

CAPTIVE AUDIENCES • Performing • In Palestine

By Thomas Suárez

The man keeps his eyes fixed on the screen through three slow puffs on his cigarette. Metal rods and pieces, bundled tightly together in a faded laundry bag, look suspicious under the x-ray, so my suitcase is placed on an old wooden table. A guard stares through the smoke rising from his lips and asks me to open it.

In the flesh, the strange bundle looks even more suspicious. The guard calls a superior, who in turn summons another. When I see all three afraid even to touch it, I realize I'd better intervene.

"Music stands." I point to the viola strapped to my back. "Three of them." The guards take a fresh, puzzled look. Exchanging glances of relief, they look back to what is not a rocket launcher, then begin waving their cigarettes like batons. *Music stands!* they laugh. *Welcome to Jordan. Music stands! Very welcome to Jordan!*

Next morning, we await the bus that shuttles people from the Jordanian to the Palestinian side of the Allenby Bridge. A border guard passes around a little plastic cup of cardamum-spiced coffee to the three of us and makes jokes in broken English. He is curious about our trio, and peers at our instrument cases. We are two violinists – Nancy Elan and Tom Eisner – and viola, which I play in addition to violin. Perusing the unfamiliar landscape, I sift through the quirks of life that have brought us here.

(Continued on page 2)

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About This Issue

Why do three musicians—two from the London Philharmonic Orchestra and one from New York—pack up their instruments and contend with the hassles of border crossings and checkpoints just to play for children in refugee camps? For one thing, says violinist Tom Suárez, an American and our feature writer, the kids seemed to like it.

For another, the kids—and the country-that-would-be-theirs—gave something back to the trio. But we'll let Tom tell about that.

Due to space limitations, we were unable to include all of Tom's account in this issue. An especially engaging report of the musicians' travel to the Dead Sea can be found on our website: www.ameu.org.

On August 23 of this year, the *SS Free Gaza* and *SS Liberty* arrived in Gaza Port carrying humanitarian aid and 46 human rights workers, including the sister-in-law of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Their confrontation with Israeli gunboats and the results of their nonviolent opposition to Israel's economic strangulation of Gaza are reported on page 13 in our interview with Anis Hamadeh, webmaster of www.freegaza.org.

Page 15 offers a selection of some of our best books from the past three years, including several new releases, and several books for young readers.

Page 16 lists our current selection of DVDs.

And on page 17, a reminder: one of the best ways to ensure the growth of *The Link* and our website is for supporters to remember us in their wills.

To all our readers, our best wishes for a joyful holiday.

**John F. Mahoney,
Executive Director**

(Continued from page 1)

Nancy was raised in a politically astute home—distant struggles of liberation, such as the Congo's fight against the Belgian yoke in the latter 1950s, always felt close to home.

I did not grow up with Nancy's political savvy, but nonetheless with a father whose sense of fairness and justice was such that at the United States' entry into WWII, he volunteered for the army even though he was an illegal immigrant whose existence was unknown to the government. He was beholden to no one's ideology and had no blind regard for authority. It was from him that I first began questioning the rendition of history and current events I was being taught in school, including, quite early on, the circumstances of our involvement in Vietnam—and the Zionist creation myth.

When the U.S. fabricated the Gulf of Tonkin "attack" to escalate its war against Vietnam, Nancy and I were both 13 and spending Saturdays at the Juilliard School of Music's pre-college division. She was more active in the anti-war movement earlier on than I, one of the tireless demonstrators who persevered when crowds were tiny and seemingly futile, but whose absolute refusal to give up enabled the mainstream outrage that ultimately ended the war, six million lost lives later.

In the mid-1960s, I began attending the rallies in Washington, and illegally distributing anti-war leaflets in school. A teacher physically attacked me for refusing to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance, screaming ethnic slurs as he punched. The Nixon Administration sent me an invitation to renounce my citizenship. But along with abuse and tear-gassing, I remember people's courage and determination.

It was about 1968 that I first used music as a vehicle for political statement. I was in a chamber orchestra being con-

ducted by the violinist Alexander Schneider of the Budapest String Quartet, and persuaded him to let me announce to the packed Carnegie Hall audience that we were dedicating our performance to all the victims of the US government's aggression in Indochina.

Nancy and I entered the Juilliard college division in turbulent 1969, and by the following spring even that apolitical institution was being torn apart by the war in Indochina and social issues at home. Juilliard students and faculty organized various protests, such as a string quartet playing on Broadway outside Juilliard, a musical rally against the war; Nancy and I were the two violinists.

Now, four decades later, she and I are sipping cardamum coffee waiting to perform on the very "stage" of another Western colonial war.

Our British colleague Tom Eisner's "journey" to Palestine is more personal. It began well before he was born, in 1938-39, when 10,000 European children were shipped to England to save them from Nazi atrocities. His mother was among these lucky *kindertransport* children.

He never knew his grandparents. In the early 1940s, they were shipped to Auschwitz.

Thus Tom grew up with a particular interest in the Second World War and the manner in which Europe had addressed the question of displaced persons. But as the noble image of Israel with which he was raised increasingly collided with reality, the ethnic cleansing and cultural dispossession of Palestine became a deeply personal betrayal. Tom wanted to see for himself.

So here we are, waiting for the bus across the valley, to enter Palestine and accomplish ... what?

