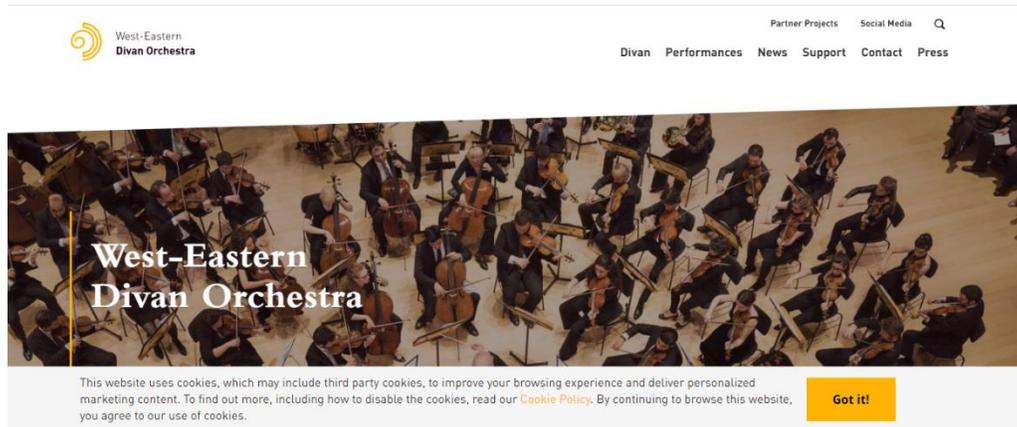


## KINNERET SUISSA

### Daniel Barenboim and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra



#### **In the context of Shared Heritage and music I focused on a case study: Daniel Barenboim and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra:**

For 20 years, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra has been a significant presence in the international music world. In 1999, Daniel Barenboim and the late Palestinian literary scholar Edward W. Said created a workshop for young musicians to promote coexistence and intercultural dialogue. They named the orchestra and workshop after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's collection of poems - "West-Eastern Diwan", a central work for the development of the concept of world culture. The orchestra's first rehearsal sessions took place in Weimar and Chicago. An equal number of Israeli and Arab musicians form the base of the ensemble, together with members from Turkey, Iran, and Spain. They meet each summer for rehearsals, followed by an international concert tour."<sup>1</sup>

#### **The research question:**

In what way does a common / opposing legacy exist in the orchestra, with reference to the instruments, music, and the ensemble of the orchestra members?

#### **Background:**

<https://west-eastern-divan.org/divan-orchestra> <sup>1</sup>

Music holds a key place in the “Intangible Cultural Heritage” of humanity, as inventoried by UNESCO since its 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Greaff, 2014). Music is a political cultural field as well as a field of symbolic social interaction, in which contested visions, memories, and cultural heritage is displayed. Social tensions around the content, transmission and consumption of music are inherent to the Ideological apparatuses of any multicultural modern state. Music creates, frames, and preserves sonic boundaries of class, gender, ethnicity and nationality. Shared music affirms our sense of identity, sense of place, and our past while marking territories with non-verbal sound. The ways music is conceived, performed, transmitted, received, preserved and forgotten, reflect our needs as individuals and as collectivities, from the level of the family to the level of the nation-state.

To understand this music phenomena which is focusing on musical heritage and to expose a range of competing visions and traditions that sustain it, one can use Clifford’s concept of 'contact zone' to examine an orchestra that challenges the model of traditional imperial repositories. The other concept is a “utopian republic” with which Daniel Barenboim described the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra and the singularity of the orchestra’s utopian projection (harmonious collaboration between Arabs and Jews) (Beckles Willson 2009a, 2009b).

### **Methodology: Interpretive research**

As a first step I analyzed the orchestra's official website and the orchestra repertoire in order to learn if these musical works and the performances online is referring to a shared heritage itself?

## **Official website analysis**

### **1. Findings**

#### **1.1 Numerical significance of Western visual imagery as opposed to Eastern imagery on the official website:**

<b>Middle Eastern visual representation</b>	<b>Western visual representation</b>	
0	12	<b>Homepage</b>
4	30	<b>Divan</b>
0	4	<b>Performances</b>
0	5	<b>News</b>
0	1	<b>Support</b>
0	1	<b>Contact</b>
0	0	<b>Press</b>
1	4	<b>Partner Projects</b>
0	0	<b>Social Media</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>Total</b>

### 1.2 **Homepage**

The homepage displays all the website's pages. All the visual imagery on the homepage are of western heritage. The literal content does not touch on the vision or contains information about the orchestra, as it mostly describes upcoming concerts. It can be concluded that the homepage represents the orchestra's activity in practice.

### 1.3 **Divan**

This category is dedicated to the orchestra's history and vision through text, video, and images.

This section contains three visual representations of the middle east, out of the four that exist in the entire website (4 out of 63).

