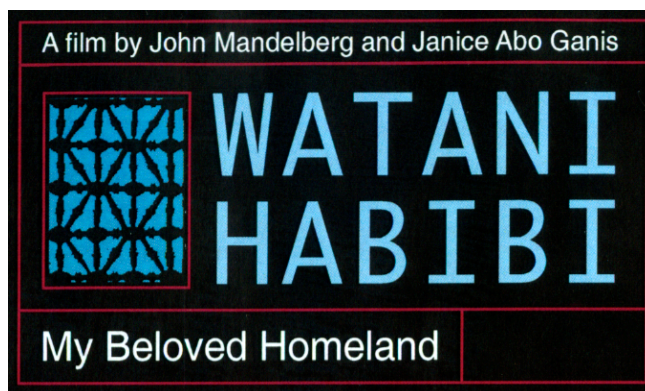


Blue Water Productions presents



Palestinian cultural resistance.
A rich musical journey of
commitment, passion and politics.

Project in Development

WATANI HABIBI presents a human face of the Palestinian people that will offer a new and alternative voice to the often unbalanced dialogue that surrounds existing representation of the Palestinian dilemma.

SYNOPSIS

A rich musical journey through the exquisite sun drenched landscapes of ancient Palestine. We hear the haunting sounds of traditional Arabic instruments: the Ney, the Qanun and the Oud, in harmony with the passionate voices of Palestinian cultural resistance.

An unprecedented exploration of Palestinian protest music and dance which features the treasured singular voice of the traditional village singer, Jawaher Shofani; the warm melodic tones of the banished maestro of folk, Mustafa al Kurd, and the youthful sounds of Arab rap calling to the world. The unforgettable Rim Banna sings her ballads of resistance for the children of the occupation. They dance to remember their past, they perform for their futures, they believe in the enduring richness and vibrancy of their artistic heritage.

PROJECT SPEC

<i>Production Company:</i>	Blue Water Productions
<i>Producer:</i>	Janice Abo Ganis
<i>Director & Co-Producer:</i>	John Mandelberg
<i>Director of Photography,</i>	
<i>Co-producer:</i>	Issa Freij (Jerusalem)
<i>Language:</i>	Arabic with Subtitles
<i>Format:</i>	16:9 HDV video (1080i)
	1 x 75 mins version
	1 x TV version hour

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

This documentary portrays a new vision of the Palestinian people through their music and their dance performances. It is a series of parallel stories which all have cultural resistance as essential components from which we can reflect on the past and the future as well as the day to day realities of living life under occupation. Each story revolves around peoples whose lives are linked to themes associated with their search for and desire for a better and free life. The difficulties they face in their daily lives as they live with fear, banishment, checkpoints and security passes; and the myriad daily frustrations imposed upon them by forces beyond their control. Performance is their voice to the world.

TOPIC BACKGROUND

“Just by making music under occupation, you are making politics, even if you don't say that...we still have the same human message, our new songs are variations on the same theme. We are looking for a better life -- just as everyone else. We still haven't lived. We're still looking forward to something else.... You have to be very stubborn and to believe in your message, to insist to do something that is practically impossible.”

Kamilya Jubran, Palestinian singer, Al-Ahram Weekly, November 8-14, 2001

There is an unique human desire in all people for freedom, love and hope that is often expressed through music and dance in a manner that is universal and life affirming. Music is a way of expressing the ideas and thoughts, traditions and meanings of life within a culture. In particular, the people of Palestine have a history of reaction through Protest songs. They are a form of expression that appear to be passive but are in fact instrumental in mobilizing and informing the people.

By filming the lives and the voices of the inhabitants of Palestine and the Palestinian Diaspora, we will gain an understanding of why they sing of “return”, “their homeland”, of “victory”, “their survival as a people” and their profound sense of grief for the death and destruction that has been visited on them as a people. Their music indeed reflects their hopes for the future & their belief in the enduring traditions of the past. The representation of the music will include traditional and contemporary musical forms.

There has always been a strong belief in the power of music as a universal theme and in the power of the protest song as an instigator of change. Parallels to this narrative are found in the African/American Civil Rights movement, the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa and the peace movement that protested against the Vietnam War.

The landscape holds a particular space in the Palestinian memory and is reflected in songs of return, dispossession and yearning. The Palestinian longing for their homeland can be represented in a nostalgic desire for a return to a simpler life that they no longer are able to participate in.

Families take picnics amongst the sun-soaked ruins of destroyed villages and show their children the pomegranate trees that continue to grow in the old courtyards. They remember a more perfect place where they inhabited the hills and valleys for longer than living memory, whose sacred sites fill their music, stories and imaginations.