We hope, of course, that our performances for refugee children might bring them some small pleasure, or at least novelty. And the very presence of Westerners is appreciated, despite the irony of people from complicit nations assuring them that they are not forgotten. Most usefully, we are eyes and ears, first-hand witnesses to counter the newspeak in the West. But to say that we will take away far more than we could possibly give, is no mere cliché; we know it is the truth.

The bus takes us westward across the parched Jordan Valley. In a region where water has never been taken for granted, Israel had decades back diverted Palestine's aquifers to feed Israeli businesses and the lawns of its illegal settlements. To our south, we can just make out a sheen that is the northern edge of the Dead Sea, itself now dying at the rate of about three feet a year from Israel's diversion of the Jordan River.

Our introduction to the occupation begins abruptly after reaching the Israeli facility at the Palestinian border. Jordanians and Palestinians wait in a seemingly static queue in a large cement room. Young women in uniforms, some seemingly teenagers, wield massive weapons and boss around Others old enough to remember 1948.

As we walk toward the end of the queue, an official comes to us and explains that we don't need to wait with these people. We look around and see no difference between us and our fellow travelers, except for our ethnicity. He leads us out of the cement room to a short line at an immigration counter, and someone carries our luggage for us. We never learn what "processing" our fellow travelers are waiting to undergo that Westerners are spared.

The immigration desk has two officers, both women in their early twenties, one on the left and one on the right. Tom and Nancy go ahead of me. Tags embossed with *London Philharmonic Orchestra* in white letters on a distinct, orange-pink background stand out on the violin cases strapped to their backs. After a few minutes of brusque questions from their examiners, Nancy, on my right, is admitted. But, to my left, Tom's examiner is getting more and more suspicious, her questions more confrontational and his replies more exasperated. Finally, in reply to a question I couldn't make out, Tom answers something about his grandparents. *You are Jewish?* follows immediately in an abruptly sweeter, though astonished, voice. There is a brief, almost giddy exchange, and Tom also passes through. When my turn comes, I get Nancy's examiner.

"You are with the man who was just here, yes?" The question comes not from my interviewer, but from the one on my left who had just interviewed Tom. She motions to the viola case strapped to my

back with the same orangey-pink tag dangling from the handle. I confirm that we are traveling together. "Please tell your friend," she implores me, twisting her neck toward me and forgetting the person she is supposed to be examining, "please apologize for me. I am so embarrassed. I thought he was Muslim." She had treated a Chosen Person as the Other. I will tell him, I assure her, about the unfortunate error. "Please don't forget to apologize for me," Tom's examiner repeats several times even as I am leaving the desk. "I feel so bad about it."

Leaving behind Palestinians uncertain of their entry or exit, we squeeze into a taxi and set off for East Jerusalem. As we drive the gradual incline from the low ground of the valley, to the hills that comprise Jerusalem and its neighboring towns, occasional Bedouin settlements catch our eyes.

For decades the nomadic Bedouin have been shoved about to make room for Israel's illegal settlements, and now there is nowhere left for them but the roadsides. Even this will now end, as Israel has designated these final slivers of Bedouin earth as "security zones" and will be forcing them onto land seized from Palestinian villages, among them Abu Dis, our adopted home in Palestine. In the meantime, Israel has prohibited the Bedouin from building any substantive dwelling, so they must pass the cold, wet winter months under cardboard propped against barren trees or in tin lean-tos.

When we reach the Strand Hotel in East Jerusalem, a six-storey, 88 room hotel, we increase its occupancy from zero to three. Although the hotel lies close to the old city, the Jerusalem branch of Al-Quds University, and other points of interest, the Occupation has destroyed the Palestinian economy. Most tourists stay in the western, Israeli part of Jerusalem.

Soon we are among the many visitors from around the world who have come to walk Old Jerusalem's cobbled streets and alleyways. The most conspicuous icon in the holy city is not Biblical, however, but the flag of Israel. Several of the old city's buildings fly multiple Israeli flags, principal among them a beautiful residence bought by the former prime minister, Ariel Sharon, towering over an ancient, narrow street. Next to its huge Israeli flag is an almost comically oversized menorah that brings to mind the colossal North Korean flag pole I saw years

ago near the DMZ, placed there by Pyongyang in a phallic showdown with the South.

What is perhaps worse than the humiliation inflicted by Israel is the humiliation Palestinian shop owners in the old city inflict upon themselves in order to survive: *I love Israel* emblazoned on t-shirts, caps, buttons, and coffee mugs. Towels with a map of all the land from the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean, bearing the single place-name *Israel*, symbolically claim the Biblical Holy Land for the modern nation-state.

The glare of memorabilia is especially prominent as we walk along the Via Dolorosa, the route along which Jesus is said to have carried his own cross to his crucifixion, and I am struck by the correlation between the cross and *I Love Israel* souvenirs: as the devout reenact Christ carrying his cross, the instrument of his destruction, they march past Palestinians similarly forced to carry theirs.

Back at our hotel, we need to practice our instruments, so I ask the manager if there is any other room I might use while Nancy uses ours. He smiles and tells me to play anywhere in the entire building, anytime, as I please. "You are the only guests," he reminds me.

In the morning we leave for Abu Dis. Close enough that it affords a perfect panorama of Jerusalem, Abu Dis had long been like a quieter corner separated by a valley. The walk between the Mount of Olives and Abu Dis is said to have been beautiful.

Then the Wall came.

There it is in front of us, extending left and right as far as we can see. No matter how ghastly you thought it would be, no matter how high the figures made it sound, it is more ghastly and it is higher. Nancy and I want to leave our marks on it. She finds a piece of charcoal nearby. But what to write?

