

Music on Troubled Soils
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PEACE CHILD ISRAEL

Good morning, my name is Melisse Lewine-Boskovich and I am the director of Peace Child Israel. I have a M. M. (Masters in Music) from Temple University College of Music (voice concentration) and a M.A. in Theatre from Villanova University, both in Philadelphia. I emigrated to Israel the first time in 1971 and was back and forth until 1993. I did a lot of acting classes and voice teaching, including for Maya Shavit's Efroni Choir. I have directing experience, 4 recordings of recitals for the Israel Broadcast Authority and performed as a soloist with all the major orchestras. This was before I experienced a personal transformation, but since we have limited time you can read about that in the article from the Jerusalem Post. (http://www.mideastweb.org/peacechild/the_plays_the_thing.html)

I'm here to tell you about "the untold story", the story about the majority-minority relations between Jews and Palestinians INSIDE Israel. Peace Child Israel was founded 20 years ago and committed itself to this issue at a time when it was much more trendy and much more sexy to be working on cross-border projects between Palestinians and Israelis, and for which it was much easier to secure funding. People rarely hear about or even acknowledge the fact that there is a very difficult relationship between Arabs and Jews in Israel that has deteriorated drastically since the 2000 Disturbances. I contend that tomorrow morning a flourishing Palestinian State could be born (*inshallah!*) with all the water and territorial continuity it needs and yet with will take another 5 generations to correct the relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel.

I don't want to talk too much because I have 3 short films that really say it all, but I can personalize this "untold story" for you. I actually wanted to participate in the conference from the beginning, but on Thursday I was dealing with the fallout of an experience at a school in Holon, near Tel Aviv. Peace Child uses theatre and the arts for dialogue but also in the creative process and as an advocacy tool. Teenagers produce original bi-lingual plays which are performed at a "gala " and then once-a-month in junior high schools. On Thursday, as the actors were boarding the bus, 20 teenagers from the school began screaming: "***Death to Arabs and you maniacs too!***" [the Jewish kids in the program being maniacs]. A Dutch film crew got this on celluloid, so there was something to cope with that afternoon. This is a clear example of the tension between Arabs and Jews in Israel, lying right below the surface, waiting to explode on the scene, like it did in the northern city of Acre on Yom Kippur when 700 extra police were brought to cope with the riots that continued for a week. President Shimon Peres had to convene religious leaders to try and ease the tensions.

I did not attend on Friday because the father of a dear friend who works on the Peace Child Israel staff passed away. Khalil Sbeit's father led the crusade with a supreme court case and subsequent appeals to allow his family to return to the village of Ikrit, from which they were displaced in 1948. Most of the Arab villages were bulldozed and new Jewish towns or kibbutzim were built over them. But Ikrit and Bir Am, in the northern Galilee, remain open fields. His father was allowed to be buried at the cemetery in Ikrit, which along with the church is still untouched. I went to the cemetery though it is customary for the women to attend to the evening meal after a funeral. There is a sign in 3 languages saying: **"This is the Cemetery of the Village of Ikrit"**. This story crystallizes the complexity of the relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel and the issues that Peace Child copes with as it begins its 3rd decade of activity.

Coming to our first film. I became director of Peace Child in December 1998. The organization was founded by Yael Drouyanoff (an actress from Habimah National Theatre) and David Gordon – the co-founder of Peace Child International who lived in Israel for awhile. He also happens to be the brother of Yusef Islam (Cat Stevens). In any case, having music in my blood, I decided the organization needed an anthem. I asked that the 10 groups of the 1999-2000 cycle supply 2 sentences, one in Hebrew and one in Arabic responding to the question: "I am in Peace Child because..." And to try and keep the sentences in 4/4 time. Well, I received twenty lovely sentences but they were in need of "arrangement". I had asked two of Israel's foremost composers to compose the song and Shlomo Gronich responded in the affirmative. He suggested I send the lyrics to the late Ehud Manor, one of Israel's finest writers. He answered the request and produced the Hebrew lyrics based on the essence of the teenagers' texts. Majid Abu Rokun did the same for the Arabic text once the melody was written. Oudist Mikhail Marun was part of the writing process.

On July 2, 2000, three hundred kids who sang the song for the first time at the 2nd annual year-end marathon where excerpts of the 10 different shows were performed at the Ra'aana Yad LeBanim, hosted by the mayor at the time Zeel Bielski. This was after a morning by the pool at the country club. The Israel Philharmonic's Arab-Jewish Ensemble was commissioned for an arrangement of the song; they were joined by Mr. Gronich, Mr. Marun and the 300 Arab and Jewish teenagers. It was joyous. Then the October 2000 Disturbances happened. Mr. Gronich led a volunteer initiative to record the PCI anthem by 8 vocalists and 8 instrumentalists for CD and video clip, along with PCI teens from Ramle and Lod and eight 4th grade children from Tel Aviv and Qalansua.

Everything was done on a volunteer basis: both the production crew and post production (Jerusalem Capital Studios) as well as Hed Artzi Recording company produced the CD and the clip pro bono. The lyrics are in the hand-outs, but I recommend watching the film and reading later.

