



The Jerusalem Youth Chorus

Transcending conflict
through song

PRESS KIT

The Jerusalem Youth Chorus

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Connect with the Chorus



The Jerusalem Youth Chorus

Our Mission

The Jerusalem Youth Chorus is a choral and dialogue program for Israeli and Palestinian youth in Jerusalem. Our mission is to provide a space for these young people from East and West Jerusalem to grow together in song and dialogue. Through the co-creation of music and the sharing of stories, we empower youth in Jerusalem with the responsibility to speak and sing their truths, as they become leaders in their communities and inspire singers and listeners around the world to work for peace, justice, inclusion, and equality.

Our Model

Established in 2012, The Jerusalem Youth Chorus is unique in its combination of music and dialogue programming, providing a transformative experience for our singers that yields both friendship and understanding on an individual and collective level across lines of religion, nationality, language, and culture. We go beyond simply singing together, delving deeper into one another's identities, life experiences, communal narratives, religious traditions, and national histories through dialogue, all within the safe space of the musical ensemble and the strong personal bonds and community it creates.

The Jerusalem Youth Chorus

JYC Factsheet

Our Chorus

- The Jerusalem Youth Chorus has around 30 singers, all from the Jerusalem area
- Equal balance between Arab and Jewish membership
- Among the Arab singers, we have $\frac{1}{3}$ Christian and $\frac{2}{3}$ Muslim
- Wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds

Chorus Meetings

- Once-weekly 4-hour rehearsal for singing & dialogue
- Alumni Program meets for separate ensemble rehearsal & facilitation training courses
- Plus concerts, retreats, social events, recording sessions, and tours

Multicultural Repertoire

- Multiple languages (English, Hebrew, Arabic, and more) & diverse musical traditions
- East-West musical fusion – we create innovative arrangements that incorporate the diverse musical backgrounds of our members, as demonstrated in Adinu, our improvisatory arrangement of a Sufi chant
- JYC runs in three languages – English, Arabic, and Hebrew – with translation, to include everyone.

Quotes from the Choristers

- “You get to know the other side...you get to be together; you get to see what it's like being with kids different than you.” - Avital, Israeli Singer
- "I learned from the sessions how not to stay silent, but to express myself." - Alaa, Palestinian Singer
- "The choir is beautiful, and we enjoy it because we are Arabs and Jews together at the same time." - Ameer, Palestinian Singer
- "I only knew Israelis; I had never met any Arabs before I came here. I didn't know what I was going to see when I came here. I wasn't sure what I expected, but what I realized was that we're all the same." - Shifra, Israeli Singer

The Jerusalem Youth Chorus

Our Leadership Team



Micah Hendler, Founder & Artistic Director

Micah Hendler (Forbes 30 Under 30 for Music) founded the Jerusalem Youth Chorus in 2012 as a synthesis of years of work in musical community-building and Israeli-Palestinian conflict transformation (including a Yale degree in music and international studies). He has founded, directed, sung with, or played with dozens of musical ensembles of varying global styles, including the Whiffenpoofs and Duke's Men of Yale. A CARA-nominated vocal arranger, he has studied Community Singing with Ysaye Barnwell and CircleSinging with Roger Treece and uses these two methodologies and others to open up the concept of what a chorus can do and who should be in it. He has been involved in Israeli-Palestinian dialogue work for more than 15 years and has written and presented in many local and global forums about his work with the chorus, including sharing the keynote presentation of the East-West Philosophers' Conference with leading Palestinian intellectual and peacemaker Dr. Sari Nusseibeh, as they explored together how sound can be used as a tool to create shared spaces in Jerusalem.



Miriam Sharton, Executive Director

Miriam was born in Chicago, Illinois, and moved to Israel, to Kibbutz Ketura, in 1984. In 1996, Miriam co-founded the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies - an environmental academic and leadership institute that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian, Israeli, and international students to learn about the region's environmental challenges and about each other. At the Arava Institute, Miriam held various positions including Associate Director and Executive Director. In 2013, she moved to Jerusalem and worked for six years as Director of Resource Development at the Jerusalem Conservatory Hassadna - one of Israel's leading music institutions for children ages 3-18. Miriam has a BFA from the University of Illinois and an MBA from Ben Gurion University of the Negev.