Carnegie Hall gives me an idea. Not my protest from the stage four decades ago, but my protest from the sidewalk exactly a year ago, against the Israel Philharmonic's Carnegie concert. While Israeli teams and musicians freely travel, compete, and perform, Israel prevents Palestinian teams and musicians from doing so. Braving the February wind and livid crowds, two colleagues handed leaflets to the arriving audience and passers-by, while I carried, Atlas-

style on my shoulders, a huge placard saying *Musicians Against the Occupation*. The words are no less relevant here. Nancy adds *USA Shame On You*, the Wall being financed with US money at a cost of \$1.5 million per mile.

Where we are standing, we are in Abu Dis, our new home, and although we don't yet know it, our flat is a minute's walk away, or was once a minute's walk away. Until the Wall. Now we must get back into our little van and drive a half hour to get to exactly where we are, but two feet away on the other side. Palestinians cannot do even this, since they carry the additional "wall" of I.D. cards that keep them in designated bantustans.

"We'll make a pastrami sandwich of them," Ariel Sharon told Winston Churchill III—grandson of the famous Winston—in 1973. "We'll insert a strip of Jewish settlements in between the Palestinians, and then another strip of Jewish settlements right across the West Bank, so that in 25 years, neither the United Nations, nor the USA, nobody, will be able to tear it apart." Even when, 10 years later, Israeli IDF Chief of Staff Raphael Eitan bragged that "when we have settled the land, all the Arabs will be able to do about it will be to scurry around like drugged roaches in a bottle," the Wall was still two decades away. Now the Wall and the settlements work in concert, strangling Palestinian villages more like a cancer than a pastrami sandwich.

The settlements are so discordant with the gentle, ancient hills that they look like fortress cities dropped into place by aliens. Wake up the next morning, and what you thought was a bad dream, won't go away no matter how many times you blink.

Israel secures the permanence of the settlements not just through heavy financial subsidy, but more importantly by encouraging the most militant of Zionists to be their colonists. Whether from Israel, Brooklyn, or Russia, radical settlers are the efficient choice to people the "facts on the ground" that are the ballast of the Israeli theft of Palestine. Heavily armed and maniacal in their conviction of divine right to Palestine, their stolen lands have evolved into tiny nation-states with whom the government of Israel must reckon.

I don't believe this was an accidental Frankenstein—it is how Zionist leaders of the post-1967 era

placed the success of their imperialist dream beyond the control of unknown future leaders.

We reach Abu Dis on the other side of the Wall, opposite our charcoal messages. A nearby minaret marks our spot. Once-busy shops are boarded up and abandoned, the Wall and I.D. cards having ripped the village in two.

The activist who will be our guide, chaperon, our second set of eyes and ears, our font of experience and information, and our translator, I will call "Marwan." Brilliant and self-educated, Marwan is the secret weapon that will ultimately defeat Zionism. He entered University at age 16—or so he jokes, meaning that he was 16 when the IDF first threw him into prison.

Inside his cell he found two worlds, one that his Israeli masters saw, the other a society of fellow inmates who pooled their knowledge and experience. Older inmates, better educated inmates, more travelled inmates, younger inmates, those with artistic talents or any number of skills—everyone learned from each other.

Walking about Abu Dis, there is something incongruous that takes us a while to identify: there is scant visible authority, yet there is calm, order, and one does not feel threatened.

Posters with photos of martyrs are plastered everywhere. Most are young and look like they could have been your neighbor. Contrary to Western perception, Palestinians use "martyr" to refer to anyone who died at the hands of, or in the fight against, Israeli aggression, not just the infinitesimal minority who commit suicide attacks.

Globalization is nowhere to be seen, at least not in its on-the-ground retail manifestations. It will come, of course, once the expropriation of Palestine is complete. But for now, there are no chain stores, no global icons planted to nurture new generations of cultural drones. We did see one coffee shop in Ramallah whose owner had a sense of humor about the issue: *Stars & Bucks* was the name of his shop.

In Abu Dis, signs reading "from the American People" and "for the benefit of the Palestinian People" are affixed to bus stops, to a playground, and to a water pumping station, all projects financed by the United States Agency for International Development

(USAID). But none of these have ever served any purpose other than fodder for local humor. The bus stops have no buses to use them, the playground has never seen children because it sits in an inaccessible edge of town adjoining a waste dump, and the pumping station, which had never been needed until Israel commandeered the aquifers, does not work and has never worked.

Even stranger is the money given to Palestine that the PA then pays to Israel to reimburse expenses of its illegal Occupation, including paying Israel's cost of imprisoning Palestinians and even of the bullets that kill them. More US money is spent to destabilize the democratically elected government now confined to Gaza.

In the evening, Marwan takes us to Dar Assadaqa (Friendship House), a community center supported by Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association, the London-based charity that organized our trip. We ask if we may use the main room to rehearse a bit before going to our flat. Soon a dozen or more people, mostly young, follow the hubbub into the room and take seats around us, and one young man



Author Tom Suárez at Anata refugee camp.

arrives carrying an oud case. When we learn that he is Ahmed Eriqat, an oud player and the Saddaqa music teacher, we put away our Beethoven and ask his help with Palestinian music I had arranged for two violins and viola. Most in need of his expertise was the beautiful *Bint Jamila*.

Electricity is not wasted, so the night is unexpectedly dark when we reach our little flat at a bend in an alleyway, a stone's throw from the Wall. The

room has no insulation and every flaw in the ill-fitted window has been discovered by the wind. Marwan left us an electric space heater, but it would have to warm the entire Levant to have the barest discernible effect, and we unplug it.

