The evening took place in a vast movie theater. First, his many accompanists asked him to give a speech to explain the forthcoming event in more detail. Niels, a tall, handsome, and very charismatic man, walked onto the stage and explained: “In this country, I only speak Hebrew! So, you’ll have to experience my speech in Hebrew. My friend, Ruth Zucker (sitting in the front row, I twitched with surprise), will join me on the stage and translate.” Of course, he could speak German better than I could, and everyone began to laugh as I went up on the stage as an interpreter. He spoke in the most elegant Hebrew, and his Hebrew teacher, who had instructed him for the past four years and sat in the audience, kissed her hand to him after every idiom. The highlight of the evening was a young Yemeni man who suddenly appeared on the stage with a “folding” piano. He was twenty years old, the very image of a fine young man from the East. He sat down at the keyboard he had just set up with a smile and absolute self-assurance and began to play European classics such as Bach, Brahms, and Chopin.

After the thunderous applause, he suddenly said in a deep, serious voice: “Now I would like to play a symphony about grief, which I composed in honor of my best friend, Leonard Bernstein.” This moving symphony was unforgettable and devastating.

Niels Hansen said to me as we were all leaving: “Ruth, you’ve got to keep your eyes on that one! Don’t let him go. Unfortunately, I have to go, but you’re still here.

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His request became my legacy! I immediately asked the organizer of the evening whether the “boy” was here alone, or if his parents were perhaps here too.

The organizer, obviously jealous, said somewhat dismissively: “You can still talk to his parents, they’re standing over there, but what do you want with them? My children play piano, too.” I hurried away and found the rather impoverished looking Yemeni couple. When I asked if they were the parents of the pianist, his mother embraced me, nearly weeping.

She said: “You are the first person who has asked about him at all since Leonard Bernstein died.”

It transpired that Eliad Sharoni had drawn attention for his musicality even as a child. His parents bought him a battered piano and later were also able to pay for a teacher. Some years before his time in the military, someone gave him a ticket to a concert by Leonard Bernstein. He was self-confident enough to go and visit Bernstein in his hotel. Eliad aske Bernstein to let him play some of his own compositions for him. Afterwards, “Lenni” gave him several hours of instruction every time he came to Israel. When Eliad went to the military, Bernstein wrote the military a letter (I have a copy of this letter even today), in which he explained: He understood that Eliad had to serve his country for three years, but he asked his supervisor to give him a task in which he could protect his hands, because he was a uniquely gifted musician.

Of course, the military simply laughed at the letter and sent him into the desert with a truck, where he spent three years doing hard physical labor. On the day that Eliad was released from the military, Leonard Bernstein died. Our meeting took place not long afterward.

From Eliad himself, I discovered that from the age of twelve to the age of fourteen, when he attended the Rubin Academy in Jerusalem, he had received a scholarship from “someone in Germany.” It turned out that the donor was a certain Niels Hansen! Without even knowing Eliad, he had given a young, musically gifted child two years of study.

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