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Refugee Orchestra Project World Refugee Day Performance

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Syrian opera singer performs with US refugee orchestra

By Jennie Matthew

June 21, 2016

<https://www.afp.com/es/news/206/syrian-opera-singer-performs-us-refugee-orchestra>

Performing Puccini to a rapt New York audience, her soprano voice soaring to the rafters, Lubana al-Quntar may be the last person most Americans would think to be a Syrian refugee.

But half-an-hour's drive from Donald Trump's campaign headquarters, she and dozens of other classically trained refugees gave a special concert at the close of World Refugee Day to highlight the cultural contributions made by those who have fled war and persecution abroad.

Just days after the billionaire presidential candidate repeated his call to stop Syrian refugees entering America, Quntar had the audience spellbound even if many of the church pews were empty.

She sang the aria "Sola, perduta, abbandonata" from the opera "Manon Lescaut," accompanied by an orchestra of refugee American musicians, followed by a haunting Syrian song called "Ya Ghazali."

"This time I feel every word that I sing -- abandoned and alone. It's so incredible," she said before the concert in a Brooklyn church held to raise money and awareness for refugee causes.

"It's great to let the whole world see what refugees look like. They have a dream, they have talent," she added, the picture of glamour with coiffed hair before changing into a plunging evening gown.

Quntar has been in the United States for five years after leaving Syria five months into its conflict. She lives in Washington D.C, where she would return by a grueling five-hour bus journey after the concert.

She comes from Suwayda, the Druze stronghold south of Damascus, where Quntar says her soul remains.

Even for a professional musician who studied in Europe and performed abroad before the war, it has been tough adapting to a new life.

"I had to start life from a zero point," she said. "It's a constant struggle, like every day, especially my heart and my mind are always with my family and my people."

The United Nations said Monday that the number of people fleeing their homes has spiked to 65 million in the worst refugee crisis since World War II, led by Syrians, Afghans and Palestinians.

- 'It's sad' -

Nevertheless, America is in the throes of a toxic debate about immigration in general and Syrian refugees in particular, with Trump and other Republicans calling for immigration to be halted from countries with links to terror attacks targeting the United States or its allies.

The United States has accepted just over 6,300 Syrian refugees since 2011, far fewer than Europe. Germany opened its doors to 1.1 million asylum seekers last year. "It's sad," Quntar said. "For me as an artist, as a musician, I cannot understand how can you hate somebody."

The concert was the brainchild of US conductor Lidiya Yankovskaya, who gathered together the Refugee Orchestra Project after witnessing firsthand Germany's response to the crisis last summer.

"The thing that really impressed me was how many people were welcoming of the refugees," she said. "When I came back to the States, I found unfortunately this was not always the case."

The orchestra brings together musicians who are refugees or whose friends and families fled violence and persecution.

Yankovskaya herself was a refugee as a nine-year-old from St Petersburg, Russia when she moved to upstate New York with her family.

"I'm hoping that our viewers and our listeners will realize how much talent and intellect and how many inspiring people come to this country as refugees... and how much their contribute to our lives."

The concert included work by Sergei Rachmaninoff, who fled the 1917 Russian Revolution and Irving Berlin, the great American songwriter whose family emigrated from Russia in the 19th century.

Donations raised at the concert will go to organizations such as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), which resettles refugees from all backgrounds. Merrill Zack, one of the group's staff, says although America has provided refuge to people fleeing persecution for centuries, backlashes come and ago.

Thousands of Jewish refugees were turned away before World War II, she says. "So is it a pattern? I don't know. Is it something that we have seen in history? Yes. Do we ask our country to continue its leadership of welcoming refugees? Absolutely."