Hani Kreitem, Conductor

Born and raised in Jerusalem, Hani Kreitem has built a career dedicated to music education and choral conducting. He teaches music theory at the Magnificat Institute of Music and also directs the Magnificat Choir of the Custody of the Holy Land. He also serves as a music teacher for the Ministry of Education in Jerusalem. Hani was a member of the World Youth Chorus and is currently a member of the international choir Common Ground Voices. He participated in the first Arab Choral Festival, ASWATUNA in Jordan, and received training from the Conservatory of Vicenza-Italy and numerous master-conducting courses. Hani holds a BA and MA in Music Education & Choral Conducting from the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance.

The Jerusalem Youth Chorus

Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions

What is the mission of The Jerusalem Youth Chorus?

Our mission is to provide a space for young people from East and West Jerusalem to grow together in song and dialogue. Through the co-creation of music and the sharing of stories, we empower youth in Jerusalem with the responsibility to speak and sing their truths, as they become leaders in their communities and inspire singers and listeners around the world to work for peace, justice, inclusion, and equality.

What impact does the chorus have?

The Jerusalem Youth Chorus (JYC) utilizes the power of community singing to transform our singers' attitudes about themselves as valuable members of our group, who can inspire others using nothing but their own voices. Our model combines interpersonal and intergroup communication to transform people's attitudes about one another – first, that they can be friends, and second, that this friendship can provide a foundation for an often-painful exploration of the world of the “other”. This process of discovery transforms world views, shattering otherwise impermeable national narratives grounded in ethnocentrism and replacing them with new visions, sounds, and understandings of coexistence.

Outside of our chorus members alone, our social impact involves our singers' friends and family. Because the pride our singers take in their participation in the chorus, our singers are actually quite vocal in their immediate communities about the lessons the chorus has taught them about themselves and the broader world. In these narratives is an authenticity of their chorus experience which often trumps societal norms that ostracize those who work across the divide. This helps change discourses in East and West Jerusalem, and beyond, that maintain a status quo of separation and fear. These connections allow the possibility of replacing these realities with a hope that another way might be possible, beautiful, and maybe even mutually beneficial.

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Finally, as a performing ensemble, we seek to spread this message together locally and globally. Our live concerts consistently inspire through multicultural artistic innovation grounded in real relationships that shine onstage. We have reached millions of people through multimedia, challenging discourses that the Israeli- Palestinian conflict is unsolvable and providing a model for people anywhere to engage with themselves, their communities, and those who are different.

How do you measure that impact?

We track, measure, and report impact based on the concentric circles described above. The quantitative data we have gathered from our surveys indicates positive changes in attitudes towards self and other and their interrelationship, but we have found our qualitative data to be even more compelling and informative, and we report it via social media and in formal reports.

The biggest evaluative test of our chorus came during the war in the summer of 2014, when rockets were falling in Jerusalem, bombs were falling on Gaza, and teens, some of which our singers knew personally, were being kidnapped and killed. Almost all Israeli-Palestinian programs stopped meeting during the war, because it was too hard to either ignore or confront the conflict raging around them. We met three times a week all summer for singing and dialogue, and our community only grew stronger, singing in bomb shelters, continuously challenging one another's' narratives, and providing an oasis of hope for everyone. No one quit during that summer. We cannot imagine a more meaningful metric.

In terms of the impact our singers have in their communities, we track the many stories they tell of challenging friends, parents, or teachers regarding their prejudices, or helping others see things from a new perspective. In terms of our performances, we measure not only audience numbers, but also how we affect our audiences – emotionally, intellectually, and inspirationally – as many ask how they can get involved.

