Daniel Barenboim Discusses Music As a Bridge to Peace in MidEast

O n Monday, Jan. 24, the award-winning progressive composer Daniel Barenboim will return to campus and discuss music as a bridge to peace in the Middle East at the first Edward Said Memorial Lecture on campus at Miller Theatre, at 8 p.m.

The event, “Wagner, Israel and Palestine,” is free and open to the public and is sponsored by the Heyman Center for the Humanities and Miller Theatre. Barenboim is expected to discuss his partnership with Said and their shared passion for freedom of expression and tolerance.

Currently music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Barenboim was a close friend and collaborator of Said’s, the late University Professor in the Comparative Literature and one of the most influential intellectuals of this past century. The details of Barenboim and Said’s lives couldn’t be more different, but they shared a love of music and the belief that it could change the way people interact for the better.

Born in Buenos Aires to parents of Russian-Jewish descent, Barenboim moved to Israel in 1952. He made his concert debut at a piano in Vienna and Rome in the same year, going on to perform annual concert tours of the United States and Europe. Barenboim is one of the world’s most celebrated pianists and conductors of his generation.

In an effort that also cemented their friendship, Barenboim and Said founded in 1999 the West Eastern Divan Orchestra, an orchestra and school that brings together Israeli, Palestinian and other Arab musicians to play music. One of the goals of the orchestra is to build relationships between members of communities in conflict. Many of their ideas on the ability of music to transcend national identity are explored in the book Parallel and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society. Edited by Carnegie Hall sensor director and artistic advisor Ara Guzelimian, the book is a series of interviews at which Said and Barenboim exchange ideas on politics, culture and music.

For Barenboim, music is a powerful tool capable of reshaping the way people view each other, themselves and the world around them. “Music... is an art that touches the depth of human existence, an art of sounds that crosses all borders. As such, music can take the feelings and imagination of Israelis and Palestinians to new, unimaginable spheres.”

Barenboim became general music director of the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin in 1992 and has served as music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra since 1991. In the fall of 2000, the Staatskapelle Berlin appointed him chief conductor for life. He also appears regularly with the Berlin Philharmonic and Vienna Philharmonic orchestras. Barenboim won a 2003 Grammy for his recording of Wagner’s Tannhäuser, and in March 2003, he and the Staatskapelle Berlin received the coveted Wilhelm Furtwängler Prize.

Accolades listing the importance of Barenboim's and Said's work aren't limited to musical honors. In October 2002, Barenboim and Said jointly received Spain’s prestigious Prince of Asturias Concord Prize for their work in bringing Palestinians and Israelis together through music. Barenboim was also awarded the Tolerance Prize by the Protestant Academy of Tübingen in southwestern Germany in November 2002 for his efforts founding the West Eastern Divan Workshop. The same month, the president of Germany awarded him the Große Bundesverdienstkreuz, the highest honor given to someone who is not a head of state. In 2014, Barenboim received the Buber-Rosenzweig Medal, the Wolf Prize for the arts in Jerusalem and the Haviva Reik Peace Award.

For more information, contact the Miller Theatre Box Office at (212) 854-7799, or visit danielbarenboim.com.