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June 10, 2004

### Melting Pot for Peace

BY GABY WENIG

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It's hard to imagine a period when Jews and Arabs got along -- but that's apparently what they did from 800-1400 B.C.E., in the historical Al-Andalus period. In Spain and North Africa, Jews, Christians and Muslims got together and collaborated on arts and sciences to create one of the world's most advanced societies.

Now, Al-Andalus, an eclectic group of musicians from all over the world is recreating the spirit of the historical Al-Andalus in concerts that celebrate the mystical pluralism of the Arab-Jewish music traditions.

"The idea with Al-Andalus is that was a melting pot that took place in Spain," said flamenco guitarist and Al-Andalus co-founder Julie **Banzi**, who spoke to The Journal from Tangiers, Morocco. "We are making an analogy to what happened in Al-Andalus and what is happening now. On an artistic level what we are trying to do is recreate that harmony, so [in our concerts] we do some traditional pieces, some Sephardic pieces, some in Ladino, classical pieces, Andalusian pieces, and we have contemporary work building from that."

At the group's June 13 concert, "Al-Andalus to Jerusalem," organized by the Levantine Cultural Center and co-sponsored by Beyond Baroque Literary/Arts Center, **Banzi** and her husband **Tarik** -- who plays oud, ney and percussion, are going to be joined by Israeli-Iraqi ethnic musician Yair Dalal, Los Angeles-based Yuval Ron, Palestinian vocalist Najwa Gibran, Armenian woodwind musician Norik Maoukian, Moroccan/Israeli dancer Maya Karasso, U.S. percussionist Jamie Papish and various other musicians from around the world in a concert that will be emceed by Ahmed Ahmed, an Egyptian born, California raised stand-up comic.

**Banzi** said the concerts make a "semi-political" statement.

"Many people in modern times think Arabs and Jews have always fought and that they have never gotten along," she said. "One of the side goals [of our concerts] is to say 'no, they haven't always fought,' and by remembering that past maybe we can help create a better future for everyone."

"Al-Andalus to Jerusalem" will take place at the Ford Amphitheatre, 2580 Cahuenga Blvd. on June 13 at 8 p.m. \$50-\$20. For tickets, call (323) 461-3673 or visit [www.fordamphitheatre.org](http://www.fordamphitheatre.org).

For more information on Al-Andalus, visit [www.andalus.com](http://www.andalus.com).

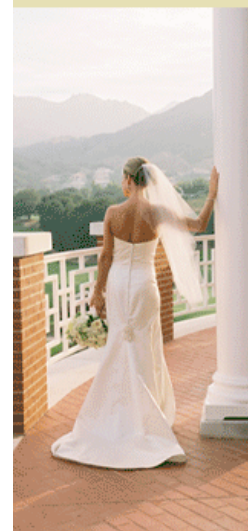
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