

Hannie: Got it!

Hi

Aliena: Ahlan (Hi)

Shalom Hannie Ricardo, singer, musician, conductor and educator, teacher of music, voice, and history; writer, photographer, and founder of the "Musical Bridges" nonprofit.

A versatile woman.

Hannie is the mother of the late Oriya who was murdered at the Nova festival on October 7, may her memory be blessed.

First of all my deepest condolences, Hannie, I am so sorry for your loss.

We are here to talk about the way you chose to cope with it, to move on, and to do it in a way that will have an impact on the whole world - that's how I see it.

So I would love for you to share with us.

First of all, I understand that the tragedy caught you in New York, what were you doing there?

Hannie: I came to New York to work. I got a job at Yeshiva University and from there I found myself after Covid without a job but with the idea of going back to school, I was a student most of my adult life. and fulfill a small dream of getting a degree in music. I have been a musician for over 30 years but without a degree in music.

So everything I did I did without a degree, yet. It will arrive sometime at the end of 2024.

Aliena: Beautiful.

Hannie: I lived here, I was in the last months of my residence in Manhattan with my brother and sister-in-law and there I received the call from Israel informing me that Oriya was missing. That they can't find her.

And that's it. From that moment my life turned upside down and there is no way back. I got on the first plane to Israel, that too was hard to find. I arrived in Israel on Monday, October 9th and on October 10th her boyfriend found her body and we learned that she was no longer alive.

Aliena: So there were also those days of not knowing.

Hannie: There were... it was Friday night, between Friday and Saturday at around 1:00 a.m. New York time until Tuesday morning, it was October 7th, 1:30 a.m. here until Tuesday around noon in Israel when we received the answer, the message that she was not alive. And that's it. Since then my life has been completely torn apart.

Aliena: How does it happen that in such a situation you do continue to study, to work, to function... how is it?

Hannie: I myself don't have an answer to that. I was always told "You're a strong woman" and apparently we find some kind of strength within us in such points that we didn't know existed.

I remember myself in the Shiva saying that I choose life. I gave lectures to the people who came, and hundreds of people came to the Shiva, and I found myself telling them that I choose life, life alongside death and not living death alongside life.

This was a very, very strong statement and I repeated it several times, probably to convince myself.

Aliena: And validate it in reality, of course.

Hannie: As a post-traumatic person, I knew immediately from the moment I learned that Oriya was dead, I told myself I needed a psychologist, I needed a psychiatrist now, not to wait with it. I instinctively, also from knowing about post-trauma and what trauma is, I knew that the hardest of all was to come. I did take this step and I take care of myself in this regard, but at the same time I allow myself the space to break into pieces, and it happens once, twice, three, four times, sometimes all day long that I can't put the pieces together into something to move on.

Aliena: You are in New York now, correct?

Hannie: Now I'm in New York, finishing the semester here. It's that learning is always. I found it to patch up all kinds of difficult things I went through in my life, studies were always a refuge. And a place to get stronger. I love studying. I actually came back here also in December 2023 to finish the semester because in October I left everything, went to Israel and did some of the courses online for a few months, the months until December, and then I went to take the exam.

Where does the strength come from, I don't know. I also did concerts in Oriya's memory when I still hadn't finished 3 months of mourning.

Aliena: We will soon talk about it in depth. I want to relay this connecting thread, we will also refer to your thesis, which in my opinion is a crazy story.

Hannie: All the... I look at the thread that runs through the last 30 years of my life or rather the last 25 years of my life, it's chilling, the connection between all the things I do, what happened to me, and how I keep on forward with it.

Aliena: Do share what this connection is.

Hannie: In 2000 I met a dear man named Prof. David Bloch, he was a professor in the Department of Musicology at Tel Aviv University, in one of the classes I attended. I took a course with him and we became very, very good friends, he was actually the one who introduced me to the music of the Jewish composers who were murdered in the Holocaust, mainly from Terezin. Theresienstadt as it is known. in Czechoslovakia at the time.

And this music captivated me and since then it has also accompanied me in my research, I delved into it very much. I met with Holocaust survivors and people who survived the Terezin ghetto and Auschwitz, who could tell me about the composers and the musical life that was in the ghetto, and of course, perform the vocal music.

Aliena: Did you have access to the pieces themselves started?

Hannie: Yes, yes, Prof. David Bloch did an amazing job, and everything that exists today we owe to him. He really went and collected, back when Czechoslovakia was part of the communist bloc and the Israelis had no access, he used his American passport to get there. And he obtained materials without which I doubt it would have been preserved and we would have had access to these works.

