

## Introducing the Palestine Strings Students

### Lourdina Baboun, 18, Violin 1 (Bethlehem)

Lourdina began learning the violin at the ESNM in Bethlehem aged nine. She says that the creativity and challenges involved in learning a musical instrument helped her navigate the challenges faced by young people growing up in Bethlehem in creative and peaceful ways. "Music brings a joy which I'm able to share with others."



Lourdina's mother Vera was recently elected mayor of Bethlehem. "Our family life absolutely hasn't changed, but we all know that our mother doesn't have an easy job. We have to support her until the end of her journey as mayor. When she was elected, I was really happy, both for her and for Bethlehem because I knew that she would be a successful woman in her new job, just as she has always been before. She will get Bethlehem what it deserves".

Lourdina wants to continue studies as a violin soloist. "In Palestine, people consider music as a hobby, not a profession. My ambition is to help change that". Reflecting on how music fits into Palestine's difficult socio-political situation, she says, "Music is the best medial to cross borders. Being a musician in one of the first new generations of musicians in Palestine, I believe we carry a message for peace, reconciliation and growth, in a world that has experienced conflict for decades".

### Sama Tarazi, 15, Violin 1 (Jerusalem)



Sama started studying violin at the age of six. "Through studying music I've gained so many friendships. I've learned so much, not only about music, but also about life. Music is one of the basics of my life now".

After taking part in Palestine's National Music Competition, a woman approached her saying that her playing gave her goose-bumps. "I can't forget this, to amaze people through performing music is such a great experience; it's like giving away a gift". About participating in the Palestine Strings, she says: "I love playing music alone, but the feeling you get when you play in a group is magnificent, it's such an adrenaline rush; you feel energy surging through all of you together on stage ... I really can't explain it".

Sama says her goal is to play in orchestras throughout the world. She says that last year's performance with Nigel Kennedy made her look at classical music from a completely different perspective, 'a more modern one'. She's thrilled to work with him again in London, "I feel so privileged to have this opportunity, and want to thank all the people who are making it happen".

### Costa Moustaklem, 16, Violin 1 (Ramallah)

Costa has studied at the ESNM in Ramallah since 2004, deciding to play the violin after seeing an orchestra on TV. He wants to study computer engineering or materials science at university, continuing violin performance as his minor study. A lot of his free time is spent playing in a string quartet with three other students in Ramallah. 'Whatever career I choose, I'll always carry on playing the violin'. 'Maybe I'll teach music to young children as a part time job, or play in an oriental music band or chamber music group'. In the meantime he enjoys being a member of the Palestine Youth Orchestra and hopes one day to play in the Palestine National Orchestra.



**Carol Ibrahim, 17, Violin 1 (Beit Sahour)**



Carol Ibrahim wants to train as a soloist once she finishes high school this summer. She particularly loves baroque music, so she's naturally very excited about performing the Four Seasons at the BBC Proms. "I've seen photos online, I was amazed, so many esteemed musicians have played there."

From Beit Sahour near Bethlehem, Carol recognizes the positive impact the opening the conservatoire has had to the community since opening six years ago, shortly after she began learning the violin herself at age nine. "We've always loved Arabic music in our village, but the conservatoire brought more variety and choice in the music people play and listen to and enjoy."

**Naseem Halabi, 16, Violin 1 (Beit Rima)**

Naseem comes from the village of Beit Rima near Ramallah. "When I started studying violin at the age of seven I was only the second person in the village ever to have studied music, and the only one to have studied violin. Fortunately now we have a music centre in Beit Rima and more people have had the chance to study and enjoy music ... it's great". Naseem, who is also an enthusiastic composer wants to carry on his musical studies at university when he finishes high school, "I want to be a successful musician and carry my nationality with me. I want to be able to tell the world that I love music and I'm Palestinian". Last year's Palestine Strings concert sticks out in his mind as the most exciting musical performing experience he's taken part in to date. "It was beautiful, Nigel has so much energy when he plays and has the ability to share it with the people playing alongside him which is an awesome feeling".