Finally, the essence of our impact is tracked, measured, and reported all at once in the original composition we wrote before our first US Tour and performed throughout that tour. Through collaborative songwriting, our singers explored the question, “What is something about our chorus community that I want to spread in the world through my voice?” This collective expression of our impact at all levels tracks and measures the value of our chorus for our singers in their own words, and our performances of this piece are themselves a stunning vehicle for reporting and continuing to spread our impact.

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Do you have any political or religious affiliations? Why or why not?

As an educational program, the Jerusalem Youth Chorus is an open environment for our singers to express themselves and learn from one another. It is not our role to tell them what to think by staking out official political positions as a program, or to put certain religious traditions over others, but to create a safe space for them to teach and share with one another. In this process, we acknowledge and address the inequalities and challenges that our singers bring with them and empower them to work together to change these realities. It is precisely because of our vision of an equal, just, and inclusive society that we engage in our work. By creating a microcosm of the kind of society we want to see and the kind of city we want to live in, we hope to remind others of what potential the city holds if we treat each other with respect, dignity, and love — if we create a place of equality and openness, where all can have a home.

What differentiates you from other organizations?

Our model is uniquely effective in the theory of cross-conflict engagement, because where it focuses on a “people-to-people” theory, it combines interpersonal and intergroup interaction as singers relate to one another both as individuals and as members of different social groups. The need for conflict transformation in Jerusalem is clear, where life in the Holy City is often characterized by division, extremism, and the psychosocial dynamics of conflict. Our superordinate goal of musical performance helps keep our group together while simultaneously amplifying our desperately needed message that a different way is possible.

We believe it is important to understand the work of our program, or any other working with youth, from the perspective of a teenager in Jerusalem. We learned quickly that teens do not join programs like ours to “make peace.” Recognizing this, we offer many things that teens from both sides are hungry for. We tap into their curiosity to meet the otherwise inaccessible “other”, the universal human desire to have one’s voice heard, and we add opportunities to learn English and travel the world. Choosing to meet the needs of our singers where they are reveals that for some, the unmet need for safe spaces, creative outlets of expression, or even after-school activities of any kind, takes precedence over otherwise unbreachable political discourses that should technically make our work impossible. Finally, once teens arrive, they stay because we

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provide a social space that is both accepting and true to their experiences, which is of high value for adolescents of any culture. The unique success of the chorus in under five years speaks to this impact.

Questions on Chorus Activity

Where are the Chorus members from? How are they selected?

Members of the JYC come from Jerusalem and its surroundings. Our high school program includes around 30 members, roughly divided between Israelis and Palestinians, who are themselves subdivided between Jews, Christians, and Muslims for a balance of backgrounds and communities. Ranging in age from 14-19, the singers bring cultural, religious and political differences to the chorus. They speak Arabic, Hebrew, and often a bit of English.

Chorus members are recruited from schools in both East and West Jerusalem. Beyond potential musical talent, the chorus looks for singers with an open mind and positive energy. For many, the challenge of singing in harmony does not compare to the challenge of dialogue with those of vastly different identities.

Political, religious, and cultural issues contribute significantly to the choir's makeup. There have been more Palestinian boys than Israeli boys in the chorus, which might be because to be a teenage guy who sings is "cooler" in Arab society than Jewish society because of the tradition of mawwal, an Arabic vocal genre based on poetry. At the same time, there are more Israeli girls participating in the choir, where Palestinian girls from conservative Muslim families are less likely to take part, as many are unable to spend time outside of school or the home without their family.

What is a typical chorus rehearsal like? How do music and dialogue function together?

We meet once a week for rehearsal, which is four hours long, with both musical and dialogue portions.

We typically divide the time into singing - dialogue - singing, where the singing is a warm-up and cool-down for the dialogue sessions, which are often heated. Our musical staff, led by our conductor, run the singing portions, and our dialogue staff (pairs of Arab-Jewish professional facilitators) guide the dialogue sessions.

