800 Jews, Christians, Muslims sing ‘One Love’ in Jerusalem

Koolulam mass singing event at Tower of David Museum joins disparate voices in a show of unity coinciding with the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

By Abigail Klein Leichman | JULY 8, 2018, 12:50 PM

At five minutes to midnight on June 14, 2018, about 800 people waited to enter Jerusalem’s Tower of David Museum.

Jews, Muslims and Christians, young and old, most of them strangers to one another, they were forgoing a night's sleep for the chance to sing Bob Marley's "One Love" in three languages and three-part harmony as a show of unity from Israel.

The event was organized by Koolulam, a social musical project that gathers as many as 12,000 people at a time, from a broad Israeli spectrum, to film a joint singing production for sharing on Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp.

Participants in the Koolulam social music project at the Tower of David Museum. Photo by Ricky Rachman

The unusual timing of this particular mass singalong wasn't accidental.

That night was Eid al-Fitr, a holiday marking the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting and introspection, and the Jerusalem visit of Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, secretary general of Indonesia-based Nahdlatul Ulama, the world's largest Muslim organization with more than 60 million members.

Staquf had seen a Koolulam video and contacted the organization to say he was coming to Israel and wanted to be part of an interfaith social music event. Coincidentally, the Tower of David and Jerusalem.com (a website offering in-person and virtual tours of Jerusalem) wanted to sponsor such an event, says Koolulam cofounder and general manager Michal Shahaf Shneiderman.

"It was an amazing confluence and fit our agenda that each person can be part of our events no matter where he comes from or what he believes," she says. "And what could be better than this historic location to host people of three religions singing together in English, Hebrew and Arabic?"

Shneiderman says Koolulam reached out to Muslim and Christian groups that might be interested in taking part. “Happily, they all came and sang with us.”

Sold out in 7 minutes

Koolulam tickets always sell out quickly but there were fewer tickets available than usual due to space limitations at the Tower of David. They were gone in seven minutes – leaving Jerusalem resident Gaby Shine Markowitz disappointed, but not for long.

“My daughter is involved in Kids4Peace and they were offering tickets they’d bought for the families, so I went with my 11-year-old daughter and my cousin,” Markowitz tells ISRAEL21c.

The midnight start time didn’t faze her. “There aren’t many things as a young mom I’d give up my sleep for but we felt it was so beautiful we decided to do it. As an Israeli and as someone who loves to sing I think it’s an amazing initiative. And it was absolutely incredible.”

Koolulam’s crew and founders — Ben Yefet, Michal Shahaf Shneiderman and Or Taicher – run the events like clockwork.

After the crowd entered the ancient citadel-turned-museum of Jerusalem history, they were handed lyrics sheets and divided into soprano, alto and baritone groups to spend the next 45 minutes learning their parts.

Participants learned lyrics in English, Hebrew and Arabic. Photo by Gaby Shine Markowitz

“The Tower of David is a beautiful place and they had the light show going as we entered, so it was an electric atmosphere,” Markowitz recalls.

Staquf, along with Brother Franz von Sales and Israeli interfaith activist Rabbi Yakov Nagen, gave greetings and blessings to the gathering.

From left, Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, Brother Franz von Sales and Rabbi Yakov Nagen at the Koolulam music event at Tower of David, June 2018. Photo by Ricky Rachman

When sopranos, altos and baritones reconvened around the stage, Yefet conducted five takes of “One Love” combining all 800 voices.

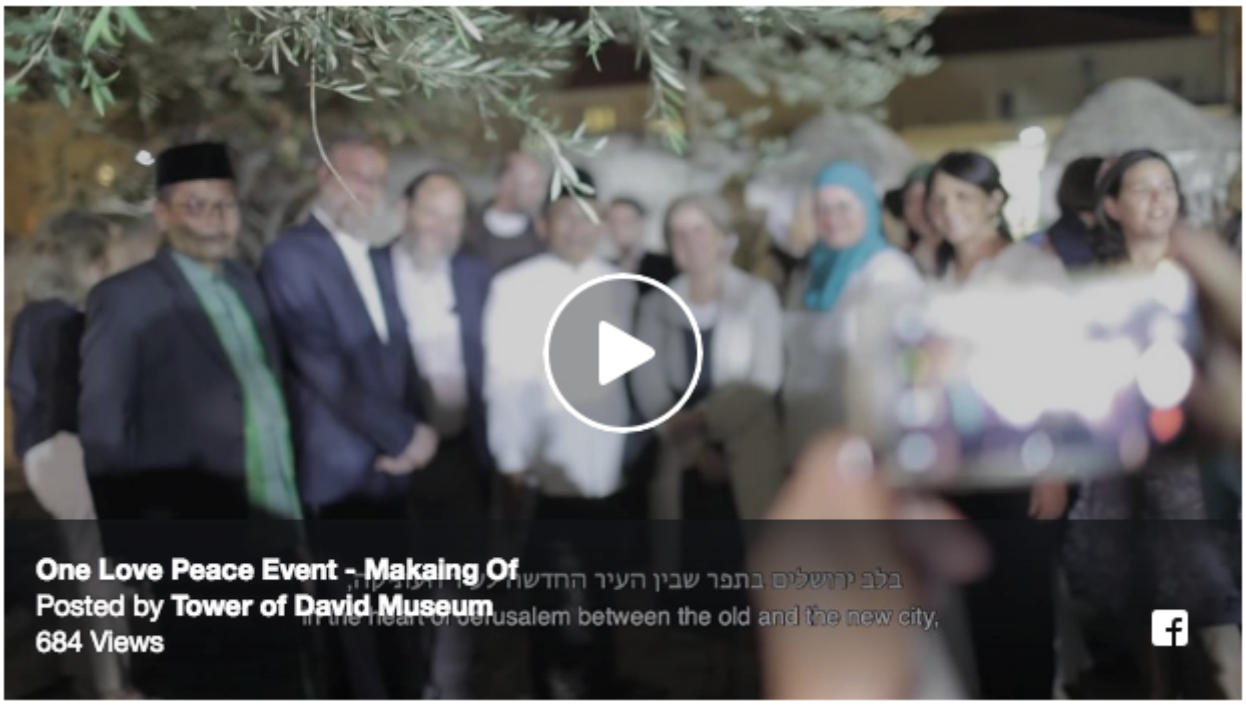
“We finished at 3:30am but it felt like the middle of the day,” says Markowitz, who can be seen at 4:03 in the video.

“It was such a buzzing, energetic atmosphere. My daughter’s eyes were shining. She said, ‘Mom, this is the most amazing experience.’ It was a privilege to be part of Jews, Christians and Muslims singing together in Jerusalem on the night of Eid.”

Partners in the singalong were the Interfaith Encounter Association, Coexistence Trip Initiative, Tiyul-Rihla, the World Jewish Congress, Bayt ar-Rahmah and many other local and international organizations involved in interfaith relations.

Michal Lichtman, founder of Jerusalem.com, explains that the Koolulam musical event was the perfect occasion for her to realize her long-held vision of “spreading good energies through sound from a place that includes all religions” to honor the memory of her late husband.

Tower of David Museum Director Eilat Lieber said she welcomed the opportunity to bring so many people throughout the world together promoting messages of peace, respect and friendship."



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