Running water is piped in from the last Ice Age. I open the shower valve quickly rather than prolong the shock. The moment I am clean my hand vibrates to the towel, but it is made of a synthetic material that repels water.

I race to bed with the taste of toothpaste in my mouth, because after half a swoosh of the icy water my teeth felt like they would crack, and slip under a blanket made from the same fossil fuel as the towel. In the coming days we learn that these towels and blankets are the universal offering among shops in Palestine, as though the Occupied Territories had been sold one vast job lot that everyplace else had refused.

Refugee Camps

Like Orwell's telescreen, the Wall seems to follow you everywhere. When we arrive at the Anata refugee camp the next morning, we see that it has sliced right through the children's playground. From the roof of the boys' school, we see why: a large Israeli settlement now sprawls over the neighboring hill, and the playground was needed for the settlement's access road.

Indeed Anata is a microcosm of the Israeli expropriation of Palestine. The residents are the descendants of Palestinians who were expunged from their homes by the Zionist war, then forgotten by the world. Instead of justice, the refugees are now squeezed in yet more, surrounded by four illegal settlements, Jews-only roads, and an Israeli military installation. Their historic links with Jerusalem have been severed both by these "facts on the ground" and by their West Bank I.D. cards.

But what is visible aboveground is only part of the methodology of dispossession. Israel situated all four of its settlements surrounding Anata over the Eastern Aquifer Basin in order to divert the aquifer's water to Israeli interests, so Anata must now purchase its own water back from an Israeli company.

Turning around 180 degrees, we look down a

little winding road to the spot where, a year earlier, 10-year-old Abir Aramin was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers as she walked to school. Israeli authorities refused to examine the scene for two and a half days, then said that rains had made it impossible to precisely locate Abir's blood or the IDF jeep's tire tracks, and thus the case could not be pursued. That an IDF bullet had penetrated the back of her skull was not contested, as it was there to see, but Israel claimed that there was no proof that the bullet was the cause of her death. Her case is altogether typical.

We are brought to the classroom where children have assembled to hear us play. Among them is Abir's brother.

String players are crippled by cold fingers. Our fingers had now been in the Ice Age for a couple of days, and the classroom is cold, so we ask if perhaps a space heater could be brought in. But quickly we regret our request: although the principal tends to it immediately and graciously, the look of horror on his face reminds us of how expensive electricity is for the impoverished camps, and indeed why all the students and teachers stay in their outdoor garments throughout the day. Not to cause embarrassment, we take quick turns in front of the barely warm wires, then quickly unplug it.

We begin our informal concert with one of several Palestinian pieces I had arranged for two violins and viola: Mawtini, the de facto Palestinian national anthem (though the Palestine National Council, affiliated with Fatah, has designated *Biladi* as the anthem). Children have been imprisoned for singing nationalistic Palestinian song as Occupation tanks roll in, but the room is safe, and Marwan encourages them to sing the words.

Next we play the popular *Aziza*, which like Mawtini I had transcribed from a rough recording. With the anthem I was restrained by propriety, but here I took more liberties, and exploited the three instruments as best I could to simulate the more colorful ensembles that would normally play it.

Whereas for Mawtini and *Aziza* I had a rough recording but no music, our next piece, *Farahaza*, was the reverse circumstance. I had secured a single line of just the melody, but could not locate any recording. Thus everything but the core melody was from my own Western imagination, and I worry

about the harmonies, inner voices, counterpoint, and even the development of the melody. It seems to sound okay to our audience.

Bartok two-violin duos end our concert and are a big hit, their intriguing rhythms and exotic sonorities bringing unexpected color to the dreary refugee day. The eastern European folk elements upon which they are based likely elicit some common denominator with the Middle East.

Indeed, perhaps Bartok provided some posthumous help in my reconstruction of the Palestinian music. When I studied composition as a teenager, analyzing his fourth string quartet had made an especially strong impression on me. While that music is a very different manifestation of folk elements, similar harmonic and rhythmic sensibilities likely found their way into my reconstruction of the Palestinian music. Coincidentally, one of the Palestinian recordings I used, that of *Haddy*, is earthy enough in performance and sound quality to imagine it coming from Bartok's wire recorder out in the field a century ago.

When we are done, we hope for some interaction with the children. Do they have anything they'd like to ask, anything they'd like to say? After polite shyness, a few children venture questions. One is all too insightful: "The boy asks," Marwan translates, "why you don't look like you're having fun when you play." It is exactly the tonic we need.

Leaving the camp by the little road Abir had walked, we head north to Ramallah, whose more cosmopolitan nature is already evident from the graffiti on the apartheid Wall. My favorite is "CTRL + ALT + DEL" in bold, neat spray paint, the keyboard combination to force a computer reboot, to "crash" an operating system and abort some debacle. The Wall has to be aborted, Palestine rebooted.

We visit Al Kamandjati, "The Violinist," a music school begun by violist Ramzi Aburedwan, an acquaintance of Nancy's. As a refugee child, Ramzi became iconic of the first intifada because of an oft-reproduced photo of him throwing rocks at an invading Israeli tank. His school is the brilliant result of an opportunity to study abroad.

The Amari camp, where Ramzi grew up, is our next stop. Eager children wrapped in warm scarves

and knitted caps sit and listen to us play. Some hold violin cases, beneficiaries of Ramzi, whose outreach program gives his good fortune back to the camp's younger generation.