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Sometimes, we experiment with different models that bring the musical and dialogue processes closer together - like collaborative songwriting, or group free improvisation to emotionally express and process a difficult topic in dialogue, or processes that give more ownership of our musical process itself back to the singers - to foster commitment and mutual responsibility.

What are the dynamics of the Chorus between participants of diverse backgrounds, faiths, and political differences?

Since 2012, the chorus—the only mixed Israeli-Palestinian choral group in the Holy City—has met weekly in Jerusalem to sing together. The community built by the Jerusalem Youth Chorus is strong and full of love. We meet through wars and cycles of violence, because in some ways, the chorus is actually the place our singers feel safest being themselves, no matter what is going on outside.

In one particular instance, this became even more pronounced. During the summer of 2014, and the rocket launches and airstrikes of the Gaza War, the chorus rehearsed several times a week preparing for our first international singing tour to Kyoto and Tokyo. Some of the chorus members were friends of friends with Gilad Shaar, Naftali Frenkel, and Eyal Yifrach, the Israeli teens kidnapped and killed leading up to this time; others grew up close to Mohammad Abu Khdeir, a 16-year-old Palestinian boy who was murdered following those kidnappings. The violence of that summer targeted Israeli and Palestinian youth, and that was very, very personal for our singers.

The day following the killing of the young Palestinian boy, Abu Khdeir, Micah Hendler, the chorus' Founder and Artistic Director, didn't know whether anyone would show up for rehearsal.

"Don't risk your safety," he recalls telling them, especially to those in East Jerusalem, and the Shu'afat neighborhood where Khdeir had lived. But half of the chorus made it—including half of the Palestinian members.

"Then this girl comes in from Shu'afat," Hendler says.

"How did you even get here?" he recalls asking her. "Like physically. How did you get here?"

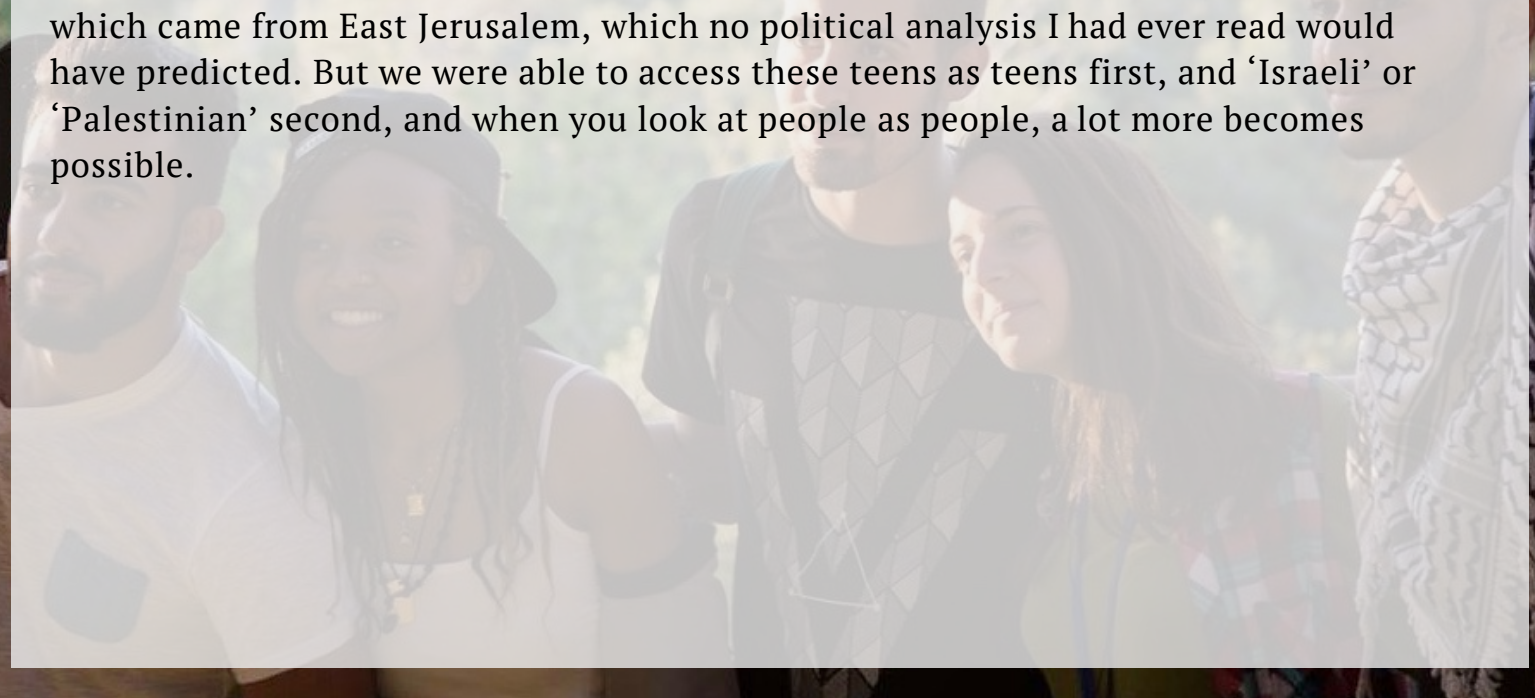
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"Well, I woke up to gunshots this morning and it was pretty awful," she responded in Hendler's recollection. "But being in my house kind of made me crazy because there was so much violence, so I just left my house and walked down the street and out of Shu'afat. Soldiers tried to stop me but I just ran away. I'm so glad I'm here now, and there's nowhere else I'd rather be."