PERFORMERS

EL-FUNOUN, a Palestinian dance troupe based in Ramallah who perform traditional dance both inside Palestine and around the world. This group is widely recognised as having played a significant role in reviving Palestinian dance and music folklore. It has also played a leading role in developing this tradition into a more contemporary form.

RIM BANNA is a Palestinian singer, lyricist and composer who was born and currently lives in Nazareth in The Galilee. She presents the Post-Modern Palestinian Arab song, which is inspired by the Palestinian people's conscience, sentiments, culture, history and folklore. Rim is committed to performing her music to children in the refugee camps. She tells stories of crawling through barbed wire barriers with her husband Leonid Alexienko, her young daughter and her twin babies to get into the camps to perform for the children. Leonid and Rim compose and perform their music together.



SUHAIL KHOURY, General Director of the Edward Said Conservatory of Music at Birzeit University in Ramallah is a practising composer and musician. Suhail Khoury's music is deeply connected with his personal experiences. It talks about freedom, victory, Jerusalem and love. Some of it was composed during Suhail Khoury's six-month imprisonment in 1988 for producing a tape of music, and is a manifestation of his experience in the Israeli jails.

JAWAHER SHOFANI is Palestine's most beloved and demanded singer of traditional Arabic folk music. She is a grandmother in her seventies and is called upon to sing whenever there is a wedding, a funeral or when a newborn baby is going to be baptised. During the most difficult times in the refugee camp of Jenin and in Bethlehem she made a lament based on a lullaby, with her own improvised lyrics, which she sings in public.

MUSTAFA AL-KURD was a pioneer of Palestinian political songs, performing as early as 1967. His music is based upon and reflects the culture and history of Jerusalem. His compositions emanate from the old universal cultural heritage of the city; and the spirit of cultural and philosophical creativity inherent in the three monotheistic religions that inhabit Jerusalem is integral to his work. He is currently music director for the Palestinian National Theatre in East Jerusalem.

SABREEN was a popular music group that formed in 1980 and has since disbanded, although their music continues to be played in Palestine. They focused on the development of the Palestinian modern song and reflect the humanitarian and cultural reality and the suffering endured from the political situation. Their recordings remain imbued with a sense of hope; yet reflect the frustrations and longing associated with the Palestinian experience. Sabreen's music blends traditional instruments like the kawal, oud, qanoun, buzuq and hand drums with modern classical instruments; the contrabass, cello and violin. Together with carefully chosen lyrics, the result is rich, experimental music.

KAMILYA JUBRAN. For twenty years, Kamilya was Sabreen's lead singer/player of the qanun and other oriental instruments, and partner in the production of four albums, which Sabreen toured within Palestinian cities, and in many other cities of the world. The period Kamilya lived with Sabreen represents a deep and dynamic process that created a new style of a unique modern Arabic song.

Kamilya now lives in Paris and is currently involved in researching texts and poems (by Lebanese Paul Shaoul, Jordanian Sawsan Darwaza and Greek Dimitri Analis among others) which describe how "absolute yet paradoxical our lives are today. Where are we going and what is happening to humanity?"

She has used these texts in a body of work developed with Werner Hasler, a Swiss musician who composes electronic music. Kamilya describes their album "Wameedd" (Sparkle), recently released in Paris, as a relationship between poetry and music but also an interplay between European electronic music and a more classical Arabic sound.

SAID MURAD was the founder and leader of the original SABREEN and has since developed an organisation that produces and records music, as well as playing a vital role in the development of music educational programmes for Palestinian children. Sabreen Association for Artistic Development is now a leading music resource organization. It continues to reach out to an underserved community to offer a spirited, innovative approach to enhancing music understanding and creativity.

Sabreen Association develops and conducts educational music workshops for students, music teachers, and the general public in Palestine. Sabreen has focused its efforts in two general areas, that of Artistic Music Production and Creative Approaches to Music Development.

Now that Palestinians are beginning to see the creation of a new state, Said is moving from the militancy of the resistance message and working towards the establishment of a musical community that will operate within the new structure.

WISSAM MURAD is the younger brother of Sabreen's Said Murad and is a singer/songwriter who plays the traditional oud. His music represents a youthful approach to resistance. Although he sings specific songs pertaining to the political cause, he also sings of love alongside global issues that condemn the destruction of the planet. He says it is assumed that as a Palestinian he will sing only of resistance and he feels the limits of that supposition.

KHALED JUBRAN, older brother of KAMILYA JUBRAN, is a performer and teacher/mentor to a group of young performers learning to master the oud. We met Khaled in Jerusalem where he holds regular informal music nights in the basement of an East Jerusalem hotel. He began these sessions, where musicians can just drop by to jam, during the second Intifada in 2000.

