

Healing through art

Iraq's children find their voices in music and dance

Words and pictures Tamara Nouri

The situation in the field of music in Iraq has deteriorated after many years of economic embargo and war. For those with a creative flare, there is the Music and Ballet School in Baghdad, a unique institution for the tuition of classical music and ballet in the Arab world. Since the school's destruction in 2003, several non-government organizations, such as UNESCO, Norway Church Aid and Voices of Wonderness of USA, helped to rebuild the School, donating many musical instruments.

Of course, there is a much greater challenge for the staff than simply imparting artistic knowledge. The degrading security situation in Baghdad has forced teachers to choose between the school and their safety; the students are traumatized and detached, making it much more difficult to concentrate on cultural activities. It is therefore considerably more impressive that these young musicians and dancers work so hard to practice their art, risking their lives to perfect their talents.

Here Skin talks to six of the school's students about their daily lives.



Zahraa Fadhel Abdul Amir

I start school at 8 am after hopefully arriving safely. Many roads are closed because of daily explosions and murders, so we have to find different routes to get to school. People stop us to check the car, but still that doesn't stop explosions from happening. We don't even have enough petrol for our cars; if we can find it it's very expensive.

After finishing school we face the same situation going back home, so I arrive very late and very tired. I usually just do my homework and then go to sleep. On my days off I stay at home and use my computer and watch TV, whenever we have electricity. Sometimes we go visit my grandparents. On the way there I always see dead bodies in police cars. In Iraq there are different militia group that kidnap people as well. God help all Iraqis. I love my school, I love music and nothing in the world would stop me from going to my school.



Husam Adin Mohammed Amin

I'm 18 years old and I live in Baghdad in Hay al-Salam. Life here is not settled, it's very chaotic. The streets are very depressing because they are so empty of normal people, people who just want to buy groceries and go about their normal lives. All the people have left Iraq looking for peace in neighbouring countries. Iraq has been emptied of its intellectuals, artists and poets; there are just a few of them left here.

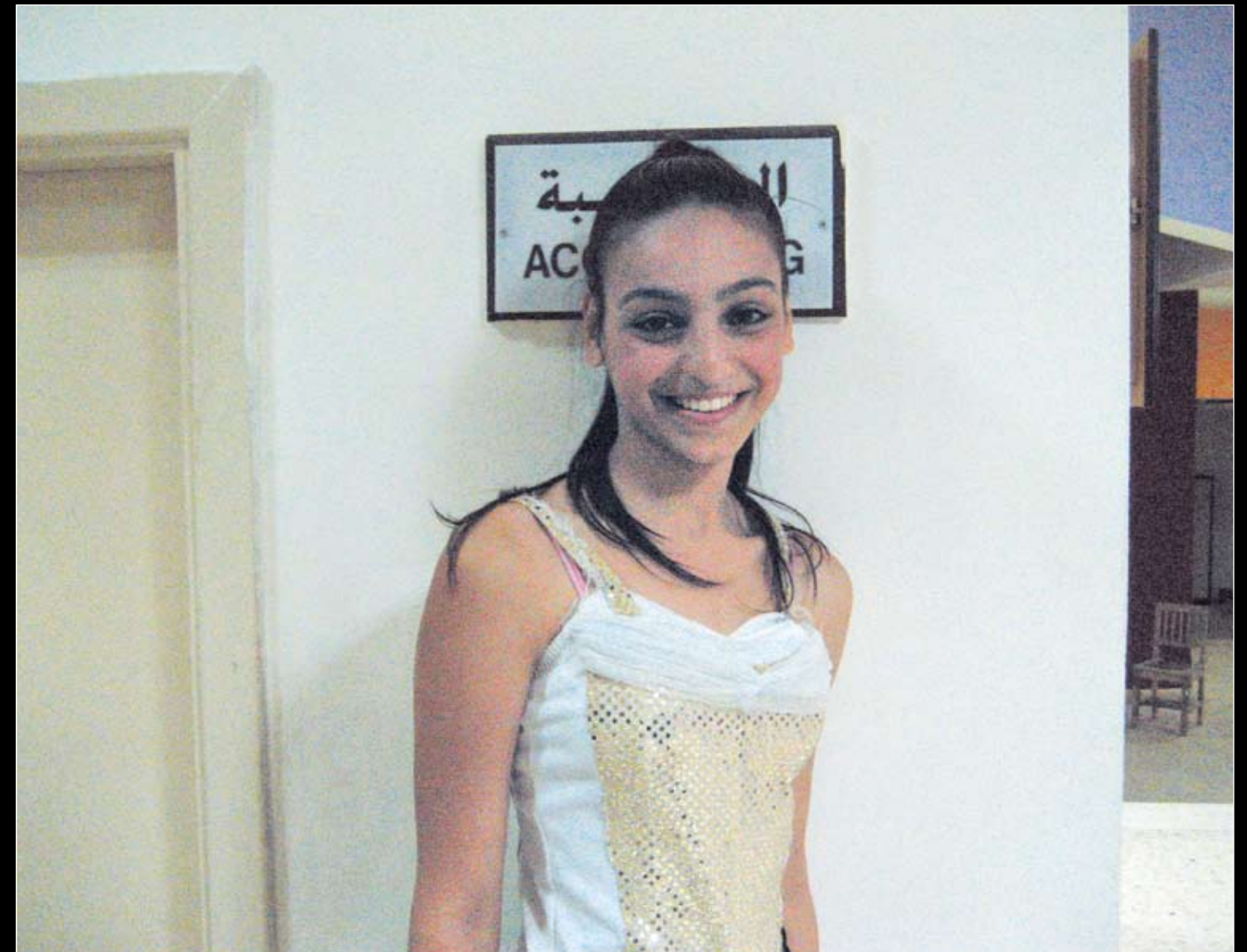
My usual day starts at school and after that I go with my father (maestro of the symphony orchestra in Baghdad) to practice playing the cello with the orchestra. My life is filled with explosions and gunshots. I remember the day my friend died in an explosion; I was there with him but he died and I was saved. >