Our singers came that summer not just because we were traveling to Japan—they could have gotten out of many rehearsals with legitimate excuses—but because they wanted to be there. They came because it was an oasis from all of the insanity and the physical and emotional violence that was happening around them. Most importantly, they came to see each other.

Which, if any, obstacles did the chorus face in the beginning?

Micah Hendler, JYC Founder and Artistic Director, explains: "In the beginning, I was a recent college graduate moving to Jerusalem and trying to start this program. Of course, I made tons of mistakes. What is critical though throughout is that one side or the other doesn't feel you're biased, or at least that both sides feel you're biased to equal degrees. Where I had to learn the terms of program management to correct those mistakes, I did not lose trust politically. I came to Jerusalem with the support of great regional partners, and I was able to begin recruiting vocal talents from high school to high school on both sides of the Green Line. And I knew how to talk to them and meet them where they were, in their languages, which goes a long way. I came to Jerusalem in July 2012. I had told myself, 'If I have ten committed singers by January, that will be success.' By October of that year, we had 80 auditions, the majority of which came from East Jerusalem, which no political analysis I had ever read would have predicted. But we were able to access these teens as teens first, and 'Israeli' or 'Palestinian' second, and when you look at people as people, a lot more becomes possible."



Frequently Asked Questions

How is the repertoire selected?

Musically, the Jerusalem Youth Chorus seeks to reflect the values of equality and inclusiveness upon which we are based, truly making manifest the concept of beauty in diversity. As our members come often from vastly different musical traditions, we draw heavy influences from both East and West in our repertoire and musical style, blending Arabic mawwal (vocal improvisation) with classical harmonies, drawing out the Arabic rhythms in everything from pop songs to traditional carols, and blending lyrics in Hebrew, Arabic, English, and beyond in songs that come from all over the world. As such, we seek to innovate and challenge boundaries musically as we do in the non-musical elements of our program.

