

Al Manara Encounter

Al Manara was the result of two significant encounters. The first was with Eloi Baudimont. I had heard him in the marching band of Mourcourt, and later in the marching band Détournée. I was impressed by his qualities as a conductor and composer. But what struck me most was the work he had done with Baba Sissoko in Mali and his achievements as conductor of Le Grand Orchestre National Lunaire of La Louvière. He managed to create a large orchestra with a number of persons who had never played music before and made them perform in front of 15,000 people, all of whom came to "reach for the stars." Eloi Baudimont is a great man, an eclectic and musical genius. He is an inspiration.

The second encounter took place in Ramallah, Palestine, with Ramzi Aburedwan. I knew of his compositions with his group Dalouna and his work as artistic director of the Palestine National Ensemble of Arabic Music. But what excited me even more was the work he had done through his association, Al Kamandjâti, creating a network of music schools throughout occupied Palestine, allowing young Palestinians, including those in refugee camps, to study music. This man, too, is more than a brilliant, eclectic musician. He, too, is an inspiration.

I proposed that Ramzi produce a first Belgian-Palestinian creation in collaboration with Eloi Baudimont. "Why him?" asked Ramzi. "Because, like you," I replied, "he crosses musical boundaries. But also because, like you, he has the

passion that characterizes musical inspiration."

Their first meeting took place in the shadow of the Tournai Cathedral under the watchful eye of another passionate musical mentor, Frédéric Mariage, who involved the Maison de la Culture Tournai in the adventure. The two musicians got to work right away. Two months later, we met in Palestine to finalize the project, choose the musicians, discuss the repertoire, and set up the production. We were delighted as the National Arab Music Ensemble of Palestine played its repertoire in front of an audience.

The first residency took place in January in Tournai. Belgian and Palestinian musicians threw themselves into the adventure, rehearsing relentlessly. Later they worked in residence in Ramallah and Hammamet. But beyond this creation that collectively mobilized them, they all shared the desire to valorize the resources of Palestinian culture and contribute, modestly yet with determination, to the full recognition of the Palestinian state.

After lengthy discussions between us, we chose to name this artistic cooperation project Al Manara, which is the name of the central square of Ramallah – an innovative Palestinian city and cultural beacon.

Al Manara, in Arabic, means "the beacon." Throughout the world, beacons bring light and illuminate the passage to the port. For our two maestros and their twelve assistants, this beacon was indeed needed to allow the passage between cultures.

Yanic Samzun*
Secretary General of Présence et Action Culturelles
(Cultural Presence and Action)

This piece was written not long before the death of Yanic Samzun on December 23, 2014.


Al Kamandjâti



25/07/2015, 7:30 PM/ Bethlehem, Convention Palace

26/07/2015, 7:30 PM/ Jerusalem, The Palestinian National Theatre "El-Hakawati"

27/07/2015, 6:00 PM/ Nablus, Al Najah University, Aziz ben Turki theatre

28/07/2015, 8:00 PM/ Haifa (location to be confirmed)

29/07/2015, 7:30PM/ Ramallah, Ramallah Cultural Palace