



## Music as a Language of Peace and Understanding

by Zade Dirani

### Intro

*In 2005 Zade, a 22-year-old musician from Jordan, began gathering young musicians from around the world to form an International Youth Symphony Orchestra as a way of bringing world cultures closer through a youth cultural exchange. Beginning in May 2006, Zade launched the Roads To You Tour in Washington, D.C. and other U.S. cities with thirty musicians from eighteen countries. By deconstructing barriers, preconceived notions and prejudices that exist among peoples of the world, Zade's vision is to share the universality of the language of music and its importance as a peacemaking tool.*

The whole idea started on 9/11 when I was scheduled to have a house concert for some friends in rural Maine. For obvious reasons the performance got postponed till the 29<sup>th</sup> and when I came back to the States to perform there was an air of [fear?]. I had been performing across America in living rooms of friends and families and through music we were connecting on a level that truly transcends all boundaries. It was so overwhelming that I decided to take that humble grassroots effort to many homes, churches, synagogues and community centers across the country in order to try and create a better awareness in the West of my part of the world.

Through music we have access to a language that does not understand any political or religious boundaries. It is a language that can convey *very* strong messages. And for me it's *incredibly* important to stress the common bonds that we all share as human beings living in this world, regardless of what religion we come from or our ethnic background. That is how the whole *Roads To You Tour* evolved. In 2004 I was discussing with my friend and colleague, Betsy Campbell, how to evolve the house concert tour? And we came up with the idea of bringing together musicians from all over the world, each selected not only for his or her musical expertise but also their leadership potential so that

every one of them would be considered an ambassador from their respective region. And beyond the stage performances we would also engage in a discussion forum on how we can collectively move toward international peace and understanding, not only as musicians but also potential community leaders.

I met with Her Majesty Queen Noor, who has been a tremendous support to my career while I was studying at the National Music Conservatory that she founded in Amman, Jordan. She agreed to be our patroness. Then I met with the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where I went to school, and they agreed to be our lead education partners. Then Seeds of Peace, that began their work by bringing Jordanian and Palestinian youth together, also became a sponsor. That is how the whole project evolved and it has embodied our mission, which is to promote cross-cultural understanding and dialogue through music.

I was born in north Jordan so my heritage is Arab and I am a Sunni Muslim. My father was educated in the U.S., my mom has a degree in English Literature, and we grew up with a lot of western music in the house. We were very fond and friends of American culture. Especially with the internet and globalization, the world is becoming a village and it is amazing how similar we all are. My parents were incredibly supportive of my studying western music and I studied Arabic classical music as well. I've always had the interest in combining both elements, so I decided to come to the States and pursue music.

I regard myself as a spiritual person, whether it is in my prayers, in my ongoing dialogue, if you will, with the Creator. And for me it is present in the music because God has given me a little bit of talent and I am responsible to Him, to my country, to my people and the people of the world because with music you have access to a language that does not understand barriers. Through music we are experiencing the power of being elevated into a higher region. I experience spirituality, not only in my personal life but also on the stage when you are connecting with the audience, whether we are giving a house concert for underprivileged children or talking about topics that really matter—we are really *living* the experience of cultural exchange.

Each culture and country is unique and no country or culture or religion has a monopoly on virtues or vices. We all have the good, the bad, and a lot of gray areas. I think that if we realize that as a concept and remind each other what it means, we can

help each other without imposing our ideology—that is very important. There is a huge gulf of misunderstanding, of “us” versus “them.” I have been tremendously blessed and fortunate to have experienced different world cultures. I regard my career as a two-way street because not only am I working on promoting better understanding of my Arab Muslim culture in the West but also I am taking the stories of generosity and support that I experience among Americans back home and sharing them with my culture.

From my experience I can tell you that there is a new generation coming up that wants to create change. The assembly of the musicians that we gathered from all around the world embodies the passion of youth for building cultural bridges to try and clean up the messes around the world. The assembly brings together musicians between the ages of eighteen to thirty so we are all in our youth. And it is very symbolic because it shows the interest and the passion of the younger generation who want to create change, and here they are coming together working in the team spirit, trust and friendship although we come from various parts of the world. We all gathered because we believe in one mission, that through music we can bring people together and help deconstruct the barriers between different parts of the world.

My experiences have been incredibly positive; I remain an eternal optimist. Some people think that we are heading into the pits. I believe that change will come and things will calm down, and God willing, we will see peace one day. The trick is not to give up. We can never give up hope and peace because once we do, we’ve really got nothing to live for. I feel that it all comes down to educating the younger generation, beginning with awareness programs that instill the values of the human life. That is how you broaden the perspectives in the young, especially those living in areas of crisis or poverty.

If I were speaking to the youth of the world, I would talk to them about my humble experiences, about how through music—through believing in my dream—I was able to connect with many wonderful people from all around the world. And how through music I grew to understand how similar we all are, especially when we do not have a language barrier. Because with music you do not have a language barrier—you communicate through the instrument. And I would tell them to dare to dream outside of the box and to do everything in their power to follow their dreams. Because often when you’re passionate about a dream, about an idea, about your talent, whatever it might be,

that galvanizes all your energy to put it towards one good cause. And I would also tell them that regardless of their chosen path and their lives, to always give back and have a goal larger than their immediate self. Because when you feel you are contributing to the larger cause, a larger unit, that is when you realize that the world doesn't rotate around you, that you're actually part of a *larger* connection, a larger network, a larger being. Focus on your dreams and as you achieve your dreams, be able to give back to your community.

*Faith* is what keeps us going. Honestly, we all know we don't have a lot of answers. And a lot of times you just look up to the sky and say, "Just give us strength, courage, wisdom and a great deal of faith so we can continue working, continue galvanizing our talent and energies toward building a world that is beautiful and secure, God willing." My two most often used words are *Shanluvich*, which is "God willing" in Arabic, and \_\_\_\_\_, "Thank God," and on the tour everybody picked up on that, my two words!

You can read more about Zade, listen to soundclips of his latest CD of East/West fusion music, *Beautiful World*, view video footage from the *Roads To You Tour* and learn about the Zade Foundation for International Peace and Understanding at [www.zade.com](http://www.zade.com).