

'If we want peace, we must have love of mankind, morality, and music'

by Muriel Mirak Weissbach

The resistance displayed by the people of Iraq to George Bush's war, and the continuing embargo imposed by the United Nations, has been viewed, correctly, as a symbol of the struggle to defend the nation-state against the dictates of a one-world government. The hardship which the Iraqi population has been subjected to, staggers the imagination. The horror stories on the effects of the embargo on child mortality, for example, which are routinely repeated in the press every time an anniversary of Desert Storm comes by, paint the picture of a population being reduced, physically, psychologically, and morally.

How can a population, despite this suffering, continue to resist? One crucial factor, is culture: that a people identifies with that which its nation has contributed to universal history.

Munir Bashir embodies the continuing contribution which Iraq, and Arab culture more generally, has made to music. It comes as no surprise then, that he should have been invited to perform in Italy, France, Germany, Hungary, and numerous other countries, in the context of solidarity concerts, for the people of Iraq, increasingly since 1991: For, he is the world's greatest living player of the oud, the stringed instrument which is a precursor to the lute.

Yet, Munir Bashir does not use his music for political propaganda. On the contrary, in discussions like the one he had with *EIR*, the issue is politics on a higher level: how to define the foundations in art—in this case, music—for understanding among peoples of different cultural experiences and backgrounds. In 1993, he was awarded the Cultural Communication between North and South Award, along with former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark.

Born in Mosul, northern Iraq, in 1930, the young Munir learned to play the oud from his father, continuing a family tradition that went back generations (and continues today, through his son). He studied then for six years at the Institute of Arabian Music in Baghdad, under Sharif-Muhyiddin.

Mr. Bashir's musical tradition is that of the *Maqam*, which, he explains, is "an Arabic term which means, literally, 'sacred or holy assembly,' assembly of a king or prince, or, by extension, a sacred place." The term has "become the name of the modal system" which, in its sounds, rhythms, and melodies, has a potentially infinite extension, through "traditional improvisation." Mr. Bashir's extraordinary scholarship in the history of this music allows him to play a *Maqam* from 3,000

years ago, as it appeared in what is modern-day Iraq, and to show the relationship to a similar *Maqam* rendition, perhaps a half-millennium later, in Persia, and so on. Munir Bashir, who performs the traditional music from *Taqsim*, the instrumental rendition of the *Maqam* on his oud, has revived the ancient tradition through both scholarship and absolute technical mastery, while continuing the tradition through improvisations. Through his extensive travel, he has sought out points of contact in foreign musical traditions with his own.

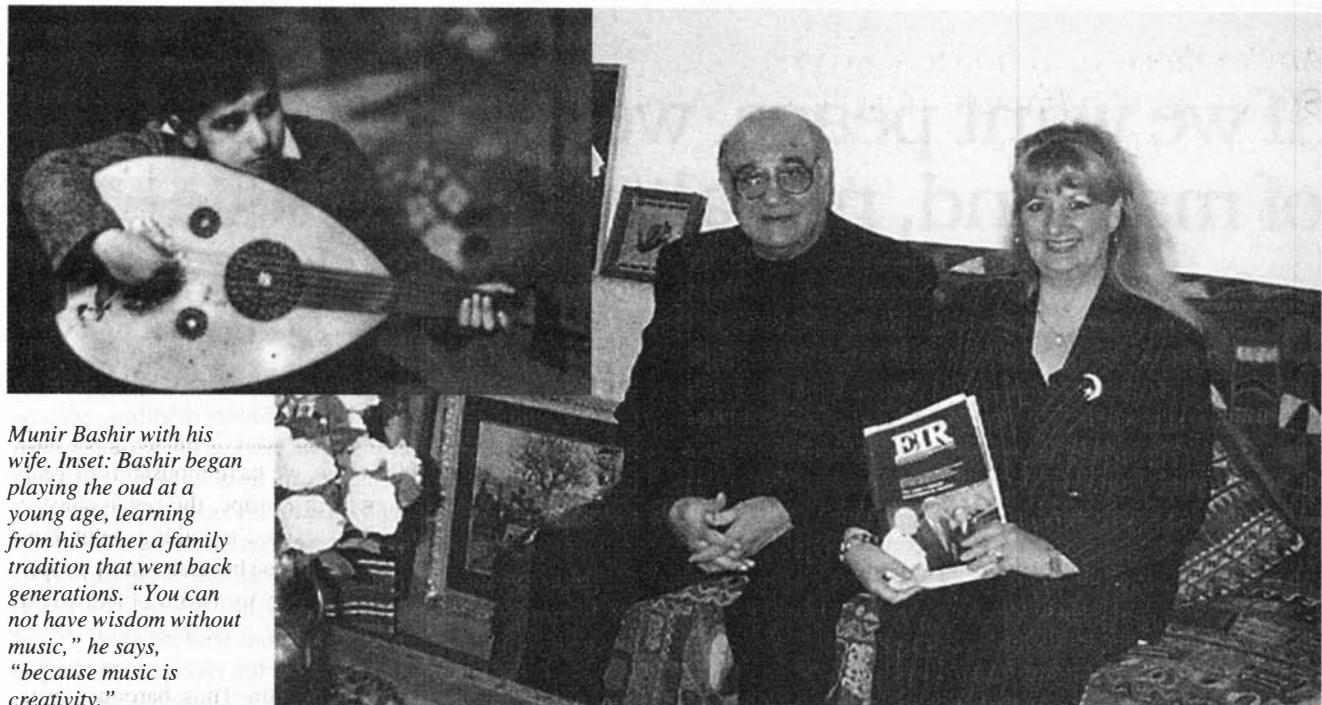
Among the numerous honors he has received, are the following: Honorary Member, Higher Committee for Music, Egypt; Order of Culture, Commander, France; Order of Civil Merit, 1st Class, from King Juan Carlos of Spain; Order of Culture and Arts, Poland; Picasso Gold Medal; Chopin Medal, Poland; Franz Liszt Medal with Higher Diploma, Hungary; Bela Bartok Medal with Higher Diploma, Hungary. He is artistic adviser to the Iraqi minister of culture; secretary general of the Arab Music Academy, Arab League; and vice chairman of the International Music Council of Unesco, of which he is a life honorary member.

