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She led the *B'not Chava (The Daughters of Eve)* performing group, wrote music for theater performances for children and youth and for the Inbal Dance Theater company, and even starred on educational television. But then she decided to change direction, and to abandon the world of entertainment for art music:

"I've done all I wanted in light music and theater," she declared when she decided to transfer her energies to art music. "When I make a decision like that – I take it all the way," says Fleischer, who has become a leading force in the top echelons of female composers of art music for concert halls.

"As a composer with my own unique style, it's not easy here," says Fleischer. "It's a small country. There's only one opera house here – if you haven't won it over, you might not achieve anything at all. It's not like Germany, a large country with many opera houses. But I don't allow the obstacles to hold me back."

... Fleischer composed the opera *Oasis* - directed by Neta Amitmoro - for the libretto written by Yael Medini. The opera is performed by the Nona Choir together with an orchestra under the batons of Nathalie Goldberg and Zvika

Fogel. This is Fleischer's sixth opera, a record only surpassed among Israeli composers by the late Yosef Tal, may he rest in peace.

It turns out that the oasis is not as green as one might think. I first ask Fleischer why her opera, which already premiered internationally in Germany in 2010 and has since been performed elsewhere abroad, is only now premiering in Israel - and in perfect timing for Passover. Does this say something about the state of music in Israel?

"Absolutely," Fleischer answers firmly. "In Israel, for the most part there is no institutional framework for producing children's operas, even chamber operas, by contrast with those available for operas for adults. Local composers in Israel are not nurtured as they are in countries such as the Czech Republic, Austria and Poland, where it is seen as a national obligation to do so."

"... when there is no framework for performing my works, I create them myself, as in the case of the Grand Opera *Adapa*, based on Akkadian myth, which was created specifically for the screen. The work is almost a new genre, going beyond the existing and the known."

Fleischer relates that she came to write *Oasis* in response to a request by a German director, whom she describes as a lover of Israel. He commissioned an opera from her for an evening which would also feature a performance of *Brundibar*, a children's opera written by the Jewish composer Hans Krása. *Brundibar* was performed in the Theresienstadt ghetto, and Krása was later

murdered in the Holocaust. The idea to weave the plot around a desert encounter between two children of the Israelites travelling through the Sinai and two local Bedouin children came from the librettist, Medini. "There is even a message of peace in this work," Fleischer says with enthusiasm.

As an orientalist, Fleischer had travelled frequently to the Sinai Peninsula. In pre-ISIS days, she returned there to draw inspiration for her composition from the authentic surroundings: "I felt as if I had gone back in time and was there with the Israelites as they left Egypt," she says. "I came back from composing in the huts of Sinai covered in gnat bites – what don't we put up with in the name of art!"

Ancient motifs such as the journey of the Israelites in the desert are not new to you. You've worked with stories such as Cain and Abel, for example, and the judgment of Solomon. Why do you prefer them to stories of the present?

Fleischer smiles: "We have so many problems here, and the news repeats its stories over and over again. Do I also have to put up with this in my art? I prefer to escape the present, I run away to the places I love. The orientalist in me draws me back to ancient times. Together with the magic and mystery of the region in which we live, these are the most important things I carry with me as a composer, lifting me up on the wings of imagination. While I'm composing, I'm in a completely different world, far away from the present. I don't want to touch the day-to-day and am not interested in gratifying the audience."

"Arabic is the most musical language in the world. It is much easier to compose for a text in Arabic. Hebrew, by comparison, is like a stone dulled and eroded in a river. Arabic has not been depleted in this way and has done better in preserving its ancient Semitic origins."

When Fleischer was a baby, her mother had her examined by an ear, nose and throat specialist. "You've brought us a musician!" the doctor informed her, explaining that this was indicated by the unusual structure of her ears. Fleischer's father, who played the piano quite well, worked as a salesman in a music shop in Haifa. When she was 3 or 4 years old, he brought a piano home and she began to improvise melodies by ear. Although she was a shy child, when guests came to the Fleischers', they were guaranteed a concert performed by the star of the family. In the Haifa Reali school events, she was always at the heart of the festivities, together with her accordion. The cello player next to her was David Witztum, now a television personality, who is two years younger than her.

Shimon Peres called her "the composer of peace," and the orientalist, Prof. Sasson Somekh, said of her that "Tsippi Fleischer manages to bridge and connect the peoples of this region, achieving encounters that politicians can only dream of."

English translation: Vera Resnick