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**Maya Dunietz Shepherds Pianos**

Five old and broken pianos are scattered around, growling in the gallery of the Artists' Residence in Herzliya, at the solo exhibition of Maya Dunietz. "The music of the work starts from a family's point of view."

Hagit: Good morning Maya, how are you? A bit hectic this morning…

Maya: Good morning. Mornings are usually hectic. There are 4 children in the house.

Hagit: Oooh…This switch always fascinates me, the way we turn from parents to professionals and back, in the blink of an eye. How old are they? And I have to ask - how did you survive the last year?

Maya: It was a mess :) They are 14, 9 and two 3 year olds.

Hagit: A full house

Maya: How did we survive the last year? I feel we were very lucky. Even though a lot of the work was either canceled or postponed, and I had a hard time without frequent rituals of live performances - which are the air I breathe, both as a performer and as an audience. We live in a green area and share a yard with my sister, parents, and some other friends and family and their children. So, we have a kind of commune that grows its food in the garden.

We initiated a lot of joint activities for everyone's children, to keep them occupied. Talented friends whose schedules were free came and taught all kinds of workshops and master classes. The search for new anchors was both interesting and challenging, but of course the trauma hit us all, and everyone broke at some point, then picked up the pieces that could be collected and moved on.

Also some of my very good friends passed away recently (not from the Coronavirus, there are other diseases…). So, amidst the social distancing and the confinement of everyone in their homes I was flooded with many questions about the motives to create, and the role of the creative process itself in life and community. It has been a very strange year.

Hagit: Very strange. And now it is even stranger to return to a kind of an unpredictable routine. I am thinking of a house full of children and voices and I immediately see a parallel line to the exhibition *Five Chilling Mammoths*, which you are now presenting at the Artists' Residence in Herzliya (for which we gathered here). There are five pianos lying in different positions (some of them quite strange), and making noises like a herd of... mammoths, did you call them that?
Maya: Yeah, I see them as a nuclear family of mammoths. The music of the work starts from the family's point of view, and a question that this topic raised - I'll try to explain - Let's imagine for a moment that they are all together in a room, at a Friday night dinner. Each member of the family holds several roles - I am a mother, a daughter, a sister, a lover, and myself - and each of these relationships requires me to behave a little bit differently, so how do I find the middle ground, when all this happening at the same time, what is the balance point between all these roles?

We decided to investigate this topic by looking at the number $\sqrt{2}$, which is an irrational number. The piano’s singing is based on this interesting number, and on the fact that the definition of a midpoint depends on our point of view of any given timeline and space. Ran Kasmy Ilan, the curator of the exhibition, explains this in more depth in the wonderful text he wrote for the exhibition.

Hagit: (Ran will join this conversation soon) And in the meantime - why pianos? Why Five Chilling Mammoths? As an artist whose sound is one of her main channels, why 'noise' and not melody?

Maya: Pianos - This is my instrument, from the age of five. My life partner. And I have always loved old pianos as their past can be heard. “Shepherds” (The Hebrew name of the exhibition) describes well the scattered mammoths, in English it's the Five Chilling Mammoths. A nice phrase as well.

Hagit: The pianos in your collection travel around the world from one place to another - there are classical pianos in the exhibition, pianos that played in concert halls and a piano that comes from a brothel in New Orleans… Why does origin matter? ?

Maya: Every object I bring to an artwork echoes its past. I feel it very strongly. As a pianist approaching the piano, I can feel what it went through by its sound and its physical response to me. How was it treated? Where did it stand and what did it see? What sounds did it hear? The history of each piano is embodied in its sound and is part of the factors that make it who it is.

Hagit: Question to Ran: In the text of the exhibition you refer to the fact that pianos, by nature, usually appear alone, and here they are "a band, herd, of wild pianos", and instead of guiding the orchestra (as a tool for composers) they become ancient animals growling together…

In our conversation, the possibility that these are demented pianos came up. A difficult term that immediately casts a shadow over old age, people who are losing themselves and their abilities. Is there a "double" game here that undermines the role of music as a tool for fun and social communication, and reflects anxieties and worries?

Ran: That's right, pianos "in nature" are solitary animals, a bit like donkeys. The situation in which they become a herd is special, unnatural if you will. There was a lively discussion between us about using words like dementia, silence or aphasia. These are pianos that can no
longer speak "piano", seemingly stripped of their ability to speak, but look how in this setting they find another way of speaking, singing, and even more, together.

Pianos in this condition can be considered deceased, useless pianos. But if there's one thing that we've learned from “The Princess Bride”, is that some are dead and some are "mostly dead." And the one who is dead only for the most part is still somewhat alive.

Anyone who walks amongst Maya's mammoths in the gallery, embraces them, feels the tremor and becomes a part of it, will immediately understand that life-potential and passion overcome any obstacle. In the end, singing is contagious, and maybe that's what we need after the last year. We are all damaged pianos, but we all still have a life-potential.

Hagit: Piano is a significant instrument in the art world. I can think of some notable and symbolic pianos used by Joseph Boyce; Douglas Gordon burned a piano near the Hadrian's Wall in Scotland, in his work The End of Civilization; John Cage's inanimate piano in the seminal work 4′33″ ... They all have a reference to the undermining of cultural foundations.

And with Maya too, the attachment of the piano vibrations undermines the "high" abilities of the musical instrument or of those who play it. In fact, it shatters the social order.

Ran: When a piano arrives at the arena it is already loaded. It is full of history, it has a dominant physical size compared to the other tools, and it presents itself as available.

And I think every work of art is a kind of deviation, something that is done "wrong." In deviation from the furrow there is a potential for discovery of new worlds. I do not think that every such deviation necessarily shatters the social order, but it at least scratches, or distorts it a little.

The western social order presents itself as free, while we live in a supervised society and in an increasingly narrow corridor of possibilities. So scratching and twisting it, to signify that more is possible, is a much required action. There is a beauty beyond the radical consensus.

Hagit: Maya, you had a similar exhibition in Marseille, before the Coronavirus crisis. Does it sound and look different everywhere? Or is there something in music and instruments that appeals to a universal person, beyond local language and culture?

Maya: Certainly every place and every space makes a work sound different, because the space within which it is played is also an integral part of it. The work responds to the space. It is built on sound waves and reflections, and space is what most influences what we end up hearing.

I first place the pianos in the space and then work intensively for about a week on the composition that suits the specific place and time.

Hagit: What are you working on now, what's the next thing?
Maya: I am currently in the process of creating five new works for a solo exhibition that will open in May 2022 at the BEMIS Center for Contemporary Art in Omaha, Nebraska, curated by Rachel Adams. In the main work in this exhibition I am expanding the mammoth family to a herd of 17 pianos (!) collected over the past year and waiting for me to come and start working with them.

Hagit: An impressive challenge.

Maya: Another work that will be displayed there is a sculpture of breathing lungs, which I have been working on for several years, and a new layer of meaning appeared with COVID. In another work, I collaborate with Amit Drori, a wonderful creator and director of the HaZira Theater in Jerusalem, and there is another work I will be working on, together with David Lemoine. It will be built from materials that we will find in the building (this is the only thing I know about at the moment). The inspiration for this work is the performative process of free improvisation. The exhibition will be accompanied by an extensive catalogue - I am really excited about that.

Besides, this year we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Givol Choir I formed with Michal Oppenheim. It is clear to us that we must do something in honor of the occasion, but we are not sure yet exactly what. Stay tuned!

Hagit: I will! And good luck

Five Chilling Mammoths I Maya Dunietz
Curator: Ran Kasmy Ilan
The Artists' Residence Herzliya
Closing: 15.5