeti's music through her at a fairly young age, especially the Second String Quartet, Atmosphères, etc. Nevertheless, my favourite composer from the past is certainly Bach, and I got to know his music by playing it on the piano. I remember playing the Toccata in E Minor, some Preludes and Fugues from the Well-Tempered Clavier, etc. I think Bach had a lasting influence on my music, particularly in the polyphonic approach that I still favour. My music is mostly polyphonic, and less harmonic in conception - a feature I find in Ligeti as well. I tend to think more horizontally than vertically.

How did you continue your musical studies after High School?

After the obligatory military service, I went on a trip to the Far East. After that, I enrolled in studies at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, and there it was like a new beginning. But you never really start from zero. I remember a conversation I had with Haim Permont when I was feeling frustrated by my progress in composition, and he said that when you go from 0 to 1, it's a huge leap, and then, from 1 to 2 it's even more difficult. And that was a big encouragement for me. It wasn't a simple task to progress from 1 to 2... I completed a first preparatory year at the Academy with Yinam Leef, and that was where I composed my first pieces that I have still kept in my catalogue - I still like them. From my second year until the end of my Bachelor's degree, I studied with Vyacheslav (Slava) Ganelin, who taught me both composition and free jazz piano. I'm very grateful to him for many reasons, even if it isn't easy to study with him. He taught me a lot of things that are sometimes difficult to grasp.

Was that your first exposure to jazz piano?

No, I had played jazz before. I was very attracted to it before, to the point of wanting at one point to become a jazz pianist. In the end, I abandoned this idea, because I understood that the process would have been too long. But I have always been attracted to free improvisation, which is what I mostly studied with Slava Ganelin. Free improvisation is still very close to the kind of expression I prefer today¹. After my Bachelor's degree, I did a Master's with Ari Ben Shabtai. By that time, I already felt like a composer - a young composer, but already a professional.

¹On the jazz-inspiration of one of Ofer Pelz's composition Unisono, see Martin Guerpin, "Fixer l'infixable: l'appropriation du jazz dans Unisono d'Ofer Pelz (2008)", in Court, Jean-Michel et Florin, Ludovic (dir.), *Rencontres du jazz et de la musique savante*, Toulouse, Presses de l'Université du Mirail, 2015, p. 93-110.

After your Master's degree, you continued your studies outside of Israel.

Yes, in 2008, I went to Paris. I wasn't interested in going directly into a doctorate programme as most of my colleagues did. I found the European scene more interesting and I wanted to get a grasp of musical life there, and not just to stay in an academic situation. So after a long search, I went to Paris and studied with several teachers. I was at the Conservatoire nationale supérieure (CNSMDP) for one year, as an auditor, and then I was at the Conservatoire de Blanc-Mesnil (CRD), where I studied with Philippe Leroux and then instrumental composition with Thierry Blondeau and electroacoustic music with Gilles Racot and Christine Groult. I also did a summer course at IRCAM, as well as various other courses. I mostly focused on electroacoustic music during my stay. Then I went on to Montreal, where I've been living for the last three years. I'm doing a doctorate at the Université de Montréal with Ana Sokolovic and Caroline Traube.

You've mentioned your sustained interest in electroacoustic music. When did that begin? What attracted you to the electronic medium?

I encountered electroacoustic music for the first time in an introductory history and analysis course given by Menachem Zur at the Jerusalem Academy. I remember him playing us an electroacoustic piece by Jonathan Harvey, Yerah Fishman and Berio among many others. Also, in the class, we were given a composition assignment, so that assigned project became my first electroacoustic composition. At the time, Menachem Zur didn't like my piece very much, but even then, I already knew that I didn't want to follow the prevailing trends; that's why, I think, for that assignment, I composed a piece for instruments and electronics instead of a purely electroacoustic work. It's a piece that has remained in 'my drawer', even though it still is very precious for me, because it's a tribute to David Lynch, one of my favourite directors. But it's a very weird piece - which is fitting for a Lynch tribute! The piece is called *No hay banda*, which is a quotation from Lynch's film *Mulholland Drive*. In that piece, the ensemble plays, then the tape plays back what the ensemble has played, but in the absence of the ensemble - totally transformed. I tried to use Lynch's ideas, and it became a really strange piece! I became more and more attracted by the idea of expressing myself through electronic means. I understood that - at the time, at least - I couldn't really progress in electroacoustics in Israel, which was why I went to Europe. Even if it wasn't totally clear to me what I was looking for, it became clear that I was mostly searching for electroacoustic composition, less for instrumental composition.