A circuitous route takes us around the Wall and checkpoints, to Bethlehem. The village of Christ's birth is now surrounded by the fortresses dropped by aliens in the middle of the night. Marwan's cigarette gesticulates towards the encroaching matrix of settlements, apartheid roads, and Wall. *What two states?* he says in exasperation. *Can you explain to me how they can keep a straight face when they tell the world they're going to make two states out of this mess?*

After a visit to Bethlehem University, where we hear chilling stories of IDF aggression from amazing Sister Patricia, we attempt to go to the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music, but are turned back at a checkpoint, and so must backtrack to circumvent the growing length of Jews-only asphalt.

The Said Conservatory, with branches in Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Jerusalem, was established by Birzeit University as The National Conservatory of Music, the name later changed to honor Palestine's great intellectual. We are warmly received. Marwan and one of the Said faculty recognize each other: they had been together in an Israeli prison as youths, and had not seen each other again until now.

Soon, we set off for Aida Refugee Camp, located between Bethlehem and the neighboring town of Beit Jala. Its sweet, friendly children are chillingly contrasted by the hell they live in. Founded in 1950 to alleviate overcrowding in nearby Beit Jibrin camp, Aida was originally composed of simple tents because it was assumed that everyone would go home after the soldiers left.

We set up our music stands on the cold floor of a room in the camp's Lajee Center, which organizes cultural, social, and sporting activities for the camp's children. Concrete walls and narrow metal staircases are painted greens and yellows, an attempt to bring some cheer to their prison. Over one wall's crumbling plaster a child has drawn a group of children being led to freedom by a fist-waving man. Behind them is a girl, different from the rest, in a blue robe, with her right hand raised high and proud. Next to it the child has written:

Father: Prisoner. Mother: Murdered. Resolution 194.

UN Resolution 194, passed in 1948, sought to get the refugees home and/or get them reparation, and agreed to recognize Israel's self-proclaimed independence only if it abided by its provisions.

A trio Beethoven wrote for woodwinds works well transcribed for our ensemble. Its fast third movement begins with the viola alone, so I am the one to set the tempo. Nancy had found it to be sluggish, so this time, before putting bow to string I put the third movement of the "Erioca" Symphony in my mind. Its fast tempo not only brings the movement to life, but also allows us to play the soft parts really, *really* softly without losing the musical tension.

And that brings an unexpected boon. We sense that the barely audible passages are piquing the children's attention, so we instinctively get softer, softer still. They are delighted and strain to hear us, amazed that we seem to be working so hard to make so little sound. Some stifle a laugh—a victory for us. When we finish we ask a translator to explain that the composer marked the music *scherzo*, the Italian word for "joke," and that he would be very pleased that it had made them laugh.

We ask the children if they would like to try our instruments, and courteous semi-circles quickly form around us. Nancy tucks her violin under the chin of one boy, perhaps 11 years old, who is captivated. She takes extra time with him while his peers gather around. He is patient, and as he follows what she demonstrates, both violin and bow look like they belong in his hands. One senses that he has everything it would take, except opportunity.

It is late afternoon, and the gray camp sun is low. Walking about Aida, we have the feeling of being in a place that civilized nations should be liberating. Metal, concrete, metal, concrete, metal, concrete, one anemic shrub sticking through the asphalt.

The Israeli military frequently raids Aida. After an attack the refugees try to cover up bullet holes to hide painful memories from children, but some still dot doors and walls. One set that has not yet been filled is pointed out. We look up and see a maze of black holes on a second storey wall and realize that we must be standing about where the soldiers were. Soldiers had entered the camp in the morning. Their

bullets pierced the head of a father at breakfast with his children. Those children now live with the memory of their father's brains splattered in their cereal.

Close to midnight, Nancy and I walk through the old town of Bethlehem. It is nearly deserted. A nun passes by, as do a couple of young men who barely notice us. Cats disappear into the trash bins. Hilly alleys intersect the dim path leading to the Church which in the second century St. Justin Martyr identified as the site of Christ's birth, the church that Israel laid siege to for a month and a half in 2002.

In the morning we continue south to Hebron, where we play a concert in the theatre at the Hebron Children's Happiness Center, followed by discussion with the students.

Music & Occupation

Everywhere we go, there are children who would jump at the chance to study music. A fortunate few in East Jerusalem, Ramallah, or Bethlehem attend the Said Conservatory, but most of Palestine is inaccessible even to an outreach program, given the limited resources and logistical obstacles imposed by the Occupation. But the arts are not mere luxury; they are an absolute right every motivated child should have, and are vital to a healthy society.

For children robbed of a normal childhood by war or occupation, music can also be a powerful means to self-dignity. Yet it is exactly in such times that children have the least opportunity. In Japan in the aftermath of the Second World War, Shinichi Suzuki set about solving this irony, devising the teaching method now bearing his name. Amidst the poverty and desolation, Suzuki gave many thousands of "lost" Japanese children something of their own, something of pride that no one could take away, a refuge from the hopelessness surrounding them.

On Suzuki's first visit to the US, in 1966, I was his subject for the maiden American demonstration of his method, on stage, to curious musicians and educators. His genius for demystifying and democratizing music continues to inspire, and the Said Conservatory has used his principles to stretch their limited resources to reach more students.

