



YMCA JERUSALEM YOUTH CHORUS UNITED KINGDOM TOUR 2014

This December, the YMCA Jerusalem Youth Chorus, a choir and dialogue program for Israeli and Palestinian high school students at the Jerusalem International YMCA, took its second international concert tour, to the UK.



It was an intense schedule – in only five days split between London and Oxford, we performed live on BBC Newsnight, at the West End’s Aldwych Theatre, and at Oxford, and recorded in the studio with Miel de Botton and Duran Duran! The tour provided the Chorus with an incredible series of opportunities to grow, and our young singers rose to the occasion with each new day, taking the group to new heights as a professional ensemble. In particular, we were able to raise the profile of the YMCA Jerusalem Youth Chorus internationally, spreading our message of hope, equality, justice, peace, and a Jerusalem that is home for all to hundreds live and millions over the air.



The tour was full of new cultural experiences for our young singers – from the expansive British Museum to conquering British politeness; from the level of performance of *Wicked* on the West End to our caroling on the Tube; from the storied colleges of Oxford and its traditions of high scholarship to learning how to stand in a queue. But as usual, our young singers embraced it all, continuing to learn from difference and expand their perspectives beyond their immediate surroundings.

One of the central goals of the tour was to provide our young singers with a valuable opportunity to bond as a group, outside of the pressures - higher than ever in Jerusalem - to remain separate, and create a space to foster the individual friendships that are blossoming within the Chorus. As one chorister said, “I love that I had a chance to talk to everyone – I feel like I can really say now that I love each person in the choir, in their own way.” And cupcakes always help. We also had the exciting opportunity to meet, record and perform with emerging artist Miel de Botton, who has been a foundational supporter of the Chorus since its beginnings.



A particularly special element of the tour was being in England during the holiday season. We were able to contribute our own unique holiday repertoire to the festive atmosphere – an Arabic-inspired arrangement of the Ukrainian “Carol of the Bells,” and a Hannukah mash-up of traditional songs and Peter Yarrow’s “Light One Candle.” Complementing these holiday additions, of course, was our moving arrangement of the Sufi chant, “Adinu.”

We return home full of gratitude for the support we have received that makes such experiences possible, particularly from the Jerusalem Foundation and Miel de Botton. Here’s to a holiday season full of light.