It seems to me that many of your instrumental pieces use an electronic component, but without necessarily placing the technology in the foreground. You don't necessarily thematize the opposition between instruments and electronics in your works. I think of it as a 'natural' use of electronics. Would you say that this is accurate?

I'm very grateful for all the training I got in electroacoustic composition, and I could say that in the end, this training had the greatest implications on my purely instrumental writing: I couldn't go on composing for instruments the way I had before after having worked for so long in electroacoustics. The instrumental and the electronic are always fused together in my compositions, because I was exposed to these new timbres, these new forms of expression that I didn't know before. Later I discovered that you can do the same sorts of things with instrumental composition. Today I'm in a situation where I have trouble finding a reason to use electronics in a composition - to produce a so-called 'mixed composition' [musique mixte], when you can do most things with purely instrumental sounds. Recently, I've been questioning the reasons for including an electronic component, - especially when you have an ensemble

of a few instruments- whereas before, I didn't ask myself this question, because it was part of my training, and was part of being exposed to a new thing. Today, after all of my experiences with mixed music, when I want to use an electronic component, I need to find a reason, something supplementary - something that cannot be achieved by purely instrumental means. If I use an electronic component, it must be in the service of a real interaction, not just the addition of another timbre or another kind of expression that could more or less be produced by instruments. Maybe the interaction will mean that the instruments will be influenced by the electronic sounds, and not only the opposite which is more common. The question of interaction between instruments and electronics is still a big question for me, because I don't have the answer yet.

I see what you mean: a piece like *Chinese Whispers* is purely instrumental, but contains many timbres that seem electronic (notably from the prepared piano part), even if the piece does not sound at all indebted to the kind of musique concrète instrumentale that we associate with Helmut Lachenmann's music (see Figure 1). In a way, you've gone the opposite route of a composer like Mauro Lanza, who began with electronically-inspired instrumental timbres (notably in his toy instrument pieces) and then moved on to focus more often on electronic environments, you seem to have turned your attention to the sound possibilities of instrumental ensembles, sometimes with only minimal electronic processing. In your recent percussion ensemble work, *Shift*, the only electronics you use is amplification - and yet the interaction of the instruments with this amplification seems essential to the piece.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the piece *Chinese Whispers* (2013) by Ofer Pelz. The score is for five instruments: Alto Flute, Clarinet B., Violin, Cello, and Prepared Piano. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 80. The Alto Flute part starts with a dynamic of *f* and includes instructions like "Ae." and "very dry attack, like a very fast and light pizz. (t.k)". The Clarinet B. part includes "H.Ae.", "Ae.", and "slap". The Violin part is marked "molto flaut." and "non vib.". The Cello part includes "Giles with air noise (as less harmonics as possible, using multiple fingers effleuré) reaching the highest register, play harmonics to the highest possible note." and "molto flaut. fino a m.50". The Prepared Piano part includes "inside Glissando with the fingernails on the tuning metals", "slider", and "Giles a guitar slider on the strings away toward the inside of the piano on several chords at once in approx C3-C4 range. The position can vary from time to time." The score is written in 3/4 time and features various dynamics such as *f*, *mf*, *pp*, and *pppp*.