Interview: Munir Bashir

Following are excerpts from an exchange with Mr. Bashir and Muriel Mirak Weissbach of EIR, in Amman, Jordan.

EIR: Mr. Bashir, your music is well-known not only in Iraq and the Arab world, but also in Europe.

Bashir: Yes, in fact I have performed throughout Europe, especially Germany. I played in Munich many times, and performed concerts in Frankfurt, Baden Baden, Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Bonn—in the Beethovenhalle—in Dresden, Weimar, and Eisenach. In Eisenach, I gave a concert at the Bach House. I was the first non-European to play there, and the first to perform on the oud. Most of the people in the audience were nuns. It was a great honor for me, because I loved Bach long before I knew Germany at all. I loved Bach because he was the founder of German music. I love other German composers too, but Bach, and Beethoven, are the two who have had the strongest influence on my art.



Munir Bashir with his wife. Inset: Bashir began playing the oud at a young age, learning from his father a family tradition that went back generations. "You can not have wisdom without music," he says, "because music is creativity."

EIR: How did you come into contact with this tradition?

Bashir: I studied the violin first, and went to conservatory at the age of ten, where I also studied the 'cello. We had Iraqi and Arabic music, as well as European music there, which I loved from childhood. I think it is important for man to have a broad cultural horizon. As an artist, I have my roots in my own art, but I am open to other art forms. Bach is a great spiritual composer, and, after all, he was the inventor of the well-tempered system. Everything in European music derives from this. But, you see, Bach also borrowed from Arabic music.

EIR: Is that true? I have never heard of that before.

Bashir: Yes, although he was German, Bach was influenced by Arabic culture. There were two cultures, that spread this. First, the Byzantine cultural influence, which was fundamentally religious. Most cultural influences come through religion, especially in music. Then there was the Arabic music, which the Arabs brought with them to Spain in 711. Arabic music spread from Spain to France, and from Sicily through Italy, and to Greece, Cyprus, Malta. Arabic music did not remain purely Arabic, but was influenced by the musical tradition of the countries it went through.

EIR: Where does Arabic music itself come from?

Bashir: The ultimate source of Arabic music is very ancient, stretching back to Mesopotamia, to Persia, to the Aramaic tradition, and passed through the Arabian peninsula and Byzantium (via Constantinople). Aramaic music traveled through southern Turkey, especially in the city of Raha, where the special song, known as the *makamat Rahawiyya* devel-

oped. This developed, as well, in the Kurdish regions and in the Orthodox Syrian Church. The music traveled then through Antioch and Syria to Iraq. The Syrians represented about 75% of the Arabs at this time (about 2,000-3,000 years ago), and up to the time of Christ, so, in the old Syrian churches, the music, whether in Haleb, Raha, or in Kurdistan, was all very similar.

