A FACE FROM JERUSALEM

Suhail Khoury

The Nay that Gave Jerusalem Back Its Breath



Suhail Khoury is considered one of the pillars of Palestinian music – a man who carried on his shoulders the burden of ensuring that the city kept its voice at a time when many tried to silence it. He was born in Jerusalem in 1963, and among the stones of the city his earliest ear was formed, in the place where the call to prayer mingles with church bells, and where the alleyways intertwine with melodies heard only by those who know how the soul listens.

Suhail studied music academically, specializing in the nay, the clarinet, and composition, and carried with him – into institutes, streets, and theaters – a simple yet profound idea: Music is not a luxury... it is an act of resilience. He co-founded the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music (ESNCM) and then earned a master's degree in music education. He has served as the ESNCM's general director and as the head of the administrative board of the Yabous Cultural Center, whose early foundations he helped lay. Through these two institutions, he redrew Jerusalem's cultural structure and built an educational and creative space that enables new generations to carry their melodies with dignity.

On stage, in rehearsals, and in halls crowded with children discovering their own voices, Suhail led the Jerusalem Girls' Ensemble and the Palestinian Arab Orchestra, composing dozens of pieces that have become part of Palestine's emotional memory. From his early days with the Popular Art Center, El-Funoun Dance Troupe, Sabreen troupe, and the Arab Music Ensemble, he honed an exceptional ability to move between styles – between heritage and modernity, roots and aspiration.

Suhail has left his mark on musical works and albums that have become significant milestones: Marah, Matar, and Bas Shway for children; "Marj Ibn Amer" for the El-Funoun Troupe; "Ashiqah" for the Washm Ensemble; and the Jerusalem After Midnight album; in addition to composing the music for the play The Lanterns, based on Ghassan Kanafani's story, and writing the orchestral vocal work "Maryam of Gaza" and the song "Peace to Gaza."

And because art in Palestine is neither neutral nor innocent, Suhail was arrested because of his work on producing a musical album – a moment that encapsulates the relationship between melody and freedom, between rhythm and resistance.

The awards and honors granted to his projects and ensembles are not personal medals, but rather recognition that this man – calm, persistent, and loyal to his vision – laid a substantial stone in the building of the Palestinian cultural landscape, leaving an indelible mark on the memory of a city that does not forget those who play for it.