

A maestro crudely off key by MARTIN SHERMAN

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In an interview with the Hebrew daily Yediot Aharonot last weekend, the internationally renowned conductor Daniel Barenboim flatly rejected the possibility of inviting Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, an ardent music lover, to any of his concerts during his upcoming visit to Israel.

"I have nothing to say to 'that man,' in spite of his love of music," snapped Barenboim, an allegedly loyal Israeli, about his democratically elected prime minister. "I think that 'that man' is inflicting great harm not only on the Palestinians but on the Israelis as well," he said, explaining the reasons for ostracizing Sharon, who was swept into power by an unprecedented landslide by Barenboim's fellow Israelis, apparently unendowed with the conductor's superior political acumen.

It should, of course, be noted that Barenboim's political "insight" and professed concern for Israel have led him into close collaboration with none other than Edward Said.

Said, an intellectual of Palestinian origin and of doubtful integrity, who was embarrassingly caught by the camera hurling stones at IDF soldiers on the Lebanese border after the Israeli withdrawal, has over the years made a name for himself as one of Zionism's most vitriolic critics, and a fervent advocate of the elimination of the Jewish state.

One can only surmise, therefore, that, for Sharon to redeem himself in Barenboim's eyes, he would have to revert to the failed policy of concession and withdrawal of his predecessors, whom Barenboim would not have hesitated to invite to his performances.

Never mind that these policies have wrought untold disaster on Israel; never mind that they resulted in the killing and maiming of thousands of Israelis; never mind that they were utterly rejected at the polls. What matters, apparently, is that they have the overriding merit of being approved by the fashionable, liberal Left.

Much of the remainder of the interview is a disturbing mixture of self-contradictory platitudes and blatant non-sequiturs. Thus, for example, Barenboim spoke in glowing

terms of the accomplishments of a joint Israeli-Palestinian-Arab orchestra which he formed (together with Said) in order to promote dialogue between protagonists in the Middle East conflict.

So it appears that according to Barenboimian logic, dialogue with citizens of Israel's adversaries is perfectly acceptable, even desirable; but unthinkable when it comes to the Israeli prime minister with whom he refuses to converse.

Not that Barenboim has any illusions about the nature of the heads of state in Arab countries. For when asked about the possibility of his peace-promoting orchestra performing in Jerusalem, his reaction was sharp: "Are you crazy?" he retorted, "There are members in the orchestra who come from Egypt [sic], Lebanon, Jordan [sic] and even five from Syria. I cannot possibly divulge their names. If I did, they may not be allowed home. They could even find themselves in more serious danger."

Strange how complacent and uncritical Barenboim is about the behavior of the Arab regimes -- especially Egypt and Jordan -- who in spite of their signature on peace agreements with Israel, still often penalize their citizens who dare to maintain overt cultural ties with the despised "Zionist entity."

But perhaps the peak of absurdity in the interview was reached when Barenboim expressed the hope of his joint orchestra performing in the near future in Damascus. It is inconceivable that he believes he could hold such an event without inviting Syrian President Bashar Assad to attend. So one must conclude that while the Israeli premier is a persona non grata at his concerts, the president of one of the most tyrannical and non-democratic states in the world is not.

Yet, in spite of his severe censure of his own country and countrymen, in spite of unquestioning acceptance of the undemocratic abuses of his country's adversaries, in spite of his liaisons with his country's fiercest critics, Barenboim still professes allegiance to Israel. "I come to this country because it is important to me," he declares. "This is who I am. This is my people."

With friends like Barenboim, one might well ponder, who needs enemies?

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