

Operetta based on Arabic poetry enthralls audience

By Hada Sarhan

AMMAN — More than 400 enthusiastic music lovers warmly applauded celebrated Palestinian composer Patrick Lama and a French classical music ensemble as they took to the stage at the Orthodox Club in Abdoun on Sunday.

The one-hour operetta, composed by Lama, is based on famous poems by Mahmoud Darwish entitled 'A Bed for the Stranger.'

Five musicians on cello, violin viola and contrabass were conducted by Frederick Ligiez, and the programme opened with well-known sopranos: Daria Dad'vaz of Spain and Gayle Docket from France.

"I have selected five pieces from the works of Darwish to emphasise: that our culture is a source of inspiration for several creative works," said Lama, who spent five months preparing this opus.

After two successful performances in Ramallah and Nazareth, Lama said he was overwhelmed by the enthusiastic audiences in Palestine.

"We managed to break the blockade, imposed by Israeli soldiers around Ramallah, and performed our recital for a huge audience," said the composer who currently lives in Paris.

Lama told The Jordan Times this was not his first operetta based on Darwish's poetry.

"Two years ago I presented the operetta, 'The Doves Flew Away,' which was also based on a popular Darwish poem and per-

formed by a famous Italian soprano," said Lama.

However, he admitted that it was a challenge for him to blend European classical music with Arabic poetry.

Music critics said Lama succeeded in his task.

Although the composer spent most of his life away from his homeland, his Palestinian Arab roots remain strong.

That attachment is most apparent in the production he is currently preparing: His first full-scale opera in three parts, with symphonic music and lyrics in Arabic.

Titled 'Opera Canaan,' it was to be staged at the opening of a Palestinian cultural project in Bethlehem, 'Solomon's Pools,' to mark the opera's first presentation in an Arab city.

Solomon's Pools consist of three huge pools, each more than 100 metres long and 10 metres deep, in a steep and wooded valley below Bethlehem. They date back to the time of Christ, and used to provide water for Jerusalem, through tunnels and aqueducts.

Lama told The Jordan Times he had always "dreamt of composing an Arabic opera with Arabic lyrics related to our culture and civilisation."

He said the discovery of a Canaanite tablet at Ugarit, in southern Syria, inscribed with Canaan's myths and history, was the "first step to achieve my dream."

"The opportunity came when Jihad Shareef, director of the project, invited me to present this opera in Bethlehem," said the composer.

Unfortunately, "the opening cere-

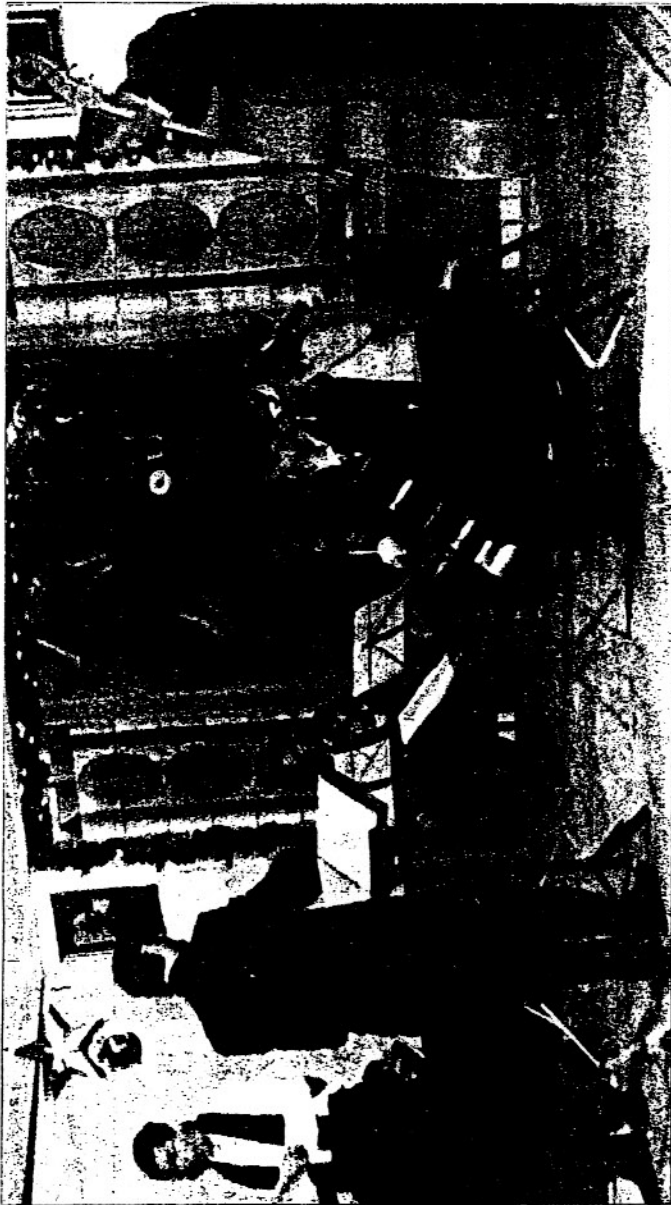


PHOTO BY HADA SARHAN

A French classical music ensemble perform at an operetta composed by Patrick Lama on Sunday at the Orthodox Club

mony has been postponed because of the Intifada," said Shareef, who was

present at Sunday's performance.

"It is a shame not to be able to stage the first Arabic opera in an Arab city," said Shareef, adding, "for a very special Arabic work."