Everything that we sing has to be on the one hand something that everyone is comfortable singing. So, it has to be universal to some degree, but it also needs to mean something. We also do not sing about peace. "Peace" as a term here has become cliché—it's easy to sing about peace and have no idea what you mean, and a lot of people do. Rather than sing directly about peace in the abstract, we sing about the building-blocks that ultimately lead to it: love, community, overcoming loss, and connection to home. Since our founding, we have sung dozens of songs from different countries, traditions, religions, languages, musical genres and styles. For a few examples:

- "[HOME](#)" (pop a cappella, performed with YouTube star Sam Tsui, with Middle Eastern fusion elements)
- "[Adinu](#)" (improvisatory choral arrangement of a Sufi chant)
- "[Rolling in the Deep](#)" (the Adele hit sung in a classical Arabic fusion style)
- "[The Prayer of St. Francis](#)" (the beautiful contemporary choral work mentioned above)
- "[Yihiyeh Beseder](#)" (an Israeli popular song grounded in hip-hop, collaboratively reimagined and rearranged by our alumni)
- "[Nassam Aleina el Hawa](#)" (a traditional treatment of Arabic folklore, accompanied by an Arabic instrumental ensemble)

The one song that we sing that has the word peace in it is the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. "Make me an instrument of Thy Peace." But what makes that song so powerful, is not just that it's a gorgeous musical setting, but that the rest of the text essentially says what it means to be an instrument of peace. Peace means spreading love where there is hatred, it means spreading hope where there is despair, it means having faith in times of great crisis. When our singers sing the Prayer of St. Francis, they know exactly what they mean, and so does the audience.

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How does dialogue work?

Half of each three-and-a-half-hour rehearsal is devoted to dialogue: The kids openly discuss what's going on between their peoples and in their communities, with trained Palestinian and Israeli facilitators guiding the discussion and translators simultaneously switching between Hebrew and Arabic (and sometimes English).

The yearlong dialogue process begins by creating a safe space in the group for people to be open and honest with one another. Then we build a foundation by focusing on universal values such as equality, justice, and mutual respect, and issues like majority and minority rights, or conflict resolution. Only then do we turn to the “hardcore” issues of the conflict that impact not only our singers’ daily lives but also their senses of self and other. By that point, our singers have a common foundational vocabulary which they can use to discuss and understand their differences, rather than being armed only with slogans that even they may not understand, that are designed to leave no room for compromise or other perspectives.

The chorus is a place of acceptance, a place where the singers feel like they can be who they are and people won’t judge them. It’s also a place where they challenge who they are, and where others will challenge who they are, but still within that cushion of acceptance and growth. These dialogue sessions, chorus members say, are difficult but enable them to air opinions and complaints on subjects ranging from mundane issues such as who sang off key at the last performance or got an extra solo to existential ones about their fundamental rights in a war-torn place. Michal Levin, who supervises the dialogue program for the choir, says, “When they come to deal with conflict, they don’t come just spilling out their opinions. Now they have to think and see what the consequences of their opinions are vis-à-vis the people they are sitting in the room with.”

Recently, we have begun experimenting with different innovative ways to integrate the musical and dialogue processes that happen side-by-side in the chorus. Says Hendler, “The most amazing musical thing that we’ve done as a group... is the original composition. Thirty Israeli and Palestinian high school singers who do not share a musical language, do not share a verbal language, do not share political beliefs, religious beliefs, come from the same socioeconomic backgrounds, literally should have virtually nothing in common, somehow found a way to write a piece of music together that is very meaningful, that is both personal and group.

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And musically it's very, very original and eclectic, and takes everything like hip hop style sampling, to Arabic mawal, like vocal improvisation, to jazz saxophone to chant, and really everything in between. And it was written by the chorus members themselves collaboratively through a dialogue process.”

During their US Tour in June 2015, during which this original composition was performed by the singers who wrote it, the chorus often ended its concerts with this piece. Encapsulating both their idealism and the difficulty of their mission, it includes this refrain: “Our love is not easy, but we can change the world if you would hold my hand.”

How long is the commitment for participants?

Over nine months of the academic year, the choir meets weekly for rehearsals, concerts, retreats, recording sessions, and tours. Technically our season is one year, but most of our singers stay longer. Our recently developed Alumni Program is a result of that fact—even when they have moved out of Jerusalem for university or army service or work, they still want to come back and see each other, sing together, talk about hard things together, and continue to grow as friends.

