

“The words “superstar” and “mandolinist” still look odd next to each other. Yet in the classical world they are starting to be joined with some frequency [...] Avi Avital who on Wednesday gave a performance of 18th-century Italian concertos at Zankel Hall with the Venice Baroque Orchestra [...] was nothing short of electric.”

The New York Times
Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim • March 12th, 2015

AVI AVITAL

MANDOLIN

Biography

The first mandolin soloist to be nominated for a classical Grammy, Avi Avital has been compared to Andres Segovia for his championship of his instrument and to Jascha Heifitz for his incredible virtuosity. Passionate and “explosively charismatic” (New York Times) in live performance, he is a driving force behind the reinvigoration of the mandolin repertory. More than 100 contemporary compositions have been written for him, 15 of them concertos including by Anna Clyne, Avner Dorman and Giovanni Sollima.

An exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist, he has made five recordings for the label mostly recently solo Bach (2019). Earlier releases include Avital meets Avital (2017) with oud/bassist, Omer Avital, which explores their shared cultural heritage and brings their differing classical and jazz musical backgrounds into dialogue. Vivaldi (2015) followed his own Bach concerto transcriptions (2012) and Between Worlds (2014), a cross-generic chamber collection exploring the nexus between classical and traditional music. He has also recorded for Naxos and SONY Classical.

Increasingly in demand as a concerto soloist, Avital’s has performed with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Deutsche Symphonie Orchester Berlin, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Tonhalle Zurich, Israel Philharmonic, Dresden Philharmonic, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony, Residentie Orkest, Norwegian Radio, Orpheus, The Knights, Detroit Symphony, Seattle Symphony and Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal under conductors such as Mehta, Nagano, Vänskä, Sado, Jonathan Cohen, McGegan, Koopman and Antonini.

He is a regular presence at major festivals such as Aspen, Salzburg, Tanglewood, Spoleto, Ravenna, MISA Shanghai, Cheltenham and Verbier and he was Portrait Artist at the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival in 2017. He subsequently curated a weekend Zeitsinsel at the Dortmund Konzerthaus with 4 programmes featuring classical, jazz and improvisations and a new collaboration with the Venice Baroque Orchestra and Georgian puppet theatre, Budrugana Gagra

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Highlights of his 2019/20 season include the world première of Giovanni Sollima's Mandolin Concerto with the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI whilst other concerto engagements bring him to the Orchestre National de Lyon, Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, Zurich Tonhalle Orchester, Staatskapelle Weimar, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and he tours the US with Les Violons du Roy. He tours Europe and Asia with Avital meets Avital, begins a new collaboration with Giovanni Sollima "Mediterraneo" and is featured as Portrait Artist at Bozar in Brussels.

Born in Be'er Sheva in southern Israel, Avital began learning the mandolin at the age of eight and soon joined the flourishing mandolin youth orchestra founded and directed by his charismatic teacher, Russian-born violinist Simcha Nathanson. He studied at the Jerusalem Music Academy and the Conservatorio Cesare Pollini in Padua with Ugo Orlandi. Winner of Israel's prestigious Aviv Competition in 2007, Avital is the first mandolinist in the history of the competition to be so honoured. He plays on a mandolin made by Israeli luthier Arik Kerman.

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Simmenauer GmbH

Kurfürstendamm 211
DE-10719 Berlin

+49 (0)30 41 47 81 710
www.impresariat-simmenauer.de