**Mostafa Saad, 15, Violin 2 (Maghar)**

Mosatafa has been playing the violin for eight years. Three years ago he joined the Palestine Youth Orchestra as its youngest member, which he now claims as his 'second family'.

"Playing in the Palestine Strings last year was a totally new experience for me. It was the first time I played in an orchestra without a conductor, and to have that experience with Nigel Kennedy was just ... wow!" "I've seen so many concerts from the UK on television but I've never been there. Everyone knows it's a great place for music. It's so cool to play with Nigel and the band again, the way they improvise is amazing".



Mostafa is undecided about whether to study music, law, or even violin making. Whichever path he chooses, he says that music will always take first place in his life. At home he plays in a string quartet with his sister and brothers. They call themselves the Galilee Quartet. Older brother Omar, 17, who also plays in the Palestine Strings, recently made news headlines by refusing to serve in the Israeli military. Mostafa stands by his older brother proudly: "As Palestinians, we want to play music to help achieve peace and equal rights for our people".

#### **Gandhi Saad, 13, Violin 2 (Maghar)**



Gandhi began studying the piano, but switched to violin after a year when he was seven years old. The violin came naturally to him as his older brothers Omar and Mostafa studied viola and violin respectively. 'Seeing instruments around the house making music, made me need to join in'. Gandhi loves Arabic music, and is also a highly gifted singer. His favorite Western orchestral composers all hail from the Romantic era. In addition to being thrilled at joining Nigel Kennedy on stage at the Royal Albert Hall, he is looking

forward to escaping at the end of rehearsals to see the London Eye, Big Ben and Buckingham Palace.

#### **Niveen Al Atrash, 18, Violin 2 (Bethlehem)**

Music was already in the family when Niveen started studying the violin 10 years ago, both her older brothers being musicians. Unlike her older brother who is embarking on a career as a professional cellist, Niveen has chosen to study engineering in the USA, starting this year, keeping up her music activities on the side, "I'm planning to join the university orchestra and chamber groups. Music brings people together. It's been a great way to make friends from all over the world".



#### **Mohammed Al Rjoub, 15, Violin 2 (Ein al Sultan Refugee Camp, Jericho)**



Mohammed first heard the violin in Ramallah seven years ago and was inspired to take up the instrument himself after his sister enrolled in an ESNCM outreach project in Jericho. Mohammed is also a keen horse rider and has a black belt in karate. 'I was inspired by the beautiful sound of the violin and the fact it seemed to be able to play any style of music'. He doesn't intend to study violin at university, but says he will keep studying and performing, and take every opportunity to become a better violinist he can find. 'It was amazing to share music with Nigel Kennedy last year, and share that music with my friends in Palestine. I'm very excited to perform with him again in London.'

**Hanine Al Rjoub, 19, Violin 2 (Ein as-Sultan Refugee Camp, Jericho)**

Hanine began learning the violin on an ESNCM outreach program, and recently began to study viola too. In addition to the five main ESNCM branches (Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus and Gaza City), the ESNCM runs outreach programs in cities such as Jericho. Baroque music is her favorite music both to listen to and perform, but her happiest performing memory was playing Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1 with Palestinian pianist Fadi Deeb and the PYO. Hanine believes the Palestine Strings performance in the Proms carries an important message about what Palestine is able to achieve: "we have the ability to be in parallel with other nations in the future, we're still at the beginning of the road, but we have hope that we can achieve more". "We want to show the world that we are a people who deserve peace".



**Marina Eichberg, 19, Viola (Beit Jala)**



Marina graduated from high school with excellent grades but took the decision to take a year out and practice the viola with the aim of continuing her studies in France or Germany. "Music is the only thing that's made me work, you have to put real effort in to reach where you want to be. It's a challenge to create something that's convincing to yourself and convincing to others as well". She says that her biggest inspiration to become a musician isn't anyone famous, but her teacher for the past three years at the ESNCM, a Canadian living in Beit Jala, where Marina is also from. Beit Jala is a hilltop village next to Bethlehem, "Most of the time it's a quiet, serene and a pretty place to live".

"The important thing for me about playing at the BBC Proms is that we have the chance to show that Palestine has something cultural to offer. Like every other nation out there, we've got what it takes to create music and art. It's our way of fighting and proving a point".

