

Happy New Year.. from Baghdad

Written by

Wednesday, 21 January 2004 01:48 - Last Updated Wednesday, 21 January 2004 01:48

An excerpt from the diary of a young Iraqi woman... Monday, January 05, 2004. Happy New Year... So this is 2004. Not surprisingly, it feels much like 2003... While many people consider 2003 a 'year', for us it has felt more like a decade. We started the year preparing for war. While the rest of the world was making a list of resolutions, we were making lists of necessary items for the coming battle. We spent the first two and a half months of 2003 taping windows, securing homes, stocking up on food, water and medication, digging wells and wondering if we would make it through the year.

>Date: Tue, 06 Jan 2004 00:41:38 -0800>From: Jillian Skeet < jillianskeet@telus.net >>Subject: Happy New Year.. from Baghdad.>To:

jillianskeet@telus.net

>>An excerpt from the diary of a young Iraqi woman...>>Monday, January 05, 2004>>Happy New Year...>>So this is 2004. Not surprisingly, it feels much like>2003...>>While many people consider 2003 a 'year', for us it>has felt more like a decade. We started the year>preparing for war. While the rest of the world was>making a list of resolutions, we were making lists of>necessary items for the coming battle. We spent the>first two and a half months of 2003 taping windows,>securing homes, stocking up on food, water and>medication, digging wells and wondering if we would>make it through the year.>>March brought the war and the horror. The scenes we>witnessed made every single day feel more like a week>some days felt like a year. There were days where we>lost track of time and began counting not hours and>minutes, but explosions. We stopped referring to the>date and began saying things like, "The last time we>saw my uncle was the day the Americans bombed that>market in Al Shu'la and dozens were killed.">>They say the war ended in April, but it didn't end in>April. April was just the beginning of another set of>horrors watching Baghdad burned and looted by>criminals seeing the carcasses of burnt cars and the>corpses of charred humans on the roadside watching>the tanks and Apaches shoot right and left realizing>that it had turned from a war into a full-fledged>occupation.>>So we sat, the last few hours, thinking about the last>few months and making conjectures about the future. In>the background you could hear a few explosions, some>gunfire, helicopters and planes. I kept thinking>something terrible was going to happen and we'd never>see the beginning of a new year.>>At around 10 pm, they turned on the generator and we>gathered around the television to watch the rest of>the world celebrate their way into the New Year. The>kids fell asleep on the living-room floor, in front of>the kerosene heater, before the clock struck 12 and>the thuds around us began getting heavier. Immediately>after twelve, the sounds of warplanes and explosions>got so heavy, we could hardly hear the television.>There was nothing on the news, as usual. Al-Iraqiya>was showing some lame fading in and out of its motto>on a blue background while all hell was breaking loose>outside. We found out the next day that a restaurant>in A'arassat, a wealthy area in Karrada, had>explosives planted in front of it.>>What have the first few days of 2004 felt like?>Exactly like the last few months of 2003. The last few>days have been a series of bombs and explosions. A>couple of nights ago they were using cluster bombs to>bomb some area. Before the bomb drops, you can hear>this horrible screaming sound. We call it 'the>elephant' because it sounds like an elephant shrieking>in anger. I'm not sure what it is or what its purpose>is. Someone said it's supposed to be some sort of>warning signal to the troops on the ground to take>cover in their tanks before the bomb hits. It's>usually followed by a series of horrific explosions>and then the earth shudders.>>It's strange what you can get used to hearing or>seeing. The first time is always the worst: the first>time you experience cluster bombs, the

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first time you feel the earth shudder beneath you with the impact of an explosion, the first tanks firing at houses in your neighborhood, the first check-point... the first broken windows, crumbling walls, unhinged doors the first embassy being bombed, the first restaurant It's not that you no longer feel rage or sadness, it just becomes a part of life and you grow to expect it like you expect rain in March and sun in July.>>May 2004 be better than 2003.>>- posted by river @ 1:12 AM>>----->*** Iraq Action Coalition Discussion Forum ***>>http://iraqaction.org/discussion.html>----->*To Post a message, send it to:

iac-discussion@eGroups.com

>*To Subscribe, send a blank message to:

iac-discussion-subscribe@eGroups.com

>* To see the List Guidelines, go to:

<http://iraqaction.org/discussion.html>

>*Any questions, contact the List Moderator at

rmasri@leb.net

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From: INEAS@aol.com Date: Mon, 5 Jan 2004 17:23:10 EST Subject: Baghdad in Four Days: A Press Release

NEW YEAR's GREETINGS FROM ALL OF US at the Institute of Near Eastern & African Studies (INEAS) P.O. Box 425125 Cambridge, MA 02142 USA Website: <http://www.INEAS.org> For Interviews or to purchase footage from Iraq, contact Wafaa' Al-Natheema, Founder Email: INEAS@aol.com

Tel: (617) 86-INEAS (864-6327) Ext. 3////////\\\\\\\////////

In This Release:

1. Baghdad in Four Days: A Report Back
2. Relation and Involvement with the IRAQI National Symphony Orchestra (INSO).

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1. Baghdad November 12 to 15, 2003 - It was morning when we arrived in Baghdad. According to the driver, there was an incident of confrontation with American soldiers, so drivers had to be diverted to a longer route to reach their intended destination. Instead of us arriving at about 10 AM from Amman, we arrived at the apartment at about 11:30 AM.

