

Jews and Turks for the children of Ukraine

The Yunus Emre Institute, which works to promote and strengthen cultures through peace and love, together with the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony, gathered for a special evening full of music and culture in order to support the children of Ukraine

On Sunday, June 12, with the Turkish consul Sinan Ertay in attendance, an event celebrating unity was held in Gindi Auditorium, all proceeds of which were donated to support UNICEF for the children of Ukraine. The Yunus Emre Institute, which operates over 62 cultural centers in 52 countries, and works to promote awareness of Turkish culture and strengthen cultural unity through peace and love, produced the concert in association with of the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony Orchestra under the management and direction of Dr. Noreen Green, who in 2020 was recognized for by Musical America magazine as one of the Top 30 Professionals of the Year. Dr. Green is also the founder of the Jewish Community Chorale.



Dr. Noreen Green & soloist Chloe Pourmorady
Photo: Yasin Ozturk

Another partner in the production is Apricot Music & Art, a cultural movement based on the performing arts, founded by the gifted artist and pianist Dr. Ayşe Taşpınar Gatenyo. The movement is dedicated to developing understanding and communication between cultures and building global communities of harmony. The organization's 'Golden Sunflower' project reveals the tradition of cross-cultural musicality in the musical heritage of the Ottoman period, by performing and recording unique works by Ottoman-Armenian, Greek, Jewish and Turkish musicians. This year's theme is 'Maftirs', a collaboration between Jewish mystics and Wallan Sufis. These choirs appeared for the first time in the 18th century in Edirne, today's Istanbul.



Sufi dancer and Vedat Gursoylu
Photo: Yasin Ozturk

"Ashkina," the piece that opened the evening, was written by Sharon Farber, a world-renowned composer for film, television and concerts. Sharon is a member of the executive committees of the film and television academies, a four-time Emmy Award-nominee, an ASCAP board member, a Grammy Award-winner for 2022, the VP Liit Al-Bait for Women Composers for Film, and the winner of the Society of Composers and the Transcription Award for "outstanding work in the art of music for film." Her project during the coronavirus pandemic, which she organized and produced for the United Nations Corona Relief Fund, includes 17 leading singers from every continent and 160 singers and musicians, and is the largest project of its kind. Sharon is also the musical director of the Arts Center at the Saban Theater.

The piece ranges between traditional, Western and Middle Eastern musical influences, and blends Hebrew, English and Turkish. "Ashkina," named for the Turkish word for "love," unites the desire for understanding, tolerance, acceptance, and peace between all peoples. It also incorporates the Hebrew word "shekinah." The women in the choir open the piece by singing a cappella of the first verse of the Bible. They are joined by the rest of the choir and the orchestra, with klezmer clarinet, chanting, flute, oud, and percussion. In the last movement, a soloist sings a prayer accompanied by the choir and the orchestra, and everyone finishes in a word that expresses universal desire: "Amen." The soloists included Omar Farouk Tekbilek, a world music virtuoso who appeared in Israel last month, playing the ney and more; Freddy Shifan, an international classical guitarist; MB Gordy, known for ethnic percussion instruments; and three LAJS Chorale members, bass Yoav Pashkowitz, soprano Audrey Yoder, and tenor Jeremy Eichberg.

Other works included the folk songs "La Rosa Enflorencia" (the tune of "Make our own we ate"), Gulpembe, and Gole Gandam, featuring vocal soloist Chloe Pourmorady, an award-winning

artist of Persian origin who also played the violin. She was accompanied by the oud playing of Asher Shasho Levy, a multi-instrumentalist, cantor, educator and researcher of the Sephardic tradition, who performs around the world with the 'Arm Tzuba Ensemble' he founded. Jim Grippo was featured playing the kanun. The orchestra concluded the first part of the evening with a performance of Nabil Azzam's "Dance of Abraham," which the ears in the audience recognized as Yehoram Gaon's "Avraham Avinu" in Ladino. We returned to the hall for the "Piano Concerto No. 1" by Ulvi Cemal Erkin, with Dr. Ayşe Taşpınar Gatenyo on the piano. The cantor Haim Mizrahi, born in Turkey, who was the cantor in the famous historical synagogue 'Neve Shalom' in Istanbul, performed a string of love songs, based on melodies by Yunus Amre, and "Ghizemli," composed by Brian Keane and Omar Farouk Tekbilek.