Figure 1: Ofer Pelz, *Chinese Whispers* (2013), for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and prepared piano, mm. 1-3

Originally I was commissioned to write a piece for instruments and electronics. When I realized that the festival could not provide sufficient rehearsal time in the concert hall, I aban-

done the idea of writing a 'complicated' electronic piece, since I one need to spend a lot of rehearsal time in the hall to make it work. It was then that I came up with the idea of amplifying the instruments ; initially, it was just a compromise, but it quickly took on an important role in the construction of the material and in the dramaturgy of the piece. The string quartet is extremely amplified so that the softest sounds it makes can be heard very clearly. The amplification also contributes to the structure of the work as a whole, which is divided into two parts. In the first part, the trio leads and the string quartet plays an accompanying role. I orchestrated this accompaniment in such a way as to simulate electroacoustic tape effects on the trio's material : reverse, reverb, freeze, etc. In the second part, the epilogue, the roles are reversed - the string quartet moves to the foreground, forcing the (non-amplified) trio to play even softer, and to stay in the background. As a result, the second part is extremely soft, almost on the threshold of audibility, and it creates a dramatic contrast with the hectic first part. The reason I amplified the string quartet and not the trio is mainly technical and practical: one can produce much softer sounds on a stringed instrument than on a piano, for example. Also, at that time, I was living in Paris, and I could test the interactions between amplification and instrumentation with the French quartet that played the piece, the Quatuor Ardeo, whereas the trio part was played by Meitar ensemble who are, of course, based in Israel.

Amplification also allows you to dramatize the rhythmic possibilities of instrumental noises - those small sounds that wouldn't be available in a concert situation without it. I'm thinking of the appealing rhythmic ostinato that begins *Blanc sur blanc* (Figure 2). We don't usually think of amplification as being a musical material, or if we do, we think only of John Cage's *Cartridge Music* or Stockhausen's *Mikrophonie I*, two works that are linked to a very specific historical moment (the development of sound diffusion technology around 1960).

In *Shift*, I took the concept of amplification in *Blanc sur blanc* one step further, in order to produce even more layers of amplification. In *Backward Inductions* for augmented piano, on the other hand, I explore the idea of amplification even further - there, the piano is amplified with contact microphones that are located on several strings of the piano. Every time the piano's hammer strikes the string with a microphone on it, the amplification is activated, because contact microphones react only to vibrations, not to sound. The amplified string then goes through a patch to a contact speaker (a transducer) that is placed on objects near the piano - a snare drum, a cymbal, a metal box, etc. As a result, when a specific piano string is struck, an object beside the piano will play 'by itself'. This resulted in a work for augmented piano, where some of the strings sound normally, some are prepared in the classical Cageian manner of placing objects between the strings, and some are prepared and amplified in such a way as to activate or amplify external objects.

I'd like to move on to your thoughts on 20th and 21st century composers who have inspired you. In a recent article on your work², you express an affinity with György Ligeti, Gérard Grisey, Witold Lutosławski, and Beat Furrer. We've already touched on Ligeti, so let's talk about the other three composers in turn, and you can tell me what aspects of their music appeals to you.

²Cf. Liouba Bouscant, "Matériaux anciens dans la musique contemporaine actuelle : postmodernité et modernité en questions. L'exemple de Michel Gotteville (1950, Canada) et d'Ofer Pelz (1978, Israël)", *Revue musicale OICRM*, volume 2, no2

J. GOLDMAN, O. PELZ

The image shows a page of a musical score for Ofer Pelz's 'Blanc sur blanc' (2011). The score is for flute, clarinet, prepared piano, and amplified string quartet. It features complex rhythmic patterns, dynamic markings (pp, mp, f, ppp), and various performance techniques like 'ghost notes', 'air sound', and 'prepared blocked notes'. The score is divided into sections marked with circled numbers 1, 2, and 3. The instruments listed on the left are Alto Flute, Bass Clarinet in Bb, Prepared Piano, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The score includes various performance instructions such as 'pizz.', 'arco', 'finger nail pizz.', 'ord.', 'L.H. pizz. (stacc.)', 'A.S.P. c.l. Bat.', and 'arco c.l. Bat. (jeté)'. The tempo is marked as 4/4 = 70.