I started performing it and of course what is best known from the ghetto is the children's opera Brundibar, which was written before the war started in '37, and captured my heart from the first sound I listened to. And I created a project of teaching about the Holocaust through music for children through this opera and I also staged it 8-9 times in Israel with so-called "regular" children, not singers or choir children, I would simply enter the classroom, teach them the subject and go from the macro to the micro; eventually we put this opera on the stage.

Aliena: Lovely.

Hannie: My Oriya also played the lead role in one of my productions and she was part of - when I founded the Musical Bridges nonprofit, I formed a choir and she was part of the choir and performed, two or three more times we managed to perform before this association was shelved.

So this music has been with me ever since. In the end, I went to study singing at the university here in New York for a master's degree, one of the pre-requisite courses was ethnomusicology and when the lecturer heard about the subject that has been accompanying me for so many years he informed me, he convinced me that I could not leave graduate school without academic work on the subject.

This was also after the year before I had written a book, It hasn't been published yet, but I wrote a story that is based on the last 20 or so years since I was introduced to this music and these composers and it is fiction.

Oriya also appeared there, not by name but I will change the nameless character to Oriya because it's all intertwined somehow, she is intertwined in my life of course but also my musical work with Terezin... I started writing my thesis about the musicians from Terezin when the narrative was them but my

observation was actually music under trauma when you come to a place where the trauma is severe – there are all kinds of traumas and I will go into this topic of the type of trauma later in the work – and suddenly I find myself in the place of my musicians, that music is, what is the role of music in my life in this unbearable, inconceivable place that it is so difficult where I am today after my daughter was murdered.

Aliena: I understand that a concert is planned, that you are producing a concert – Let's talk about this.

Hannie: A year and a half ago already, it's been six months since October 7th which is also unfathomable how quickly time goes by. In October 2022 as part of all my engaging with the composers, I started writing music, because I thought about how I was going to memorialize my composers in another way, not just singing and not just writing and not just lectures, something more. And I said I will write Kaddish, the Aramaic words of the Kaddish "Yitgadal VeYitkadash Shme Rabba", with my own melody, and I will put quotations from the music of my composers in it and I will create something new, where the idea was to say Kaddish on the composers.

That was the idea. And then I had an idea to send it to a Jewish music competition, but I'm not a well-known composer, I'm a singer, I'm not a composer, or at least I wasn't until today. And it got stuck somewhere in August 2022. I didn't know where to take it. The musical spring stalled a bit and then October 7th came, and it really shakes you so hard that... I was torn from my reality here in New York, I was planted in a reality in Israel, and Israel for me, you know, was to get to Oriya first, and Israel without Oriya is a difficult, unbearable reality, Life itself without Oriya is an unbearably difficult reality, but I hadn't been to Israel for 4 years, more than 4 years, I mean I didn't live there.

Aliena: There were visits.

Hannie: I built my life here, I had a job, I had my studies, and I was supposed to move into a new apartment of my own on October 15th, I talked about it with Oriya on October 6th and we had a very long conversation for an hour and a half, Oriya and I talked, and suddenly you wake up one morning and all the reality you knew until a few hours before is forever gone.

Aliena: Indeed...

Hannie: I was completely lost, completely lost. And no, no.. I stuck to singing even though it was very difficult for me to sing, but I found that until December I could sing and from December I couldn't sing anymore. It just stuck. And I couldn't play. Something closed in me, every song I had sung in the past suddenly became... the words took on a different meaning. almost every song... I had to find neutral songs that wouldn't cause an outburst of emotions because there are hard things in life, losing a daughter is the hardest thing.

Aliena: Nevertheless, you went to something whose words are very, very significant – Kaddish – you turned to this project, and you are immersed in it.

Hannie: It turned out this way, it's not something I thought "Here, let me do it". There was the Kaddish, it was ready there. I played it once during the Shiva, I think, to a very good friend of mine who is a pianist, we used to perform together. And didn't touch it.

Then what happened is this - There is an Israeli rapper called Tuna, and I learned during the Shiva that he was Oriya's favorite singer and something in me said I must have him come at the thirty-day memorial. I approached him and asked him if they would come, and they said yes. So at Oriya's thirty-day Itay came with the guitarist and he sang three songs, one of them was "In the turn" – You are dancing, you are sailing, if you feel like flying, don't look down" - and this song stuck in my head, I didn't have to listen, it just played on a loop and when I returned to Israel in January this song was still there. The whole time I wasn't singing anything else, this song was going in a loop.