It was dusty upon our arrival. I couldn't help but notice how much more polluted Baghdad has become and how damaged since I last visited it in Winter, 2000. The most intimidating scenes in the streets of Baghdad were the American tanks. Imagine you drive in your town's streets and instead of being in front of a civilian car or behind a mini-van, you drive near military tanks with soldiers pointing guns at you and/or people in the street. I can bring this to the attention of families who raised teenagers, especially males, when I report about the fact that these soldiers, for the most part, have been male teenagers with imbalanced hormones and fear. So, you can probably envision the amount of trouble they undergo and cause. I have read and heard of so many stories about American soldiers' random shooting at Iraqi civilians before, during and after this recent trip to Baghdad. Luckily or unluckily, we did not witness any shooting or explosions.

I had worked tirelessly for months to organize a seven-women delegation to go to Baghdad to take donations (in the form of instruments, spare parts and money) to the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra (INSO) and the Music & Ballet School. But due to the security situation in Baghdad especially in August and September, five of the seven women decided not to go. So two of us left for Amman and headed to Baghdad on November 12.

On November 13, we visited Munther J. Hafeth and the director of the INSO, Hisham Sharaf. We handed them the donations in the form of spare parts, mostly strings, and few student instruments. On Friday, November 14, we attended one of the INSO rehearsals at the Convention Center and I videotaped it. The next day, we visited the Music and Ballet School, videotaped some of its classes and sport activities and interviewed two of the most prominent music teachers at the school, Fu'ad As-Sadin and Fu'ad Al-Mashta. I later interviewed one of the earliest musicians of the INSO, Dr. Nouri Bahjat, who left the Orchestra in the early 1950s.

Because of the security problems in Iraq since Baghdad fell to the occupation forces, we did not leave outdoors beyond 7 PM. We always made sure to return no later than that hour and sometimes earlier. We were given rides by people we knew or accompanied a family friend when taking taxis. The fear from leaving home after sunset was unknown to Iraqis prior to this war. It is a horrible curfew to especially women, who, as always, have to pay more price should they walk on their own or be out after dark. I felt so bad for all of my female cousins who have been staying home by choice (due to fear) or force.

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The return from Baghdad to Amman was exhausting. In addition to the lengthy driving hours between the two cities, we had to linger at the Jordanian borders for eight hours. There were hundreds and hundreds of cars waiting to be inspected due to fear from smuggle, a matter that was poorly conducted by the Jordanian employees o-n that day. o-nly three individuals were working to check and stamp passports and few others to inspect hundreds of cars.

Baghdad has changed dramatically: No traffic lights in majority of the streets. It now has some highly condensed and polluted areas with no electricity and no phones in so many towns. Those who can not afford generators, they live for hours in the dark daily. The quality of water is highly questionable. If the capital is in such a condition, o-ne wonders about the situation in other cities!

////////////////////////////////////Our Institute has produced a 14-minute documentary o-n the trip to IRAQ. Part of the proceeds from the documentary will go to music schools in Baghdad. The documentary, "Baghdad . . . in Four Days" can be obtained for \$20 by writing to INEAS@anol.com or

I.N.E.A.S. P.O. Box 425125 Cambridge, MA 02142 USA Checks are payable to
INEAS(* _ *) _____ (* _ *)

2. The Relation and Involvement with the INSO:

My relation with the INSO goes back to 1999 when I attended their live performance in February of that year in Baghdad. I met few of the musicians following that concert and soon began to communicate with them irregularly until Summer 2001 when I decided that in order to bring the INSO to the United States and other countries, the world has to learn more about their history, accomplishments and activities. So after contacting few of the INSO musicians outside of IRAQ (Munir Allahwerdi and Bassim Petros) and later Munther J. Hafeth, viola player and composer in Baghdad, we began to publish a monthly e-newsletter about the history and activities of the INSO and about classical symphonic music as well as information about western, Arab and Iraqi composers. Other former INSO musicians joined the team at the beginning or later such as Beatrice Ohanessian, Agnes Bashir, Nahla Jajjo, Zaid Esmat and others. The first e-newsletter was published and emailed in October 2001. A year later, and to lessen the pressure, I decided to publish these INSO e-newsletters o-n a bimonthly basis. It attracted more than 325 subscribers from five continents who were receiving these e-newsletters for FREE. The beauty was that all the members of the writing/editing team were working independently without censorship by corporations and/or governmental agencies and for the mere love of music.

