

UNESCO Beirut organizes a Syrian Bridal Folk Songs Concert



Syrian traditional music and songs, in all their diversity, are endangered expressions of Syrian intangible heritage and its safeguarding is an urgent need.

The 2017 UNESCO survey report on “Intangible Cultural Heritage of Displaced Syrians” notes that the effects of armed conflicts on intangible cultural heritage, by nature a less visible cultural form, have been less widely considered. This type of heritage depends on transmission from generation to generation and is comprised of various domains, including but not limited to, local knowledge and know-how, artistic expression, crafts and traditions, religious practices and rituals, language and oral expressions, some of which are place-specific and/or tied to the physical heritage. Intangible cultural heritage is an integral part of the identity and memory of an individual and a society, strengthens social cohesion and ensures a sense of continuity. According to the report, “there is little reason to doubt that intangible cultural heritage is also heavily affected as a result of war, destruction, death, displacement, and the associated disruptions to the social, economic and cultural fabric of communities.” The most important part of safeguarding oral traditions and expressions, such as traditional wedding songs, is maintaining their everyday role in society. It is also essential that opportunities for knowledge be passed from person-to-person to survive, as well as the chances for elders to interact with young people to pass on songs during the wedding ceremonies, as cultural celebrations.

In the framework of the “Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage” project funded by the European Union, UNESCO hosted the Syrian all-female Gardenia Choir in a concert in Beirut, at Théâtre Beryte, on Saturday 31 March 2018. The aim of the concert was to ensure that these songs are kept alive and are well celebrated by Syrians inside and outside the country.

Gardenia Choir is an ensemble of Syrian women and girls who have unique singing abilities. The choir was established by the conductor Ghada Harb, who is also a soprano singer and teaches at the Damascus music conservatory from which she graduated in the year 1999.

The concert, called “Bridal Folk Songs”, celebrated wedding traditions from the different cities in Syria. Ms Safana Baqle, a member of the choir, took care of the musical arrangement and orchestration of the songs selected for this event. During the past year, the choir was curating wedding songs from the different ethnic, religious and regional groups in Syria.

The choir performed 14 [songs](#) in total. There were songs from the coastal cities in Syria like Tartous that describe the emotional sendoff of the bride and wedding traditions such the use of henna and hammam, which are observed by many brides. Other songs represented ethnic groups like the Syriac, the Kurdish, and the Circassian. The Circassian song, describes the inner and physical beauty of the bride, and is so upbeat that it was often performed also during other circumstances such as conflicts.

During the event, Gardenia Choir performed an emotional song written by Ghada Harb called “I don’t want henna on my hands”. The choir chose this theme to highlight the issue of early marriage that has been on the rise in Syrian communities inside the country but also in the refugee communities in neighboring countries. The song is about a girl who is asking her mother to have mercy on her. She does not want to wear make-up, put henna on her hands and get married at a very young age; she just wants to play with her friends and go to school to have a future.

The choir is composed of 20 singers: 12 sopranos and 8 altos. The choir was accompanied by 8 musicians (cello, buzuq, violin, percussion, qanun and nay players).

The “Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage” project is a pioneering initiative funded by the European Union and supported by the Flemish Government and Austria. The main objective of the project is to contribute to restoring social cohesion, stability, and sustainable development through the protection and safeguarding of cultural heritage in view of the on-going and growing destruction and loss of Syria's rich and unique cultural heritage.

http://www.unesco.org/new/en/beirut/single-view/news/unesco_beirut_organizes_a_syrian_bridal_folk_songs_concert/