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Music Review | Jerusalem Chamber Music Festival

Keeping a Fall Festival Alive the Whole Year-Round

By [ALLAN KOZINN](#)

The Jerusalem Chamber Music Festival, which the pianist Elena Bashkistrova started in 1998, is held every September and attracts an international slate of mostly young musicians (but also some older ones, among them Ms. Bashkistrova's husband, [Daniel Barenboim](#)). Between seasons, ensembles from the festival get its name around by touring, and on Tuesday evening, Ms. Bashkistrova and a handful of string and woodwind players offered the first of two concerts at Zankel Hall.

The performances were lively and polished, as performances by touring ensembles representing chamber music festivals almost invariably are. At their best, though, these musicians offered more than just polish. In three [Mozart](#) works — the "Kegelstatt" Clarinet Trio (K. 498), the D major Flute Quartet (K. 285) and the Quintet for Piano and Winds (K. 452) — balances were remarkably fluid, and the ensemble's phrasing seemed to expand and contract with the music's impulses, giving the readings an almost organic shapeliness.

Between Mozart works, the ensemble offered an assured, tensile account of Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony (Op. 9), in Webern's quintet reduction. Ms. Bashkistrova's live-wire pianism enlivened the performance and provided its modernist edge, offsetting the impulse toward Romanticism suggested in the rounded tone produced by the ensemble's string complement, Kolja Blacher, violinist, and Danjulo Ishizaka, cellist. It seems odd that we still think of Schoenberg as one of the defining spirits of contemporary music: this work, at least in its original scoring, dates back a full century, and it is by no means the oldest piece of Schoenberg's to have regular performances.

The program did include some indisputably new music, though. Betty Olivero, an Israeli composer, contributed "Aria," a 2005 work for piano, violin, cello and clarinet. The score begins with a pianissimo violin trill that alludes to Messiaen's "Quartet for the End of Time," written for this same instrumental combination. But Ms. Olivero quickly goes her own way, leaving behind Messiaen's apocalyptic evocation in favor of an idealized vision of the here and now. In its most vivid section, the work juxtaposes a Hebraic clarinet line with violin writing tinged with Arabic timbres and ornamentation.

The musicians brought the same level of focus to Ms. Olivero's work as to the older scores, and there was much to admire in Karl-Heinz Steffens's agile clarinet playing, both here and in the Mozart "Kegelstatt" Trio. Mathieu Dufour's limpid flute tone floated nicely above and within Schoenberg's and Mozart's music. And a wind quartet anchored by Marie-Luise Neunecker's solid and well-tuned horn playing proved a vigorous counterpart to Ms. Bashkistrova's pianism in the Mozart quintet.