Tuqa Saad Jaafar

I play the cello and double base. We have a driver that drives my brothers and me to school every day, which takes a very long time. After school I practice with the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra, then I go home and as usual I work on my homework and practise music. On my day off and holidays I spend most of my time at home, watching TV, practising music and on the computer.

Once I was going home from school, I saw a pickup truck full of dead bodies. Their faces were yellow, I was so scared I was crying from fear because I had never seen dead people before. The situation in Iraq is affecting our lives and our studies. I hope it will get better soon.



Rula Falah Salih

I am 15 years old and a ballet student of the Music and Ballet in Baghdad, but I left Baghdad with my mum and two brothers a year ago after both my brothers received a letter threatening them that they will be kidnapped. One of them is a violin player and a student of ballet.

We left our family and friends and we came to Amman looking for safety. But at the border they did not let my eldest brother to enter Jordan because he was over 18 years old; my father stayed in Baghdad as well. I wish one day we will be together again as family. I wish I will return to my school again, my time there was the happiest time in my life; I love it so much! I want to tell my family and friends that I always think about them. ➤



Rania Nashaat Majeed

I spend my day at school playing the French horn. When I get back home from school I do my homework and practise music. I spend my days off at home because it's too dangerous to leave the house after 4pm. Life here is full of explosions, so we are always late in going to school or returning home. There are usually dead people on the road. Once my brother and I saw people in a car right next to us kill a young doctor, just like that, and no one in the street had the ability to help him.

The best thing that has happened in my life is joining the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra. Life is very difficult in Baghdad because our government never thinks of us, they think only of themselves. Many people loot and kill in the name of democracy. I wish from the bottom of my heart that Iraq will get better.



Hadeer Saad

I start my day at school by asking my friends how they are and how they spent their night. Despite the terrible situation in Baghdad we still study music and go to school daily. When I get back home I spend the evening doing my homework and practising music. I never go out to play because my parents won't let me, it's too dangerous. I pray daily and in every prayer I ask God to save Iraq and to let us live in peace. ●