An Israeli jazz composer and pianist is kicking off a North American tour in support of her second album with a concert on October 1 at Calgary’s Beat Niq jazz club. It will be followed by an engagement on October 2 in Edmonton.

Anat Fort was born near Tel Aviv and studied classical piano as a child. Also she naturally gravitated toward jazz. In the mid-1990s she came to the U.S. to study jazz, wanting to balance a natural tendency towards free playing with a proper understanding of the tradition. In the last several years she has become an influential figure on New York City’s alternative jazz scene, and is a highly regarded player in Israel.

Her new album on ECM Records is called “And If.”

In an article titled “The Best Countries in the World,” Israel was ranked between Spain and Italy, scoring seventh overall in health, 25th in terms of quality of life, and 15th in economic dynamism. In a rating that would surprise many Israelis, Newsweek also ranked Israel 27th in political environment.

The next Middle East country to make the list was Kuwait at 40, while neighbouring Jordan placed 53rd. Iran and Syria also made the list, but ranked 79 and 83 respectively.

This study comes after a recently released Gallup poll, which stated that Israel was the world’s 8th happiest country, tied with Canada. The poll was published in Forbes Magazine.

Interestingly, the “best” countries ranked in Newsweek’s study exhibited a correlation with the “happiest” countries measured in Gallup’s poll, at least among the top-ranked countries. The U.S. and Britain scored 11th and 14th place in the Newsweek study, compared with 14th and 17th in the Gallup poll.

Israel was ranked the “best countries” by how well they scored in five categories: Education, health, quality of life, economic dynamism, and political environment.

While Israel ranked 22nd overall, it scored better in the health sub-category, where it ranked seventh out of 100.

The board of directors of The Little Synagogue on the Prairie Project Society at the Lion Awards ceremony. (l. to r.) Shel Berovich, Betti Weiss, Shauna Switzer (Treasurer), Trudy Cowan (Vice President), Emanuel Cohen, Irena Karshenbaum (President), Jack Switzer, Leslie Levant (Secretary). The Little Synagogue on the Prairie Project received a Calgary Heritage Authority 2010 Lion Award in the Advocacy and Awareness category at a special ceremony on July 28 at the Water Centre. The Lion Awards are presented by the Calgary Heritage Authority, which is part of the City of Calgary. As described on the City of Calgary website, “The Calgary Heritage Authority, fold, recognizes citizens and groups who have undertaken initiatives, of any scale, in support of heritage conservation in Calgary.”