

Vertigo and Noa Wertheim ring out 2020

• BY ORJ L. LENKINSKI

Throughout her remarkable career, choreographer Noa Wertheim has had to roll with the punches more than a handful of times. Being spontaneous, adaptable and light on one's feet are qualities that make leading a major dance company feasible. With her uniquely spirited outlook and approach to life, Wertheim has turned many lemons into meringue pies. Challenges present themselves and, together with her partner in life and work Adi Sha'al, Wertheim finds creative solutions to keep doing what she loves while tailoring her company's activities to the current times.

This has never been as crucial as in the past several months. With theaters closed and performance options incredibly and indefinitely limited, keeping a company afloat is a nearly impossible task. Yet Vertigo Dance Company is set to host a major festival, albeit online, in which it will premiere two new works created during this strange period.

"We had planned to have a festival during Sukkot I think, I barely remember which holiday it was, but it had to be postponed," laughs Wertheim over the phone. "Now, we will have it at the end of December to ring out the year."

At first, Wertheim and Sha'al had hoped that by this point, live performances would be



NOA WERTHEIM'S 'Bardo.' (Yoel Levy)

within the restrictions. However, facing yet another postponement, they decided to roll with the times and host the festival using digital platforms. Over the course of five days, they will broadcast two new works, *Bardo* by Wertheim for the company and a duet by former Vertigo star

Rina Wertheim-Koren together with percussionist Itamar Doari as well as a selection of works from the company's repertoire.

"Bardo, in Sanskrit, means a transitional period between life and rebirth," says Wertheim. "That is very much where we are, having to rein-

vent ourselves over and over." To make this work, Wertheim called on several veteran Vertigo dancers to form a capsule and keep the creative fires burning in the studio. "When all this happened, I sent my foreign dancers home. In any case, I prefer to cultivate Israeli talent. I try to keep percent-

age of foreign low so as to give positions in the company to local dancers. We got a group together of our seasoned dancers and we began working." Naturally, the outside world filtered into the creative process. Wertheim and her cast used their hours in the studio to process, reflect

upon and release the difficulties they were being faced with the outside. "It's a very light piece. I think we were all in need of some lightness," explains Wertheim.

The second premiere is another near miracle. "Rina and Itamar had these plans to make a work together. They

were meant to perform it in a bunch of different places but the lockdown stopped that. They managed to perform live once and are continuing their very interesting collaboration here." For Wertheim-Koren, this marks a return to the stage after a long pause. Once a seminal member of the company and the longstanding right-hand woman of Wertheim's, she had left the stage seven years ago and not returned. Until now.

In addition, the Vertigo Dance Festival will present screenings of *Leela, One, One and One* and the iconic *Birth of the Phoenix*. Also set to be broadcast is Sharon Fridman's creation *Shape On Us*, which is performed by the dancers of the Power of Balance project under the direction of Tali Wertheim and Hai Cohen. The group is comprised of performers with and without disabilities. *Shape On Us* was filmed during its premiere as part of the Israel Festival.

All of these pieces, remnants of canceled performances and postponed plans have been carefully curated to compose the festival's program. "I feel very strongly that this festival represents what we are all about: art, community and environment."

The Vertigo Dance Festival will take place December 27-31. For more information, visit www.vertigo.org.il. All events will be free of charge.

Heavy rock guitarist Leslie West dies at 75

Heavy metal pioneer, born Leslie Weinstein, bought first guitar with bar mitzvah money

• BY MIKAEL WOOD

Leslie West, whose band Mountain helped lay the groundwork for heavy metal with fuzzy, hard-riffing songs like the cowbell-enhanced "Mississippi Queen," has died. He was 75.

His death was confirmed Wednesday by his publicist. On Tuesday, his brother Larry wrote on Facebook that West's heart had stopped and that he'd been put on a ventilator.

A physically imposing presence with a self-effacing sense of humor – *The Great Fatsby*, he called one solo album – the singer, guitarist and songwriter was among those who bridged the gap between the bluesy hard rock of the late 1960s (as typified by Cream, whose producer Felix Pappalardi went on to play bass in Mountain) and the flashier, more theatrical sound of '70s metal acts such as Judas Priest.

West's music was sludgy and rough-edged, with growling vocals and squealing guitar solos. But his songs had sharp pop hooks that played well on the radio; "Mississippi Queen" went to No. 21 on Billboard's Hot 100. And his lyrical outlook was sunnier than Black Sabbath's signature doom and gloom – a vestige of the hippie idealism enshrined at the Woodstock festival, where Mountain famously played one of its earliest gigs in front of a crowd numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

"Look at me / I believe it's true," West sang in "For Yasgur's Farm," titled in tribute to the dairy-farm owner who hosted Woodstock, "You're a part of me / I'm a part of you."