Highlights of the AFP Story Placement



<https://www.yahoo.com/news/syrian-opera-singer-performs-us-refugee-orchestra-074316780.html>



<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-3651932/Syrian-opera-singer-performs-US-refugee-orchestra.html>



<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/afp/2016/06/entertainment-us-music-syria-conflict-refugee.html>



<http://www.globalpost.com/article/6777536/2016/06/21/syrian-opera-singer-performs-us-refugee-orchestra>



<http://www.france24.com/en/20160621-syrian-opera-singer-performs-with-us-refugee-orchestra>



<http://www.dailysabah.com/music/2016/06/22/syrian-opera-singer-performs-with-us-refugee-orchestra>



<http://www.chinapost.com.tw/art/music/2016/06/22/469989/In-NY.htm>



VIDEO: Syrian opera singer performs with US refugee orchestra

June 21, 2016

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40TLOgYboBg&feature=player_embedded



An orchestra made up of classically trained refugees performs in New York to mark World Refugee Day, alongside a top Syrian opera singer who left the country soon after the start of its devastating civil war.

Refugee Orchestra Project Brings Exiled Musicians to Brooklyn

By Lucy Westcott

June 24, 2016

<http://www.newsweek.com/refugee-orchestra-project-brooklyn-syria-russia-473603>



When she was growing up in St. Petersburg, Russia in the early 1990s, Lidiya Yankovskaya would see large demonstrations while on her way to her thrice-weekly chorus rehearsals.

“I remember passing by a major square in the middle of the city where fascists would fly large swastika flags and hand out pamphlets that said ‘Kill all the Jews’ on them,” she tells *Newsweek*. “Russia, in general, at the time was in economic and political turmoil, so there was a lot of hardship overall. When that happens, people tend to blame any larger minorities that exist.”

Yankovskaya’s family is Jewish and, like many others, they left Russia as refugees, eventually settling near Albany, the capital of New York, in 1995. On Monday, as World Refugee Day was celebrated, Yankovskaya was in Brooklyn conducting the Refugee Orchestra Project, an organization she founded last year to demonstrate the kind of contributions—be it economic, artistic or cultural—that many refugees have made and continue to make to the U.S.

“I hope to demonstrate just how many refugees are around us each day and what we bring to the world,” she says.

According to a new report from the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) published on Monday, there are now 65.3 million people who have been forcibly displaced, which adds up to one out of every 113 residents of Earth. The United States resettles around 70,000 refugees every year, although fear-mongering rhetoric against refugees and immigrants continues to take center stage in the current U.S. presidential campaign.

Days after the mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando that killed 49 people, presumptive Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump said Muslims in the U.S. should be profiled in order to prevent further attacks. Trump has previously referred to Syrian refugees in the U.S. as a "trojan horse."

Since the Syrian civil war broke out in March 2011, the U.S. has taken in 6,551 refugees from that country (including more than 4,600 this fiscal year). Between 1959 and 2014, the U.S. resettled 459,884 refugees from Russia and the former Soviet states, including Yankovskaya and her family.

The concert at the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn Heights on Monday was the project's second-ever show, following its inaugural concert in Boston last month. Around 60 people were in the church pews while more than 81,000 people watched the livestream, says Yankovskaya. As well as showcasing the talents of musicians who fled their countries and the threat of persecution, the orchestra allows performers to highlight the works of refugee composers, including Irving Berlin—a Jewish refugee from Russia who wrote and composed "God Bless America"—and Sergey Rachmaninoff, who fled during the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Featured works by non-refugee composers keep to the theme of fleeing the homeland and loss; Monday's concert included a duet from *The Consul*, an opera by Gian Carlo Menotti, in which the characters try to obtain visas in order to leave an unidentified totalitarian European country. Yankovskaya says it's "emotionally powerful to perform these works."

Among the orchestra's performers, which mainly consist of refugees and the children and grandchildren of refugees, was Lubana Al Quantar, a Syrian refugee who is considered the country's first opera singer. Al Quantar, a soprano, performed traditional Syrian music on Monday, as well as "Sola, perduta, abbandonata" ("Alone, lost and abandoned"), a song from Giacomo Puccini's opera *Manon Lescaut*.

"Lubana was very fortunate to escape at the beginning of the Syrian war," says Yankovskaya. "She had said to me that if she hadn't left, if she had tried to leave even a little later, if she hadn't had the opportunity to leave right then, she wouldn't be alive today or she'd be in a refugee camp, along with countless others."

