

## **A Guiding Light Falls on Ramallah**

By Sam Bahour

(Ramallah, May 7, 2004) Ramallah is now usually quiet at night. This has not always been the case for this summer town located in the center of the West Bank. As a matter of fact, before the latest Israeli military aggression and subsequent re-occupation of the West Bank, Palestinians in Ramallah were known to walk the streets and socialize well into the night. However, tonight the deafening silence was broken, not by the frequent Israeli tanks and jeeps that now enter and exit the city at will, but rather by the music of the distinguished Daniel Barenboim, one of the great musicians of our time.

Despite the Israeli Apartheid Wall and despite the humiliation of having to cross the Israeli military checkpoints surrounding Ramallah, this world renowned musician, an Israeli by nationality, visited Palestine again, being received by a larger and larger audience every time.

Mr. Barenboim, this absolutely incredible musician – a legend in his own right – took to the stage tonight at the Friends' Boys' School in front of a standing room only audience and proceeded to perform an extraordinary piano recital. For a continuous sixty minutes, the mixed Palestinian and foreign audience watched the intensity of his every move and the fiery of his musical climaxes along with the occasional lull in the beat. Children in the audience stared with awe. If I did not know better, I would swear that my daughter Areen, a first year piano student, didn't blink throughout the entire performance as she soaked in every note.

More than a musician, Mr. Barenboim is a humanist who sees beyond the frameworks that define traditional conflicts, especially those between Palestine and Israel. He values justice, social justice, which he profoundly articulates as the needed foundation for successful resolutions of conflicts around the world.

Returning following intermission, Mr. Barenboim addressed the audience and reflected upon the life of the noted literary critic, scholar, advocate for Palestinian independence and his close friend, Dr. Edward Said (1935-2003). As the disciplined musician he is, Mr. Barenboim explained how he and his late friend, Dr. Said, created the Barenboim-Said Foundation in order to promote "music in education" and "educational music" – two distinct goals as stated by Mr. Barenboim.

Mr. Barenboim reiterated the need for "all sides" to look beyond the borders issue and economic issues, and so forth, but to realize that without the presence of social justice peace will not come to the region.

Mr. Barenboim spoke frankly of the need for both Palestinians and Israelis to remove the ignorance of "the other" in order for a peace based on social justice to ushered in. He spoke to the fact that more and more people from all corners of the world understand that the existing situation has reached a point that is now intolerable.

As if a piano recital was not enough, Mr. Barenboim proceeded to proudly announce that an initiative that he and the late Dr. Said started during their last trip in August of last year, the desire to create a Palestinian Orchestra within five years, had already begun to bud. He spoke as two dozen Palestinian youth music students from the National Conservatory of Music Student Orchestra -- or more accurately called tonight by Mr. Barenboim, the Palestine Youth

Orchestra -- surrounded him on stage, each armed with a weapon of mass pleasure – violins, flutes, cellos, and drums. This beginning Palestinian orchestra performed for the first time tonight under the directive of conductor Daniel Barenboim. They were received by multiple standing ovations and by Mr. Barenboim's beaming pride and joy.

Through music, Palestinians have proven that they have the institutional discipline of development needed to join the ranks of a global world. As Mr. Barenboim stated tonight, everything is linked, everyone is linked, all our actions have ramifications, and music is a teacher of this interconnected reality. Palestinian organizations like the National Conservatory of Music (<http://ncm.birzeit.edu/>) in Jerusalem and Ramallah are giving Palestinian children an alternative to the destruction being imposed on them. Mr. Barenboim is not only paying lip service to a different kind future for our two peoples, he is contributing to forging this future, professionally, financially, morally and politically.

As Mr. Barenboim so eloquently spoke tonight, one could not but think about how many other of our Israeli neighbors share his humanity. As I told Mr. Barenboim following tonight's event, as he engaged my daughter about her first piano lessons, we thank him for allowing Palestine to share in his legend, just as much as we respect and admire him for putting humanity and justice before all else.

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