

## UPF IAACP Middle East Webinar: The Role of Culture and Art in Peacebuilding

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UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION



# Melting Our Differences: The Role of Art and Culture in Peacebuilding

“Toward Peace in the Middle East” is a webinar series that presents the Perspectives of the major stakeholders in building peace in the region

Thursday, November 25, 2021 ♦ 10-11 a.m. EST / 4-5 p.m. CET

Zoom link to join the webinar: <https://zoom.us/j/92600244012>  
Or live on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/upf.europe/>



**Dr. David Eaton**  
Composer/Conductor/Producer; Co-Director of Music, Hyo Jeong Cultural Foundation; Conductor, Hyo Jeong Youth Orchestra, USA/Korea



**Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld, PhD, Moderator**  
President, Universal Peace Federation, Israel

While politics, economy, and religion are needed in peacebuilding, culture and arts, and particularly music, are just as essential. We talk with composer and conductor David Eaton, whose projects in the Middle East have created powerful communal experiences through music; and we listen to his music, because, as he says: “It is not a matter of just talking about art, but about producing art that can bring change.”

**Europe and the Middle East** -- The potential of arts and culture to advance peace in the Middle East was the focus of a webinar held by UPF's International Association of Arts and Culture for Peace (IAACP).

The latest in a series of UPF webinars on peace in the Middle East, "Melting Our Differences -- The Role of Culture and Art in Peacebuilding" was held on November 25, 2021.

The American composer and conductor Dr. David Eaton, who is based in South Korea, was the main speaker.

Dr. Eaton is the co-director of music at the Hyo Jeong Cultural Foundation and conductor of the newly formed Hyo Jeong Youth Orchestra. He has been the music director of the New York City Symphony since 1985 and has conducted numerous concerts with the orchestra at such venues as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and the United Nations. He has 80 original compositions and over 900 songs and arrangements to his credit. His book (soon to be published) is titled *What Music Tells Me: Beauty, Truth and Goodness and Our Cultural Patrimony*.

In her welcoming remarks, UPF-Israel President Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld said that music has been used since ancient times to express joy, happiness and gratitude. Miriam, the sister of Moses, burst into song after the miracle of crossing the Red Sea; King David, who was known as a harp player, sang in joy when gaining a victory.

Art and music come from the heart and touch the heart, Dr. Hirschfeld said. They go beyond our mind and penetrate the deeper parts of our soul, which are free from boundaries, borders, or prejudices.

In all cultures, music is used in prayers and spiritual ceremonies, uplifting the spirit and diving into the depths of the soul, she said. Those who practice meditation use the healing and relaxing power of music; dancers and gymnasts use the empowering and energizing quality of music; and parents in all cultures sing lullabies to their children, revealing the unique capacity of music to bring love and comfort.



In his presentation, Dr. Eaton referred to two memorable quotes: one from the UPF co-founder and the other from a renowned American composer/conductor:

*People often think that politics moves the world, but that is not the case. It is culture and art that move the world. It is affection, not reason, that strikes people in their innermost being. When hearts become receptive and are able to receive new things, ideologies and social regimes can change.*

**-- Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon**

*Art cannot change events. But it can change people. It can affect people so that they are changed. Because people are changed by art -- enriched, ennobled, encouraged -- they can act in a way that may affect the course of events by the way they vote, they behave, the way they think.*

**-- Leonard Bernstein**

Dr. Eaton discussed the power of art and music -- as expressions of beauty -- to advance peace. He quoted the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who, seeing that beauty affects each of us, argued that the aesthetic experience is the archetype of revelation. Through experiencing beauty, we can be transformed, becoming open to new ways and new thoughts in general, which can help us as we seek new paths to peace.

