

ARCHER-CAPUZZO, SONIA, D.M.A. *Common Ground: Promoting Communication and Fostering Trust Among Israeli Arabs and Jews Through Music*. (2008)
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Most Israeli Arabs and Jews live lives apart. They live in different neighborhoods, attend different schools, and often work in different locations. It is not surprising, then, that there is a lack of basic communication between Jews and Arabs in Israel, which leads to misunderstandings and hostility. Many organizations and groups are trying to bring Israeli Arabs and Jews together to encourage communication and trust. This dissertation explores the role two musical ensembles—Shesh Besh/The Arab-Jewish Ensemble and The Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra—can play to provide common ground, promote communication, and foster trust between Arab and Jewish musicians and audiences.

Shesh Besh and The Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra both contain Israeli Arab and Jewish members and are both based in Tel Aviv, Israel. They perform for Jews and Arabs throughout Israel and play abroad, primarily in Europe and the United States. They perform a mixture of Western classical, Arab art and folk, Jewish folk, and original compositions that combine these styles to emphasize the Arab-Jewish makeup of the ensembles.

Through interviews, travel, and research, I examine the ensembles, their missions, the musicians, the audience, and the music performed. The musical examples discussed in Chapter Three are in the online multimedia portion of this dissertation. In this dissertation, I ask whether Shesh Besh and The Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra succeed in attaining their shared goal of promoting communication and trust between Israeli Arabs and Jews.

COMMON GROUND: PROMOTING COMMUNICATION
AND FOSTERING TRUST AMONG ISRAELI
ARABS AND JEWS THROUGH MUSIC

By
Sonia Archer-Capuzzo

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Approved by

Kelly J. Burke
Committee Co-chair

Gavin Douglas
Committee Co-chair

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-chair _____
Kelly Burke

Committee Co-chair _____
Gavin Douglas

Committee Members _____
David Teachout

Robert Wells

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

We have to face the fact that either all of us are going to die together or we are going to learn to live together and if we are to live together we have to talk.

Eleanor Roosevelt

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER	
I. "WHEN BOTH SIDES ARE RIGHT"	1
A Brief History of Modern Israel	6
Israel's Jewish and Arab Population	10
The Difficulty of Defining Israeli Arabs and Jews	12
Separation in Israeli Society	16
II. "THE MORE CONTACT WE HAVE OF THIS SORT, THE BETTER"	21
The Ensembles	21
Shesh Besh/The Arab-Jewish Ensemble	21
The Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra	26
Choosing the Ensembles	29
Interviews and Meetings	30
III. "IT'S A WAY TO SHOW THE MULTICULTURAL POINT"	41
The Music of Shesh Besh	45
The Music of The Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra	56
The Importance of Musical Styles	60
Visual Messages and Marketing	62
IV. "INSPIRED BY THIS IDEA OF JEWS AND ARABS BEING TOGETHER"	79
Arab, Jewish, and Israeli Identity	81
Israeli Audiences	90
A Wider Audience	92
Who Benefits?	96

V. “WE PLAY MUSIC <u>TOGETHER</u> ”	103
Communication	103
Contact, Communication, and Trust	115
Beyond Music	117
Measuring Success	121
VI. “SOME THINGS YOU JUST FEEL”	125
Small Steps	127
Further Research	132
SOURCES CONSULTED	135
APPENDIX A. LIST OF MUSICIANS	146
APPENDIX B. MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS	147

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Arab-Jewish Population of Israel 1949-2006	11

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: 1947 United Nations Partition Plan of the Mandate of Palestine	7
Figure 2: Israel's Districts	18
Figure 3: <i>Shibolet Basade</i> transcription	49
Figure 4: <i>Iqa'at Maqsum</i>	51
Figure 5a: Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and Shesh Besh Program	64
Figure 5b: "IPO News" from Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and Shesh Besh Program	65
Figure 6: Shesh Besh Album Cover	66
Figure 7: Star of David in Muslim Mural, the Alhambra, Grenada, Spain	68
Figure 8a: Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra Flyer, front page	73
Figure 8b: Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra Flyer, back page	74
Figure 9: Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra Album Cover	75

CHAPTER I

“WHEN BOTH SIDES ARE RIGHT”

“What do you do when both sides are right?” I have heard this question asked several times during discussions about the conflict between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. In Israel alone, one can argue that the Palestinians should have a right to return to the land of their forebears, and one can make a comparable case that the Jews should stay in the land of their ancestors. Similarly, Israeli Jews, and Arabs in Israel and the Palestinian territories deserve to live safely, unafraid of attack. In fact, these positions are quite similar. Both Arabs and Jews have a desire to live in the same area (today’s Israel), and both hope to live peacefully. For some, living peacefully means that the other side would have to disappear. However, many Arabs and Jews in Israel recognize that they must learn to live together.