Yankovskaya decided to start the Refugee Orchestra Project after she returned from a trip to Europe during the height of the continent's refugee crisis last year, when

the world watched as refugees and migrants walked hundreds of miles and took to the sea for dangerous journeys. When she got back to the U.S., Yankovskaya says she was “very surprised that despite the fact that we are separated by an ocean and that we have very stringent immigration rules, many people here were not nearly as accepting or as welcoming” as many in Europe.

“There was an enormous amount of backlash at even the potential of having Syrian refugees come into our country,” she says.

Proceeds from the concert went to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and HIAS, formerly known as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, a major resettlement agency in the U.S. that helped Yankovskaya and her family when they arrived two decades ago. While the Refugee Orchestra Project was only meant to perform two concerts in Boston and New York, Yankovskaya says she’s now getting calls to take it to other cities.

Merrill Zack, director of community engagement programs at HIAS, believes events like the concert bring the public face-to-face with a crisis that can, at times, seem overwhelming and out-of-reach.

“When faced with such a staggering crisis of such epic proportions, it’s hard to connect to it and to really understand who refugees are,” says Zack. “When you go to a concert like the one [on Monday], you can look at some of those folks and say, ‘Oh, refugees are people like me.’ These are people’s lives that are at stake.”



ALJAZEERA

US: Refugees set up orchestra in New York

Newly created Refugee Orchestra Project seeks to highlight the role refugees play in American culture and society.

By Gabriel Elizondo

June 26, 2016

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/refugees-set-orchestra-york-160626035807017.html>



After fleeing violence and persecution in their home countries, a number of musicians have come together to set up an orchestra in New York.

The Refugee Orchestra Project includes refugees from Syria to Russia who hope to communicate their experience through music, raise funds for those in need, and highlight the importance that refugees play in American culture and society.

Lubana al-Quntar is the first Syrian opera singer to obtain international recognition. "Seeing the struggle of my people every day, it means so much to me to sing for them," said Quntar.

The orchestra also performs works by composers who were refugees. A recent concert was [held](#) on [World Refugee Day](#) in Brooklyn.

"We are a country of immigrants," says Lidiya Yankovskaya, the artist director and conductor of the orchestra.

Yankovskaya, who fled Russia when she was a child to seek asylum in the United States, points out that "almost everybody here came from somewhere and came to escape persecution of one sort or another".

She came up with the idea of the orchestra following the Syrian refugee crisis. "I was hoping that this project would showcase the importance that refugees continue to play in our culture and society while also raising funds for those in need," Yankovskaya said.

There are a total of 65.3 million refugees - the largest in history - at the end of 2015, [according](#) to the UN Refugee Agency. On average, 24 people were forced to flee their homes every minute.



ALJAZEERA

VIDEO: Refugee orchestra shares stories through music

June 26, 2016

<http://video.aljazeera.com/channels/eng/videos/refugee-orchestra-shares-stories-through-music/4988002000001>

Permanent Link: <http://bit.ly/29nReYN>



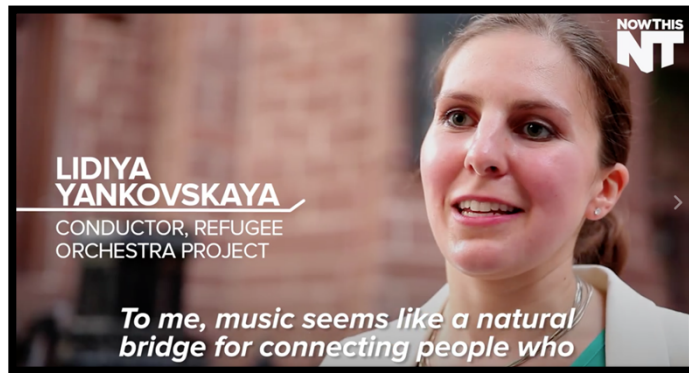
After fleeing violence and persecution in their home countries, a number of musicians have found a new audience in the US. The Refugee Orchestra Project is finding ways to showcase the positive impact refugees have on American culture and society.