Suzuki, indeed, was surely an inspiration for the music-teaching method devised in Venezuela in the

1970s, known as *El Sistema*. Whereas, Suzuki's method was originally intended to nurture "noble hearts" rather than prodigies, and evolved from his theories of natural language acquisition, *El Sistema* began as a means of saving impoverished children from crime and death on the streets, and relies more heavily on traditional Western methods. Nancy proposes that *El Sistema* would be ideal for Palestine, and smiles at the thought of the Citgo gas Americans pump into their SUVs funding Palestinian music education.

But now we are in Hebron. Before music, Hebronites must worry about being thrown out of their homes in the middle of the night by armed settlers.

Hebron's old city is typified by two or three storey buildings lining either side of narrow streets. In a strategy paralleling settlers' commandeering of the hilltops above rural Palestinian villages, heavily armed settlers have been forcing the legal residents from the upper floors of Hebron's dwellings, leaving the remaining ground-level residents at the mercy of attacks from above. The down-slope advantage of hilltops is now a vertical free-fall. Settlers in commandeered upper floor flats throw their garbage, as well as rocks, bricks, and appliances, down to the alley and people below. To defend themselves, Palestinians have spanned the narrow streets with metal fencing, horizontally secured above their heads to the walls on either side. Look straight up and instead of sky, one sees settler waste of every sort, from cement blocks to human feces, suspended by the Palestinians' protective fencing.

We visit the Hebron office of Christian Peacemaker Teams, in a dilapidated, otherwise abandoned building at the edge of the old city. Their power being that of witnesses ("getting in the way," as their motto puts it), in Hebron they are kept busy indeed. The phone rings, and our discussion with the woman who runs CPT Hebron is cut short. There is a "problem" elsewhere in the city, and she scoots out the door.

Nancy and I continue up the stairs to an open-air landing overlooking Shuhada Street, once a bustling market area but now a Jews-only road. After the 1994 massacre at Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque, in which Brooklyn-born settler Baruch Goldstein murdered 29 and wounded 150, the Israel military closed Shuhada

Street not to settlers, but to Palestinians. We watch as two settlers, one armed, walk toward the Hadassah Settlement, two IDF soldiers with machine guns keeping vigil behind them. When we reach the roof, we see that we are being watched by a soldier atop the next building.

The rooftop soldiers are everywhere. Walking back near the center of the old city, Tom looks up and addresses one. The sun has fallen behind the building and the soldier's face is in the shadow. The soldier moves his rifle to a horizontal position, the silhouette of him and the weapon taking the shape of a cross. Our activist implores us to move on. Tom believes that as long as he is gentle with his tone and courteous with his words, only good can come of the attempt, and he introduces himself as a Jew who lost grandparents to the Nazis. The soldier is strikingly unimpressed. Two young Palestinian men passing nearby stop and peruse the scene warily.

Tom asks the soldier to consider what Israel is doing to the Palestinian people, and describes what he has seen with his own eyes. Our activist becomes frightened and implores us to move away. The Palestinian men, feeling safer against the soldier with "internationals" by him, approach Nancy and shake her hand.

On the way back to Abu Dis, Marwan suggests we visit Herodium, a flat-topped conical hill that King Herod the Great transformed into a fortress palace in 23 B.C. Turning onto a small road near the base of the fortress, Marwan stops and asks a local man if there is any problem with checkpoints; he is unsure. We drive up the road carved into the side of Herodium until reaching a gate with a soldier, who tells us to turn around. The Israeli military has taken over access.

When we reach Abu Dis again, we learn that one of the boys who had been with us at Friendship House has been arrested. The IDF wanted him and his brother, but not finding them, took their parents hostage, releasing them only after the sons surrendered themselves. No one knows what they are accused of.

Having met with lawyers representing prisoner issues, we have some idea of what the boys might face: youths are told that unless they cooperate and give names or whatever else is demanded, the IDF

will spread the rumor that he or she has become a collaborator. This is a threat literally worse than death, since not only is collaboration the ultimate disgrace to one's name and family, it also leaves the supposed collaborator vulnerable to vigilante justice.

Arbitrary, illegal imprisonment serves not just to demoralize and cripple Palestinian society, but just as important it creates for the rest of the world the facade of a "guilty" populace. That is the *coup* of being imprisoned: it makes you guilty. One can read the Jerusalem Post, for example, and find the term "terror operatives" used synonymously for Palestinians in prison. You're guilty, else why would you have been imprisoned? And if you're tortured, as many Palestinians are, you must be *really* guilty.

Thus when we hear that Israel has had to incarcerate thousands and thousands of Palestinians, we realize that Palestinians are a very violent, lawless bunch, and so who can blame Israel for defending itself against such a neighbor? Nor do we consider that even the "guilty" Palestinians are guilty only of resisting aggression and occupation, and that this resistance, short of targeting civilians, is legal, indeed necessary.

And when we hear that Israel has released a hundred Palestinian prisoners, we are impressed by the risks Israel is willing to take for peace: they have released a hundred *guilty* Palestinians. If only Palestine would reciprocate and release a hundred Israeli POWs, but alas they've but one, and unlike Israel's prisoners, he is, by international law, a legal one, a soldier captured during an aggressive action by an occupying army.

Sunday morning we greet Jenny Tonge and her husband, Dr. Keith Tonge, who have arrived to join us on our last day of concerts. A former member of Parliament, Baroness Tonge had been sacked from the Liberal Democrat front bench for remarks she made about the Israeli Occupation following a trip to Palestine. She is now a member of the House of Lords.

Accompanied by the Tonges, we go to Abu Dis Boys' School, which was recently attacked by six IDF soldiers. Despite the seriously injured children, despite the witnesses, despite the impossible inconsistencies in the soldiers' account, Israel refused to investigate.