How can one possibly help both sides to see that the other has a point? By finding common ground, perhaps Arabs and Jews can discover a way to empathize with one another. Common ground could literally mean the land that both Arabs and Jews claim as their spiritual homeland. However, it can also be a shared interest, experience, or point of view. By finding one common aspect, Arabs and Jews in Israel can begin to see other instances of common ground, other ways in which they are similar, and can coexist

peacefully. The common ground of the Holy Land can potentially become a shared reality as Israeli Arabs and Jews discover another kind of common ground.

Some believe that music can be that common ground. Through the act of music-making, musicians from both sides—Arab and Jewish—can explore a common interest together. It is no coincidence that musical ensembles combining Jewish and Arab members have formed in Israel, and beyond in the case of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, which meets annually in Spain. In this dissertation I will focus on two such ensembles—Shesh Besh/The Arab-Jewish Ensemble and The Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra—both of which endeavor to encourage communication between their Israeli Arab and Jewish members and their audiences. Through this study, I will ask if the act of music-making can provide common ground, promote communication, and foster trust between Israeli Arabs and Jews.¹

I travelled to Israel during the summer of 2007 to meet with members of Shesh Besh and The Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra and to hear them rehearse and perform. I heard several individuals in Israel speak of the “other” in stereotypes (i.e. Arabs are less cultured/sophisticated than Jews, Jews are more uptight than Arabs), but I also encountered those who spoke of their friends from the other side with genuine affection and admiration. I saw lingering signs of the war with Hezbollah, which occurred a year

¹ In this paper, I will refer to Arab citizens of Israel primarily as Israeli Arabs. However, many emphasize their identity as Palestinians. I will acknowledge this identity during my discussion of Israel’s modern history. However, Israeli Arab/Palestinian identity is too complex to address fully in this dissertation. For further discussion of Israeli identity issues, see: Smadar Bakovic, *Tall Shadows: Interview with Israeli Arabs* (Lanham, Maryland: Hamilton Books, 2006); Ben Brinner, “Beyond Israelis vs. Palestinians or Jews vs. Arabs: The Social Ramifications of Musical Interactions,” *Music and Anthropology* 8 (2003), online article, accessed 30 April 2007, University of North Carolina-Greensboro, EBSCOhost database; Daniel Lefkowitz, *Words and Stones: The Politics of Language and Identity in Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Laurence Louër, *To Be an Arab in Israel*, translated by John King (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Benny Morris, *1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

before my visit, during the summer of 2006—rubble spilling from buildings and spent missiles used as public art—but I also heard Israeli musicians speak of supporting each other during the war, during which Hezbollah attacked Israeli Jews and Arabs. The musicians and others I met while in Israel were a complex mixture of personalities and viewpoints.

The combination of personalities and belief systems led some to be more or less open-minded in their perceptions of the “other.” For instance, I heard a couple of older Jewish men, on separate occasions, describe all Arabs as dishonest. These Jewish men were a product of an Israeli Jewish belief that all Arabs are hostile toward all Jews. Tomislav Longinović encountered racism similar to that described above as he researched music and racism in the former Yugoslavia.² He writes that “race” is not always based on the color of one’s skin.³ In Yugoslavia race became a way to divide East from West, Europe from Asia, and Christians from Muslims. The differences between these groups, though often not great, were seen as insurmountable, similar to the apparently insurmountable differences between those with different skin colors. Racism in Israel is similar to that encountered by Longinović. Many see Arabs and Jews as separate groups divided from one another by race. Similarities between the groups are often ignored because differences are emphasized to such a high degree. Labels like “Arab,” “Palestinian,” or “Jew” are applied to a blanket group to highlight their race by others and by those who claim membership to these groups. Some Arab Israelis claim to be Palestinians out of pride and solidarity with the Palestinian Territories, while some

² Tomislav Longinović, “Music Wars: Blood and Song at the End of Yugoslavia,” in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, ed. Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 622-643.

³ *Ibid*, 630.

Jews label Arab Israelis as Palestinians to express their mistrust of all Arabs. Any Israeli can use Race and ethnicity to emphasize difference or similarity, to express fear or acceptance, and to prolong or fight the continuing Jewish-Arab hostilities in Israel.