VIDEO: This orchestra wants to change the way the world sees refugees

June 28, 2016

<https://www.facebook.com/NowThisNews/videos/1094785157278274/?pnref=story>



VIEWS: 107,000 LIKES: 1,500 SHARES: 413

VIDEO: The Refugee Orchestra Project is performing in Brooklyn for World Refugee Day

June 20, 2016

<https://www.facebook.com/NowThisNews/videos/1089104051179718/>



VIEWS: 84,000 LIKES: 2,000 SHARES: 226



REFINERY29

How This Opera Singer Is Raising Her Voice In A Very Different Way

By Kaelyn Forde

July 5, 2016

<http://www.refinery29.com/2016/07/114469/syrian-singer-refugee-orchestra>

Few people think of music as something refugees carry with them as they make their harrowing journeys to safety. Yet throughout history, some of the world's biggest composers and musicians — including Irving Berlin, Frédéric Chopin, Kurt Weill, and Gilberto Gil — have done just that.

As the world faces the [worst refugee crisis since World War II](#), refugee musicians and singers are using their voices and music to raise awareness about the plight of the [65 million people](#) who have been forced from their homes.

Lubana Al Quntar is one of them. Forced to flee her native Syria after peaceful pro-democracy protests turned into a violent government crackdown and full-blown civil war, the acclaimed soprano and opera singer has made it her mission to share the plight of those she left behind.

Most recently, Al Quntar, 42, [performed in Brooklyn](#) with other artists as part of the [Refugee Orchestra Project](#), which was started by conductor Lidiya Yankovskaya. She was inspired to form the orchestra after she realized that many of her colleagues and friends didn't know she had come to the U.S. as a refugee from Russia.

"I think many people in this country don't realize just to what extent we rely on refugees and immigrants in our culture, our society, and our everyday life. In the world of music, I've seen how much musical style has been influenced by refugee composers," Yankovskaya told Refinery29.

Yankovskaya, Al Quntar, and the other members of the Refugee Orchestra hope to raise awareness about the plight of refugees through their music, as well as raise funds for aid organizations helping refugee families rebuild their lives. Proceeds from the concert went to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and HIAS, a global Jewish nonprofit that protects refugees.

"This is who I am representing now: Syria and all the people in Syria...now, I feel like this is my mission," Al Quntar said. "I just want to be a Syrian singing."

Al Quntar shared her own story of fleeing Syria and finding a new home in the United States with Refinery29.



When did you come to the United States?

"About five years ago. I came here when it was the beginning of the revolution in Syria. And by chance, I guess, I got here at just the right time for me."

What was it like when the revolution started in Syria?

"First of all, we felt so happy that people had finally expressed their anger and refused this dictatorship. [The government of Bashar al-Assad], they own the country and it was hell for us. When they started the uprisings, everybody was saying: 'Syrians will not come [out]. They will not, they cannot, because this is a regime that is so violent and so criminal.'

"I was still there for the first three or four months. My friends were part of that. Some of them were captured, some were in prison, some of them died under torture. So, for me, it was really a shock, because we used to hear about this regime and how criminal it is, but to see it in front of your eyes is surprising.

"The first year [of protests in 2011], the people were like: 'We want democracy! We want freedom! We want security!' The people didn't say: 'We don't want the regime.' They were hopeful that the regime would change their policies. But when the thing started with the children in the school of [Daraa](#), people they couldn't accept that. [Editor's note: After writing anti-government slogans on the wall, children and teenage boys were arrested and tortured by al-Assad's forces.] From that, it changed very very dramatically. And the response from the regime was to attack the whole city. Cities, actually. Now, only Damascus and a few other cities are still standing.

"In my nature, I cannot be silent. I couldn't keep my mouth shut. For me, for us as Syrians, it's so dangerous when you just speak against the regime or against what's happening."

What was it like to come to the U.S. as a refugee? Were you nervous? Were you scared?

"From the personal side, you have nothing. It's like you begin a new life from zero. I had to start everything from nothing.

