



THREE'S COMPANY (From left) Sharon Azrieli Perez, Richard Dreyfuss and Steven Mercurio bond during a rehearsal of 'Kaddish' at the Jerusalem Theater.

Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post

Hollywood legend Richard Dreyfuss joins conductor Steven Mercurio, soprano Sharon Azrieli Perez and the JSO for Leonard Bernstein's Symphony No. 3 'Kaddish'

• By DAVID BRINN

Even though they had only met that morning, renowned American conductor Steven Mercurio, international soprano Sharon Azrieli Perez and Hollywood star Richard Dreyfuss were already bonding in the Henry Crown Auditorium at The Jerusalem Theater on Thursday morning.

Ahead of Monday night's performance with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra of Leonard Bernstein's Symphony No. 3, "Kaddish" in memory of Azrieli Perez's father David Azrieli, the trio were hovering over the sheet music and exchanging notes in a post-first rehearsal huddle.

Despite having landed a day earlier in Israel and nursing a bad back, Dreyfuss appeared jovial as he prepared for his narrator's role. Still sporting the big-screen boyish smile and the eye twinkles, now framed by a shock of white hair, the 67-year-old Dreyfuss explained how he became involved in the project.

"The maestro asked me if I would do it, and I said yes. I had just finished watching the American Masters documentary on Bernstein. I had just finished! And then I got the call," said Dreyfuss, sitting in the foyer of the theater.

He added that it wasn't the first time that he would be reciting Bernstein's "Kaddish." In 1994, he participated in the Papal Concert to Commemorate the Shoah at the Vatican in the presence of Pope John Paul II and performed the role with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Gbert Levine.

According to the New York-based Mercurio,

both men laughed and Mercurio said, "Yeah, I made him do the triple back flip, that's what won me over."

According to Azrieli Perez, the concert was not originally intended as a memorial to her father, the Canadian-Israeli real estate developer and philanthropist who died in July 2014.

"Steven and I have been working together for some time making recordings. I'm an unusual combination of opera singer and cantor, so maestro beautifully orchestrated some cantorial music for me," explained the Montreal-based Azrieli Perez.

The two realized they shared a love of Bernstein and noted that 2015 would mark the 25th anniversary of his death. After they had decided to work on "Kaddish," Azrieli Perez took the concept one step further. Because she had been forced to cancel a performance with the JSO last year due to her father's illness and subsequent death, she suggested that the "Kaddish" take place in Jerusalem and be performed in honor of her late father.

"It just seemed 'b'shert' that it should happen now – here was a Kaddish a year after my father's death – it's a remarkable coincidence and it turned into a memorial concert," she said.

In addition to the featured performers, the concert, held in cooperation with the Azrieli Foundation, will feature a children's choir, an adult choir, and cello soloist Michael Fitzpatrick's cello concerto, Bloch's "Schelomo."

For Dreyfuss, the endeavor has already begun to bear fruit on the first day of rehearsal.

"Sharon and I met this morning, and it was fabulous. Then I heard her sing, and I said, 'if that's her, then they're not making a mistake,'" he said.