Among the musicians with whom I spoke, all were dedicated to their colleagues and friends from the ensembles, whether Jewish or Arab. This is not to say that stereotypes and tensions, like those mentioned above, disappeared. Rather, they seemed less important than the humanity of the musicians' friends from the other side. The difference between these two perceptions is that the first sees the other side as a large, hostile group, while the second sees a collection of individuals with varying beliefs and values.

Shesh Besh and The Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra are a gathering place for musicians who enjoy performing and want to explore new repertoire, whether it be Western classical, Middle Eastern—Arab and Jewish—art and folk, or a combination of these styles. Music serves as a common interest for the Arab and Jewish musicians. However, these ensembles are also about more than music. They are just as much a product of the hostility in the Middle East as they are of the musicians' desire to perform new music together. They exist not only to perform music, but also to encourage meetings, communication, and trust between Israeli Arabs and Jews. Musical performance is an active, public art form, and Shesh Besh and The Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra use these characteristics to promote their message of Arab-Jewish coexistence, communication, and trust.

Thus, both ensembles embody a complex mixture of Arab and Jewish identities and musics. One can argue that complexity of identity could be a weakness in the

ensembles, leading to disagreements and strife, as musicians struggle to reconcile their musical, ethnic, religious, intellectual, and other identities. However, it is also possible that the diversity within the ensembles can strengthen them by pointing to unexpected commonalities between musicians.

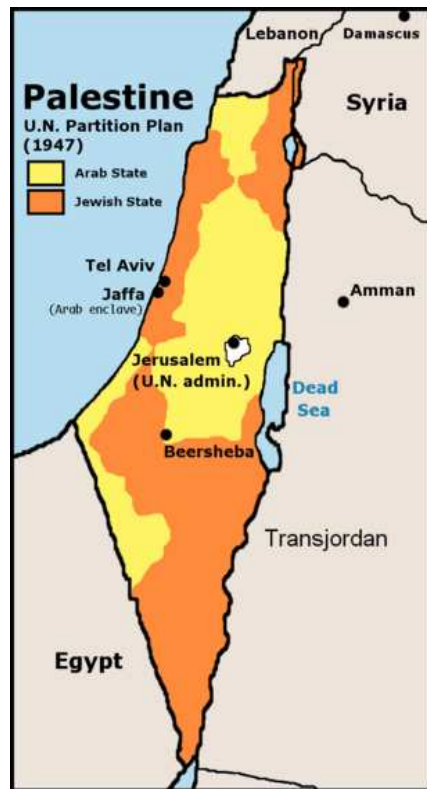
Is it possible that the act of making music together can lead to better relations between Arab and Jewish musicians in Israel? Can performing together encourage communication and even trust? Can the effects extend to the audience? The members of Shesh Besh and The Arab-Jewish Youth Orchestra with whom I spoke have varying answers to these questions. All of them have formed friendships with musicians from the other side through these projects. They are less sure about the affect these ensembles have on audience members, whether they are Israeli (Jewish or Arab), American, European, young, or old. In this dissertation, I will delve into the complexity of the ensembles' missions and members, their music, and their audiences, to try to discover if music-making can indeed provide common ground, promote communication, and foster trust between Israeli Arabs and Jews.

A Brief History of Modern Israel

In order to understand the significance of the Arab-Jewish conflict within Israel, it is important to understand modern Israel's history. In 1917-1918, the British and their allies captured Palestine from the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Palestine became a British Mandate. At the time, Palestine was predominantly Arab, though a growing Jewish population existed in the area. Many Jews lived in Jerusalem because of the religious significance of the city, while others lived in scattered settlements in Northern Israel,

especially around the Sea of Galilee.⁴ A small population of Jews also lived in the port city of Jaffa, which today is located just south of Tel Aviv.

In the late 1800s, Jewish nationalism, or Zionism, began to take shape in Europe. An important part of Zionism was the belief that Jews should return to their homeland and religious center of Palestine to escape persecution elsewhere in the world and build a Jewish religious, cultural, and political community. Zionism fueled Jewish immigration to Palestine throughout the early twentieth century, especially as Nazi persecution escalated before and during World War II. As more Jews entered Palestine, Arab and Jewish factions battled for control of the Mandate. Rebellion simmered just below the surface for years, until finally boiling over in 1945. The United Nations stepped in and proposed a partition plan for the Palestinian Mandate in 1947 (see Figure 1).



⁴ Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*, 2nd ed., (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 24. Hereafter Sachar.

