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Multi-ethnic symphony celebrates love and brotherhood

The Oscars almost threw a wrench into the musical plans of 50 instrumentalists, their conductor, guest soloists, the venue they are renting and the word they'd already spread about their concert.

But Musicians of the World Symphony Orchestra (MWSO) maestro Joseph Milo and manager Lucy Ravinsky kept the phone lines burning to rearrange everyone's schedules from the previously booked evening slot to the new 2 p.m. start time on Sunday, Feb. 27, at Oscar Peterson Concert Hall.

Now players and audience alike can take in both events.

Romantic Arias - Music for Lovers: An afternoon of opera, operetta and Broadway is "a wonderful preamble to being at home, watching the Oscars," says Ravinsky, who had to rearrange her own life five years ago by quitting a full-time job to administer her husband Milo's idea, which snowballed from around its conception.

"I'd had a casual conversation with

my Russian doorman," recalls conductor and pianist Milo. "When I told him I'm a musician, he said he was the former principal cellist with the Moscow Symphony but couldn't find work in Montreal. Some time later, a pizza delivery man saw the piano in my apartment and told me he had been a violinist with the Bucharest Opera in Romania. I sat down with my wife and said there must be more people out

Arts Scene

Heather Solomon

there like that, and we should do something about it."

Between the Tel Aviv-born Milo's long years of experience as a conductor in Israel, the United States and Canada, and Ravinsky's stint as manager of the McGill Chamber Orchestra, the MWSO quickly found its feet.

What makes this orchestra unique is its multicultural approach, exploring music from around the world inspired by the 20 ethnicities of the members.

"They come from all over and studied in various methods but the basics are the same," Milo says. "We talk in musical terms in Italian, French, German, and sometimes Hebrew, whatever they understand. But we have one language that we speak. It's called music. They work very well together."

"They also help each other get gigs and teaching jobs, because we keep 30 per cent local musicians for the purpose of integrating the others."

Venezuelan, Haitian, Middle Eastern, Peruvian and Chinese programs have incorporated musicians playing native instruments with the symphony, which also interprets the classics.

Different themes are also popular, such as the upcoming Jazz and Symphony, the MWSO's program for Montreal's annual cultural all-nighter *La nuit blanche*, set for Harvey Lev's Griffintown industrial building Feb. 26 at 8 p.m. (call 979-3978 for information).

The MWSO concert in the popularized love-month of February features four guest soloists: internationally renowned soprano Sharon Azrieli, a longtime friend of Milo's, along with mezzo-soprano Jessica Bowes, tenor Hugues Saint-Gelais and baritone Charles Prévost-Linton, the beloved anthem interpreter at Montreal Canadiens games.

Azrieli has been juggling gigs abroad - three of them with the Israel Chamber Orchestra - with work for her PhD in music at the Université de Montréal, for which she is just completing her thesis on finding Jewish prayer modes in Verdi.

"Maybe it was because my ear was sensitized by doing a lot of cantorial work



Soprano Sharon Azrieli, left, maestro Joseph Milo and orchestra manager Lucy Ravinsky prepare to delight hearts with their Feb. 27 matinee concert.

(Heather Solomon photo)

that I heard a lot of nusach in Verdi," says Azrieli, who will sing the title role of Verdi's *Aida* for the New Jersey Association of Verismo Opera on April 17.

For the MWSO concert, she's delighted to be serenading Montrealers with duets such as *Bess, You is My Woman Now* from George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* and Jacques Offenbach's lilting *Barcarolle* from *The Tales of Hoffmann*.

Her main aria will be the dramatic *Pace, Pace mio Dio* from Verdi's *La forza del destino*. The orchestra will play a musical tribute to Richard Rodgers with tunes from *The Sound of Music*, and you'll also hear *I Dreamed a Dream* from *Les Misérables* and *Memory* from *Cats*. Excerpts from Franz Lehár's operetta *The Land of Smiles* and Georges Bizet's *Carmen* are among the other treats.

"Everybody is going to walk away with something they loved in the program because of its versatile nature," Milo says.

For tickets, call 484-7428. For a short documentary on the MWSO's adventure making a celestial film score last August, visit www.musiciansoftheworld.ca.

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