Mountain's music also found a surprising afterlife as source material for dozens of hip-hop acts, including Jay-Z and Kanye West, who've sampled the drum beat from the band's live-at-Woodstock recording of its song "Long Red."

In a tweet, Dee Snider of Twisted Sister called West "one of the founding fathers of heavy metal" and said he witnessed



LESLIE WEST (Wikipedia)

other guitarists "bow down before him," including Eddie Van Halen, who died in October.

This month, Dave Grohl of Foo Fighters, along with producer and keyboardist Greg Kurstin, posted a rendition of "Mississippi Queen" on YouTube as part of their virtual Hanukkah Sessions series.

Leslie Weinstein was born October 22, 1945, in New York and grew up in Forest Hills, Queens. Inspired to play guitar after seeing Elvis Presley perform, he bought his first instrument with money from his bar mitzvah and began emulating licks by blues greats such as B.B. King and Albert King, as he told Guitars World in 1987. (Waddy Wachtel, who went on to become a session pro known for his work with Keith Richards and Stevie Nicks, lived in the same apartment building and aided West in refining his technique.)

West and Larry soon formed a Rascals-style garage-soul group called the Vagrants, which built a following within the same Long Island scene that fostered Billy Joel's Hassles; the band signed with Atlantic Records' Atco imprint and cut a well-received cover of Otis Redding's "Respect," yet rock stardom beyond the East Coast never quite materialized.

Pappalardi, who produced several of the band's singles, maintained his relationship with West after the Vagrants

broke up, and he oversaw the recording of West's 1969 solo debut, "Mountain." The two formed the group they called Mountain with keyboardist Steve Knight and drummer N.D. Smart; Corky Laing replaced Smart not long after Woodstock, which West said Mountain had been booked for because the band shared an agent with Jimi Hendrix.

Mountain's first LP, the gold-selling *Climbing!*, came out in 1970 and was followed quickly by *Nantucket Sleighride* and *Flowers of Evil*, both released in 1971. The band broke up the next year, which led West and Laing to form a short-lived trio with Cream's Jack Bruce; West, Bruce & Laing signed to Columbia Records and made two studio albums and a live LP.

In 1973, West reunited with Pappalardi in a new lineup of Mountain, though it didn't last long. West returned to his solo career – including for 1975's *The Great Fatsby*, which featured a cameo by Mick Jagger – and later reconvened Mountain again (minus Pappalardi, who died in 1983) in various forms on the road and in the studio.

In 2011, he had a leg amputated due to complications from diabetes, but just months later released a solo album, *Unusual Suspects*, with appearances by Slash and ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons. His most recent album, *Soundcheck*, came out in 2015.

West, a frequent guest on Howard Stern's radio show, is survived by his wife, Jenni, whom he married onstage at a Woodstock anniversary concert in Bethel, New York, in 2009.

Years after Mountain's heyday, the guitarist said he was still creatively stimulated by the sound he helped originate.

"I've noticed a lot of guys from the '70s... are now trying to play stuff that they never played in the first place, and their credibility goes out the window," he told *The Times* in 1990. "I'm not wanting to force anything or pretend."

"I just do what comes naturally." (Los Angeles Times/TNS)

Talking Heads, Grandmaster Flash, among Grammy Lifetime achievers

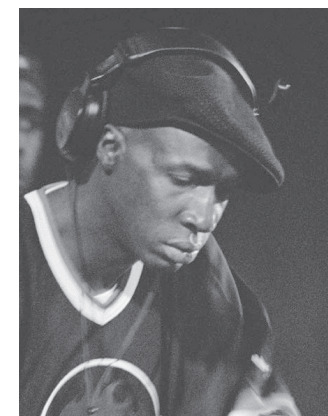
• BY JEM ASWAD

LOS ANGELES (Variety.com/Reuters) – The Recording Academy has announced the honorees for its 2021 Special Merit Awards.

The Lifetime Achievement Award honorees are Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five, Lionel Hampton, Marilyn Horne, Salt-N-Pepa, Selena, and Talking Heads.

Ed Cherney, Benny Golson and Kenny "Babyface" Edmonds are Trustees Award honorees; and Daniel Weiss is the Technical Grammy Award recipient. The honorees will be recognized on the 63rd Annual Grammy Awards on January 31, 2021. Given the challenge imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, more details about the special award presentation event will be announced at a later date, according to the announcement.

