



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

## 2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

**-In Iraq, Music Has No Boundaries, Only Bridges-**

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**Baghdad** - Physical as well as mental boundaries have unfortunately divided people in this country. But there are influences: social, economic, and now cultural working to bring people and communities together, including the soothing and healing balm of music.

A group of Iraqi musicians has made it their goal to break down sectarian and religious barriers through a universal language they believe transcends differences. Thus was born the "Bridges Quartet."

The musical group is the brain child of Karim Wasfi the Quartet's solo cellist, lead chair (player), who is also Director of the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra.

He and a group of his fellow Symphony members play venues throughout Iraq incorporating various Iraqi and other performance artists. By doing so, Bridges hopes to not only create bonds between the performance artists themselves, but also to provide bridges across boundaries so desperately needed by the people of Iraq themselves.

The concert was sponsored by the American Chamber of Commerce Iraq.

Now, it's concert day. People of all ages, race, creed, color, nationality, religion, sect, and background are sitting as if for a banquet in the ballroom of the Al Rashid Hotel eagerly waiting for the Bridges Quartet to arrive.

On today's menu, a rare feast indeed -- chamber music from Mozart and Beethoven as well a solo interpretative piece for cello from a modern composer and a piece composed by the 1st Chair Violinist in the Quartet.

For dessert? Cakes and coffee after the concert and a chance to rub elbows with the performers. Excitement abounds as chatter diffuses quietly through the hall. A brief announcement tells us all of a slight delay, but it's Baghdad. What else is new?

The audience is an eclectic blend of the population currently in Iraq today. Soldiers from Coalition Forces nations, both officers and enlisted men wearing camouflage and desert boots; contractors in baseball caps; diplomats and bureaucrats in suits and dresses. And of course, two young children accompanied by their parents and dressed in princess' attire round out the attendees.



The "Bridges" string quartet performed at the Rasheed Hotel under the direction of Karim Wasif (on right) the quartet's leader and solo cellist who is also director of the Iraqi National Symphony.

All present have come in eager anticipation to be immersed in a brief escape from the troubles just outside the walls of the hotel; to enjoy something that unites people; to be entertained and uplifted by the grandeur of sparkling musical composition.

Moments later, to a round of applause, the four cultural heroes of the Bridges Quartet files up on stage. They start softly with Eine Klein Nacht Musik by Mozart; a soft, simple lyrical piece and one of the most recognized works in any classical music repertoire.

As the Quartet begins to play, a phenomenon takes hold. Everyone is equal, and all notions of differences fall away. The music and its performance are the equalizer, the pastoral calming force, and the diversion all at once. All tensions melt away with every successive bar of music that is played.

By all accounts, it is simply an affair of the hearts, the minds, and the souls of those who attend. For a time strife and turmoil are banished. People are swept off their feet with the beauty of the music; their consciousness is elevated and they are happy.

Time falls from the face of the clock as the performance unfolds. The musicians are swept up by their skill and enthusiasm. The audience is spellbound.

As all good things tend to do, the performance comes to an end. Of course, an encore is called for and Quartet leader Karim suggests the final movement of the Beethoven Chamber piece the Quartet has just finished.

From the audience comes the question, "Why not an Iraqi piece?" Without skipping a beat, Karim asks the man to read his program; after all the third selection on the program was composed by the 1st Chair violinist in the Quartet who is an Iraqi and his piece was performed this very day!

But in keeping with the splendid environment now pervasive as a result of their shared miracle, Director Karim states that they will go ahead and play the final movement by Beethoven, but with an Iraqi interpretation. The requestor laughs aloud and vigorously nods his head in agreement, and the audience applauds in concurrence as the miracle continues.

After the concert, desert is served as people vie to have their photos taken with Quartet members.

It can honestly be said that as the attendees filtered out back to the world, they left satiated but hungry. They were satiated by the brief interlude of peace and harmony brought to their lives by the miracle that happened. They left hungry for future encounters with their desire for the Bridges that crossed the boundaries that currently so impede their lives everyday.