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Home > Arts & Entertainment > Israeli flamenco gypsy musician Yuval Ron strikes a chord

Israeli flamenco gypsy musician Yuval Ron strikes a chord

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A little over a decade ago, His Holiness the Dalai Lama summoned people from all over the world to create a musical movement dedicated to mark the new millennium with, "hope and commitment to peace and universal responsibility."

Thus, the World Festival of Sacred Music was created and set forth to unify people from all realms.

Last Sunday night, the Broad Stage was filled with an energy and anticipation that is seldom felt amongst frequent concertgoers.

Oscar-winning artist Yuval Ron presented his American premiere of "The Soul of Spain," a concert showcasing the frequently unknown ancient origins of the beloved Spanish art of flamenco.

The ensemble of 10 who backed Ron is a group of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian musicians and dancers, serving as an exemplary group of performers for the World Festival of Sacred Music.

Informed attendees talked about the Yuval Ron Ensemble's rare ability to combine Sephardic Jewish heritage, music and dance from the Middle East, and rich Spanish and Gypsy traditions.

The ultimate goal of the show being a demonstration of unified harmony and peace.

"Yuval Ron is a wonderful educator. He doesn't just stand up there and play music. He is fascinating and hypnotic to listen to. He talks about the culture, the history, the styles of music. That's why I'm here," said Lyn Ayal, a fan of the Yuval Ron Ensemble.

Ron was born in Israel to parents that raised him in a secular household, although he had always been fascinated with the history and traditions of the Jewish religion.

He graduated cum laude from Berklee College of Music as a film scoring major, prompting him to move to Los Angeles for work.

In the mid-nineties, Ron wanted to create something with the idea of bringing peace to the Middle East. For 25 years, his attraction to prayer had led Ron as a composer to gather ancient forms of musical prayer, blending them, and fathering modern works of art.

Ron never thought he would ever perform these pieces of music in their original forms until 2000, when the group played their first concert in Israel and he realized the power of the message of unity brought forth by presenting prayers from all three religions on stage.

The Yuval Ron Ensemble has also gained controversies over the last decade.

This past June, a show in Istanbul was stopped due to a radical Islamic group associated with Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah who threatened to interrupt the concert.

Though the mayor and the head of police of Istanbul urged Ron to continue despite his concern, it was still planned to go on until five hours before the show when the prime minister called the mayor and demanded that the show be cancelled.

The Islamic radical group had told the prime minister that they would not support him in the general election that was to be held four days later.

Regardless of the backlash that they have received, the Yuval Ron Ensemble has touched the lives of the people who witnessed its culturally rich performances.

"I got an email once from somebody in San Bernardino. A foreigner. I could tell by his writing. Maybe he was an illegal immigrant, I don't know, but he wrote to me saying since he arrived in this country, a few years ago, his life has been hell," said Ron.

"I don't know the consequences, but he said that the music and the concert was the first time in a few years that he sensed to be alive. And it gave him motivation and energy to live."

To Ron, there are a few moments he feels empowered when on stage.

One of those moments is when Briseyda Zarate Fernandez, the flamenco dancer, and Maya G. Karasso, the Sephardic Jewish dancer, take the stage together during the second act of the show.

However, the moment after the show that the Ensemble gets to spend with fans is what fulfills Ron the most.

"Some people are really, really moved," said Ron. "And it's beautiful. I'm very, very happy to hear what people have to say. They write to me emails. People tell me amazing things about the impact of the work of our music and the message and the teaching on their lives."

"This is really the real conversation for me," said Ron. "That's why we're doing it, really. This is why I love meeting people after the show. It's one of my favorite moments in this work. It's to be with the people."



Photo Credit: Sylvia Spross
Oscar-winning artist Yuval Ron presented his American premiere of "The Soul of Spain," a concert showcasing the frequently unknown ancient origins of the beloved Spanish art of flamenco.

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