



Left: The Joubran Trio are brothers. All talented *oud* musicians, Samir and Wissam had played together for years; they became a trio in 2005, when Adnan turned 19.

MUSICAL RESISTANCE

The Palestinian Joubran Trio are exceptionally gifted *oud* musicians with a potent and inescapable political conscience.

'MUSIC WASHES AWAY from the soul the dust of everyday life,' wrote German novelist, Berthold Auerbach in the 19th century. There is plenty of dust in the lives of the Joubran Trio; the particles are made up of the range of emotions that come with being Palestinian and Arab-Israeli. But rather than washing away these feelings, Samir Joubran, the trio's founder, has discovered a way to make use of them by pouring them into music and exuding them on stage with kinetic energy. Besides being extraordinarily gifted *oud* musicians, the Joubran Trio make the intensity of their emotions become so palpable that they almost hover in the air above them.

Samir and his brothers Wissam and Adnan have been playing the *oud* together since 2005. Forming a trio was a project that the eldest brother Samir, 34, had been waiting for until Adnan turned 19 and he literally pushed him on to the stage. Samir and Wissam had already been playing together for years, ever since Samir brought Wissam along with him to play in a concert in Paris when he was 12. Wissam, says Samir, has always been the most relaxed of the three.

The Joubran brothers grew up in Nazareth; their father Hatem is a renowned third-generation *oud* maker and their mother is a singer. Samir

studied the *oud* at the Muhammad Abdul Wahhab conservatory in Cairo, while Wissam is a master luthier, the first Arab graduate from the Antonio Stradivari violin-making school in Cremona, Italy. Adnan started playing percussion but soon turned to the *oud* and was trained by his brothers.

The three brothers are now based in Paris. Life in Israel – and also in Ramallah in the West Bank, where Samir lived for six years – became too difficult. France is where Samir's international career took off in 2002 when he performed at a music festival with his brother Wissam. Two weeks after

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the concert the duo had a manager and a label, and they've never looked back. In 2005, after Adnan joined Samir and Wissam, the trio performed at New York's Carnegie Hall.

Their music is based on classical Arab musical modes, but their repertoire is anything but and much is improvised. Bluesy, Western influences can be discerned and Samir says he listened to a lot of flamenco and music by Paco de Lucia before putting together their second album, 'Majaz'

('Metaphor'), released late last year. (The cover art was designed by master calligrapher Hassan Massoudy).

On stage the symbiosis between the three brothers is lovely – improvisation and solos flow freely between them like conversation. Because the Joubran trio are part of the population of nearly 1.5 million Palestinians that hold Israeli passports, they cannot play in most Arab countries. 'Unfortunately I cannot be part of the culture that I belong to,' says Samir. 'We understand the position these countries have taken, but we would like to be part of the bridge-building.' Getting across the message that the Palestine question must be dealt with is as essential to Samir as his music. The trio will soon tour the US; 'a very difficult place to promote myself as a Palestinian,' says Samir. 'But I'm stubborn. I need to put pressure on these places and I go there with a loud voice and a clear idea: we are musicians from Palestine and we are life projects, not death projects. We need peace, but before peace we need justice.'

Samir was also able to reach the Arab countries he can't visit via a documentary aired on various television stations in 2006. 'Improvisation', by Palestinian filmmaker Raed Andoni, tracks the Joubran brothers as they create their trio and records their differing political views and their unifying passion for the *oud*. Still, Samir hopes that the trio will soon be able to play more in the Arab world: 'We want to be there physically.'

Meanwhile the Joubran Trio is moving in new directions musically. For 'Majaz', Palestinian percussionist Yousef Hbeisch joined them, and now Samir is contemplating playing with other international musicians, first on stage, and then, perhaps, recording.

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—Olivia Snaije