"As we welcome the new class of Special Merit Award



GRANDMASTER FLASH (Wikipedia)

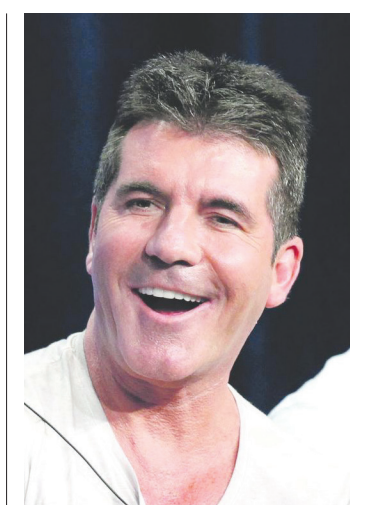
honorees, it gives us a chance to reward and recognize the influence they've had in the music community regardless of genre," said Harvey Mason Jr., interim president/CEO of the Recording Academy.

"As a music creator and music lover, I am grateful that we are able to look back at our influences and see the impact that

they have made on our community. In a year where music has helped keep us together, I look forward to honoring this iconic group of music creators."

According to the announcement, the Lifetime Achievement Award celebrates performers who have made outstanding contributions of artistic significance to the field of recording, while the Trustees Award honors such contributions in areas other than performance.

The Recording Academy's National Board of Trustees determines the honorees of both awards. Technical Grammy Award recipients are voted on by the Academy's Producers & Engineers Wing Advisory Council and Chapter committees, and are ratified by the Academy's trustees. The award is presented to individuals and companies who have made contributions of outstanding technical significance to the recording industry.



SIMON COWELL (Reuters)

Simon Cowell to be judge on 'The X Factor' Israel

• Jerusalem Post Staff

British television personality Simon Cowell is poised to judge the fourth season of *The X Factor* in Israel, according to Yahoo News.

Cowell, the original creator of *The X Factor*, has been judging the British competition since the first season aired in 2004. Cowell also founded ITV's *Britain's Got Talent*.

"Over the years, The X Factor format discovered amazing talents from all over the world, I can't wait to see what Israel has to offer," Cowell said, according to Yahoo.

The X Factor has aired three non-consecutive seasons in Israel (2013, 2014 and 2018), on Channel 13, with Israeli supermodel Bar Rafaeli as the staple host of the show.

The three competitions showcased some of Israel's top talents, including singers, composers, judges and songwriters such as Eden Ben Zaken, Moshe Peretz and Eden Alene, who was set to represent Israel in the 2020 Eurovision Song Contest.

The new season of *X Factor Israel* has just gone into production and should air in 2021. This will be Cowell's first appearance as a judge outside the UK or the US.

'Christmas Makes Me Cry' is latest holiday song written by a Jewish musician

• BY GABE FRIEDMAN

Some of the most enduring Christmas songs were written by Jews. Now Jewish rocker Adam Weiner has added a new song to the mix, and if "Christmas Makes Me Cry" doesn't turn out to be canon, it's at least very 2020.

Weiner, of the indie band Low Cut Connie, has "all kinds of mixed feelings about the Christmas season," as he told NPR. He wrote a song about it for the NPR Morning Edition Song Project that was released on Wednesday.

The title gives away that it's not a typically cheery Christmas tune. Weiner didn't tell NPR that the season depresses

him because he feels left out as a Jew – it makes him feel lonely in general. Add the tragedy of the pandemic this year, and it's difficult to keep up the happy holiday facade.

"To me, the good aspect of the holidays is increased sympathy. It's a time when, suddenly, people become more altruistic, more neighborly. And then it fades. That always bothered me. But, here we are, during a global pandemic. Everybody is going through something, and everybody is feeling isolated, and everybody has experienced some form of grief," he said.

Weiner hails from Cherry Hill, New Jersey, where he used to get "lost" in the religious

songs at his temple, Congregation Beth El, as he told the Jewish Community Voice of Southern New Jersey in 2018. Particularly those sung by his childhood cantor.

"If I'm being honest, I think he was a big part of my musical youth," Weiner said. "His voice was very soulful in a particularly Jewish way that I think really seeped into my consciousness. It felt like pure spirit."

He also called himself "extremely Jewy" in a 2016 interview with the Jewish Exponent of Philadelphia, which took place just after then-President Barack Obama chose a Low Cut Connie song for his annual playlist. (JTA)