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SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 2015

MUSIC **Yuval Ron performs at CTS**

Posted By [Kyle Long](#) @DJKyleLong on Sat, Jan 17, 2015 at 3:00 PM

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Aziz - Whirling Dervish

There aren't many musicians who can list a command performance for the Dalai Lama in their bio, but Israeli musician Yuval Ron can and does. It's a strong testament to Ron's claim that his interfaith music ensemble is building bridges of peace between followers of Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

In addition to being a world renowned master of the oud, Ron is also an award winning composer, and a noted lecturer who has spoken at several prestigious institutions including Yale, MIT, Johns Hopkins.

And the timing of Ron's January 22 concert at the Christian Theological Seminary couldn't be more fitting. A recent rash of extremist Muslim attacks has created a virulent anti-Islamic sentiment I have not felt since the days and weeks following 9/11. If you're feeling depressed, hopeless or angry about these current events, Yuval Ron has a message of musical healing for you, regardless of which side of the ideological fence you fall on.

I recently spoke with Ron via phone from his home in California.

NUVO: The music of your ensemble seeks to bring understanding between followers of different traditions of faith. For you what role does an artist have in the movement for peace and social justice?

Yuval Ron: I feel that we have an incredible responsibility and an enormous role in this movement because people look up to us. Of course we have elected leaders and politicians, but there are also leaders who come from the cultural and spiritual communities. People follow, listen and imitate those cultural leaders.

I speak to thousands of new people every year. Every year there are thousands of ears and minds that I can reach and influence. The way I communicate, the values I project, the sense of harmony I bring to music has a potential to influence and inspire people. And that's not my own personal case, every musician can play that role.

NUVO: In the many years you've been traveling the world with your ensemble I'm sure you've had some powerful encounters where your music has deeply influenced or inspired your audience. Any memorable stories you would like to share?

Ron: There have been many cases where people have come to me after the concert and said before the show they had lost all hope for peace in the Middle East but during the concert something awoke in them. Some people have told me the concert is a life transforming moment for them. There are immigrants that have written to me and said that since they moved to the U.S. their lives had been bleak, and they were in poverty and depression and when they heard the music it gave them a ray of light.

There's a Syrian-American woman who came to one of my concerts. She told me she had been a volunteer in Gaza for seven months and she came back so depressed from the situation in Gaza seeing all the misery in the refugee camps. When she came back to the U.S. she was filled with depression and hate. She had hate for anything to do with the Israeli government or American companies that could have any connection to the misery and suffering she witnessed in the Palestinian territory. This woman came to my concert in upstate New York and she told me this concert was the first time she started healing herself from that hate and depression. It freed her from the negative emotions that were holding her in a prison. She started seeing the complexity of the situation. There are good and bad guys on both sides of the conflict.

In 2009 I was invited to play a concert by the king of Morocco. I was the first Israeli ever to be invited to play in Morocco at the Sacred Music Festival of Fez. There are all kinds of situations like this that we don't expect. But it all starts with our intention which is to bring people together and see the truth beyond boundaries of ethnicity, religion and borders. We choose to seek beauty in every tradition and when we do that amazing things unfold.

I could go on and on, but I'd like to bring up one more example. I ended up being made an honorary Malaysian artist. I'm an Israeli. There's no diplomatic relationship between Malaysia and Israel. Malaysia is a Muslim country in Asia that doesn't recognize the state of Israel. For them Israel does not exist. They are more extreme than the neighbors of Israel. Egypt and Jordan recognize Israel. Malaysia does not let Israelis enter. You can not get a Visa to visit Malaysia. It's the most extreme position.

I can not go and visit Malaysia but I ended up being made an honorary Malaysian representing Malaysia for their presentation on the nation's independence day in Los Angeles. For three years in a row I was invited to do this by the ambassador of Malaysia who happened to see my concert and became a fan of my music. That brought this man representing a country that does not recognize my homeland to become my friend. We're still in touch and we're talking about bringing my ensemble to Malaysia.

NUVO: I read that you've worked with a pair of neuroscientists on a project exploring sound and the brain. Can you talk about what you learned from this project regarding the role music can play in healing the body?

Ron: This is really fascinating. I learned a great deal about the inner mechanisms of the brain and how they respond to music. When you are involved with music making there are more circuits in your brain that are activated than most of the other activities we do in life. When we read, when we talk, when we write there are certain areas in the brain that are involved. When you do music there are many, many areas of the brain involved because music is involved with math, memory, emotions, personal expression, and coordination. There are an enormous amount of circuits in the brain that have to be involved.

I also learned how these processes affect the brain and the study of those processes have

confirmed many of the mystical teachings I've collected through the years regarding how music has been used by yogis, and great masters in the East, in India, Turkey and all over the Middle East. The way they used music for healing and to create ecstasy is now being confirmed by neuroscientists.

We are living in a fabulous time where neuroscience is starting to confirm what the mystics have taught us about the power of sound to influence our well being. Now music therapists can use these studies and show them to insurance companies and hospitals to prove that what they are doing is not an illusion. It's actually working.

It goes beyond healing into understanding the universe, what the universe is made of, and how it was created. The string theory teaches that everything is vibration, which comes from the mystical traditions. Everything is vibration, me, you, a rock, a table – it's all different forms of vibration. If you can manipulate the vibration you can affect the reality. You can use sound like any other tool. You can use it to heal, or to hurt.

Now all those things are being addressed by scientists. It's just the beginning of this incredible age where scientists are beginning to explore this frontier of how sound works, and exploring issues of creativity, and consciousness. It's a fascinating time.

NUVO: One of the most striking elements of your performance is the way musicians from different musical backgrounds come together to create this cohesive sound. The last time I saw your group you were playing with the great Qawwali musician Sukhawat Ali Khan. Qawwali music has such a distinct and individual sound, but you integrated Sukhawat Ali Khan's music so well with your ensemble. I'm curious how you select your band members and who will be performing with you this time?

Ron: I go with my heart. Not just with the musicians but with the songs and the material. I always choose things that really move me deeply and touch my heart. It's handpicked material, because not every folkloric tune from the Middle East would be presented at my concert. It goes through my filter that I've developed over many years of being a composer for theater, television, film, and radio.

Some performers when I hear them it really moves me deeply and I connect with them and I establish a relationship with them. Sometimes that grows into a meaningful collaboration. That's how I connected with the Sufi Pakistani master you mentioned Sukhawat Ali Khan.

The people I'll be bringing to Indianapolis this time include first and foremost our whirling dervish who is a great dervish from the Mevlevi Order that comes from the great poet Rumi. The Sufi organization of Rumi's followers is called the Mevlevi Order. The dervish we're bringing is from this order and it's a direct link to the lineage of the great mystic poet Rumi. The dervish is a prayer and meditation in movement. It's spectacular, it's hypnotic and tantalizing to see.

I'll be bringing our Armenian woodwind master Norik Manoukian. A world famous master of the Armenian woodwind. He's played music for the soundtrack's of movies like Dead Man Walking, Helen of Troy and he's played in the national orchestra of Armenia.

We will also have our singer Katyanna Zoroghlian, she is of Lebanese heritage and my drummer Jamie Papish who is of Jewish-American heritage. Our ensemble represents the three Abrahamic traditions: Jewish, Christian and Muslim.

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by Kyle Long

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