

Palestine Choral Festival

continuing a musical renaissance

By Michael Stevens

The inaugural Palestine Choral Festival – a true celebration of community music-making – was held in 2013. The 10-day festival in August reached audiences throughout the West Bank, with more than 30 concerts and over 30 educational, outreach, and community events. Now, in August 2016, the Palestine Choral Festival returns, bigger and more far-reaching than before.

Even for people with only a limited musical background, singing together in choirs gives rare pleasure. Almost everyone can sing without even thinking about it, and with only very basic training, people can sing together in choirs in a way that gives enormous gratification and satisfaction not only to themselves but also to those who hear them. Singing in this way builds individual self-esteem and contributes to community cohesion and well-being. Even better, there is no need for expensive equipment or instruments, and it is a pastime available to people of all ages. It's fun, easy, and cheap!

It should be no surprise therefore that the range, number, and quality of choirs in Palestine continues to grow. This year there will be more than 50 – from Gaza, the West Bank, and 1948 Palestine.

Equally important in the festival is the involvement of high-quality, international choirs, both to perform concerts and to enjoy workshops and rehearsals with the Palestinian choirs. The festival is produced by the Choir of London, in association with the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music.

The Choir of London will be joined by the Choir of St Peter's College, Oxford (UK), the Chœur Régional Hauts de France (France) and, from Australia, the Open House Ensemble and The Australian Voices. These five visiting groups will travel throughout the country for a series of concerts, children's singing days, workshops, opera performances, and other events over ten days from August 11–20.

Highlights include a children's singing day for around 200 children from 15 Palestinian children's choirs in the Al-Khawaja Palace in Nîlin on Saturday, August 13; a celebration of choirs from the Bethlehem and Hebron districts at Dar Annadwa (Bethlehem) on Friday, August 19; and a gala concert featuring all the international ensembles and many of the Palestinian choirs, at the Ramallah Cultural Palace on Saturday, August 20.

There are more than 40 public concerts in all (most of them free to attend) that will explore different choral traditions, including a performance of Fauré's Requiem in Beit Jala and concerts of Western and Arabic music, contemporary Australian music, opera highlights (featuring soprano Dima Bawab), and chamber music with some of Palestine's most talented young musicians, in cities and villages throughout Palestine.

We look forward to welcoming you to the festival – and hope that afterwards, whatever your age, interests, or experience, you might be inspired to contact one of the many participating choirs and try joining a rehearsal yourself!

Michael Stevens is the director of the Palestine Choral Festival.

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Songs and Stories from Around the World

August 11-20, 2016



Opera Highlights – featuring Dima Bawab

Thursday, 11 - Jerusalem
Friday, 12 - Bethlehem
Saturday, 13 - Ramallah
Sunday, 14 - Haifa
Monday, 15 - Birzeit University
Thursday, 18 - Nablus

Children's Choir Concerts

Thursday, 11 - Hebron
Saturday, 13 - Nîlin
Monday, 15 - Beit Reema
Tuesday, 16 - Nablus
Wednesday, 17 - Deir Ghassane

Chamber Music – featuring young Palestinian musicians

Wednesday, 17 - Bethlehem

Gala Concerts

Thursday, 11 - Gaza
Thursday, 18 - Beit Jala
Friday, 19 - Bethlehem
Friday, 19 - Birzeit University
Saturday, 20 - Ramallah

Joint choral concerts that bring together Palestinian choirs and visiting choirs will be held in Aboud, Azzariyeh, Beit Jala, Beit Reema, Beit Sahour, Bethlehem, Bir Zeit, Deir Ghassane, Gaza, Haifa, Hebron, Jenin, Jerusalem, Jifna, Nablus, Nazareth, Nîlin, Ramallah, Sebastiya, Shefa-Amr, and Taybeh.

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