Figure 1: 1947 United Nations Partition Plan of the Mandate of Palestine⁵

Under the U.N. Partition Plan, Jerusalem would be an international city, controlled by the U.N. About 45 percent of the new Jewish state would be Arab, while one percent of the Palestinian state would be Jewish.⁶ Both sides greeted the Partition Plan with strong opposition, and civil war broke out in Palestine. On May 14, 1948, in Tel Aviv, David Ben-Gurion and a group of Jewish government ministers declared Israel an independent Jewish state. The announcement was followed within hours by formal recognition of Israel by the United States and the Soviet Union. On May 15, 1948, the First Arab-Israeli War broke out as members of the Arab League pitted themselves against the new state of Israel.⁷

Israel won the First Arab-Israeli war in large part because of the unity of the diasporic Jewish community post-Holocaust, and their determination to live in an independent Jewish state. Fragmentation among the Arab states contributed as well. The Arab League members lacked a central leader during the war, which led to a disintegration of coordination between the Arab states fighting Israel. Because of the war, Israel gained territory and a firmer position as an independent nation. The Jews of Israel (as well as Jews still living abroad, such as in the United States or Europe) gained further confidence and determination to defend the country. Around 700,000 Palestinian Arabs

⁵ *1947 UN Partition Plan*, Answers.com, accessed 11 October 2007, available at <http://www.answers.com/topic/1947-un-partition-plan>.

⁶ William Ochsenwald and Sydney Nettleton Fisher, *The Middle East: A History*, 6th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004), 536. Hereafter Ochsenwald and Fisher.

⁷ The Arab League was founded in the 1940s by several Arab countries, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. It is still in existence today. The Arab League, or more formally, The League of Arab Nations, endeavors to promote the interests of member Arab states.

fled the country, becoming refugees.⁸ Most of the refugees found sanctuary in the Arab states surrounding Israel, most notably Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon. Only about 150,000 Arabs remained in Israel, living under military rule until 1966. While Palestinians in Israel and Jordan became citizens of these countries, most other countries in the Middle East did not grant Palestinians citizenship. In Lebanon, refugees were denied citizenship because the influx of Muslim Palestinians would have tipped a delicate balance between the ruling Christians and the growing Muslim population in the country. In other countries, such as Egypt, leaders hoped that the Palestinians would soon go home, rather than placing a financial burden on already struggling states. Today, large populations of noncitizen Palestinian refugees continue to survive throughout the Middle East.

The conflict between Arab countries and the Israeli state continued into the 1980s, when the Fifth Arab-Israeli War ended. Conflict between Israel's government and Palestinian organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah continue today. There were periods of relative peace over the decades, but border raids, five Arab-Israeli wars, and two intifadas consistently interrupted them.⁹ The intifadas, literally "shaking off," were a protest by Palestinians against Israeli rule in the occupied territories. Both intifadas turned violent, ending in numerous casualties, especially on the Palestinian side. The intifadas became especially troubling for Israel as Arab Israeli citizens joined the protests. Though Israel managed to win each of the wars, and to put down the protestors

⁸ Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 602. Hereafter Morris.

⁹ The five Arab-Israeli wars occurred in 1948-49 (first), 1956 (second), 1967 (third), 1973 (fourth), 1978-1983 (fifth). The intifadas occurred in 1987 (first) and 2000 (second). More information on the Arab-Israeli wars and intifadas can be found in Sachar; Ochsenswald and Fisher; Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, ed., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

in the intifadas, the constant conflict continued to erode relations between Arabs and Jews within Israel and throughout the Middle East.

On September 13, 1993, there seemed to be hope, according to American, Israeli, and Palestinian leaders, for a resolution between Palestinians and Israelis.¹⁰ Jewish Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat signed a peace agreement in Washington D.C. after intense negotiations. The PLO began taking more responsibility and control in the Palestinian territories. Israeli and Palestinian leaders and the United States hoped that controversial issues like the right of return of Palestinian refugees and control of Jerusalem might eventually be resolved as goodwill increased. However, there was resistance on both sides to the peace process from those who feared giving up too much (or anything) to the other. On November 4, 1995, the peace process was derailed when a Jewish Israeli religious nationalist assassinated Prime Minister Rabin. It is surprising to many that a fellow Jew assassinated Rabin. However, this shows the divisions within Jewish culture in Israel, which I will address later as a significant factor in the continuing conflict, along with divisions in Arab Israeli culture.

Israel's Jewish and Arab Population

Demographics in Israel have played an important role in its history since its time as a British Mandate. The population balance between Jews and Arabs in the area has been a driving force in the hostilities, not only in Israel, but throughout other areas of the Middle East as well. After World War I, Palestine contained approximately 620,000 Muslims and 70,000 Christians who were primarily Arabs linguistically and culturally.

¹⁰ Sachar, 994-997.