Throughout this year, our singers rehearse and perform an impressive range of songs in English, Arabic, Hebrew and other languages focusing on songs that reflect the chorus's values and goals and cover all musical styles. The chorus performs locally and overseas, has recorded and performed with artists such as David Broza, Mira Awad and Sam Tsui, and has also sung with renowned ensembles such as the Yale Whiffenpoofs and the Young People's Chorus of New York City.

In dialogue, chorus members have the opportunity to express themselves and hear others, working to understand the perspectives of “the other side,” empowering them to become forces for peace within their communities, both individually and collectively, while experiencing personal development and furthering their interpersonal and communication skills.

In addition to our weekly rehearsals, chorus members have the opportunity to add an additional rehearsal and become part of the chamber chorus, which performs more challenging repertoire in a smaller ensemble. Twice a year the chorus goes on “retreat,” taking 2-4 days for intensive rehearsals and dialogue sessions while also having lots of time for fun, activities, and great experiences.

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Almost every year, the chorus goes on tour. The tours are an amazing opportunity to perform on the world stage, explore other cultures, meet new friends, and collaborate with new partners. Choir members are hosted at “homestays” by local community members providing a home away from home and an unsurpassed intercultural experience, while enjoying the different sights, sounds, smells, and, of course, foods. As a chorus, we’ve traveled to Japan, the United Kingdom (twice), Switzerland (twice), and the United States (four times).

Questions About Donations

How is the JYC funded?

The Jerusalem Youth Chorus is working to become its own amuta (non-profit), and it is currently being assisted in starting that process by the Artemis Pioneer Israel Foundation. Meanwhile, our fiscal sponsor is PEF Israel Endowment Funds.

JYC is funded almost exclusively through generous donations, in addition to various small grants from charitable foundations. We are blessed by the support of individuals and organizations around the world, from New Haven to Tokyo and beyond, who believe in the power of song to cross borders and have helped us spread our message internationally.

What will my contribution fund?

Contributions fund our year-round, on-the-ground programming in Jerusalem and also our special projects - recording, filming, concert tours, special workshops, and more. This includes staff costs, production costs, administrative fees, and more. If you’d like a better sense of our finances, please reach out to our Executive Director at miriam@jerusalemyouthchorus.org.

Is my contribution tax-deductible?

The Jerusalem Youth Chorus is affiliated with the PEF Israel Endowment Fund (a 501(c)3 nonprofit with EIN: 13-6104086) via the Artemis Pioneer Israel Foundation (Amuta #514607761). This means that you can give tax-deductibly in Israel, the United States, and many other countries!

The Jerusalem Youth Chorus Media

The Jerusalem Youth Chorus has been featured for its innovative musicianship and integrity of purpose and process from the Late Show with Stephen Colbert and the New York Times to Galgalatz, Scene Arabia and more than 100 other news sources. We have recorded with multi-platinum Israeli artist and peace activist David Broza in Jerusalem and with Andy Grammer in Los Angeles. Our music video “Home” has amassed over 400,000 views. We have toured to Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Switzerland, and have performed at venues as celebrated as the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, the United Nations in Geneva, and as a featured ensemble at the Yale International Choral Festival. In 2017, our Founder and Artistic Director Micah Hendler was selected as one of the Forbes 30 Under 30, and in 2020, chorus alumna Eden Alene made history as the first Ethiopian-Israeli selected to represent Israel in the prestigious Eurovision Song Competition.



