

THE SCORE

Reader's passions



TOM EISNER

The LPO violinist is inspired by the power of music to build bridges across a divided nation

A few years after my maternal grandparents died in Auschwitz in 1944, the state of Israel was founded in the hope of ensuring that such a horrific fate might never befall the Jewish people again. But there was one problem: the Palestinian people had for centuries already been living on the land that was to be Israel.

Over the years I have followed the developments in the Middle East closely, and spurred on by my family history I decided to see the area for myself. I wanted to communicate with the 'other side' through my violin.

We hear a lot about the separation wall that runs through Palestine, dividing one community from another and often cutting a single community in two. Music is among the many casualties. While Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra draws high-profile attention to the way music can build bridges between young people from Israel and the Arab nations, the occupation and the wall make it difficult for children in Palestine's West Bank to have the opportunity to study music.

In February, Nancy Elan, like myself a violinist in the London Philharmonic Orchestra, violist Tom Suarez and I headed for the West Bank. Our trip was organised by Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association, an organization that focuses on Abu Dis, a village near Jerusalem. We took with us a trio by Beethoven, Bartók violin duos and arrangements of Palestinian folksongs.

Since the West Bank is largely isolated by

the wall, visits from the outside world are greatly appreciated.

Our first concert was at a school in the 'Anata refugee camp. Next we played at the Amari camp in Ramallah, and then we visited the Al Kamandjati school. An American clarinet teacher, Douglas Metcalf, had recently been appointed; it was poignant to hear drifting from his room Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' arranged for three clarinets.

At the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music in Bethlehem, I met Scottish violin teacher Alistair Mitchell. He told me that music education in Palestine suffers from a lack of consistency: most teachers only stay about a year. The school's director Jalil Elias commented that despite all the problems of travel restrictions, through music he wanted to put smiles on the children's faces.

In Bethlehem, we played at the Aida refugee camp, many of whose children are orphans traumatised by military incursions. After we played, we gave many of the enthusiastic children their first experience of holding and playing a violin.

Back in Abu Dis, a snowy night turned into a beautiful day, so at one school we decided to move our performance outside. The entire school of several hundred boys crowded around us and responded instantly to the snappy rhythms of the Bartók duos, clapping along and demanding encores.

At our final concert at Al-Quds University in Abu Dis, we joined forces with Palestinian musicians. This event was one of the most satisfying of all. And it proved something that has always meant a lot to me: when you play music with a group of total strangers, 10 minutes later you are friends. ■



Music goes some way to uniting a divided land



For more information on the Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association and to donate to its music teacher fund, visit camdenabudis.net Send your passions to classicfm@haymarket.com

Tom's
choices



Bartók Solo Violin Sonata; Violin Duos
György Pauk (violin),
Kazuki Sawa (violin)
Naxos 8.550868



The Ramallah Concert, et al.
West-Eastern Divan
Orchestra/Barenboim
Warner 2564-69480-6