

# Brother's birthday piano was key to Yaara's success

BY SIMON YAFFE

YAARA Tal's sliding doors moment came at an early age. She was six when her brother, Roni, received a piano for his birthday.

But, as Roni showed no interest in it, Yaara started to tickle the ivories, instead.

And, more than 60 years later, she is one of the most renowned pianists of her generation.

"As soon as I started to play the piano, my brother's teacher told my parents I should be given some lessons," Israeli Yaara told me from her home in Munich.

"She said it looked as though there was some talent there."

Roni, meanwhile, moved to America and enjoyed a successful tech career in the Silicon Valley.

Yaara is perhaps best known for her work with her German partner Andreas Groethuysen.

They have released numerous recordings of piano music for four hands — largely world première recordings.

Their CDs have won the coveted Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik 11 times, while the German Phono Academy has awarded its ECHO Klassik-Prize to five of their recordings.



NEW WORK: Yaara Tal

However, Yaara has gone it alone for her latest work.

**Yaara Tal: *Tracing Bach*** (Sony Classical), which will be released next Friday, selects preludes from the famous *Well-Tempered Clavier* by Johann Sebastian Bach and places each of them alongside a fugue by a different composer.

The selected fugues are from composers through 250 years of musical history such as Bach's son Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, Robert Schumann, Frédéric Chopin, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Anton

Arensky, Lyonel Feininger and Reinhard Febel.

"The Bach prelude and the fugue complement each other beautifully and coherently, illuminating each other in a new and refreshing way," Yaara said.

Yaara added: "The new album came about because I had a lot of time on my hands during the pandemic.

"I had been known as a soloist and so I wanted to go back to spending more time on the piano on my own.

"I did a lot of research and wanted to see what was in the repertoire, which was a lot."

Yaara was raised in Netanya, the daughter of Miriam and Itzhak Tal.

Her father, who was born in present-day Ukraine, was sent to work in a labour camp during the Holocaust before joining the local partisans.

And her mother, who was from present-day Slovakia, survived Auschwitz, but both her maternal and paternal grandparents were murdered.

Yaara's parents found their way to Israel, where her father Hebracised his surname from Kestenbaum.

"They were very special people,

although I guess most people think the same about their parents," Yaara said.

"My parents never put the Holocaust at the centre of mine or my brother's upbringing.

"I never felt any sadness, sorrow or loss. They were generous, warm-hearted and calm."

She went on to study piano with Arie Vardi, and composition with Abel Ehrlich and André Hajdu at the Rubin Academy in Tel Aviv.

After graduating, she completed her military service, before moving to Munich — having won a German Academic Exchange Service scholarship — to study at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater.

And, perhaps surprisingly, her Holocaust-surviving parents were supportive of their daughter's new life in Germany.

Yaara recalled: "They always said that they did not understand anything about music, so that I had to make my own way, choose my teachers, and they would support me in everything I was going to do.

"Even when they became old, they never said, 'come back to live in Israel'.

"My father visited Munich once and my mother, three times. I think my mother always felt European —

she missed Europe.

"She actually said she could see herself living in Munich and we started to look for an apartment for her here, but she died soon afterwards."

Yaara, 66, has lived in Munich for more than 40 years. Both an Israeli and German citizen, she still feels Israeli — and she has never encountered antisemitism in Munich.

The 66-year-old met Andreas when they were both students and they formed as a duo in 1985.

"Andreas is not Jewish, but he does speak Hebrew," Yaara laughed. "There were no problems with his family with my being Jewish — it was not a thing, at all."

The duo have released numerous albums and have also won the Prize of the German Record Critics, the Cannes Classical Award and the Schwabinger Art Prize.

"Thankfully, we have a loyal label in Sony Classical," Yaara said. "We have worked with them for almost 35 years and, I think apart from Yo-Yo Ma, we have worked with them the longest out of all the artists.

"That kind of thing is rare today."

■ [tal-groethuysen.de/index-en.html](http://tal-groethuysen.de/index-en.html)

## Actress Tracy-Ann Oberman was told she didn't look enough like Anne Frank to play Jewish roles

ACTRESS Tracy-Ann Oberman told *i* newspaper about facing antisemitism in the entertainment industry.

The 54-year-old was raised in a Jewish home in Stanmore, north London.

She claimed that her drama school principal recommended changing her last name, as she didn't "look enough like Anne Frank" to play Jewish roles.

The *Friday Night Dinner* and *Toast of London* star added: "Contemporaries of mine, like Rebecca Front and Samantha Spiro, we were all pretty much told, 'Try and keep your Jewish heritage out of the way because casting directors will see you differently'."

She also claimed that at her 1995 audition for the BBC production of *Pride and Prejudice*, she was told,

"That was a lovely reading, but nobody looked like you during Jane Austen's times'."

Oberman — who will appear later this year in new BBC drama *Ridley Road* — contemplated changing her last name to Denham or Smith but "then I just thought, 'Oh, f\*\*\* it', which I think has kind of been me all the way along, which is, this is what I am, take it or leave it."