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I had no idea the world would suddenly be that interested in the INSO! The last thing was to envision that the State Department, Department of Defense (DOD) and the Pentagon invest so generously (money, time and energy) on a foreign musical cause such as this! They had it so easy: The Orchestra plays western symphonic music, which is better to adopt by an administration that has been antagonizing Arab and Middle Eastern people and cultures, and this Orchestra's cry for help has already been made popular by the media and by some organizations rallying to end the embargo against Iraq.

I've worked for over a year trying to find a co-sponsor to invite the INSO to the USA and perform, but the lack of funding or co-sponsorship due to a variety of reasons on national and international levels prevented it from happening. When the European and American media began promoting the INSO especially after talks about the US war against Iraq, I began to receive tens and tens of email requests about the INSO since January of this year. The influx of emails later increased dramatically after the Fall of Baghdad and following the live interview from Baghdad that Boston's WBUR aired in April by Dick Gordon. But none of these emails or calls were to discuss the possibility of them coming and touring the USA.

Due to international media coverage of the predicament of the INSO and the fact that some of their instruments and other inventory during and following the war were damaged, most of the received email and phone requests were to help benefit the INSO, to organize an event to raise funds for the INSO or to contact them directly. It was both intriguing and exhausting dealing with the many emails, issues and needs and to even witness the competition between the media and also between individuals and organizations who were interested in truly helping or pretended to help. Additionally, communicating with the musicians in Baghdad, including the director of the Orchestra, was problematic during the first five months of the war/occupation.

It was unfortunate that the tone and direction of aiding the INSO musicians and of inviting them to DC on December 9th has turned political. The DoD and the Pentagon in collaboration with the National Endowment for the Arts were to collect and air lift musical instruments to the INSO and the Music and Ballet School. Such collaboration was referred to as Operation Harmony and was announced about on the Internet two months prior to the announcements on the Kennedy Center's concert. The State Department and the Kennedy Center were the only entities to invite the INSO to perform in the USA! The Dutch Embassy's attempt to organize a performance made of only seven INSO musicians, while the Orchestra in DC, was rejected by the State Department!

Due to the worldwide support and large donations the INSO has received during the last four months and to the political turn of events that accompanied the INSO project since the fall of

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Baghdad, the Institute of Near Eastern & African Studies (INEAS) has discontinued receiving donations for the Orchestra, instead will collect donations for the music schools in Baghdad.

INEAS intends to organize educational tours to Jordan and IRAQ beginning in March 2004 and to help Iraqi music schools with donations and guest teachers. If you are interested in funding/cosponsoring INEAS's educational tours or being a participant, contact us to receive further information.

For the support we've received in helping the INSO and the Music & Ballet School, WE THANK:

*PIRASTRO in Germany*Thomastick in Austria*The Violineri Company and Alex W. Grants Violins in Australia*LaVerne Kuhnke, INEAS member in IL*Mohammed Al-Baghdadi, INEAS member in CA*Charles Coe, INEAS member in Massachusetts*The Episcopal Church in Rhode Island (RI)*St. George Orthodox Church in RI*Howard Hersch in Nevada, CA.*Anna Gold in Nevada, CA. *Lena Andaya in Sacramento, CA *Nancy Hill in Nevada, CA.*Judy Bromley in Nevada, CA. **Members of the Auburn Symphony in Auburn, CA.*Sally Mack in Massachusetts*Judy Gerratt of Music For A Cause in Massachusetts*Stuart Dunbar of 38 Cameron in Massachusetts*Jessica Stensrud in Massachusetts*Ben Stepner, Jazz Musician in Massachusetts*Bob Sinicrope, Jazz Musician in Massachusetts*Philip and B.J. Brown Devlin in Massachusetts**The wonderful audience attending the June 27th Jazz Benefit in Cambridge, MA.**The team of organizers and volunteers of the June Jazz Benefit*Ian Zimmerman in NY
*Allegra Klein of Musicians For Harmony in NY*Joseph Lin in NY*Anonymous in NY*****We also thank the media outlets that publicized the events and/or the Women's delegation to Iraq: Cambridge Chronicle? Newton Tab? The Boston Globe? Mohammed Zawwawi of Voice of America Radio/Arabic Service? Samaa' Elibyari of Caravan Program/90.3 FM in Montreal? Rebecca Winzenried of Symphony Magazine? Paul Chuffo of Soundcheck Program/WNYC radio? Katarina Kratovac of the Associated Press? Ariane Todes of Strad Magazine of England//////////N//////////We would like to also acknowledge Alex Alejandro of the Red Cross in Massachusetts for donating first-aid products to accompany the women's delegation and for the extra time spent in training on CPR/First Aid//////////Many thanks go to Mohammed Salim of the Jordan Hashimite Charity Organization in Amman for helping while the delegation was in Amman, and to the Royal Jordanian Airlines for offering a discount on a round-trip ticket (NY-Amman-NY)