"I was very scared, because I was coming to the unknown. I used to travel — I went to London, I was in Germany. It was the second time for me coming to the U.S., but I came not knowing what the future would be like and what was going to happen. I had nothing here. I didn't know what to do. I was in the airport looking around me, like 'What?' and thinking, *This is unknown*.

"So, I didn't know what to do. My friends were sending me [messages] saying, 'Don't come back, they have been asking about you,' because they heard they were monitoring me. My parents said, 'We're happy that you could make it.' But I came alone."

What role did music and singing play in your life in Syria?

"You know, I don't remember myself as having not been a singer. I would sing when I was 4 years old. My teachers recorded my singing at school. But the opera life in Syria started really late...they opened the Opera Department and I was the first one who attended. I couldn't imagine myself as anything but a singer.

"But I didn't know about the opera life much. It was an adventure for me, because there was not a Syrian opera singer I could look up to and see what the future is like. But I could try and put this on the music map in Syria. It was very challenging and very exciting for me.

"When I sang with the orchestra for the first time as a Syrian opera singer, people were so excited. I was granted two scholarships...to continue my academic studies and get my master's. Then, I participated in this big international competition, the Queen Elizabeth competition in Belgium, where I won the biggest prize. And that was really huge for me, for my career, and for Syria, as well. I think it was the first

time for a Syrian to attend this international music competition. And so when I won this international prize, it was really like, *Wow!*"

How has it made you feel when you hear some politicians in the United States, such as Donald Trump, speaking out about keeping refugees from coming here?

"It's sad that this person has made it for so long because he has his supporters...I would say that the United States is made up of people who have been refugees from the start. So, how is it possible to treat people that are in desperate need just to be alive, just to be safe, this way?"

"It's not a matter of being like, 'Yeah, I want a nice life. I want a nice car.' It's not like that. It's a matter of life and death. People are dying and everyone is watching them die every day, one by one...we're talking about children, we're talking about women. We're talking about people, ordinary people."

Do you someday hope to go back to Syria?

"Of course I would go back. Of course. I was forced to not come back. I'm in danger, but that's where my family is, where my friends are. I watch their suffering every day through the TV and it is like torture for me. It's like, 'Okay, I'm here, I'm safe,' and I can't even enjoy anything, I can't. I feel so...I don't deserve this. My family has no electricity. I cannot enjoy anything here...this is the most horrific thing that you can ever see in your life. You're watching the TV and it is like a movie what's happening."

With all that is going on, how do you find joy in your day-to-day life? Is it through music?

"I don't, I don't. I don't, actually. For me this is...you know, I loved music so much...now, in this country, I even cannot do that. It's like the door really shut in front of me."

What do you hope people will take away with them after hearing the Refugee Orchestra perform?

"We're one. We're people. [Refugees,] we're just like other people. We feel the same, we have the same dreams. I hope that they understand that."

What is your advice for young women?

"Women in general, especially in Syria, are the highest prize that you can even imagine. I see the young Syrian girls who made it to Europe or to another safe place — I see how strong they are. So, I'm not really worried about them, because [strength] is in their nature. And I see my students, in Europe, even in Syria, how they cope with all these difficulties. They create something so beautiful from nothing."

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June 20, 2016

<http://www.gettyimages.com/license/541912938>



Russian-American soprano Zhanna Alkhazova sings with the Refugee Orchestra Project on World Refugee Day at the First Unitarian Congregational Society June 20, 2016 in the Brooklyn Borough of New York. / AFP / DON EMMERT



Lidiya Yankovskaya, of the former Soviet Union, conducts the Refugee Orchestra Project on World Refugee Day at the First Unitarian Congregational Society June 20, 2016 in the Brooklyn Borough of New York. / AFP / DON EMMERT









Lubana Al Quntar, a Syrian opera singer who was granted asylum in the United States, sings with the Refugee Orchestra Project on World Refugee Day at the First Unitarian Congregational Society June 20, 2016 in the Brooklyn Borough of New York. Performing Puccini to a rapt New York audience, her soprano voice soaring to the rafters, Lubana al-Quntar is the last person most Americans would equate with being a Syrian refugee. / AFP / DON EMMERT





Deseret News

She fled Russia with her family. Now, she has a powerful message about the refugee crisis

By Billy Hallowell

June 27, 2016

<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865656980/She-fled-Russia-with-her-family-Now-she-has-a-powerful-message-about-the-refugee-crisis.html?pg=all>

As the world continues to grapple with a monumental refugee crisis precipitated by the rise of the Islamic State, a music conductor is taking steps to show U.S. citizens the positive impact that she believes refugees have had — and continue to have — on American culture.

