

Ynet Entertainment September 9

The Jerusalem Sacred Music Festival: as *exciting* as the coming of the Messiah

"Maqam Yerushalem" the performance that concluded the Jerusalem Sacred Music Festival was both surprising and exciting—largely due to Omer Avital who provided the musical direction and Haya Samir who astounded us with her vocal talents. The meeting between east and west has never looked more whole (play on words "Yerushalem" shalem means whole).

Yesterday evening, for two hours, we were fortunate enough to be able to watch the closest thing to the coming of the Messiah from a musical perspective. Maybe even politically. It was the *perfect* concert. For one evening Jerusalem was what it could be, what it should be: a city that transforms its differences into a fertile unity.

In the dramatic backdrop of the Tower of David Museum's forecourt, next to the Jaffa Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem, an amazing and incredibly diverse group of musicians and vocalists (by any standard) joined forces. Alongside western musicians playing the cello, violin and viola, sat an enthusiastic kamanchist (a long necked Turkish string instrument) and a dedicated flutist playing the ney (an Arab hollow cane flute), as well as a musician strumming a large wooden trapezoid structure with dozens of strings known as a Kanun (a string instrument that is a key element of every middle eastern orchestra).

The soloists were no less varied and ranged from renowned Arabic singer— Lubna Salame, to the Ethiopian singer-saxophonist Abatte Barahun, to the wonderful vocalist, Haya Samir, who is capable of performing almost every musical genre and Maimon Cohen a cantor and lyricist in the Jewish-Moroccan tradition. This rich combination of some of the most talented individuals provided us with a scintillating performance: an east-west, Jewish-Arab, traditional-*contemporary* musical fantasy of love and longing, pain and passion, sanctity and profanity.

Maqam Yerushalem

The entire composition whether it be ancient or contemporary in tone was based, as it should be, on traditional maqams (oriental scores). The maqam is comprised of two parts, a musical scale that delineates fixed tonal relationships, and a musical arrangement (melody) that is based on this scale. The maqam, as a whole, represents a special form of emotional content which is identifiable by its core melody. Among other things, the maqam determines the rhythm, the duration of the beat, the space between them and the introduction of the first note of the oud.

Sewing Tears

The second part of the evening was just as moving and exciting as Haya Samir took up a front stage position. Samir has an incredible vocal range and is a dramatic singer with a charismatic presence. Together with 18 musicians and Ben Zvi's backing singers they produced an amazing whole: Omer Avital's bountiful and complex creation—Sewing Tears.

Omer Avital is one of the most prominent jazz bassists in the world and his workschedule is packed with international performance dates. Next week he is due to perform in a festival in Berman, Germany, the week after with his trio for a few nights in one of Tokyo's leading jazz clubs, a month after that at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York, then back to Israel and to top it off he has been invited to perform at a jazz concert in Bologna, Italy.

The work, which he composed especially for this evening, is based on a musical arrangement of psalm 126 "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy." This is a highly absorbing, sweeping and rhythmic piece that makes use of the wealth of influences with which this prolific musician works: ranging from classical western music to artful Arabic music, as well as modest flamenco strains, a Kurdish maqam, Israeli songs from the pioneer days and of course a lot of jazz: a plethora of unrivaled, fascinating and exciting music.

Omer Avital served as the musical director for the entire evening and to our great joy did so with incredible skill. Congratulations and thanks should also go out to Yair Harel, the artistic director. Harel is a musician who specializes

in traditional Jewish poetry, as well as Persian and Andalusian music. Over the last few years he has directed much of his energies into Arab liturgical music.

The Maqam Yerushalayim brought down the curtain on the Sacred Music Festival and the Jerusalem Season of Culture 2012. Nobody could have asked for a more glittering closing performance than the one we heard last night. A rich and inspiring performance that introduced a new-old Israeli sound based on tradition and which created a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.