Figure 2: Ofer Pelz, *Blanc sur blanc* (2011) for flute, clarinet, prepared piano and amplified string quartet, mm. 1-3.

- Witold Lutosławski:

I was exposed to Lutosławski's music by Slava Ganelin, who introduced me to his String Quartet (1965), and then to other pieces as well. He became my favourite composer for a time. I experimented with aleatoric rhythms in some of my earlier music, for example in *Equilibrium* - in the style of Lutosławski. I find his writing very appealing. I think he is absolutely correct that his aleatoric style of writing gives musicians a liberty of expression and it also made me feel more free while composing - it allowed me to express something about time, and not to fixate on every little detail of a composition. And even if I don't listen as much to Lutosławski's music today, his writings on music - particularly on music perception - remain very important to me today, and contain many relevant remarks about the situation of music today, and my own current concerns. He writes about the way a composer tries to lead a listener on a path - this is something that he really mastered in his own music.

- Gérard Grisey:

A bit like with Lutosławski, it mostly goes back to his approach to perception. In contrast to other modernist works of the 20th century that can sometimes seem to be voluntarily contra perception, the ban on repetition, for example, Grisey really masters perceptual guiding, even though everything is also so calculated and, so to speak, very French, in a way. You always listen to Grisey's music with open eyes, you are what Lutosławski describes as an 'active listener'. And of course, when I studied in Paris, the *école Spectrale*, is still a very dominant school, and one cannot ignore the acoustic phenomena of spectral music. The simple fact of being aware of the acoustic properties of sound obliges a composer to integrate this knowledge into

every moment.

- Beat Furrer:

Furrer is one of the most important composers of his generation for me, because of his use of a kind of repetition that does not simply exhaust the listener. He always presents new material within a repetitive framework. This is very appealing to me, and something that I try to do in my own works.

That makes me think of the way you treat repetition in *Chinese Whispers*, that does recall something of Beat Furrer's music for me (I'm thinking in particular of the piano piece *Phasma* (2002)). To put it in slogan form, I hear 'repetition without minimalism', I suppose this is what you mean by the term you use, i.e., "unstable repetition".

Exactly. I would define the style I am striving for today as 'repetitive non-minimalist music'. In a way. Minimalism, it seems to me, aims to keep the listener in a kind of vague, non-directional state, one in which the listener ceases to anticipate any change, because you come to know that no change will arrive - it puts you in a kind of zen-like state, whereas in Beat Furrer's music, and I hope my own as well, I always try to keep the listener in a state in which he tries to anticipate successive coming events, and also to stimulate his memory of what came before - an active listening, rather than to foster a passive, meditative state of perception.

How do you construct the kinds of repetitions one perceives in *Chinese Whispers*? Which elements do you repeat and which do you change? What kind of change do you think is sufficient in order to intrigue the listener?

This is a question to which I still don't have an entirely satisfactory response; I'm currently conducting research and exploration on the perception of repetition. I believe that music is meant to be listened to, so the listener plays an important role in the construction of the work. One might then ask: Who is the listener? Is he or she a specific person, or is the listener posited as someone with ideal or average perceptual capacities? I tend to follow Lutosławski (2007) in taking the listener to be myself, because I am in a position to know my own likes and dislikes and my own perceptual abilities. Of course I also hope there are some other listeners out there with a perception similar to my own. Coming back to your question, I construct my forms through listening. There are some linear progressions, some contrasted moments, but everything is in the end the product of the way I imagine the experience of the music. In my piece *Rewind*, which explores a similar idea as *Chinese Whispers*, I constructed the repetition through a generative process. I found this to be a very interesting creative approach, but in the end I always count on my ears, or my imagination. It is important for me to repeat certain elements while changing others. Sometimes the change is very subtle and sometimes it is drastic, but one should always still be able to hear that it is a repetition of something previously heard. I believe that a change should be big enough to be perceptible, and small enough to allow our faculties of memory to compare them with previous events.