Lidiya Yankovskaya launched the [Refugee Orchestra Project](#) last year, an effort that uses music "to demonstrate the vitally important role that refugees from across the globe have played in [America's] culture and society."

According to the organization's website, Yankovskaya — who grew up in St. Petersburg, Russia — recently [realized that many](#) of her friends and co-workers have no idea what it's like for people to be forced to seek asylum from horrific issues that they face in their home countries.

Yankovskaya, whose family is Jewish, [told Newsweek](#) about her own personal experience growing up in Russia in the 1990s before her family fled to the U.S. and later settled down near Albany, New York.

"I remember passing by a major square in the middle of the city where fascists would fly large swastika flags and hand out pamphlets that said 'Kill all the Jews' on them," she said of experience in her native land. "Russia, in general, at the time was in economic and political turmoil, so there was a lot of hardship overall."

Yankovskaya said that such circumstances often lead people to blame "larger minorities" that might be present inside of a country.

She launched the Refugee Orchestra Project last year to rally singers and musicians who, like her, have come to the U.S. as refugees. Joining these individuals and their family members together, Yankovskaya stages musical performances that are aimed at showcasing the positive impact of refugees.

Following the group's first performance last month in Boston, the orchestra gathered again at First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn, New York, on June 20, offering a second concert that coincided with World Refugee Day.

According to [Newsweek](#), the orchestra also performs pieces from refugee composers — or musical compositions that at least deal with themes related to people who have been forced to flee their nations and homes.

Consider that opera singer Lubana al-Quntar — a Syrian refugee — [performed at](#) the First Unitarian Congregational Society event, telling the Daily Mail that she now lives in Washington, D.C., after fleeing Syria not long after the civil war began five years ago.

"I had to start life from a zero point," al-Quntar explained, [detailing her struggles](#). "It's a constant struggle, like every day, especially my heart and my mind are always with my family and my people."

Monies raised through the Boston and New York City performances will be donated to the International Rescue Committee and HIAS, formerly known as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society — the group that helped Yankovskaya and her family. You can find out more about the orchestra's work [here](#).

The numbers surrounding worldwide refugees are staggering, with a new United Nations report finding that 65.3 million people have been forcibly moved from their homes. The U.S., for one, is known to resettle about 70,000 refugees each year, taking in 6,551 Syrian refugees since the nation's civil war broke out in 2011, [Newsweek reported](#).

The refugee crisis has become a common theme in U.S. presidential campaign rhetoric, with Republican candidate Donald Trump [repeatedly warning](#) about threats that he believes are inherent. The presidential contender even told a crowd last September that he would send Syrian refugees back if elected president.

"I'm putting the people on notice that are coming from here from Syria as part of this migration," he said during a rally at the time. "If I win, they're going back."

He has repeatedly called for restrictions on Muslim individuals and families immigrating to the U.S., expressing fears earlier this month that allowing too many people from Middle Eastern countries could be a "Trojan horse" of sorts.



The Human Face of the Refugee Crisis on the Concert Hall Stage

By Sophie Lewis

July 1, 2016

<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2016/07/01/human-face-refugee-crisis-concert-hall-stage/>

There are many artists at work in the world creating socially conscious and politically engaged art, but most work at some distance from the beneficiaries of their skilled effort. Not the New York–based members of the **Refugee Orchestra Project**. Founded by refugees from Russia and Syria, the ensemble aims to bring a personal face to the refugee crisis by showcasing these individuals' importance to a country's cultural wealth.