Dr. Eaton spoke of his involvement in Jerusalem interfaith programs involving the three Abrahamic faiths -- in particular, his collaboration with the Israeli musician David D'Or. They composed a peace cantata, *Halelu: Songs of David*, using the words "Peace, Shalom, Salam Aleikum" in the hope that performances of this composition would stimulate further discussion to "find a better way." Here is a link to a portion of *Halelu*:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=8x2NglWX5M0&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8x2NglWX5M0&feature=youtu.be)

A meeting of minds happened in 2008 when Dr. Eaton met Kitty Cohen, the Israeli founder of the Folklore of the Other institute. Here was someone who had worked for 20 years with interfaith conferences and concluded that a different approach was needed. Cultural events, sports and service projects, rather than conferences, allowed people with differences to work together for a common cause. Art, music and dance were more effective ways to create conditions for harmony.

One example of such cooperation that inspired Kitty Cohen was the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. This is a project of the pianist/conductor Daniel Barenboim and the scholar Edward Said, who in 1999 brought together young musicians from Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Iran, Lebanon, and Spain. They come together every summer to rehearse and present concerts, touring the world. Here is what the co-founders of the orchestra said about this project:

*The Divan [orchestra] is not a love story, and it is not a peace story. It has very flatteringly been described as a project for peace. It isn't. It's not going to bring peace, whether you play well or not so well. The Divan was conceived as a project against ignorance. A project against the fact that it is absolutely essential for people to get to know the other, to understand what the other thinks and feels, without necessarily agreeing with it. I'm not trying to convert the Arab members of the Divan to the Israeli point of view, and I'm not trying to convince the Israelis to the Arab point of view. But ... I'm trying to create a platform where the two sides can disagree and not resort to knives.*

**-- Daniel Barenboim**

*Strange though it may seem, it is culture in general, and music in particular, that provide an alternative for the conflict of identities. My friend Daniel Barenboim and I have chosen this course for humanistic rather than political reasons on the assumption that ignorance is not a strategy for sustainable survival.*

**-- Edward Said**

Link: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1s7840LMoVA&list=PL2760s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1s7840LMoVA&list=PL2760s)



As he drew to a close, Dr. Eaton referred to Edward Said's words, commenting that if we desire to overcome ignorance, we have to deeply examine the root causes of conflict and suffering. The role of beauty here – as the archetype of revelation – is to help us develop a consciousness that, in turn, can help us probe these questions and begin to find answers that can lead to sustainable solutions.

In keeping with Dr. Eaton's approach to art -- "It is not a matter of just talking about art but about producing art that can bring change" -- the webinar included several examples of "music beyond borders."

Parts of Dr. Eaton's projects were shown and heard, as well as examples of cooperation between Arab and Jewish artists, such as the song "There Must Be Another Way" by Mira Awad and Noa; the project Kululam of Jews, Muslims and Christians singing "One Love" at the walls of Jerusalem's old city; and Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah," performed in Arabic and English by Jewish and Arab singers.

In her closing words, Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld, the president of UPF-Israel, explained the choice of the

concluding song, "Ya Mama," sung in Moroccan by an Israeli singer, Shimon Buskila, and dedicated to his late mother. Through this song a prayer was offered for health and long life to all mothers and fathers throughout the Middle East, Europe, America, Korea and all corners of the world – with a special dedication to Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the mother who is the wind beneath the wings of this webinar series.

Here is a translation of the lyrics:

*Mom, why did you go / You are my soul and my life  
My tears are for you, mother / You taught me and worked hard for me  
You, your beauty, are the light of my eyes  
My mother, you are the mercy / My mother, you are most precious  
How you ran around and worried for me / I miss your beauty, you are the light of my eyes  
Ya mama – My mother*

Links:

"There Must Be Another Way": [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RN8B1xvCxI0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RN8B1xvCxI0)

"One Love": [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZzK29\\_V8jQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZzK29_V8jQ)

"Hallelujah": [www.youtube.com/watch?v=irEpp0NsgkI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irEpp0NsgkI)

"Ya Mama": [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUGfK5ILDwA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUGfK5ILDwA)