

The Zen garden in the Ryoan-ji in Kyoto, Japan



All the historic temples of Kyoto are fascinating, but the Ryoan-ji is extraordinary. It contains the quintessential Zen garden, with fifteen large boulders floating on a lake of raked sand. There's no spot from which a person of normal height can see more than fourteen of the stones, however: an implied, unspoken koan. Contemplating the garden for an extended time encourages a highly charged sense of primed emptiness, exactly what is required for any activity that demands extreme concentration. That state is essential for a conductor, and I find it helpful to use the sense-memory of my visits to Ryoan-ji to recover it.

The balcony of my late father's apartment on Rehov Diskin in Jerusalem



Photography by Atta Wong

My father moved to Israel in the late '70s, and for the last seventeen years of his life lived in a flat on Rehov Diskin in Jerusalem. His block was next to the upscale Kiryat Wolfson development, but much more heimish. On the street side he was on the second floor just above the busy street life, but the rear – with a good-size balcony – was on the cliff wall, far above the Valley of the Cross, with a spectacular view across to the Israel Museum on the far side, the Monastery of the Cross below and the Knesset building in the distance. Inside was the bachelor flat of a frum scientist whose publications ranged from teaching manuals for Talmud to works on biblical archeology, piled from floor to ceiling and from wall to wall with seforim and secular books. Visitors would make their way to the guest room, which they'd share with motors and measuring equipment on the inventor's workbench. Going from inside the flat to the balcony was like emerging from a cave into a magnificent world. ♫

Jerome Hoberman grew up in Teaneck, New Jersey. He earned degrees from Brandeis and the University of Wisconsin, and a doctorate from the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University. He moved to Hong Kong in 1991 and is about to begin his nineteenth season as music director of The Hong Kong Bach Choir and Orchestra, and is also principal conductor of the Baguio Cathedral International Music Festival in the Philippines. Among the orchestras he has conducted are the Shanghai Symphony, Shanghai Philharmonic, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, Manila Symphony, Ukraine State Symphony and Muntenia Philharmonic in Romania.

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