



Incontri in Terra di Siena Festival marks **Yehudi Menuhin's centenary** and welcomes back **Palestinian and Israeli musicians from Polyphony Ensemble with Saleem Ashkar**



Friday 29 July – Friday 5 August 2016
La Foce, Val d'Orcia, Tuscany
www.itslafoce.org



"Encounters of the classical kind in Tuscany's loveliest garden"
The Arts Desk

The 28th *Incontri in Terra di Siena* - founded in memory of **Antonio Origo** and his wife **Iris**, the Anglo-American author of ***War in the Val d'Orcia*** – returns to mark the **centenary of violin legend Yehudi Menuhin**, a close friend of the Origo family and founding member of the Tuscan chamber music festival. The week long festival based at La Foce, one of Italy's most enchanting gardens, runs from 29 July to 5 August and will welcome back pianist **Jeremy Menuhin** who will join Artistic Director **Antonio Lysy** and Norwegian violinist **Henning Kraggerud**. Israeli Arab and Jewish musicians from **Polyphony Ensemble** make a much-anticipated return with pianist **Saleem Ashkar** to open the summer festivities. The festival has announced the appointment of pianist Alessio Bax as the Artistic Director for 2017.

Set in the buildings and gardens of one of Tuscany's most beautiful estates, and in the historic castles and churches of the Val d'Orcia, the festival welcomes a variety of musical genres - from **Pepe Romero** of the famous Romeros family of guitarists to traditional Neapolitan *tarantelle* with tenor **Pino di Vittorio**, Grammy-winning saxophonist **Ben Wendel**, the **Southbank Sinfonia** with pianist **Alessio Bax**, **Andrej Hermlin** and his **Swing Dance Orchestra** and many more delights.

Yehudi Menuhin (22 April 1916 - 12 March 1999) met **Iris Origo** in Rome after the end of the World War II - most likely in 1948 - and they instantly became friends. During the war, Menuhin had performed for the Allied soldiers and after the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, he had given a concert with pianist and composer Benjamin Britten for the surviving inmates still on the site while they awaited repatriation. As an act of reconciliation in the wake of the Holocaust, he became the first Jewish musician to return to Germany to perform with the Berlin Philharmonic and Wilhelm Furtwangler in 1947. When Iris and Yehudi met shortly after, Menuhin had just read Iris' moving tale of the German occupation of Italy during World War II and was particularly taken by the story of the Swiss nurse Schwester Marie who with Iris looked after the many children who had sheltered at La Foce (and who would become Menuhin's children's nanny). From that encounter, the Menuhins became life-long friends and often visited the Origo family at La Foce. In 1961, Iris' daughter Benedetta married Menuhin's pupil Alberto Lysy and Yehudi was the best man at their wedding at the chapel at Castelluccio on the La Foce estate. With Yehudi's blessing Benedetta Origo and her son Antonio Lysy founded *Incontri in Terra di Siena* 28 years ago.

Argentinian violinist Alberto Lysy, the first and only student of Yehudi Menuhin, became his protégé after winning an award at the International Elizabeth Competition in Brussels. In 1977, Alberto Lysy co-initiated the Menuhin Music Academy in Gstaad in honour of his mentor. In 2014 soloists of the prestigious academy gave several concerts during the *Incontri in Terra di Siena*.

Palestinian-Israeli pianist **Saleem Ashkar**, a former pupil of the Yehudi Menuhin School in England, will perform in an evening of piano quintets with young members of the Polyphony Ensemble. In 2014, when *Incontri in Terra di Siena* dedicated the festival to nurturing young talents, the **Polyphony Youth Ensemble** made their debut at La Foce. The mixed group of Arab students from Polyphony Education and Jewish students from the Jerusalem Music Center performed a programme of works by Beethoven and Dvorak. They have been brought together through the **Polyphony Foundation** - an organisation that bridges the divide between Arab and Jewish communities in Israel by uniting young people to perform classical music. Saleem Ashkar spoke in 2014 to The Arts Desk explaining the foundation's work: "*What we do is not symbolic, is not cosmetic, what we do is real work in the service of this youth, in the service of educating*". The German classical music magazine *Concerti* commented on their performance: "*One of the musical and emotional highlights of the last year was the performance by the Polyphony Youth Ensemble in which Arabic and Jewish Students came together to play Haydn and Dvořák in elated harmony.*"

Click here to watch a video on the Polyphony Foundation:

<http://vimeo.com/59260857>

'One of the most enjoyable musical enterprises of the Tuscan summer'