**Omar Saad, 17, Viola (Maghar)**

**Omar Saad's** younger brother's violin teacher encouraged him to take up the viola six years ago. He says his teacher Leonid Kuperman, contributed invaluable to his musical knowledge and style of playing. Omar intends to study towards a professional career as a violist, but has been working as a tennis coach, and competes actively as a swimmer. He recently wrote to the Israeli Ministry of Defence, refusing to partake in military service. As a Palestinian Druze male, he is obliged to serve in the Israeli army when he reaches 18. The letter, which says



that he refuses to violently oppress people he grew up playing music with, has been translated into numerous languages and inspired a Facebook page which attracted over 10,000 members in only a matter of days, "I was surprised and didn't think it would echo so fast amongst people who understand my point of view." Despite still being under 18, Omar faces jail for his non-violent insistence that all people are equal, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. "I'm not scared by prison, but I do think about it all the time. After all, it's not a normal place to be."

### **Tala Khoury, 23, Viola (Ramallah)**



**Tala Khoury**, has played the viola since she was 6, studying at the ESNM shortly after it was founded. She recently graduated as a nutritionist and began working for the World Health Organization. Tala keeps up her viola playing by performing at in the ESNM Orchestra and the Palestine Youth Orchestra as well as various Arabic music groups in Ramallah where her family live. Her favorite performing memory relates to a recent PYO performance at the National Conservatory in Rome. Several members of the Palestinian Diaspora were there, many of them refugees or people unable to return to Palestine. Some of the audience had asked if the orchestra could

play the nationalist song 'Mawtini' during the interval. At the end of the concert, the leader stood up and began playing it from memory, eventually all the musicians joined in, receiving a standing ovation from the audience.

### **Jude Mohammed Amous, 13, Cello (Jerusalem)**

**Jude Amous** has been playing the cello since she was six years old, and sites her biggest musical influence as the American cellist Yo Yo Ma. Her favorite piece of music is currently the Overture to Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, which she discovered recently when she had to learn its famous opening for a recent Palestine Youth Orchestra audition. Jude also plays basketball and enjoys acting. She has never seen a professional symphony orchestra live. Her first experience will be seeing the BBC Symphony Orchestra perform Holst's *The Planets* at the BBC Proms this summer whilst the Palestine Strings are in London rehearsing at Maida Vale Studios.



### **Rand Khoury, 12, Cello (Jerusalem)**



**Rand Khoury** has been playing the cello for seven years, studying at the ESNM in Jerusalem. Rand used to lead the cello section in the Jerusalem Children's Orchestra, and was this year accepted into the Palestine Youth Orchestra for the first time, where she will be the youngest student this year. She enjoys the annual ESNM summer camps, which include orchestral and chamber music workshops, and also enjoys horse riding and playing soccer.

**Iman Abbasi, 16, Cello, (Jerusalem)**

**Iman Abbasi** was awarded a scholarship to study at cello at the ESNM six years ago. Together with her brother and her sister, she represents the first generation of musicians in her family. 'I love the cello and enjoy playing it'. Besides playing the cello, Iman performs in a traditional folkloric dance troupe, a dabke group, and also competes learns Taekwondo, and has competed in several Taekwondo tournaments recently in Palestine.



**Eleni Moustaklem, 19, Double Bass, (Ramallah)**



**Eleni Moustaklem** began playing the double bass six years ago after her piano teacher, also a bass player, recommended she try the instrument. She has no regrets, and her bass playing keeps her busy every moment outside of her English literature and translation studies at Birzeit University. Aside from classical groups, she plays in Arabic music ensembles and a host of fusion groups in her hometown. 'When we were on stage with Nigel Kennedy it felt more fun to play music, and we felt like the audience were more interested. He certainly knows how to reach the audience and maintain their attention. He has a beautiful aura and enjoys his playing.' Asked about Palestine's best asset, Eleni says, 'We have a strong

bonding to this land, to its history, and to a stolen identity that we are not ready to surrender. The will to exist and carry on is our strongest trait. Our strongest asset is our love for Palestine'.