



Jerusalem: the city of two peaces

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Jerusalem is a central point of reference for the three great monotheist faiths. King David made the city the political and religious capital of Israel, creating a centre for Judaism within and beyond the region. Jerusalem is a holy city for Christians as the place of Jesus of Nazareth's teaching, crucifixion and resurrection. It was here too that the first community of early Christians proclaimed their religion. And for Muslims, the city is traditionally the third most holy in Islam after Mecca and Medina. Before they prayed facing the Kaaba in Mecca, the most sacred site for Muslims, they directed their prayers towards Jerusalem.

In the course of its 4,000-year history, the city has been destroyed, looted and pillaged some 40 times. Today's Jerusalem, which was supposed to be a common bond with shared history and sacredness for the three religions, unfortunately presents a picture of discord and serves as a point of contention for people with contradictory claims to religious influence.

This city, nonetheless, bears the seed of peace in its name. The Hebrew word "Jerusalem" can be interpreted to mean city of two peaces, referring to both the earthly and heavenly peace heralded by the Old Testament prophets. The etymologically observant will recognise the Hebrew shalom in the name—and the related Arabic salaam, both of which mean peace.

Starting from this idea, Jordi Savall and Montserrat Figueras—specialists in music of old centuries and UNESCO Artists for Peace in 2008—have produced an unusual musical project, *Jerusalem: La Ville des deux Paix* (the city of two peaces). On this musical album, accompanied by a 400-page book detailing the historical and musical background of the city, the two artists explore musical traditions from Jerusalem's various epochs: the Jewish, the Christian, the Arab and the Ottoman eras.

For the dialogue-centred Jerusalem project, Savall and Figueras brought together Jewish, Muslim and Christian musicians from many countries that have left traces on Jerusalem's musical traditions over the centuries: Israel, Palestine, Greece, Syria, Armenia, Turkey, England, France, Spain and Italy.

The section on the "Jewish city" begins with its foundation and ends with the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. It is presented musically through a selection of the most beautiful psalms of King David as preserved in the ancient musical tradition of the Jews of southern Morocco, along with a piece on the 1st century Rabbi Akiva, one of the most important fathers of rabbinical Judaism.

The Christian section embarks with the arrival of Queen Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine I, in 326 CE and ends in 1244 CE. It opens with a dark, meditative hymn to the Virgin Mary, attributed to Emperor Leo VI (886-912), and closes with a quiet, humble improvisation on the hymn, "Pax in Nomine Domini!" ("Peace in the name of the Lord!").

Among other pieces in the Arab section of the album, a version of the 17th chapter in the Qur'an—entitled "the Israelites"—describes the Prophet Mohammed's ascent to heaven from the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif through song.

The album's most dramatic piece is a historic recording by Shlomo Katz, a Jew of Romanian origin. Before Katz was to be executed in Auschwitz in 1941 during the Holocaust, he asked for permission to sing the hymn, "El Male Rahamim" ("God full of compassion"). Deeply moved by the magnificence, emotional depth and intensity of the music, the Nazi officer on duty allowed Katz to escape. In 1950, he recorded the song as a lasting testament and hymn to the victims of Auschwitz. Exuding a moving sense of tragedy and grace in itself, the piece becomes a devastating musical document in the knowledge of its history.

"Music", according to Savall, "becomes the indispensable means of achieving a genuine intercultural dialogue between human beings from very different nations and religions, but who nevertheless share a common language of music, spirituality and beauty."

Savall and Figueras' Jerusalem album is an astutely compiled mosaic of religions and cultures. Every song, every set of lyrics forms a possible starting point for exploring the dramatic and chequered history of the medieval East and West, and the points they have in common.

* Lewis Gropp is a freelance journalist based in Cologne, Germany. Specialising in faith issues and world literature, he is also an editor at Qantara.de, an online magazine that covers issues relating to the West and the Muslim world. This article was written for the [Common Ground News Service](#).