Khaled said he wanted to create an oasis of music amongst the chaos, to see life continue despite the fear and isolation people were feeling during those times and suggests that resistance music is that which is played under occupation.

He arranges these evenings to give young performers an opportunity to meet and play together. Because an occupying army governs the country, it lacks an appropriate infrastructure that would have an interest in providing support and venues for cultural activities. Therefore there are no venues for musicians to perform and gain experience in Palestine and they are not invited to perform in Israeli venues. Subsequently, musicians rely on invitations to perform outside Palestine, in Europe, Egypt and other Arab countries.

REEM TALHAMI, popular solo vocalist, opera singer and actress performs contemporary and traditional songs in concert with various groups and as a solo artist. She graduated from the music academy in singing and voice training, and started her artistic journey at the beginning of the 1990's. Reem was the lead vocalist for some well-known Palestinian groups like "Ghurbeh" and "Washem". In cooperation with the Greek pianist, Sarandis Kassaras, Reem has prepared a distinctive program of solo singing with piano, which was performed in Egypt and Tunisia. In addition, she has been part of an Arab Orchestra in Tunisia gathering a large number of Arab artists and musicians.

SAREYETT RAMALLAH TROUPE FOR MUSIC AND DANCE is a dance club that began in 1930. It is one of a number of dance clubs where inexperienced dancers ranging from about twelve years old to thirty are tutored in traditional and contemporary dance forms. They present professionally choreographed performances and have performed in Palestine, the United States of America, Switzerland, Italy, U.K., and Egypt. The dance group specifically commissions the dances and the music from professional Palestinian composers and choreographers. They are currently performing a contemporary dance piece called "At The Checkpoint".

At the performance the producers attended, they were struck by the intensity of the emotion the dance evoked in the performers. It was an opportunity for these young people to openly express feelings that personal experiences at the checkpoint and separation wall had generated.

The Hip Hop band, **DAM**, with a mix of Middle Eastern politics, traditional Arabic music and a hip-hop beat has proven extraordinarily popular with Israel's 800,000 Israeli Arabs, and with Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and beyond. Though they have yet to record an album of their own, Dam's concerts in Israel and Europe have regularly sold out.

The band seems to be riding the wave of the Arabic-language hip-hop revolution. It's a revolution that is not happening without a struggle. When the Arabic language al-Jazeera television station reported earlier this year on Egyptian rappers MTM winning the 'best modern Arab act' in the first Arabian Music Awards, the reporter questioned whether rap was a bad influence

- suggesting anxieties about hip-hop harming traditional Arab music. Yet perhaps such fears mask more political concerns: Arab commentators have also been quick to point out the potentially 'corrupting' influence of hip-hop's outspoken words. (*Interview with Tamer Nafar by Dina Shiloh* <http://www.dam3rap.com/arabrap/>).

There are a number of performers living in the Diaspora who also make music that re-iterates the protest. Of these we are working with **REEM KELANI**, musicologist and performer living in London and Hip Hop DJ **IRON SHEIK** in the United States.

PRODUCTION DEVELOPMENT & DISTRIBUTION AGREEMENTS AVAILABLE:

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ABOUT US

BLUE WATER PRODUCTIONS is a New Zealand based Production Company founded by Janice Abo Ganis and John Mandelberg in 2005 to produce independent documentary films commencing with *Watani Habibi*.

JOHN MANDELBERG, an international award winning documentary filmmaker from Australia, has been producing and directing film and television for 25 years. He has worked as an independent producer as well as contracted by various Australian production companies.

His previous production company, Black Dog Media, produced a range of film and television productions, corporate videos and education programmes.

JANICE ABO GANIS has a Master of Fine Arts Degree and works as a contemporary photomedia artist and as a commercial photographer. This film making enterprise utilises a crossover of her well-established creative skills and aligned with the experience of the Director, John Mandelberg, makes for a sound basis upon which to complete the project and further productions that the company intends to undertake.

Janice Abo Ganis and John Mandelberg are also currently senior lecturers in Photography and Moving Image respectively at the Waikato Institute of Technology in Hamilton, New Zealand, where they teach at undergraduate and postgraduate level on the Media Arts programme at that Institution. They have received research-funding support from their Research Faculty to develop this project.

ISSA FREIJ is a Jerusalem-based Palestinian filmmaker/cinematographer. He has worked as a freelance cameraman and director for over 25 years for International television networks including ABC, CBS US, BBC, Channel 4, Swiss TV and france2. A founding member of Al Ma'amal foundation for contemporary art, Jerusalem, and a founding member and musician of "Sabreen" Palestinian music group.

