

A music lover goes to Paris

By [URY EPPSTEIN](#)

Music lovers can have a sonically good time in Paris without spending even a single hard-earned euro. There are abundant free-of-charge concerts in the French capital, many of which are in churches - though they are not necessarily religiously themed.

The Middle Eastern cynicism that assumes free or cheap offers indicate poor quality does not apply to Paris.

No less than Mahler's First Symphony was featured in the small, out-of-the-way church Sainte Marguerite by the amateur orchestra Note et Bien. Surprisingly, there was nothing amateurish about the performance. The young, not yet well known conductor Julien Leroy, a protégé of Gergiev and Masur, produced a vivid rendition with a rich, well balanced sound and tastefully calculated, unhurried tempi, and he even managed to maintain transparent textures despite the reverberant church acoustics.

Without having to go all the way to Prague, one can also enjoy the Smetana Choir in Paris's modest, somewhat remote parish church Du Bon Secours. Though perhaps not one of The choirs, conducted by Lenka Lipensja it nevertheless represented some of what is best in the glorious Czech choral tradition.

Besides the standard repertoire, the program included some all-but-unknown fascinating pieces by Czech composers, such as Dvorak and Janacek.

However, there are also concerts for which one does pay in Paris - and they're not cheap.

For Israeli music fans, Paris provided the welcome opportunity of encountering Israeli musicians whose absence in Israel is rather conspicuous. One of them, p calls Paris his home, working as a professor at the famed Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique. He appeared with Russian violinist Vadim Repin at the prestigious and discretely elegant Theatre des Champs-Élysées in a program presenting Beethoven's most popular Violin and Piano Sonata, RARE OPPORTUNITY. Jeremie Rhorer conducts a French version of Gluck's 'Orpheus and Eurydice.' Photo: Claude Doaré "Kreutzer," as well as less known pieces by Debussy and Stravinsky. It appeared as though the Parisian atmosphere had noticeably softened Golan's formerly assertive touch and increased his flexibility and subtlety of nuance. Repin displayed a pure, mellow sound and, above all, brilliant virtuosity. The twosome's mutual attentiveness was especially noteworthy.



RARE OPPORTUNITY. Jeremie Rhorer conducts a French version of Gluck's 'Orpheus and Eurydice.' Photo: Claude Doaré

Paris also offers the chance to hear another internationally renowned Israeli musician not usually met in Israel: conductor Daniel Oren. At the Opera Bastille, he directed an impressive performance of Verdi's Rigoletto, displaying his formidable capacity of producing an almost-inaudible orchestral pianissimo to create an increasingly shattering dramatic effect. The forcefully energetic abductors' chorus was one of this production's highlights.

The Russian Ekaterina Syurina, with her bright, delicate and innocent sounding soprano, was the Gilda of one's

dreams. In the title role, baritone Ambrogio Maestri sounded appropriately sonorous. However, his climactic final outcry "The malediction!" - often attempted but seldom properly achieved - amounted to a disappointing anti-climax. Israeli bass Yuri Kissin's impersonation of Ceprano was menacingly ominous. On his lengthy list of roles at important foreign opera houses, the Israel Opera did not appear.

Another rare chance that Paris offered was Gluck's opera Orpheus and Eurydice in its rarely staged French version, performed by the Cercle de l'Harmonie orchestra and the Les Elements choir and conducted by Jeremie Rhorer at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees. More dramatic and emotional than the work's earlier Italian version, Orpheus is impersonated here by a tenor and not by a contralto, thus adding credibility and impact to the plot. The initially terrifying demons' choir, intensified by strategically placed trombones, sounded drastically mollified by Stefano Ferrari's soft, intensely imploring tenor. The Russian Julia Novikova's crystalline, lovely soprano impersonated an enchanting Amor to make one fall in love.

A pilgrimage to Vienna in order to hear the world-famous Viennese Concentus Musicus ensemble and the Arnold Schoenberg Choir was rendered unnecessary by Paris's renovated Salle Pleyel, where they performed little-known Bach Cantatas. Choirmaster Erwin Ortner's substitution for the indisposed chief conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt did not seem to make much of a difference. The ensemble was excellently well rehearsed and professional, and Ortner turned out to be energetic and sensitive; the performance was lively, inspired and intensely involved. There was more joy of playing and singing than one often encounters in period instrument ensembles. Among the soloists, Timothy Sharp was particularly noteworthy for his dark, powerful and expressive bass.

And this was all a good start for an Israeli music lover in Paris.