The Islamic Abbasids took from this music tradition, and built up our music and philosophy of music. This was what then was communicated to Europe. The central musical instrument, the oud, is what in Europe was later called the lute, or *laute* in German. They all come from the oud. The *biwa* of Japan, and the *pipa* of China, are granddaughters of the lute. The troubador tradition was based on this music; in fact "troubador" comes from the Arabic word "tarab," which means to sing.

This music was to influence Bach later. Bach was the first, in fact, who composed for the solo lute. There is a very close relationship between the music of Bach and the renaissance of the 12th-14th centuries. When I hear Bach, I feel him very close to me.

EIR: This is not something that is generally known or discussed in European circles. Is it among Arabs?

Bashir: The problem of the Arabs, is the European orientalists. They have turned Arabic music history on its head. The reason is, because of the religion, the orientalists were fanatics. Music history was rewritten, as developed by Bedouins. But they had an urban culture too, they had taken the music of the countryside, the mountains and the rivers—if Mesopo-

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tamia had not had a river, there would have been no culture. I will sing something to demonstrate this. This is a Bedouin melody which then was transformed in a Persian version and then reappears in a Byzantine form, but it is the same melody, and it later turns up as an Arabic song. Previously we did not know these things, not because we are ignorant, but because we did not want to know.

EIR: I understand you have done field research, to document some of this music as it has come down to the present day.

Bashir: I have taped a lot of music in the field, for example, of the Sufis. These melodies come out of the Aramaic period, out of the Syrian, Mesopotamian, and Arabic periods, all of them have flowed into Sufi music. I have heard this music everywhere, in Turkey, in Greece, India, Iran; I have visited 52 countries. Since I was a child, I knew how different peoples sang, I had an idea of the universal quality of music. Music is universal, but it has its specific roots in each land. So a Bach, is a German from Eisenach, he's not a "European." The history of music that a musician must have is from all music traditions, otherwise, he is not a musician.

In this sense, this ancient music still exists. Because they were philosophers, scientists, and musicians all together. Whoever was an astronomer, a writer, a philosopher, a doctor, had to be a musician in those days, because you can not have wisdom without music, because music is creativity.

Certainly, you can destroy and create cultures. Look at Michael Jackson: Can you compare that to Bach or Beethoven? This is music that enslaves people, and it will fade away. Why did it appear at all? Who brought it? I don't know, but I know that it is music to destroy humanity. Bach remains. Verdi remains. The symphonic orchestra, over hundreds of years, has only had one instrument added. Bach's music has had not one note added to it. This is our heritage.

Now this heritage is in danger, and it has to do with politics. There are political forces that want to destroy people, like a mafia, which wants to destroy the spirit of people. As in France, I mentioned that one hears music with the feet not the mind. We have not understood the need to recognize this tendency early enough. In the United States, 60% of the youth are drugged, because they lack the ability to think, to meditate. How did this happen? It's like the old Chinese torture, with water: The water drips, one drop at a time, to destroy the mind. It is the same, with this music. If we want to talk about peace, we cannot have it without purifying ourselves, without love

for mankind, morality, and music.

EIR: What do you think is the fundamental difference between Arabic music and western European music?

Bashir: Our music, Arabic and eastern music, goes back 6,000, maybe even 9,000 years, we have thousands of years of music behind us, whereas in Europe, the renaissance in music took place 300-400 years ago. I'm talking about thousands of years. We come not from one but from many people.

For the European peoples there are two problems: first, after World War II, with pop and rock 'n roll, musicians wanted to "free themselves" from Bach, but they cannot even reach Bach, much less go beyond him. Thus, baroque music, romantic, and modern music all became fashionable, then they too were gone. In 20-30 years from now, what will be left? Electronic music? The music Europe has now, is music to destroy people.

I believe there is a worldly power, like a mafia, which wants to destroy people. Europe has given itself a new culture, in which machines reign supreme, and man can not exist without machines. There is no spirit in this culture. I have nothing against technology—let it be clear—but you cannot destroy man. The human quality, through art, philosophy and music, is necessary. I believe there will be a return to culture, although it may take years. We will either destroy ourselves, or, with spirit, love, and music, we will recreate culture.

It begins with the education of the unborn. You know, I met a woman, who told me that she educated her child musically while it was in the womb. Everything that a pregnant woman does, what she eats, where she goes, what she hears, will have an effect on her, and therefore on her offspring. This woman listened to a lot of music, hopeful music. The child now speaks six languages! This is something that has been studied over the past 20 years in various scientific centers in Europe. The human mind learns at every age. You know, people say, an old person cannot learn. But that is not true; bring me a 60-year-old and I will teach him music. He doesn't need to be an artist, he needs only to be open to music.

