

THE MAN in charge of the new avenue of artistic exploration is pianist, conductor and composer Yaron Gottfried, who recently ended a 10-year tenure as conductor of the Netanya Kibbutz Chamber Orchestra. (Mathe Andras)

Fulfillment of a dream

The Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music in Ramat Hasharon has been in full swing for close to three decades now, churning out hundreds of artists across a wide range of disciplines

• BARRY DAVIS

There is a grassroots philosophy about music which purports that “university of the streets,” rather than the more cloistered environs of a recognized institution of education, is where musicians should learn their craft. The supporters of this mind-set believe that getting into a few scrapes and learning from life itself, at the ground level, is the “real” way to go.

Then again, there are hundreds of music academies, schools and conservatories around the world that are doing brisk business and churning out top-grade artists annually. Yehuda Eder, founder of the Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music

in Ramat Hasharon, certainly goes along with the latter ethos.

“I came up with the idea of a place where they teach music out of a sense of disquietude,” says Eder, “but I have always been looking for new horizons. I have never been satisfied with just playing music. I have always felt the need to impact on a community – sort of like a rabbi, or something like that.”

Eder has been performing, recording and producing rock and pop music for over four decades. He met former Kaveret rock band member and vocalist-guitarist Danny Sanderson when they both served in the IDF Nahal band, and they remain good friends to this day. “We meet up for coffee and stuff, and go on about all the problems of the world,” laughs Eder. “Danny was one of the first people to join what became the management committee of Rimon.”

Eder brought a wealth of industry experience to the music school venture. In addition to his contribution to various groundbreaking rock outfits, such as seminal mid-70s band Tamuz, he got his hand on the production tiller with such stars as singer-songwriter Chava Alberstein, pop megastar Shlomo Artzi and late poet-troubadour Meir Ariel. But even that did not satiate Eder’s creative bent. “I’d finish a record and then I’d wonder if that was all there was to life. I needed something more.”

That considerable added value to Eder’s life began taking form in 1983, and he spent two years finding veterans of the

YEHUDA EDER, founder of the Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music in Ramat Hasharon. ‘I have never been satisfied with just playing music. I have always felt the need to impact on a community.’ (Courtesy: Dror Katz)

music scene to teach at the educational work in progress. The Rimon show finally got on the road in October 1985. "There were four us – Gil Dor, Ilan Mochiach, Guri Agmon and myself. I felt some sort of Zionist urge to do something, although to begin with I really had no idea how to go about it. I was just a kid from Kibbutz Kfar Hanassi, with a dream."

The dream has been in full flow for close to three decades now, churning out hundreds of artists across a wide range of disciplines, from pop and rock to more jazz-oriented endeavors. Much of the latter takes place in conjunction with the Berklee College of Music in Boston, Massachusetts. Rimon enjoys a close working relationship with the acclaimed American institution, and each year Rimon graduates transfer to Boston, often with study grants, and also with generous support provided by the Beracha Foundation. The Rimon students spend two years there, rubbing shoulders and playing music with students from all over the world.

The new school year has started, and Rimon has added another string to its genre-hopping bow, with the introduction of a classical music stream. The man in charge of the new avenue of artistic exploration is pianist, conductor and composer Yaron Gottfried, who recently ended a 10-year tenure as conductor of the Netanya Kibbutz Chamber Orchestra.

Gottfried appears to be the man of the moment. In addition to his activities in the classical field he is an accomplished jazz artist, living comfortably in both worlds. He says he is delighted that Rimon decided to broaden its educational swath. "It is a wonderful initiative which came from Rimon, and the idea is to offer something different compared with the study programs you get at music academies around the country," Gottfried points out. He should know: he undertook his formal musical education at the Rubin Academy of Music and Dance at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

While some might find it a bit strange that an institution devoted entirely to the commercial side of the music tracks should suddenly offer instruction in a "far more serious" field, Gottfried believes that Rimon is the perfect home for what he is planning to give his students. "The very fact that this department is part of a place like this allows me to keep things more open and flexible. Academies, even if they want to change direction, they have all this heavy baggage of God knows how many years. But here I can start something new and fresh, and precise in its declaration of intent, while also being very dynamic."

Gottfried says that dynamism is also buoyed by not having to worry about instrumental pedantry. "This department is

not about performing music at all; there is only performance that relates to conducting. The department is not for a violinist, for example, who is looking to improve his playing skills, but is designed to help students improve their compositional ability. We are particularly looking for students with the best creativity ability."

The idea, explains the new department head, is to help students widen their horizons. "We want people with an open mind, who want to acquire the working tools they need to compose and to arrange music, and to bring their composition to the highest possible level."

The department will also teach its students mundane and pragmatic skills. "They will learn how to conduct themselves in the open market," explains Gottfried, "and, for example, to write an arrangement for a specific project. But the basic emphasis here will be on classical music."

The department will also keep its numbers down, in order to be able to provide the students with as individual attention as possible. "This is a premium stream, and not the regular Rimon sort of venture. In general, people come to Rimon with far less grounding in music and come here to learn the craft, you know, they learn how to write songs [Eder teaches in this field], and most of the students are vocalists. But this department will take graduates of music high schools, or people who have been playing professionally for a few years, and have already begun exploring the possibilities of music."

Rimon head and veteran jazz saxophonist Amikam Kimmelman is happy with the new department, and the way things are shaping up at the Ramat Hasharon campus in general – particularly in view of a recent official development. "We were squatters here for around 30 years, but we have now got legal permission to stay here for another 45 years."

And it is not only on the official land rights front that things appear to be flowing in the right direction. "This is a very strong institution with good connections all over the world, not just with Berklee," Kimmelman continues. "It began with Berklee around 20 years ago, and relations with five institutions. Now we are talking about 30 institutions all over the world, and Berklee is like the Harvard of music education."

On top of all that, there is a fine, state-of-the-art new building on-campus, with professional recording studios and soundproofed classrooms.

"Our students get a good education here and that also prepares them for their time at Berklee, where they gain experience in all sorts of fields, like production.

"We can be proud of our work here at Rimon." ■



JAZZ CONCERT. (Courtesy: Roni Wagner)

RIMON ENJOYS a close working relationship with Berklee College of Music and each year Rimon graduates transfer to Boston. (Courtesy)