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062 Aeham Ahmad Interview Transcription
Elke Gruhn, Wiesbaden, Germany
July 5, 2016

Aeham Ahmad: In this dirty war nobody can have a decision. You dying or flowing. You have it only one way. And I don't have a lot of hope of changing it with the music. Three years into the siege, I stay, play piano, and fighting to the people back in Yarmouk come but I don't have energy to complete work like this. I need to make hope for my family. And I don't need to be my boys' Achmed Aleckmenan refugee.

I have a lot of rules from classical music because I learned classical music from my professor Vladimir Zareski and this professor put it into my head about the laws of music, the laws in Europe and how you can understand the strict life in Europe from the music. From Mozart, from Beethoven. Yes. It doesn't have a lot of mosaic. It has a lot of feeling but it's not like the feeling and crying of the Arabic people. Our music is talking about our life, a lot of pain with the music, a lot of sadness. In the music of Europe, you can listen to Mozart and you can understand more and more the age of Mozart; you can understand the sadness or happiness from the music.

I only speak English from four months ago. I didn't speak English. But I have to speak with the people. Yes, four months ago I don't speak English but I come to Miss Elke one time. I didn't speak English but I am on the stage and don't need want others to tell my story. I need to tell my people's story from me. Or I need to talk to the people about the music, why I play this kind of music. And I like to speak, open the book — six hours on the train, seven hours on the train — but I have to learn German because we are in Deutschland!

The schools in Yarmouk and other places have been destroyed by bombing. There has been a place made for reading underground. It is a safe place for 100 children. A small place for happiness because there has been a lot of sadness, a lot of dying there. I have a friend who makes music, makes jokes with the children. It's not the things we talk about at school but can help the people and helps the children to don't stay in the street because it's very dangerous in the street. Only the piano stays in the street and they play the piano — crazy! The sniper killed Zana with me when she play [piano] with me. Yes, he killed her from shooting [her] in the head. Twelve years old is her age. Yes, it's good to play with the children under the ground, not outside

I miss my wife and two boys only. And my father and my mother. The _____ when we come back makes it _____ in Wiesbaden, or Deutschland, or America.

America don't take one refugee and make a big problem in our land. I remember George Bush what he say, "We need to make a new Middle East. *This* is the new Middle East. It began in Afghanistan, and after Iraq, and you have now IS [ISIS] and _____. YES, the new Middle East full with oil to Europe. You can see the prize [oil] down and the food go up and up. The country will be not happy. See all this business. You don't see this air, maybe; we will die all!

My family is not in a safe place. Nobody in Syria is safe. My family in Yarmouk come but not have a lot of money now. Make it in 50 days by foot. It's not safe [for my family] but it's good [for them] to stay with my father and my mother. My boys because miss me a lot. My father and my mother stay in Yarmouk because my brother is in a prison from three years and my mother she doesn't need to go out of Yarmouk to see Allah. My father and my mother talk to me and [tell me] to take my boys out of the hell. I don't can take my father and mother [out of Syria]. I can only take my wife and my two boys.

In general maybe you take the [immigration] paper now, maybe six months. A lot of people help me. I see this helping. Because a lot of people have to wait one year, six months. But I make a lot to play the piano, talk to people, and a lot of people help me from politics, from normal people. Looks like Amnesty International makes 10,000 letters, to all the governments in all the world [saying] "We need the family for Aeham Ahmad. Because I make a lot of concerts and I speak English and [people] don't understand your pain when you can't talk about the pain.

I tell a story from Yarmouk a lot before this time and I've told it to people in Germany, and China, and _____ and I have told it in a documentary film from _____. A lot of people call me from _____ and say, "How can we help you?" I tell them, "You need to help the refugees. Don't give help to me. I don't need help."

I don't can tell them to go to this people because maybe this people take the money and don't help the refugees. I tell them to ask the refugees about the help they need. Don't ask me. I don't need help Thank you for your question. Because I don't can tell this person, go to him and give him your money because one time I trust people and the people collect money in Europe about 100,000 Euro for Yarmouk and give him. Nothing coming for us. We were dying from hunger.

I was making falafels one time in Yarmouk because I don't play piano to feed my family. I was making falafels for the people of Lintz not from _____ and there were a lot of people waiting for a piece of falafel because they were dying from hunger, and the bomb — I listen and killed three, four people in the line and cut the leg of my friend who was taking falafels from the hot oil. And the oil coming this way [sprayed up] going out onto . One millimeter [more to the left] and would lose my eyes. That was in 2013. And after I had to do physical therapy [for] I had to play piano.

My wife artist. She painting. She coming to me in my shop and said, "I need to pay _____. You not looks to me like you need to pay _____. What need. and she talk to me and said, "I need to know you." Yes, yes, come and we will drink coffee and talking. How are you? What's your name? And looks like this, after two days we eat together. After three days we married. After three days we have this. After two months we married.

From five years she not painting because after when we married, having two boys, and having a lot of work, and Kinan he waking up at 4:00 and Achmed wake up at 10:00 at night, she don't sleep. And I fighting all the time and play the piano and she talk to me,

“All the idea for painting is gone.” I talk to her I say, “When you come to Deutschland, we will see Miss Elke and you will be painting all the time. It is the home for art.”

I play piano all the time — the beautiful, beautiful pianos — looks like this one — 100,000 euros, this piano. I play on a Steinway D piano with Martha Argerich, a _____ of a piano. We only see Martha Argerich looks like this in a photo, just touching the photo. I play three times with Martha Argerich with a piano 200,000 euro, it’s name a Steinway D — it’s a big, big one with a big you know — for the Berlin full harmony.

I played with the Berlin full harmony, Stuttgart full harmony, B_____ full harmony, D_____ full harmony, Hamburg full harmony, Munich full harmony. It’s a very, very big pleasure but I don’t feeling good. I need to get back to Yarmouk and play piano in the street. Because one time I say [to] myself, “Aeham, why pianist I am?” I don’t need to focus on refugee because refugee. I need to focus on artist not refugee. [There are] a lot of artists in Deutschland and I think after this one years, what happens with me? Maybe I will pay [sell] falafels in a small shop in Wiesbaden. I will not complete piano because maybe the people will be tired from this music, not need to listen to more [of] this music — I don’t know but it’s my dreaming. Pay falafel and I no complete music. I make good falafel, don’t worry!

Music makes us happy. Full of energy and full of lovely things in the heart but it doesn’t make anything for the stomach. In Yarmouk we don’t can’t make anything for stomach because we have 100,000 people and we can’t make falafels for 100,000 people but we can play music for 100,000 people because it’s not working with oil and water and we don’t have [enough] beans to make falafel. One time I asked myself, “What music can I make to make the children happy?” The piano, it’s not the traditional thing [in Syria]. When the children see the piano, they say, “What’s this? Banjo? I put the piano one time, one hour — a lot of energy from the children — and four, five in the piano. I have twelve girls in the piano, ya? And my boys and I, we are smiling. Yes, [music] makes us smiling.

I have a lot of memories from the music. I didn’t play a lot of pain music. Now I play a lot of pain music because I have pain. But in Yarmouk, you can listen to the video. I don’t play the same sounds now for happiness. When I see the human market coming on the way to Deutschland and Europe, when I see the human market business killing children in Aleppo, I though what I could make. I don’t make any thing. I talk about Syria and play music tell the people my story but it is not changing anything. We can change a little maybe.