Lidiya Yankovskaya, artistic director and conductor of the orchestra, fled Russia as a child and sought asylum in the United States. Her approach to founding the orchestra is simple: “almost everybody came here from somewhere and came to escape persecution of one sort or another.” By sharing their talents with a larger audience, Yankovskaya and the members of the Refugee Orchestra Project hope that the power of music will help bring common ground to this fiercely divisive political issue. The orchestra aspires to create a greater base of support and understanding for refugees around the world.

Yankovskaya continued: “I was hoping that this project would showcase the importance that refugees continue to play in our culture and society while also raising funds for those in need.” According to the UN Refugee Agency, as of December 2015 there was a total of 65.3 million refugees in the world. On average, 24 people are forced to flee their homes every minute. As *NPQ* recently reported, this figure is **historically unprecedented**.

Made up of both amateur and professional musicians, the project seeks to make visible the faces of refugees who live and work in our communities. It is easy to think of refugees in abstract terms and to believe that those impacted by the refugee crisis are far away—but, as Yankovskaya has pointed out, this project **reveals** that refugees are, more often than not, our neighbors, colleagues, and friends. The historical measure of this cause was revealed in the musical choices of the ensemble's first performance in New York, on June 20, which featured works by composers who were once refugees, including Kurt Weill, Paul Hindemith, Darius Milhaud, Irving Berlin, and Sergei Rachmaninoff.

New York is not the only place where the refugee crisis has inspired and impacted contemporary classical performances. Five years ago, the Syrian National Orchestra for Arabic Music (SNOAM) played to audiences in the Damascus Opera House,

employing diverse headliners from Plácido Domingo to Gorillaz. Now, with mounting conflict every day and a horrific civil war still raging, many of its musicians have been forced to flee and are refugees in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Others have stayed behind and attempt to continue to live and perform in their increasingly dangerous countries. For the first time since the civil war began, former and present members of the SNOAM came together to perform on June 24, opening the Glastonbury Festival with guest stars Paul Weller and Bassekou Kouyaté. The concert, which was **live streamed around the world**, was broadcast in Syria and the Zataari refugee camp in Jordan. Featuring a mixed program of traditional Syrian music and Western repertoire, the goal of the concert was to celebrate the cultural vibrancy and artistic life of Syria despite its current hostilities.

Aside from the typical obstacles encountered when preparing a large-scale concert, the orchestra members had to deal with unique complications. Issam Rafea, the conductor of the SNOAM, was unable to leave the United States to be present for the first day of rehearsals due to his pending application for refugee status. Rafea's travel restrictions, however, pale in comparison to the logistical headache of arranging visas for 50 Syrian musicians. To avoid the difficulty of securing all the visas needed in time to book the performers' flights, **Ian Birrell**, foreign reporter, columnist, and cofounder of the music collective Africa Express, which reunited the SNOAM musicians, **chartered a Boeing 737** to transport the musicians privately.

The emotional resonances of the Refugee Orchestra Project concert in New York were shared by the Syrian National Orchestra's reunion concert in London. Conductor Issam Rafea's brother is one of the orchestral musicians, and his sister sings in the choir. The concert at the Glastonbury Festival was their first opportunity to see each other since Rafea left Syria in 2013. The concert also has larger political ramifications. Africa Express's leader, Damon Albarn, hopes to win over at least some of those who are against refugee resettlement in Europe by sharing the stories of these impressive Syrian musicians. He remarks, "I want people to see these concerts to experience the humanity of this homogenous shadow which they feel so threatened by."

Albarn hopes that the orchestra's performances can help to heal political divisions in Europe and promote greater acceptance of refugees—but among the members of the orchestra themselves, the act of making music together inspires greater political reconciliation. The individual musicians, for example, are split between those who approve of Bashar Al Assad's regime and those who are opposed. For many orchestra members, making music together is an opportunity for patient political dialogue. As violinist Sousan Eskandar noted, "It doesn't matter if we all have different opinions; we have to find a way to bring them together. Maybe you make good points, maybe I do; [but] we can become one. [...] When there is violence in the world, you have to make more beautiful music, and make it more intensely."