

Israeli leavens serious songs with lighter fare

POP

Chava Alberstein

Where: The State Theatre, 15 Livingston Ave., New Brunswick

When: Thursday 8 p.m.

How much: \$20-\$38; Call (732) 246-7469 or visit www.statetheatre.org

What else: She also plays Kaufmann Concert Hall, 1205 Lexington Ave., New York, on Wednesday at 8 p.m. Call (212) 415-0500 or visit www.92y.org

BY KAREN IRIS TUCKER
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

From her Tel Aviv neighborhood in Israel, folk-pop singer Chava Alberstein bears witness to the more stormy, melancholy and awkward moments in life, channeling them into her music.

It isn't that the 37-year-old singer — a musical icon in her homeland — doesn't acknowledge the value of pretty love songs. She has recorded many within the rich repertoire of her more than 30 albums. Yet that universal medium isn't what drives her artistry or what inspires her most, personally.

Alberstein, a political dove in a land wracked by war, says that for her, "the main thing about being a singer is to talk about issues that other singers don't talk about. Maybe," she theorizes, her lyrics are "more for newspapers than for music."

The singer-guitarist's latest CD, "End of the Holiday," comprised entirely of Hebrew language songs, reflects Alberstein's dark fiber on daily happenstance. Within Alberstein's deep, toasty silt, she croons each story as one about an elderly congregant who wails broken-heartedly in an empty prayer pew, his synagogue's membership on the wane ("Empty Synagogue"). Elsewhere, the raucous title track lenses a group of vacationers headed for home, "gathering its belongings and turning its back to the sea."

Alberstein, who collaborated on Holiday with her husband, filmmaker Nadav Levitan, has managed to maintain a relevance in popular music for more than three decades. She attributes her appeal to "always working, always asking questions. I'm not always secure," she confides, "but my work is good enough. I always feel that I'm getting closer to something but I don't know exactly to what."

Such inquisitiveness led Alberstein a few years ago to compose "The Well," a set of



Yiddish tunes, with a younger breed of kindred musical spirits, the *Klezmers*.

"I always look for new companions and new collaborations," she says. "When I was very young, I worked with old composers. And as I'm getting older," she says with a gravelly laugh, "I work with young people."

Alberstein, whose romance with Yiddish is one of her hallmarks, has devotedly recorded in that tongue for many years. She says Yiddish is "like a collective memory" of Jewish families, many of whose members, like that of Alberstein's, perished in the Holocaust. Later-day Israelis and American Jews might consider Alberstein emigrating in her dedication to Yiddish, a now little-used language. She says she remains unflinched, however, by the fashion of the day, and her audience, a motley mix of all ages and creeds, continues to grow even as she samples unradio-friendly material.

"You have to listen to the world, but also to yourself," she remarks simply of her musical philosophy. People go to see Alberstein perform, she says, because "they are interested to hear me in the same way I'd be interested to hear a Greek singer — I like the music even though I don't understand the words."

Fans who attend her performances can expect a mix of romantic misadventures, along with ones that unflinchingly encapsulate the impoverished lives of fringe members of society and immigrants in Tel Aviv.

The latter subject interests Alberstein a great deal, as she herself emigrated to Israel as a 4-year-old child from Poland. "We were all, in a way, refugees and immigrants," she says. Her lyrics, she adds, "are trying to take people on a journey, to show them a different face of Israel — something that maybe you don't see in the papers, or see on CNN."



FRIDAY, MAY 14, 2004
THE STAR-LEDGER