

Daughter of Sderot

Middle Eastern voice for peace emerges



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SMADAR LEVI: A singer dedicated to creating harmony between Jewish and Muslim cultures at the Seeds of Peace concert.

By **ROI BEN-YEHUDA**
Special to *The Epoch Times*

Amidst the recent tensions in the Middle East, a voice for peace and unity has emerged. No, it is not the voice of a political leader, nor is it the voice of a grassroots movement; rather it is the euphonious and haunting voice of singer Smadar Levi.

A daughter of Sderot, the Israeli town adjacent to Gaza that is at the center of the conflict in the region, Smadar has dedicated her musical career to recapturing and modernizing the spirit of what historians have called *Convivencia*: the coexistence and interchange of Jewish and Muslim cultures.

Smadar's music is best described by her as "rhythmic Mediterranean music peppered with a gypsy sound." A polyglot herself, Smadar sings in Arabic (Tunisian, Moroccan and Egyptian), Hebrew, Greek, Spanish and Ladino (Judo-Spanish). Her music is a blend of original and modern renditions of traditional songs.

Smadar was born of Moroccan-Tunisian lineage, and some of her earliest memories include dancing to the mesmerizing pulse of the Middle Eastern drum, and listening with her father to classical Arabic music. "My main source of inspiration came from my parents," she says. "My father would play *darbuka* and sing, and I would join in front of family and guests. There was always Arabic music playing at home. My house was filled with the sweet sounds of Farid el-atrash, Um Kulthum and Abdel-u-hab."

After her Army service in Israel, Smadar traveled around the world, picking up sounds and studying with various musicians. In 2000, she began working on her own project in New York City. "When I came back from traveling around the world, I had a vision of what I wanted to create. I wanted a band made up of members from

City. I listened to many incredible musicians, and I shared with them my vision and sound. I was happy that many of them were attracted to what I had in mind."

"We try to remain tied to our Mediterranean roots, without religious or national boundaries."

After searching high and low for the best musicians from the Middle East, Smadar assembled an all-star international band. "I was able to put together a fantastic band made up of Israelis, Turks and Arabs. Today our music is rhythmic Mediterranean peppered with a Gypsy sound. We try to remain tied to our Mediterranean roots, without religious or national boundaries."

In 2004, Smadar recorded her debut album entitled "Smadar" to much underground buzz. The CD featured both traditional and original scores. The work was produced by Shay Bacher (Alabina and Greg Wall) and Tamir Muscat from the band *Balkan Beatbox*. The first song on the CD, "Ghali Ya Bouy" (My Father), was recently selected to be featured on the upcoming international compilation *Rough Guide to Belly Dance* (World Music Network). Smadar's song will be featured alongside such giants as Omar Farouk and Natacha Atlas.

While Smadar strongly believes that music and art ought to transcend poli-

performance. "The content of my lyrics are not necessarily political—I sing about the great themes of unity and exile. Of love won and love lost. But I suppose that the sum total of what I represent—my presence, my appearance, lyrics, the multi ethnic makeup of my band and the fact that I am girl from Sderot who sings in Arabic and Hebrew—all point to a political statement."

This insight has not escaped many people who have heard Smadar's music. In February, the internationally-renowned nonprofit organization Seeds of Peace honored Smadar with an award for "uniting cultures to achieve peace through music." The award was given to her at a gala in which she performed along with three-time Grammy winner John Legend for the organization.

Rebecca Hankin, Director of Communications for Seeds of Peace, said, "Smadar's show was a musical and visual representation of what Seeds of Peace stands for. An Israeli playing along side Arab and Jewish musicians. A beautiful sight and a beautiful sound."

Most recently Smadar finished recording the vocals for the 9/11 movie "Narrow Gate." "Smadar's expertise was what we were looking for," says Bill Lacey the film's composer. "Her voice conveyed the desired emotional depth and content that the movie needed."

Today Smadar is hard at work preparing to record her second album. This project promises to further showcase Smadar's musical vision, vocal range and songwriting abilities. "Fundamentally I am about the opening of the heart. If my music can reach people, unite people, show them a different type of coexistence between Jews and Arabs, then I will be fulfilled as an artist and as a human being."

theater

'Macb

An uneven

By **JUDD HOLLANDER**
Special to *The Epoch Times*

There's mischief afoot at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park as the New York Shakespeare Festival kicks off its summer season with "Macbeth." This production has been imbued with the proper atmosphere along a wonderful performance by Liev Schreiber in the title role, but, as a whole, the show is lacking something to give it the necessary dramatic punch it needs.

After winning a glorious victory on the battlefield for Duncan, King of Scotland (Herb Foster), Macbeth is on his way home when he meets three "weird sisters" (aka witches—Joan Macintosh, Ching Valdes-Aran, Lynn Cohen) who give him tantalizing clues to his future, including the fact that he will one day be king. When another prophecy made by the sisters comes true, Macbeth, with the help of his scheming wife (Jennifer Ehle), plots to murder Duncan. The deed is soon accomplished with the blame placed on another, and the end result being that Macbeth is given the crown. But the new ruler soon realizes he has to continue killing in order to silence those who suspect him or want to bring him down. Eventually Macbeth begins to descend into madness as he learns too late the dangers of taking mystical predictions at face value.

The play can be viewed on many levels, specifically, looking at the evils of war, how a taste of power can corrupt even the truest man and how we, as mere mortals, might not always be in control of our destinies. What director Moises Kaufman seems to be going for here is the unraveling of the man Macbeth has become and his transformation from warrior and hero to murderous coward and, ultimately, to a fatalistic tyrant.

Schreiber is excellent in the role and in the different shadings of his character the story requires. However, Ehle as Lady Macbeth doesn't fare as well. The scene where her character learns of the prophecies and resolves to be totally evil in order to embark on a murderous path to the throne is a key section of the play, but Ehle seems to be just reading her lines rather than embodying them. (This is a problem with many of the other cast members who never seem to actually become their characters.) While Ehle gets better as the show goes along, she's never as convincing in the part as she needs to be.

On the plus side, one usually doesn't equate humor with this work, but Kaufman and Ehle bring it out during a party scene where Macbeth sees the ghost of someone he recently



LADY AND LORD
Delacorte Theater pr

killed. As the monarch and more unwound I the apparition, one of his increasingly fran to explain away her s with one excuse afte the scene becoming r farcical as things pro tually calls to mind a comedy.

Also interesting are the three weird sisters, final line (the last lin which shows who rea control over the event witnessed.

The production is sure, but there are enc nents to make it more esting. Free admission in Central Park don't f the natural scenery len lectly to the productio tumes by Michael Kr; some of the clothes we