(See the clip at: <http://www.mideastweb.org/peacechild/multimedia1.html>)



(Avishai's son, Gdi, is bottom right of the above photo; my daughter, Alex is bottom left)

Composer Shlomo Gronich met renowned Um-Khoultum interpreter Lubna Salame for the first time at the recording of the PCI anthem. I encouraged them to work together, which they did on an ad-hoc basis. In the winter of 2005 I met Mr. Gronich to discuss a 5-year reunion of the anthem artists to perform at Peace Child's year-end event which would take place in June at the Cameri Theatre in Tel Aviv. He suggested that rather than going for a one-time-only event, we to try and create an ensemble with Lubna and others. Thus the ADAMAI Ensemble was established with seed money which I secured mainly from the Alan Slifka Family Foundation and the New Israel Fund. On June 10, 2005, ADAMAI Ensemble performed pro-bono for the Peace Child Israel teenagers after their marathon of excerpts.



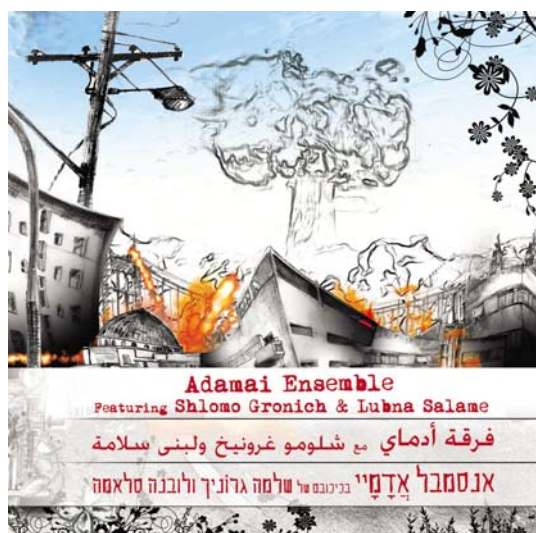
The name of the ensemble is an acronym that coincides in the Arabic and Hebrew languages for:

“Man” * “Mankind” * “Land” * “Water” * “Blood”

the connectors and separators.

Further contributions secured a 30-minute audio CD, a video clip and a website: www.adamaiensemble.com The Adamai Ensemble traveled on tour to the U.S. for the first time in 2005 (New York) and in 2006 to San Francisco, shortly after the 2nd Lebanese War with new repertoire including “Too Absurd”, which was the basis of the next film.

“Too Absurd” is a 4-minute music clip of a song which originally addressed the dilemmas of peace-makers in a battle zone. Kiklop Productions created an animated film that expanded the content to include universal issues. I wrote the lyrics and was privileged that such a renowned musician set them to music and that the production company turned the song into such a strong and meaningful film.



To view the “Too Absurd” clip:

<http://www.mideastweb.org/peacechild/voladam/Adamai.htm>

The last film I will show is a retrospective of 20 years of Peace Child Israel activity. On June 26th, we mounted the first-ever Arab-Jewish reunion at the Jerusalem Theatre. It was a risk just searching for the alumni from a span of over 20 years, but after six months of searching, thirteen busses arrived in Jerusalem in June. The rationale for the effort was a long-term impact study of the alumni to answer the question often asked: “*So, what happens LATER? Did the program really have an impact?*”. We are proud to report that the findings were mainly positive. (The Executive Summary can be seen at: http://mideastweb.org/peacechild/pci_evaluation.html)

This film was screened for the alumni. A lot of stills represent the early days because the original activity was filmed in formats that simply don't exist anymore.

This event was also another example of amazing volunteerism by Israel's top calibre Arab and Jewish musicians and actors. You have the program and the Israeli's in the crowd can tell you how high profile these artists are.

The film opens automatically when visiting the following link:

<http://www.mideastweb.org/peacechild/reunion.html>

The inclusion of David Bowie's "Heroes" at the film was not accidental. The kids, teachers, schools and parents who agree to participate in programs like this are truly heroes. It's not easy for Arabs and Jews to sit in the same room. They deserve a salute. I actually created a new word in Hebrew: "*Be-chatz-la-chei-nu*", which, roughly translated means: "Good luck to us all".

Thank you.

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P.S.

Naturally, after all the musicians performed, the "finale" of the 20th anniversary event in Jerusalem was the PCI anthem. The clip was screened with 4 girls on stage singing with the playback. Two of the original 4th grade singers from Tel Aviv and Qalansua, who are now in 12th grade, joined two singers from the "Class of '08". Almost immediately, audience members joined them and began jumping around on stage.



Rough cuts of the 20th Anniversary Reunion can be seen at:

20th Anniversary: **Act I: Reunion & Theatre Marathon** :
http://vod.actv.co.il/actv_vod/pci-act1.wmv

20th Anniversary: **Act II: Celebs Salute Peace Child** :
http://vod.actv.co.il/actv_vod/pci-act2.wmv



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