The Jerusalem Youth Chorus

Press Quotes

“Established in 2012, the chorus is one of the few coexistence initiatives to weather the hatred and violence that have erupted on both sides over the past year. Meeting in one of the rare places here that are considered neutral ground, the imposing Jerusalem International YMCA on King David Street in West Jerusalem, the group does not ignore the politics but creates an alternative environment where young Israelis and Palestinians can discuss their differences while producing music together.” - Isabel Kershner, Jun 27, 2015, The New York Times

“Jerusalem, after all, is a city where Arabs and Jews live on opposite sides of town, attend segregated schools, and shop at separate stores. Within the safety of the rehearsal space, the singers befriend their counterparts from the other side.” - Lei Wang, Aug 25, 2014, Mother Jones

“Jerusalem is a divided and divisive city. Many different communities—defined by religion, culture, ethnicity, language, history and almost anything else people could use to differentiate themselves from one another—live in close proximity but rarely meet. The YMCA Jerusalem Youth Chorus has become a place where Palestinian and Israeli, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim high school students from East and West Jerusalem come together, twice a week, to sing, engage one another in dialogue and just be friends. Over the past three years, these teens have found common ground amidst the reality of the pervasive conflict around them.” - Co-authored by Darya Watnick, Tour Manager for the YMCA Jerusalem Youth Chorus, Oct 13, 2015, The Huffington Post

“Now the choir sings songs in Arabic, English and Hebrew to facilitate cultural understanding between the musicians. Still, through music, Hendler was able to create a safe haven for young people to put aside their differences and share their common love of singing.” - Natalie Morin, Jun 24, 2014, Mic

“At a time when both Israeli and Palestinian society is becoming ever more polarized, an interfaith, inter-ethnic chorus is creating a safe space for young people to confront their differences while melding musical traditions into a unique multicultural sound.” - Barbara Slavin, Jul 2, 2015, Al-Monitor

“Many other organizations that seek to bridge the divide simply draw the line at playing football, or painting, or whatever activity they choose. But they never address the conflict itself. ‘I think that’s nice, but that’s step one,’ says Hendler. ‘It ends up being the elephant in the room....Because people are also political, and certainly in Jerusalem, everything is political.’ The chorus, in contrast, is unwavering in its commitment to bringing the difficult realities into the room.” - Bahira Amin, Feb 3, 2019, Scene Arabia

The Jerusalem Youth Chorus

Singer Profiles

"Everything starts small, so we start small and will grow step by step. This is how it works with us, so if we start peace in small groups, we hope in the future to make peace with bigger groups." - Suzette, East Jerusalem

"I live in Israel, I'm an Arab, there's Jewish people, like that's what I know. But I never talked to them, I never knew them, I never knew their opinion. After joining this choir, it changed my life. It made me know what they think. It made them know what I think." - Samia, East Jerusalem

"The choir made me learn that I can listen to them. I can always like hear what they want to say. I used to always stand for my opinion, and everyone stood for their opinion, everyone thought they were always right. And then like, the process, people started to listen. People started to respect the other, which is so important." - Hili, West Jerusalem

"I just really learned that arguing is really pointless and it can go on for ages. I think you just really have to focus and put things behind you as people. Let certain things go and just try to work towards a better future." - Zoey, West Jerusalem

"It was a time when we had really intense dialogue. People kept speaking about jihad and talking about things that I love and care about in a really horrible way. At first, I was upset but then I realized over time that I appreciated that they had said these things because I was able to see their perspective. I saw them for who they are, and I was able to understand their side. They weren't insulting me; it was just how they feel." - Shifra, West Jerusalem

"Sometimes we end up hurting each other without meaning to do so, and I believe that in order to achieve peace with people, first you have to have your inner peace. Therefore, I had to forgive a lot, believing the other person has forgiven me as well." - Sofia, East Jerusalem

Reflecting on that, Avital, one of our singers from West Jerusalem, tells this story about how hard it is to simply "forgive and forget":

"It was a dialogue session we were doing about Holocaust Remembrance Day. Somebody said something that really hurt my feelings. I told myself that I would never be able to forgive them for what they had said. For a while, I didn't talk to them. But as the year went on and the next year started, things moved on. I care deeply about this person and love them very much, but nothing was ever resolved. It wasn't forgotten but I explored how to forgive. Four years later, we revisited the original topic in a dialogue session. Afterwards, this person came up to me and said, 'Wow, I realize now what I said in our first year. I'm so sorry.' It was an amazing moment."



The Jerusalem Youth Chorus

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