Our problem as Arabs is, we learn French and English songs, but not the songs from our own culture. Each has to learn his own language before learning others. If I had no musical background, I could not have my own music; I take from all musical traditions, but I have my own.

EIR: Do you think everyone should learn music?

Bashir: Yes: An intellectual who has no relationship to music is a danger to society. Someone who knows, who has studied science, but has no music, he is no scientist. He is superficial. It is like the case of a minister of culture who has no contact to artists. Most ministers of culture have no music. Yet, many doctors, and especially surgeons, study music. Why? When they operate, they have to be precise, they must be totally concentrated. I know a surgeon, who hears profound music when he operates, he is in deep meditation or concentration, which generates hope, even if, medically speaking, there may be no hope. If he has no hope through music, then the doctor will become a beast.

EIR: The great physician Ibn Sina was also one of the greatest minds in music, in the Islamic world.

Bashir: Music which heals is great music, music which comes from man, and from woman, from a beautiful, hopeful voice. I stand by women, they must have their rights. I don't mean women who want to become men! I am for peace in the world, and therefore fight for the rights of women, of the child, for love of all. It is very difficult to make people understand what I mean. People misunderstand me when I say that women should rule, because they have not studied women. I think a "body-building woman" is a female beast, they want to bestialize women this way. That is not what I mean.

Music is love and is peace. When I was in Mexico, the piece I performed which the audience liked the best was called *Amor y Paz*: "Love and Peace." I played 12th-century music for them in a Mexican church. In 1974, I was in Iran, and was the only one to play in a mosque; I played my music. In Córdoba, in Rome, I performed in churches, in Paris and Vienna, at the opera. In Salzburg, I played together with Friedrich Gulda on the clavichord. Wherever I go, I try to use local themes and weave them into my music. In Italy, I played "O Sole Mio," in a church with 1,000 people. The priest wanted to know how I had attracted so many people to the church. He said, he had only five or six on Sundays. In Mexico, I played Arabic and Mexican music, and showed them the connections, through the Spanish tradition. In Yokohama, I was given a gold key to the city, and was made an honorary citizen. There in Japan, I played Japanese and Arabic music, and the people cried, in a very Japanese way—very loudly. I went to Japan to correct the view they had of Arabs, that "Arab=oil," and showed them what our music is.

I, Munir Bashir, believe that human beings are influenced by where they live. A peasant from any part of the world will have certain dances, perhaps they come from the movement of his activity in the fields, but there will be a distinct music in his dance, distinct from that of peasants in other regions. Yet, each form of music is subject to influences. Urban cultures are influenced by cultures around them. Each culture shares with those around it, each has its central roots, regardless of the religion, or other factors. We have to work culturally together.

PKK violence makes Germany a theater for surrogate warfare

by George Gregory

*This article is translated from the April 3 issue of the German newspaper Neue Solidarität. The violent protest actions and other operations of the banned Kurdish Workers Party are properly viewed as classical irregular or low-intensity warfare, in which internationally coordinated narco-terrorism constitutes a key component of an overall "strategy of tension," designed to weaken and discredit the institutions of the sovereign nation-state. This theme is further analyzed in the German-language study *Strategy of Tension: The PDS, Narco-Terrorism, and the Post-Communist International*, published by EIR Nachrichtenagentur in January 1996.*

"Up until now the guerrillas have fought in the mountains like regular soldiers. From today on we will also be deploying suicide-commandoes into action. Not just in the mountains, but also in the enemy's cities, will we heroically advance into battle unto death." This was the warning of March 22 which the self-proclaimed spokesman for the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, issued to Germany and the United States. "I say this to the U.S.A. and Germany. The enemy [Turkey] is conducting a war of genocide and annihilation. This is not your war, so hands off of the PKK," he said. Öcalan lives in Damascus, Syria, and sometimes in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon.

After the latest demonstrations of Kurds on the occasion of the Kurdish New Year's celebration, the *Newroz*, during which PKK cells attempted, with some success, to provoke violent riots, Öcalan's words have the ring of a declaration of war in the name of his people and the cause of justice. But, that is *not* what it is about at all.

Öcalan's words, like most reports in the media, are propaganda. There were approximately 150 police and border guard personnel who were wounded in the fracas, along with 300 demonstrators, and there were around 1,500 arrests at the demonstrations in German cities. The most violent confrontations between the PKK and Germany's federal border police took place at the German borders with Holland and Belgium. In those situations, compact agent provocateur PKK units sought direct combat with the police. In general, the tactics