



BY NATHAN JACOBS

RELEASING one album is an achievement not to be scoffed at. And yet, French violinist David Grimal, pictured above, went one better last week, releasing two albums of very different character on independent label La Dolce Volta.

The first, *Poulenc — Stravinsky — Prokofiev*, sees David and Israeli pianist Itamar Golan bring to life three sonatas by three famous composers.

The second, *JS Bach — The Six Sonatas & Partitas*, was released on the same day, and has David performing the ultimate masterpieces of solo violin repertory.

“The recording process has been very easy and it has all come very naturally,” said David, who turned 50 earlier this year.

“Itamar is also a marvellous pianist, world famous, and has been playing with the greatest violinists on this planet for more than 30 years, so we had just a wonderful time playing.”

“We inspire each other very much, but it was easy to be with him and, even though we are different, it looks like we have some rules in common and an understanding of the world beyond materiality.”

“He is like a poet, a dreamer, so it has been a creative time with a great feeling of freedom.”

Born and raised partly in the suburbs of Paris and partly in Cairo, Egypt, David comes from a family with no history of professional music.

His mother, Genevievé, was an English teacher and his father, Nicolas, was an Egyptologist, although his uncle did spend time as an amateur violinist and his grandmother as a pianist.

The musical side of his family coincides with the Jewish side, although religion is not something particularly pertinent in his life.

“I was not raised into Jewish culture,” he added, from his home in Paris.

“Instead, my relation to the fact of being Jewish is more towards a responsibility to make the world a better place . . . or at least to try.”

“Simply trying to behave like a human being as much as we can is a good place to start.”

To that end, David founded Les Dissonances in 2004, a European classical music orchestra composed of international soloists and young talents, one of the few symphony orchestras that regularly performs without a conductor.

They have developed a ‘let’s play together’ concept where he prepares the musicians to perform

Recording is easy for David as he releases two albums in one day

as a unit with absolute freedom of interpretation.

The repertoire includes most of the classical works, such as Mozart and Beethoven, and, in order to develop youngsters’ knowledge of classical music, Les Dissonances leads educational projects with violin workshops in schools, educational concerts, and open rehearsals.

The ensemble also leads a social project dedicated to homeless people called L’Autre Saison (the other season), where musicians, dancers, narrators and comedians come together to take part in a charity concert.

“I care about the human relation and that is about what you can establish with yourself, which is very important,” he said.

“Then it is about building relationships with your companions in life and in today’s society, it is very important to try to repair what has been destroyed, especially with people suffering on the streets.”

“We have too many of them in Paris, it is terrible and we don’t even look at them anymore, we see they are dying and we don’t care.”

“So that is why we have dedicated these concerts to homeless people, so those who can afford it will come and pay, and with that money, we try to get people off the streets.”

A sought-after chamber musician and teacher, David is tireless in his quest to reflect on the role of his art in society and is passionate about reinventing the sense of the collective and looking at music in a different way.

Renowned internationally for the originality of his musicality, he started to play the violin at the age of five.

He won first prize in violin and chamber music at the Conservatoire de Paris in 1993, before doing postgraduate studies with world-famous French violinist Régis Pasquier.

He was appointed Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres (Knight of Arts and Letters) by the French Minister of Culture in 2008, a way to recognise eminent artists and writers who have contributed significantly to furthering the arts in France and throughout the

Melanie compelled to tell story of namesake

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TEN years ago, after Melanie Levensohn had married her winemaker husband Pascal, she discovered a battered folder in his office with her name ‘Melanie Levensohn’ written on it.

But, it had nothing to do with her, it was a folder dedicated to her namesake, a cousin by marriage who was a student in Paris in the 1940s before being deported to Auschwitz aged 19.

The parallels between them became clearer, both born of German heritage, both having studied in France, but the difference between them was that the first Melanie was Jewish — a fact that ultimately led to her murder.

After stumbling upon the folder, Melanie felt an immediate

‘Being the namesake of a Melanie Levensohn who was deported to Auschwitz had a massive impact’

connection and was inspired to write her debut novel, *A Jewish Girl in Paris* (Pan Macmillan, £9.99) weaving what she knew of Melanie’s real life with research into Paris during the German occupation.

“I felt like I really needed to do something with all these documents, I needed to write something,” 52-year-old Melanie told me.

“I didn’t want to write a documentary because I wanted to give her a more emotional memorial, so that is why I came to the fictionalised version of the story, intertwining my life with hers.”

“As a German, I feel it is an important contribution I can



TRIBUTE: Melanie finds her namesake’s name on a memorial wall



SAME NAME: Author Melanie Levensohn and, right, her namesake who was murdered in Auschwitz



make, to raise awareness and to help people not to forget what happened, especially in these times of ongoing war and conflict situations where we feel these things shouldn’t happen again, but are still threatened with repeating history.”

Born close to Frankfurt, Melanie attended a boarding school close to Lake Constance in southern Germany.

She studied literature and international relations in France and Chile, before becoming a spokesperson for the World Health Organisation in Geneva.

Melanie also worked as a communications expert at the World Bank in Washington, DC, before she met her husband Pascal, who is Jewish, and joined him in Napa Valley, California, where they created an award-winning wine estate.

Threatened for years by horrendous wildfires, they moved back to Geneva with daughter Aurelia.

A Jewish Girl in Paris focuses on Paris in 1940, where a Jewish girl named Judith falls in love with a Christian man, secretly planning to flee the country together, but she disappears before they can leave.

More than 60 years later in America, a woman called Jacobina is searching for Judith, a half-sister she did not know existed until her father tells her on his deathbed.

The story is based on true family events.

Roughly 20 years ago, Pascal was at an event where his second cousin Jacobina mentioned a half-sister who was not present.

He then learned that Jacobina’s father, his uncle, requested on his deathbed that she promise to search for a half-sister, Melanie.

As it turned out, both Pascal’s father and his uncle escaped the Nazis, the former doing so after being sent to a camp in Romania.

Jacobina spent 12 years compiling any information related to her half-sister, writing to the Holocaust Museum and the Red Cross as well as contacting the Shoah Memorial in Paris, and many research centres that trace Holocaust victims.

A large folder was created, filled with faxes, documents and proof of the French transition camp Melanie was initially sent to.

Within it, there were also copies of German-written faxes by Gestapo and SS high-ranking officials confirming the train which deported Melanie and many other Jews to their death at Auschwitz.

“Finding all of this was incredibly emotional for me,” Melanie said. “It is really through my husband that I became a more conscious and aware person.”

“Of course, especially as a German, you constantly think about what happened and learn and read about it, but through my husband and his first-hand family situation, that really changed my life in terms of how conscious I am now about the Holocaust.”

“Our marriage changed my perception and understanding, but being the namesake of a Melanie Levensohn who was deported to Auschwitz in 1943 had a massive impact.”

“Here I was, 70 years later, a new Melanie Levensohn from Germany joining this family and that was very emotional for all of us, and is what inspired me to write the book.”

The book was originally published in 2018, written in Melanie’s German mother tongue, but it has taken years to have it officially translated.

She described having the translation as a “dream,” finally enabling her extended family to read it in English.

But one memory in particular, just prior to the German version’s initial publication in 2018, stands out for Melanie, having visited the Shoah Memorial in Paris.

“There is a big wall of names there, and one of them engraved is Melanie Levensohn,” she finished.

“We really went back to honour her and that was as close as we could get to the real Melanie, to her spirit.”

“Hopefully it can now live on, in some way, through the book.”