- Financial Times -

The 2016 Incontri in Terra di Siena Festival

Friday 29 July

Opening Concert

Polyphony Ensemble & Saleem Ashkar *piano*

Saturday 30 July

Alessio Bax *piano*

Southbank Sinfonia

BEETHOVEN, *Emperor Concerto*

Sunday 31 July

Pino di Vittorio *tenor*

Monday 1 August

Ben Wendel *saxophone & Friends*

Wednesday 3 August

Pepe Romero *guitar*

Henning Kraggerud *violin*

Antonio Lysy *cello*

Thursday 4 August

Jeremy Menuhin *piano*

Henning Kraggerud *violin*

Antonio Lysy *cello*

Friday 5 August

Closing concert – an evening of jazz, dancing and thermal baths

Andrej Hermlin and his **Swing Dance Orchestra**

The Skylarks

"Incontri is a festival embedded not just in the landscape and towns of Tuscany but also its history."

– The Arts Desk –



History of La Foce



Antonio Origo (an Italian nobleman from Florence) and **Iris**, his young wife, bought La Foce in 1924 and dedicated their lives to bringing progress and social change to the poverty-ridden valley. During the Second World War and in its aftermath, the Origos remained at La Foce and sheltered evacuated children and escaped prisoners of war. Iris gives a vivid description of the events that engulfed La Foce during these tough years in her book *War in Val d'Orcia*.

The gardens of La Foce are cherished in Italy and abroad and were featured in the BBC 2 programme **Monty Don's Italian Gardens**. Designed by the English architect **Cecil Pinsent**, who also created Bernard Berenson's garden at Villa I Tatti, they were gradually built from 1924 to 1939. The gardens were conceived to enhance the Villa and expand the spectacular view over the valley of the Orcia river to Monte Amiata beyond. The terraces gently blend with the landscape, following the humanistic Renaissance ideal of geometrical order close to the house, gradually becoming wilder as they approach the woods. Lemon pots, roses, Mediterranean plants, wisteria, box parterres, laurel and cypress hedges, and paths and benches of travertine punctuate the natural curves of the hills.

Antonio and Iris Origo's daughter Benedetta and grandson Antonio Lysy established the music festival in their memory in 1989. Lysy, a Los Angeles-based cellist, is the Artistic Director of the festival, which enjoys patronage from honorary board members including **Charles Dutoit, Maxim Vengerov, Maurizio Pollini, Vladimir Ashkenazy and Colin Firth**.



Antonio Lysy

Antonio Lysy is an internationally renowned cellist, appearing as a soloist in major concert halls around the world. He has performed with orchestras including the Philharmonia, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Camerata Salzburg, the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, the Orchestra di Padova e il Veneto, the Israel Sinfonietta, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Lysy has also performed under the baton of such distinguished conductors such as Yehudi Menuhin, Charles Dutoit, Yuri Temirkanov and Sandor Vegh. In 2010, Lysy released an album dedicated to cello works from Argentina, called *Antonio Lysy at The Broad: Music from Argentina* (released on the Yarlung Records label). He earned a Latin Grammy Award for the track *Pampas*, written for him by Lalo Schifrin.

In addition to his solo career, Lysy is also an experienced pedagogue. He spent a number of years as a professor at McGill University in Montreal. Lysy now holds the post of Professor of Cello and Head of Strings at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) where he now resides.

Iris Origo

Iris Origo vividly describes the wonderful though sometimes difficult years at La Foce in her two autobiographical books, *Images and Shadows* and *War in Val d'Orcia*. Iris (1902-1988) was brought up between Florence, Ireland and America, until she married Antonio Origo and settled at La Foce.



Images and Shadows

(London 1970; reissued by John Murray, London 1998 and David Godine, Boston 1999)

An autobiography, in which Iris Origo describes her childhood spent between Europe and America, and her subsequent move to La Foce, a large farm in Tuscany. There she shared with her husband Antonio the responsibility of bringing back prosperity to the barren land and impoverished people.

War in Val d'Orcia, An Italian War Diary 1943-1944

(London 1947; reissued by David Godine, Boston 1984)

A classic of the Second World War, this diary is an elegantly simple chronicle of daily life at La Foce, a Tuscan no-man's land bracketed by foreign invasion and civil war. "The Marchesa Origo's faithful record is one of those precious and rare accounts that give the truth of history with the art of a gifted writer, that bears witness nobly to ignoble times" (Helen Wolff)

Other books by Iris Origo include:

Leopardi, A Study in Solitude

The Last Attachment

The Merchant of Prato. Francesco di Marco Datini 1335-1410

A Need to Testify

"the brilliance of the Incontri continue to draw visitors and musicians to La Foce."

- Concerti -

For further information please visit:

www.lafoce.com

www.itslafoce.org

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