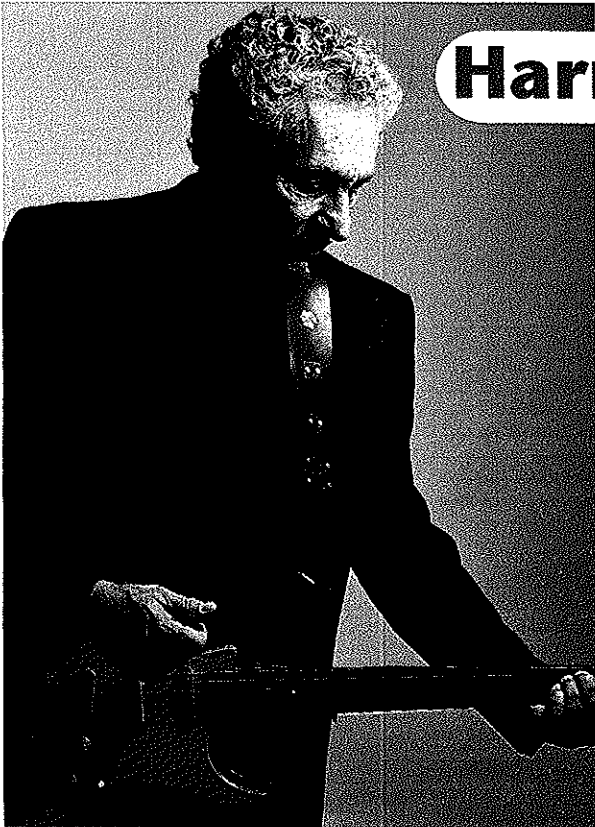


Harmony across the pond



Veteran rock guitarist and Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music president Yehuda Eder. (Omer Messinger)

• By BARRY DAVIS

When it comes to global reputation and international standing in the jazz domain, they don't come much higher than that of the Berklee College of Music over in Boston, Massachusetts.

Berklee started life in 1945 when its precursor, Schillinger House, was founded by Lawrence Berk. The institution took on its current, world famous moniker in 1954, when Berk incorporated the name of his son Lee Elliot Berk in the title.

Berklee is the largest independent college of contemporary music in the world, offering courses in a wide range of styles and genres, from jazz to hip hop, and bluegrass to flamenco.

Over the last three decades or so the Boston school has become a powerful magnet for budding Israeli jazz artists looking to get quality instruction, and to mix with like-minded youngsters from all over the world and benefit from the experience of some of the sector's performing and recording elite who also earn their keep as members of the college teaching staff.

Our own equivalent of Berklee is the Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music in Ramat Hasharon, and the two educational establishments have enjoyed a close synergy for some years now. Masters from Boston come to Israel on a regular basis to present workshops and perform with Rimon students, while many of our top professionals across a broad musical spectrum have furthered their craft by studying at Berklee. These include current Red Sea Jazz Festival artistic director and internationally acclaimed saxophonist and educator Eli Degibri, and stellar saxophonist and clarinetist Anat Cohen.

Rimon students have been able to combine home comforts with the obvious advantages of studying jazz in

the discipline's homeland by including a year's study in Boston in their Rimon four-year degree program. The Americans are now returning the favor and, from the coming school year, will allow their US students to take their freshman year in Ramat Hasharon, followed by three more back in Boston. Several Americans have already registered to attend Rimon as of October.

This is a substantial feather in Rimon's hat and a boost for its global image. "This is a historic precedent whereby an academic degree program in the United States allows its students to take a full year in Israel," notes Rimon CEO Moshe Sinal. "The excellence [of tuition] at Rimon is the reason why we are seen as a leading institution on the global music scene."

Sinal sees the confluence as being of wider, political, import too. "Rimon is breaking through academic and economic boycotts," he notes, and is a cultural ambassador.

Veteran rock guitarist Yehuda Eder is delighted with the new development.

"I think it is a natural bond, on all kinds of levels," says Eder, one of the founders of Rimon and currently president of the Israeli school. The guitarist, whose CV includes stints with seminal 1970s Israeli rock outfit Tamouz - which also featured Shalom Hanoch and Ariel Zilber - has produced top-selling pop and rock albums for Shlomo Artzi, Meir Ariel and Hemi

Rudner. Eder also spent three years at Berklee, in the late '70s, and his predecessor in the Rimon hot seat, jazz saxophonist Amikam Kimmelman, is also a Berklee alumnus.

It was then that he met and befriended current Berklee president Roger H. Brown. The two hit it off from the word go, partly due to a shared admiration for one of America's legendary rock outfits, the Allman Brothers Band. It was to be an enduring relationship, and one that has helped to further cooperation between the schools Brown and Eder now head.

"I met Yehuda early on, and we immediately bonded over our efforts to help Berklee and Rimon cooperate more with one another," says Brown. "We have broken much bread together."

Brown says he has been aware of the quality on offer in Ramat Hasharon for quite a while.

"As soon as I became president of Berklee, I began hearing about great musicians from Israel, most of whom came through a relationship we had with Rimon. I learned that the founders of Rimon were Berklee alumni and that they were passionate about music and music education. That was over a decade ago."

The Berklee chief clearly has no doubts that Rimon and its teaching staff are more than capable of matching the Boston institution's standards.

"Rimon is one of the world's great schools for jazz and contemporary music," declares Brown. "The faculty are very dedicated, the students are serious and committed, and now the school has a beautiful new facility that gives students even more opportunities and support."

The latter refers to a state-of-the-art building that incorporates classrooms, a recording studio and rehearsal spaces. Brown was present at the official inauguration ceremony a couple of years back.

Brown says that his school and its Israeli counterpart also share a common educational ethos, class structure and artistic development ethos.

"Rimon is like Berklee in that the faculty are not just academics; many are working artists. And unlike the traditional music school where the students are, in some ways, subservient to the wise and all-knowing faculty, at a school like Rimon faculty are facilitators and catalysts of the dreams and aspirations of the students. We know that students need to create their own music, not just emulate ours."

Israeli jazz musicians have been making tidal waves in the States and across the globe for over two decades. Naturally, the evolution of musical excellence from this part of the world has not gone unnoticed in Boston.

Brown believes the secret to the high standard of Israeli jazz musicians is partly due to a cosmopolitan outlook and the numerous cultural and ethnic strands that run through Israeli society.

"This is a question we all love to discuss and debate. My simple answer is that Israel has somehow blended the discipline and rigor of European music education with the freedom and iconoclasm of the US, with the interactions that come from the rich diversity of cultures one finds in Israel - from Yemen, Russia, Ethiopia and all over the Middle East and Europe."

The new academic integration is a natural progression of the eclectic spread.

"Yehuda and our team at Berklee were brainstorming new possibilities for collaboration, and we came up with this idea," Brown adds. "We believe that music is becoming less restricted by national boundaries, and we want to help create musicians who can thrive in this boundary-free climate."

"We have worked with Rimon to create an opportunity for a student to begin at Rimon and then transfer to Berklee. Those that do so will have a vastly enlarged view of the world, exposure to musical traditions from other cultures as well as the strong core musical background Rimon will teach them. And all this happens within a curriculum designed to mesh with ours at Berklee."

Sounds like a good joint plan and one that will, no doubt, keep future members of the jazz communities on both sides of the Pond in good hands for years to come.

For more information about Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music: www.rimonschool.co.il



(Right to left): Eder, Berklee College of Music president Roger Brown and a friend at the Rimon school in Ramat Hasharon. (Rami Zeringer)