There are many children, no large room, and only time for one performance, so Nancy suggests to the headmaster that we play outside on the asphalt to have room for everyone. Most of the boys pour into the yard and surround us, while some opt to stay in the outdoor hallway and peer at us through the metal bars, giving them a closer, "backstage" view.

Next we go to a boys' school and orphanage run by the Arab Institute, then drive to a school on the hilly outskirts of Abu Dis run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. Here we meet up with Ahmed, the oud player, who has rehearsed some



Children of the Anata refugee camp bid the trio goodbye.

songs with a few of the students. After we play, one of the teachers sees me looking at a little pillow on which a student had embroidered, in English, *there's no place like home*. The teacher picks it up and hands it to me, pointing to the words. An image flashes through my mind of Palestinian refugees clicking their heels three times, as Dorothy does in *The Wizard of Oz* while repeating those words.

Our last concert is in the auditorium at Al Quds University, and is attended by students and faculty, Baroness and Dr. Tonge, and our various Abu Dis and Ramallah friends. We play music with Palestinian musicians from the university, and dubka dancers share the stage with us.

The next morning, Nancy and I wake to find that

Tom had gone out early and gotten us three cans of spray paint: green, black, and red. Time to confront It. *The World Sees Through This Wall* comes to my mind. I use the green paint.

Our concerts over, we are now tourists for a day, and head to Jericho and the Dead Sea. An Abu Dis youth joins us on the chance he might slip past the check point and see the Sea; though it lies in Palestine, Palestinians are barred. I get the sense it is a long-denied pilgrimage for him. Later I learn that his cousin was murdered by the IDF. His cousin was 11.

The next day we leave for Amman. Weaving east through the vaguely lunar, sub sea-level landscape toward the Jordan Valley and our flight home, I have the feeling that I am reentering a familiar blur, a hazy dreamland. Behind us is reality. You can see it, touch it, measure it, get hurt by it. Behind us is the truth—no artificial "balancing" of unbalanced issues, no need to make unequal "suffering" equal, no bogus "complexities" created for their own sake.

The decades of posturing, summits, initiatives, brokering, and most exasperating of all, the obfuscating "road maps"—the whole sorry legacy has done nothing but evade the actual issue. Simply put, if Israel obeyed international law and UN Resolutions, the rest would be moot.

Justice will require laying bare the truth from the mid-1940s on, and dealing with far more than "just" the Occupation. Indeed, the nearly exclusive focus on the Occupation, and the virtually unchallenged definition of the Occupation as post-1967, have been to Israel's enormous strategic benefit.

Although Palestinians are the immediate victims of these 60-plus years of injustice, we will follow. We will become, in our complicity, our own victims, turning ourselves into just another of the shunned rogues that history looks back upon with horror and disbelief. ■

Thomas Suárez, who resides in New York, is the author of "Early Mapping of the Pacific," "Early Mapping of Southwest Asia," "Shedding the Veil," and the novels "The Crustacean Codex," and "Viol Player of Cattigara," as well as numerous articles on the history of cartography and socio-political issues. He runs the website palestinejournal.net.



Left: Nancy Elan demonstrates how the bow is held.
Above: Performing at Anata refugee camp.



Above: One of hundreds of checkpoints, the constant face of occupation. Right: The Wall, here separating a shepherd and his sheep from grazing land. Below: A secretly taken photo of an IDF soldier checking a Palestinian's papers.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS SUÁREZ

Studying music theory at the Edward Said Conservatory.



“Get Out of MY Shop!”

The Dead Sea, whose shore is the lowest dry land on earth (nearly 1400 feet below sea level), straddles three countries: Jordan on the east and southeast, Palestine on the west and northwest, and Israel for about 15 miles on the southwest. Israel, however, has expropriated the Palestinian region of Dead Sea, and now prohibits one particular nationality among all humankind from going to it: Palestinians. Thus Marwan tells me that unless we are lucky and all slip through the checkpoint, I must take over the driving. The three Palestinians among us—he, the driver, and a youth from Abu Dis who I’ll call Tariq—would stay behind at the checkpoint until we return. Nancy and I are excited to see the fabled Sea, but we feel complicit, as if patronizing a whites-only establishment — indeed a whites-only establishment owned by the very “coloreds” being kept out.

We are lucky at the checkpoint. Most happy is Tariq, for whom the Dead Sea is a long-denied pilgrimage. I find out that his cousin was murdered by the IDF. His cousin was eleven.

While walking along the shore, Tom hears someone with an American accent remarking that he’s met people from all over the world here. Tom, with his usual calmness, asks the man if he’s ever met anyone from Palestine here. The man doesn’t seem to understand Tom’s point.

Not having a bathing suit, I strip to the waist and swim into the unique sea, feeling as though I am somewhere between a magic realm and a science experiment. Once the sun dims behind the distant clouds, the air temperature begins to change markedly, and I join Marwan and Nancy on the shore. Marwan has saved a bottle of Palestinian beer for me from Jericho.

When we are ready to start back, I go ahead to look for Tom. Just as I approach a small area of three or four concessions selling drinks and souvenirs, I am attacked by hundreds of airborne tourist postcards that a sudden wind snatched from an unwary merchant’s display. His young son races after them. In any other situation I would have instinctively grabbed what I could for the boy, but I did

nothing for the salvation of the countless *Dead Sea /Visit Israel* postcards hitting me in the face. If they had been blown Tom’s way he would have carefully retrieved them, then sat down with the boy and in a friendly manner ask him if he knew what country he was in.