I played the piano for a bit and then suddenly I realized that it was Oriya's quote, that I was going to write the continuation of the Kaddish, and it is all dedicated to Oriya. One thing led to another, and after a few days I already had a segment on Oriya and I met with, I asked to meet with the wonderful Talia Ilan the conductor and I asked her if she would agree to conduct my piece, I still didn't know where it was going, I said I needed it to be performed on the anniversary of Oriya's burial on October 15 I want them to sing the Kaddish. Kaddish Oriya.

Aliena: Publicly, with an audience –

Hannie: In my mind, I wanted the Israeli Opera, I wanted to perform at the Opera, I told her I wanted it to be at the Israeli Opera on October 15th, that's what I told her. Then she heard the piece, was fascinated by it, and asked me a very simple question - What about an orchestra? So I said: "But I've never written for an orchestra", to which she replied: "Yes, but you've never written anything like that. And look what you did."
So I said ok, we'll try. After I got the OK from her, I approached Beyt Terezin, I played it to Tammy, the CEO of Beyt Terezin (Terezin Home)...

Aliena: Just say a few words about Beyt Terezin, what is it?

Hannie: Beyt Terezin is the museum/archive / place of the survivors of the Terezin ghetto and their families. There are a lot of materials left over from the ghetto, documents, and also a collection, a museum of things that existed or were done following Terezin.

Aliena: And it's the same ghetto of your composers.

Hannie: Yes, I came to Beyt Terezin following David Bloch, my professor at the time, he had a workshop there that he founded and held for over two decades, and they played, learned the music from Terezin, and learned about the Terezin ghetto. I went there and said "This is the project I want, are you with me? And they said yes. Then we got to the Israeli opera. I told them there too, I played it to them, and they

opened their eyes wide, they didn't think it would be that and then they said they only had October 7th available.

Aliena: 2024.

Hannie: 2024, I said "I'm taking it".

Aliena: Crazy.

Hannie: So... I'm a grieving mother writing a Kaddish for her daughter that she started a year before... I started writing this Kaddish a year before, it's completely crazy.

Aliena: Totally. It's unfathomable, really. chilling.

Hannie: Then I told them OK, so October 7th we are in Tel Aviv, I want the 15th of October at the Jerusalem Theater. So it took some time, and this was set too. At that time the piece had not yet reached completion, I had not finished the piece yet. The end was very, very difficult for me because I felt that I was addressing Oriya personally and this piece was written, now it has already been proofread, and in the next few weeks it will go to print, and we started forming a choir, we already have about 40 people in the choir, I want 60 and we are working on it. I want at least for the first year only Israelis to sing this piece. Only Israelis. And only Jews. All the nations will forgive me, but this Kaddish must be said by us, for the sake of our dead.

Aliena: Who else got involved in the vision?

Hannie: The Jewish Agency and private individuals, also here now when I talked about the project with some people, their hearts opened and now I hope that their pockets will open too because we, my idea actually at the beginning was just to say Kaddish for my daughter, but I can't ignore what is happening in the world and the anti-Semitism and the evil that is shown towards Israel regardless of the war, it's just – hard to say – pure evil.

Aliena: Do you feel it in New York?

Hannie: Oh yes, sure!

Aliena: Really?

Hannie: Of course! I got some comments, I usually wear the yellow pin, the yellow ribbon for the release of the kidnapped, and I got antisemitic comments about it, not many but there were, when I approached one of the security people he said "The pin is provocative".

Aliena: Wow. OK.

Hannie: Then I realized there was no one to talk to. There is no one to talk to. And I don't want to get into deeper anti-Semitic aspects at the moment, but I decided that I will take this project and show the whole world what the Jewish people are made of. that we rise from the ashes. We will rise from the dust again and I feel that if we do not rise now and stop apologizing for our existence and simply demand our place by virtue and not by grace, then we have nothing left for the next generation.

And I see myself precisely because of the place I'm in as a bereaved mother who lost her daughter in a way – I won't say in the most horrible way because I know of several cases personally where the girls died a more horrible death than my daughter who was "only" murdered, she was shot

Aliena: We won't go into details.

Hannie: We won't go into details, but she was "just" shot. And it's an absurd situation to be in to say Thank God she was just shot.

Aliena: Really. Completely absurd.

