



## Culture & Art

### Concert Celebrates Middle Eastern Diversity, Peace

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LOS ANGELES — In stark contrast to the ongoing violence in the Middle East, a concert celebrating the eclectic music and ethnic diversity of the Middle East was held in Los Angeles last week.

The performance, called “Deep Soul,” included lyrics in Kurdish, Hebrew and Arabic and was “dedicated to a more pacific Middle East,” according to the Levantine Cultural Center, which hosted the event in California on Aug. 2.

The ensemble was composed of musicians Yuval Ron from Israel, Delil Dilanar, who is originally from the Kurdish region of Turkey, and Jamie Papish from the United States. The performance was held under a crucifix to an enthusiastic and diverse crowd seated in the old wooden pews of a Christian chapel.

The Levantine Cultural Center was established in 2001 “to champion a greater understanding of the Middle East and North Africa,” French-Moroccan co-founder Jordan Elgrably told *Rudaw*.

“We present arts and education programs that help bridge political and religious divides... The power of music is found in its universal beauty. Music inevitably brings people together, despite their differences,” Elgrably said.

The crowd was comprised of Kurds, Turks, Armenians, Arabs, Christians and Jews who were all seated under stained glass windows depicting Biblical scenes.

Kurdish master musician Dilanar captivated the audience with his skillful seduction of the Tambour, a lock-neck mandolin, and the Duduk, an ancient Armenian flute. The vibrato of Dilanar’s voice echoed the history of his people, and locked the audience into religious states of elation.

Israeli musician Ron interacted closely with the audience, encouraging people to sing, dance and clap along with performances that celebrated ancient tribal stories of love and beauty. Ron calls on stories that are over 1,000 years old to convey the themes of beauty, change and forgiveness.

Kurdish refugee Najah Amin, who attended the performance, said, “I don’t think there is any religious conflict between each people. We’re all human, we’re all from different kinds of backgrounds and religions, but we all get together... Los Angeles is like a melting pot. Everybody lives here, and everybody has a different opinion about everything. But we all live happily.”

The three musicians arranged the stories with contemporary flavors and sounds that made the music more accessible to the California audience. The ethnic diversity created a safe climate for people to celebrate their respective cultures together.

Ron spoke to Rudaw after the concert. “I feel that the music that I play brings people in, and melts their hearts. I feel the music almost hypnotizes the people to forget about themselves, bringing them to a deep place inside themselves... This music is of the old world, of cultures that developed art around fire pits in the desert.”

Ron is a scholar and performer of Middle Eastern music, and a well-respected member of the Jewish community in Los Angeles.

“There are two main arteries that motivate me: one, which is my need to connect to my roots, and the other — and maybe an

even greater drive I feel — is a calling and continuous push to make a difference. What really drives me is the social and political message — that we still need to maintain hope in humanity getting along and humanity evolving,” Yuval said.

Yuval suggested that the recent resurgence in music from the region might be attributed to generations of people who are re-discovering their cultural roots through music. The Levantine Cultural Center, for one, has an active roster of events that celebrate the music and art of the Middle East and North Africa.

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