

Palestinian music project takes off

Debate in the ongoing Middle East peace process has centered on economic policy options, and rightly so. Either the regional peace partners break the stranglehold that the International Monetary Fund and World Bank have had over economic policy options, or the region will be turned into a free-market nightmare, with dwindling, not rising, living standards. Yet, crucial though it be, economic development is not the *only* ingredient necessary for peace. There is also music.

The Palestinian Music Conservatory has officially opened its activities. According to one violin teacher, "Everyone agrees, that economic progress is necessary for peace. But food is not everything. In addition to feeding the body, we have to feed the mind and the soul. That can be done only by music."

The ambitious project, which is the first of its kind for Palestinian youth, began last summer, as a workshop. Twenty-eight students participated in the six-week program, which was focussed on string instrument instruction, for violin, 'cello, viola, and double bass. All the youngsters were beginners, who learned the basic technique, through a variation on the Rollin method. The instructor, an accomplished violinist with years of experience in teaching, uses the classical Verdi tuning, of C=256, which the Schiller Institute has revived worldwide. The campaign reached the Arab world first in spring 1994, when Schiller Institute representative Sheila Jones gave a week-long series of music education workshops in Jordan.

Following his successful summer school, Sahel Khoury, who is the director of the project, expanded it to establish a real conservatory. The first music school was based in Ramallah, a Palestinian city in the West Bank, beginning in October 1995. Now, the conservatory is expanding to other cities in the West Bank, and in Gaza. Plans include expansion to Nablus, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem, by the end of this year.

At the conservatory in Ramallah, there are 30 string students, 80 piano students, 10 students of the oud (the Arab stringed instrument which was the precursor to the lute), and wind instruments. There is a core group of six teachers, which the conservatory hopes to augment, with volunteer teachers coming from abroad. The fundamental idea is to build a string orchestra as the centerpiece of the conservatory, gradually adding instruments and students, to make complete orchestras. Students will master the Classical rep-

ertoire as well as Arabic music.

While teaching the Rollin method, the school is developing its own course of study for beginners, which is particularly adapted to Arab students. They have taken well-known Palestinian folk music, and used the common melodies as the basis for a graded series of exercises. The exercises begin with the simplest melodic line, for beginners, then become progressively more complex. The course is composed of six volumes, with 20 *études*, or studies, in each.

The enthusiasm with which the project has been greeted is evident in the rapid growth and expansion of its activities. This project, which is planting the seeds for the Palestinian national orchestra of tomorrow, needs support of all kinds. Thanks to contributions from Japan, the conservatory has been able to establish a basic stock of instruments, but many more are needed. In addition, tuning forks in the lower tuning are required, as well as books, music scores, exercises, all for beginners in violin, viola, 'cello, and double bass, as well as piano. Volunteer teachers for all instruments except the piano, are in urgent need. Teachers should be fluent in English, and be able to stay for one year. The Schiller Institute supports the initiative wholeheartedly, and calls on its friends to join, by contributing teaching materials. Write to the Schiller Institute, P.O. Box 20244, Washington, D.C., 20041-0244.

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