I notice that your music often has a very clear dramaturgy - there is something about it that recalls the emotional arc of Romantic music, even if the musical vocabulary is resolutely rooted in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This aspect makes me think at times of some of Wolfgang Rihm's music.

Possibly, but I would have to explore Rihm's music further in order to be able to respond with any confidence. You may be right that there are aspects of dramaturgy in my work, without the vocabulary of Romantic music I'm not attracted by the idea of composing a completely conceptual music, where there is no development whatsoever, no dramatic arc, although I do

really appreciate some composers who do follow this route.

Can you discuss some of the dramaturgical ideas, however vague, behind the *Blanc sur blanc*, *Chinese Whispers* or *Shift*? Does your use of electronics or repetition contribute to the dramaturgy?

The dramaturgy is essentially related to the fact that, as I said, I compose music for a listener. I believe that listening involves dramaturgy in the sense that the listener seeks to make sense of the sound events and their succession. I strive for my music to tell a story, albeit a very abstract one. It moves from one place to another, it has a cast of characters (the music material) that evolve throughout the piece. In *Chinese Whispers* for instance, the initial repeating gesture gradually modifies through a process of unstable repetition, then later it is as if we are zooming in on the same object, so that we only have a partial view of the whole and a few very clear details. At the end of the piece, I zoom back out again on the same object, offering a view of it from a great distance, offering a complete view of it, but with fewer details.

Speaking of references to music of the past, your music does not shy away from making explicit references to other musical genres, sometimes popular genres like latin jazz in *Unisono* or flamenco in *Equilibrium*³.

We are supposed to be now in the postmodern period, where everything can be used. I agree with this definition in general, even though I also believe that contemporary music has a language - broadly defined - that was invented in the 20th and 21st century. This language is built out of many different conventions and schools, and is not narrowly defined like tonal language, but there is nevertheless a common vocabulary that is constructed, in my own case, out of the music that I have heard in my life. This is the language with which I try to speak in my music. Yes, it can be a mixture of elements from other genres, but, in my case, it is not inscribed within the classical postmodern tradition in which materials are used eclectically - everything goes together. I don't agree with this approach. The more a composer can speak in the language that has emerged from his own musical experiences, the better he can express what he is trying to express.

Speaking of expression, it seems to me that few of the titles of your works refer to elements of the outside world. It seems to me that they fall broadly into two categories - those whose titles refer to a formal aspect of the work or a technique, in the manner of an *étude* (I'm thinking of Debussy's *Pour les notes répétées*). *Convergence*, *Unisono*, *Constant Motion* and *Shift* fall into this category. The second category are works that refer to colours (or absence of colours!), among which we find *Blanc sur blanc*, *Grey* and *Colours in a Fog* (and sometimes a title falls into both categories as with *Unisoni Transparenti!*). Are titles essential to your creative process?

I would say that I think in terms of metaphors. For me a metaphor is an inextricable part of the creative process. Many times, the metaphors for my works come from the visual field. Although I am not actually synesthetic, in a way, I think everybody falls somewhere on a spectrum of synesthesia. In a way, my choice of visual metaphors in my music, is the expression of a kind of synesthesia which is real. Many metaphors from my music come from the visual arts, but remain very abstract (like *Blanc sur blanc* - white on white). It doesn't refer to anything concrete, but it was part of what I had in mind while composing. I had a particular visual image in mind while composing - an imagined painting made up of small dots, that represents the first movement of the work, and also of lines, that represent the second movement. It's an

³See Martin Guerpin (2015), op. cit.

image that is present in my mind while I compose, that allows me to imagine what will happen musically. I tend to conceive of music in this visual way, rather than as notes. I also tend to sketch out my compositions in graphic form, as drawings, before I compose any notes.

You write many works that are conceived with specific performers or ensembles in mind. One of your most sustained collaborations is with the Israeli Ensemble Meitar, who are starting to earn a well-deserved international reputation, and have already come to Montreal on two occasions. They will releasing a monographic CD recording of your music in 2017. How did this association come about?

