



photo: Fred Carroll

NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ORCHESTRA

builds cultural bridges in Mideast and Europe

The National Arts Centre Orchestra with conductor Pinchas Zukerman after a performance in Berlin, Germany, 2000

Music is a universal language, says world-renowned violinist Pinchas Zukerman: “It is an art form that doesn’t need translation. It can cross barriers and build bridges, culturally, linguistically, if you let it.”

As music director of the Ottawa-based National Arts Centre Orchestra, Maestro Zukerman saw these words proved true when the ensemble toured the Middle East and Europe in October 2000. On the three-week program were 15 performances in seven countries, along with many master classes, school visits and Webcasts. The schedule kept members of Canada’s national orchestra busy. But they were proud to fulfill their role as cultural emissaries from a country with an international reputation for bridge-building.

Since the orchestra was founded in 1969, touring—both within Canada and abroad—has been an important part of its activities. It performs regularly in the United States and has travelled throughout Europe, as well as in Russia and Asia. The 2000 tour was the most extensive in the orchestra’s history, with performances in Israel, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, France and Britain. Helping to make it possible was financial assistance from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), plus logistical support from Canadian embassies and consulates.

making.” An equally warm reception awaited the orchestra in Europe, where the ensemble earned praise for its virtuosity, warmth and clarity of sound. After a sold-out concert in Cologne, Germany, noted one reviewer, “Encores were required to calm the enthusiasm of the audience.”

Before the start of the tour Prime Minister Jean Chrétien had requested orchestra members to serve as “cultural diplomats.” Nowhere did they take that role more seriously than in the Middle East, where they were scheduled to perform in Israel and—a first for the orchestra—Jordan. Among the educational events planned was a video conference between Canadian, Israeli and Palestinian high school students, as well as a master class with the Orchestra and students from the National Conservatory of Palestine in the West Bank city of Ramallah. Unfortunately, at the last minute an outbreak of violence forced cancellation of the Jordan concert, the video conference and the event in Ramallah, but the orchestra is calling this only a “postponement.”

Educational outreach was an important aspect of the orchestra’s bridge-building efforts wherever it went on the tour. Maestro Zukerman and players visited local schools and held master classes in several cities. A Web site enabled music lovers and students in Canada to tune in to (and even participate in) live Webcasts of master classes or access the musicians’ daily tour journals. Says education manager Claire Speed, the tour reinforced the orchestra’s role “not only as educators, but as international educators.”

The tour undoubtedly created strong bonds across borders, with the key strand being the music itself. The orchestra is scheduled to tour the United States and Mexico in fall 2003, with support from DFAIT and Export Development Canada. ♣

Alongside Beethoven, the program showcased compositions by Canadians Denis Gougeon and Peter Paul Koprowski. Performing as violin soloists were Edmonton, Alberta, prodigy Jessica Linnebach (age 17) and Maestro Zukerman himself.

The tour began with two sold-out concerts in Zukerman’s home town of

Tel Aviv. There critics hailed the orchestra players as professionals who performed with the “enthusiasm and warmth of amateurs” and transmitted the “love of music



National Arts Centre Orchestra violinist Janet Roy teaches elementary schoolchildren in Tel Aviv, Israel.

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