Hannie: But this is the case. And I say I stand on two legs, I won't give in, and it's hard, I tell myself every day several times a day - don't fall, don't fall. To hold on, to create this thread that I will hold on to in order to move on. A. Because I'm here, I'm not a person who will go and take my own life, I'm not. And I say in all honesty, I often don't want to get up in the morning, it's not a situation I want to be in in this reality where my Oriya is not there! It's... there is still a part of me that is waiting for messages from her, that is waiting for someone to wake me up from this nightmare, to take me...

Aliena: I understood that she said goodbye to you, kind of, right?

Hannie: She said goodbye to me, she sent me a message, probably that was the last message that came out of her phone, she sent me a message. "Mom, I love you very much." And that's it. The messages I sent her at 1:30 am from here remained with one check mark. So... I guess that either she realized that she wouldn't get out of this alive, and wanted to say the final goodbye to me, or... I don't know, I don't know exactly what happened to her in the last half hour, in the last moments, I don't know... but she said goodbye to me... and... it's bitter but in a way sweet to know that she was thinking of me in the last moments. She thought of Ima. (mom). Which for me is a lot.

Aliena: Obviously.

Tell me, Hannie, how can we help you? How can I help you? How can this interview help you? What do you need right now?

Hannie: We will do the two concerts in Israel, and I apologize for being a bit scattered.

Aliena: It's all good, all good.

Hannie: That's the state of the head, it doesn't always go in a straight direction...

Aliena: You are great and wonderful and it's all good.

Hannie: But to create what I call "Culture against anti-Semitism" is to bring this Kaddish that I created out of the greatest pain that connects Holocaust to Holocaust, to resurrection. And bring it to the United States, here, to New York, and then to Boston, to all the big cities.

Aliena: To LA of course.

Hannie: LA.

Aliena: ...Where I'm at.

Hannie: LA is a very, very important city to bring this project to because it brings music by the composers from the Terezin ghetto, connects between the horrible holocaust that was in the 40s of the last century and the holocaust we went through in October 2023, and shows that we will be here and we will create.

Aliena: Do you need money Do you need professional support? Do you need to recruit more singers for the choir? Everything you need – this is the place to say.

Hannie: So I need people to donate to the project, there is a special account for Beyt Terezin, it is also recognized for US tax purposes.

Aliena: Great, I'll attach it to the video.

Hannie: And just donate. And I turn to everyone, not only those who can put a lot of money but also those who can give \$10, \$20, \$50 because it is like the legend about the Western Wall. The legend says that this

wall was built by the poor of Jerusalem, the poorest people, stone by stone, that's why the stones are not the same size... And they put in the little they had to build the Western Wall, and this is what was left of the Temple. So I turn to everyone, and a penny is as important as a hundred and vice versa. I invite everyone to be part of this project.

Aliena: You also want more singers, right?

Hannie: The truth is that the singers I want, I need to form the choir in Israel, we need 20 more singers, so if you have acquaintances in Israel who want to sing and whose hearts are in the right place, that was my condition for all the singers.

Aliena: Obviously.

Hannie: Vocal ability, reading notes, and having the heart in the right place. This is what I asked to be in the totality of the person, and the people who came, they come voluntarily. Everyone who joined it volunteered.

Aliena: Beautiful. Is there anything else you can think of? We're just about to finish and it's very important to me that you fully express yourself.

Hannie: What I'm saying is, I want to tell Oriya's story, the story of the Nova children, I can't separate the story of Oriya and the other children, 404 of the Nova party and the Psyduck party, so if there are communities that want to invite me to come and speak, then call, get in touch, I will come to speak.

Aliena: Both in Hebrew and English, of course.

Hannie: Hebrew, English, both languages are fine by me. But for me, it is important to spread the story, to bring the story of the children, I also tell about the Kaddish but mainly about the children and their story and our story as a people. And I'll come anywhere, from LA to Alaska to Miami.

Aliena: Hopefully, we can get to all these places and I'm with you.

Hannie: I will go wherever possible to talk and tell and spread and say that the Jewish people are on their feet, they will not knock us down.

Aliena: So Hannie, on this blessed note, I first of all want to thank you again for responding, for your openness, and for sharing with me, I know it is not easy for you to talk about these things, and I really hope that we will reach as many as possible and that we can all together with you realize this vision for you. And

I want to wish you Shabbat Shalom and to all the people of Israel a peaceful and blessed Shabbat Shalom, as pleasant as possible.

Thank you very much, Hannie.

Hannie: Thank you very much, Aliena.

Aliena: Goodbye.

Hannie: Goodbye.