The first time I worked with the Meitar Ensemble was while I was still a student. Menachem Weisenberg and Ayal Adler suggested to Amit Dolberg, Meitar's artistic director, to include a new work of mine in their concert. It was in 2007 and since then, I've written three other works especially for the ensemble and they played many other pieces of mine as well. In a way, I grew-up, during these 8 years, working with this ensemble that follows my path as a composer.

You were born in Israel, and the new music world is still stubbornly locked into a nationalistic structure. The country of birth is a required piece of information on concert programs, along with year of birth and name of your 'master'. While the contemporary art world has tried to break out from this older nationalistic, generational and master-disciple interpretive framework (with limited success), the contemporary music scene has not. As a result, listeners come with certain expectations about a composer who comes from the Middle East. Their expectations may not be satisfied, even on the superficial level, that few of your titles are in Hebrew. Is this deliberate?

Titles are always a big question for me when I compose. I consider them very important, but sometimes it takes a big effort to find a title, sometimes, the right title just falls on my plate without effort. The (banal) reason many of my titles are not in Hebrew is simply because most of my pieces were composed outside of Israel, and I consider it to be more communicative to give titles that speak to the people in the place where the piece is performed.

Do you think that the Israeli composers of your generation share certain qualities? Which Israeli composers from your generation do you feel aesthetically close to?

When I was living in Paris, there were three young Israeli composers living there (perhaps the only three Israeli composers living in Paris at that time), Hadas Peery, Nimrod Sahar and myself. All three of us studied with Philippe Leroux at the time. I remember sitting with Philippe at a café when he said to me that he was amazed all three of us were from the same country but that he couldn't find a single aesthetic connection between the music that we composed. At the time, I didn't understand what he meant. Why should the three of us have a common language or aesthetic simply due to the fact that we were born in the same country? I don't think that Israel has any strong aesthetic schools in contemporary music, although one does sometimes notice similarities between the works of students and their teachers. In general, I think Israel is still too young and full of people from such diverse cultural backgrounds, for there to be any strong aesthetic commonalities between artists, especially since these artists often train in very different places like the U.S. versus Europe, etc. This is very different from the situation in Europe. I came to understand from my stay in Paris that even in the Europe of the 21st century, stylistic schools are still alive and well. As a result, the composers who are close to me aesthetically will not necessarily be Israeli nationals. That being said, I do feel a link to many of my composer friends from Israel, not necessarily rooted in an aesthetic connection, but rather in the fact that we worked together, shared ideas, solved problems together, etc.

I'm thinking of Ophir Ilzeski, Hadas Peery, Dan Deutsch, Shaul Bustan, Amit Gilutz, Nimrod Sahar among many others. . .

Do you consider yourself an Israeli composer, or is your nationality an inessential part of your nationality? Is there a discernible Israeli tradition of composition that you feel you fall into, or has your background in France and Canada made any sense of cultural identity not relevant to your music?

My Israeli/Jewish identity is big question for me as a composer and as a person. I don't deny this identity, of course, but I question its meaning. I think it's an important question to ask of a composer, even if it is not obvious in my music. I think that we Israelis have more problems to define our identity. I found the solutions of the older generations of composers, the new immigrants from Europe, like Paul Ben Haim, who tried to define the essence of Israeli music, to be very forced, unnatural and inadequate. To propose a mixture of the European tradition that they knew with a dash of orientalism, strikes me as very artificial. This question is very difficult to answer, because Israel is a very recent country, and to have something distinctly Israeli in the music of that country is nearly impossible because Israeli culture is a hard thing to pin down. Arik Shapira claims that Israeli music reflects the Israeli personality - known for being forthright, un-genteel and somewhat aggressive, and this aspect of the Israeli national character certainly comes through in Shapira's music. In my own case, I wonder if my music truly displays Israeli aspects. It is something that remains a question mark for me. I don't ignore the cultural dimension of my music, I'm just questioning it for the time being.