

Mozart Festival has a tantalising 'menu'

— ROBYN SASSEN

Thirty-two-year old French-Israeli pianist Jonathan Gilad is one of the key performers in this year's Johannesburg International Mozart Festival. Earlier this week, he spoke to the SA Jewish Report from his home in Berlin, about his love affair with the piano.

It's a fitting focus. This, the sixth Mozart Festival is themed *Un'Aura Amoroza: Love's Delights and Dilemmas*, quoting Mozart's opera *Così fan tutte*. The festival's directors Richard Cock and Florian Uhlig, have put together a programme to match.

The festival was originally coined in 2006 to celebrate the 250th birthday of globally recognised Viennese composer, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, a precocious prodigy who died at 35, leaving a legacy of some of the most beautiful music in the world. In six years, the festival has digressed from being about Mozart only. This year, comprising 22 events, it features seven Mozart works.

"In 30 minutes, Liszt takes you by the

hand, from the first note to the last," says Gilad of Frans Liszt's piano sonata, one of the pieces he chose for his recital on February 3 in Johannesburg.

"It enables you to travel into his musical world and experience atmosphere, colour, virtuosity, lyricism. I have played this work for six or seven years. Every time I come back to it, I find something new and interesting. I think I will return to it all my life."

Marseilles-born Gilad started piano at the age of five. "I liked practising and quickly followed the music path." He was taught by Dmitri Bashkirov, father-in-law of Israeli Argentine-born pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim.

"When I was 11, I started auditioning to perform to the world." At this age, he'd also started winning gold medals in piano and chamber music studies, which brought him to the attention of the international music arena.

As a teenager, on short notice, Gilad was approached to replace Italian pianist Maurizio Pollini, nearly 40 years his senior, at a recital in Chicago's Orchestra Hall, on the recommendation of Barenboim. It was



Gilad's US debut. In 1998, he debuted in Berlin, replacing Barenboim himself, who had been double-booked.

Having blossomed so young, Gilad led a double life. "I was a normal teenager but also a pianist who travelled. I studied engineering in Paris, but I was also commuting to Madrid where I continued my music studies."

The Mozart Festival's Composer-In-

Residence this year is Johannesburg-based Clare Loveday, who read for her PhD in music at Wits in 2009. She laughs when asked about her love affair with the saxophone.

"I think it's the most versatile instrument. It has this big deep complex sound, which differs depending on a player's training. There is no end to what you can do with it. While the piano is gorgeous, it

plays so beautiful with itself."

Two Loveday works perform on the festival, including a brand new piano concerto: *Three Portraits of Intimacy*. Also, she's involved in the festival's sound installation, a collaboration between her, violinist Waldo Alexander and artist Nandipha Mntambo.

"Thinking about it makes my feet sweat, which is very good for me, as I'm normally in control." The work lasts 10 minutes and features a panel discussion thereafter. The Goethe Institut is sponsoring repeat performances of it, after the festival. Annual festival favourites include Orchestra from Scratch which invites audience participation, provided you have grade 3 or higher in music; *Buskaid in Concert*; and *Cinema Improvisando*, live music to silent films, with Paul Hanmer on piano.

• *The Johannesburg International Mozart Festival takes place in Johannesburg and Pretoria, January 25-February 9. There are two post-festival concerts on February 14 and 16, with a Valentine's Day theme. Visit www.join-mozart-festival.org.*