Tom is not far away, at a little bar that sells drinks and snacks. Three people are working there: a middle-aged woman who seems to be the proprietor, a young woman who is the main clerk, and an African man working in the back. Tom introduces me while the younger woman eyes me suspiciously, then tries to engage her. She laughs in ridicule — *oh, yes, the poor Palestinians, I’ve heard it all before*. Tom stays calm and points out, with unbearable politeness, that we are standing on the Palestinians’ land, to which she replies with nastier ridicule that it is only his *opinion* that this is Palestinian land, and that she has her *own* opinion.

And that is when I butt in. I counter that it is a matter of simple international law, not of her opinion or our opinion or anyone else’s opinion. But it is her next jeering *ha!* at which, for the first time during our entire time in Palestine, I snap. For a moment, I am completely silent.

Get out of my store! I scream. The two women step back and stare at me, shocked. But I keep screaming at them to get out of my shop, *my* shop, nudging my way behind the counter as I do, *MY* shop. Their expression changes from anger to utter bewilderment, and they make signs that it is their shop, *really, their* shop. *Ha!* I scoff, pushing in even further behind the counter. *That’s*

only your opinion. Out! Go! Get the hell out of my shop! Out! The black worker in the background watches the strange scene progress with a cautious curiosity; one can only imagine what is going on in his mind.

I leave the concession area, turn toward the parking area, and am confronted with a white sign saying *Go in Peace* in three languages. Through the rest of the evening, I can’t tell how much of my shivering is from wearing wet clothes in the cold, or from being shaken up by 60 years of collective misery having been dismissed with a jeer. —*Thomas Suárez*



From The Link's Links

<http://www.freegaza.org/>

Go



On August 23rd, the SS *Free Gaza* and SS *Liberty*, carrying 46 international human rights workers and humanitarian aid, arrived in Gaza Port—the inaugural achievement of the Free Gaza Movement. AMEU Vice President Jane Adas interviewed Anis Hamadeh, who manages the Free Gaza Movement's website.

Why and when did the Free Gaza Movement come into being?

The Free Gaza Movement came into being about two years ago and was initiated by experienced human rights workers from several continents. I joined in about a year ago. Israel said the Gaza Strip was no longer occupied, but people in Gaza suffer severely from Israeli restrictions that have no legal basis at all. While the UN and other responsible organizations and countries have failed to act, the Free Gaza Movement has been successful – a triumph for civil nonviolent direct action.

What has been the reaction of the Israeli government to the Free Gaza Movement's efforts to break the siege on Gaza?

"Chaotic" seems to be the right term here. First they said we were pirates and breakers of international law, which was rather amusing. (I say "we," but I was not on board.) When they noticed the gigantic media coverage they said, "OK, you can come in" – an occupier's statement. Finally, in an al-Jazeera TV interview with our Huwaida Arraf, one Mr. Gissin, an Israeli official, said, "Boats may land in Gaza when they have no weapons on board." You can find the video online. We take him at his word. After the boats arrived, the authorities arrested Jeff Halper, an Israeli boat passenger, for entering Israel from Gaza, despite their own official previous approval. Now, after our first success, the army seems to be anxious to take revenge on the poor Palestinian fishermen by shooting at them even more than before. It is all documented. Actually, the Israelis claim that it is a provocation for them when Palestinians go fishing in their own waters to make a living. They are truly amazing. Israeli officials are scared, that's for certain.

Publicity is essential for the success of nonviolent direct action. Did American and European main-

stream media pay attention? *Oh yes, it is just too sensational not to be covered. Nobody remembers when the last ship or boat freely entered Gaza, but it must have been before 1967 at least. Even Zionist-friendly newspapers acknowledge the courage and determination of the Free Gaza passengers who fear neither death nor devil to take a stand. I watched the arrival of the boats in Gaza on August 23rd here in Germany on the 8 o'clock evening news. Many, many people cried for joy that day. Archbishop Desmond Tutu and even the United Nations are in favor of our project. Another reason for the success of Free Gaza is the new internet media of the 21st century. This is a precedent for much more than Palestine. My motto is: "The path of non-violence is the path into the public."*

What is your role as webmaster? *I post news and other items and maintain the "Free Gaza in the Media" clipping list, which has more than 1,400 items today, covering maybe a fifth of all international media reactions. I write thank you notes to endorsers and have a lot of worldwide correspondence. I also wrote four or five articles so far and do whatever is needed. My favorite work is with the Free Gaza Song Contest, which is my baby. I wrote the "Free Gaza Song" and posted it on YouTube encouraging people to sing along and win a prize. I also wrote "From the Cyprus Shore a Boat" and "Gaza on My Mind." Meanwhile, there are studio versions of the songs online and many people have joined the show with videos, mp3s, and lyrics. The contest is open until the end of the year and everybody is welcome to participate. Here is the link: www.anis-online.de/office/events/FreeGazaSong.htm. Songwriting is what I do best. I am a musician and poet.*

What will be the next step for the Free Gaza Movement?

The SS Hope is next in line and will carry, among

18 others, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mairead Maguire and Mustafa Barghouti, my favorite Palestinian politician and a great man.

In the long run there will be a permanent ferry sea-line between Cyprus and Gaza. We are determined to go all the way and we said that right from the start. So let me shout this out loud: we are hundreds, we are thousands we are millions, and no army in the world will stop us.



Photo copyrights: SS *Free Gaza*, Free Gaza Movement; Anis Hamadeh, Juergen Kircher.

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