Referencing selected texts that appear on the website:

*An equal number of Israeli and Arab musicians form the base of the ensemble, together with members from Turkey, Iran, and Spain. [...]*

*[...] That music can break down barriers previously considered insurmountable.*

*[...] The conviction that there is no military solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and that the destinies of Israelis and Palestinians are inextricably linked. Through its work and existence, the orchestra demonstrates that bridges can be built to encourage people to listen to the other's narrative.*

(Restored from: <https://west-eastern-divan.org/divan-orchestra> on 2020-12-08)

According to the text, there is a representational equality between all members of the ensemble: Israelis and Arabs from different countries. Additionally, it claims that music possesses the power to connect between people across barriers that are considered non-breachable, and that the orchestra demonstrates how one can create a connection and encourage people to be more attentive to each other's narrative.

#### 1.4 Concerts

From browsing this section, the conclusion is that the vast majority of the orchestra's concerts occur in western countries, mostly Europe and the USA. Out of the many concerts between 2017-2020, only one concert was conducted outside of these countries, in Chile.



#### 1.5 News

An overwhelming majority of the media coverage of concerts are from western news sources.

## 1.6 . Support

This page presents options to donate to the orchestra, a list of regular contributors.

When a user chooses to donate, a page called “What we do” will be available with the following text:

*We are not a political organization. We cannot solve the Middle East conflict. But we believe that the destinies of Palestinians and Israelis are inextricably linked and that we can help break barriers considered insurmountable. Music makes people emotionally receptive. The very structures and forms of music are central to human interaction. The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra opens up channels of communication based on equality, cooperation and justice for all. Our musicians don't just listen to music: they listen to each other.*

(Restored from: <https://barenboimsaidusa.org/what-we-do/> on 2021-01-17)

The first sentence specifically says that this is not a political organization, with no intention to resolve or address the conflict in the middle east. Instead, they believe that through music, they wish to connect between people and to create a dialogue based on equality, cooperation and justice for all. The last sentence details: “*Our musicians don't just listen to music: they listen to each other.*”

The page later links to two of its partner projects: The Barenboim-Said Akademie in Berlin & The Barenboim-Said Music Center in Ramallah.

As mentioned, the Support Us page mentions regular contributors, including large corporations such as BMW and Quintet (a private Luxembourgish bank owned by a Qatari family).

## 1.7 Contact

Communication is done exclusively in English, to German organizations, with the official institute located in Berlin.

## 1.8 Press

It seems the photos on this section were PR driven and are used as marketing material for the main target audience of the orchestra.

## 1.9 Partner Projects

Between the seven different partner projects, one is located in Ramallah, one in New-York, another in Spain, and the rest are based in Berlin, which makes the vast majority of them be based in western countries.

1. BARENBOIM-SAID AKADEMIE, BERLIN
2. PIERRE BOULEZ SAAL, BERLIN
3. BARENBOIM-SAID FOR MUSIC, RAMALLAH
4. BERLIN MUSIK KINDERGARTEN
5. DANIEL BARENBOIM STIFTUNG, BERLIN
6. BARENBOIM-SAID FOUNDATION (USA), NEW YORK
7. FUNDACIÓN BARENBOIM-SAID, SEVILLA



### 1.10 Berlin Musik Kindergarten & Barenboim-Said for Music, Ramallah

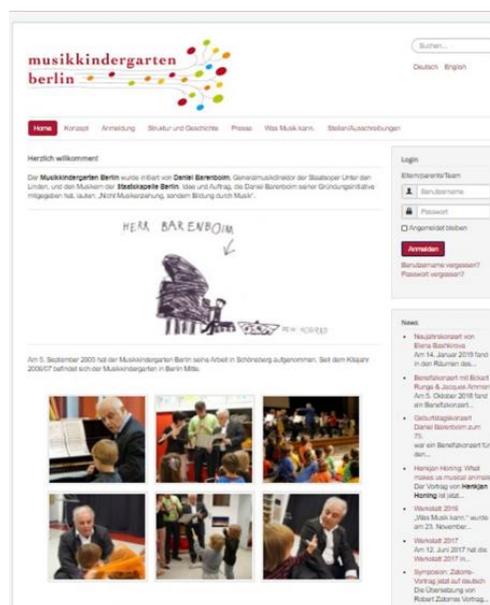
Education for equality, justice, and cooperation through music

The website holds a “Partner Projects” category, which contains seven such projects. One is a music center in Ramallah, and one is a kindergarten in Berlin. Each project has its own webpage.

The Ramallah music center's website is lacking in content and presents a paragraph about Said, one about Barenboim and one explaining the project: *"The Barenboim-Said Center for Music aims to build an informed and vibrant Palestinian society where music plays an integral part in educational development and shapes the identity of children and young adults."*

(Restored from: <https://www.barenboimsaidformusic.com/> on 2020-12-01)

This is while the Berlin kindergarten's website contains extensive information, is divided into subcategories, and holds a friendly UI. According to its visual imagery it seems to have been designed for the children participating in the project. There is no representational equality in projects in the west and the middle east in practice, which stands in contrast to the portrayed vision of the orchestra.

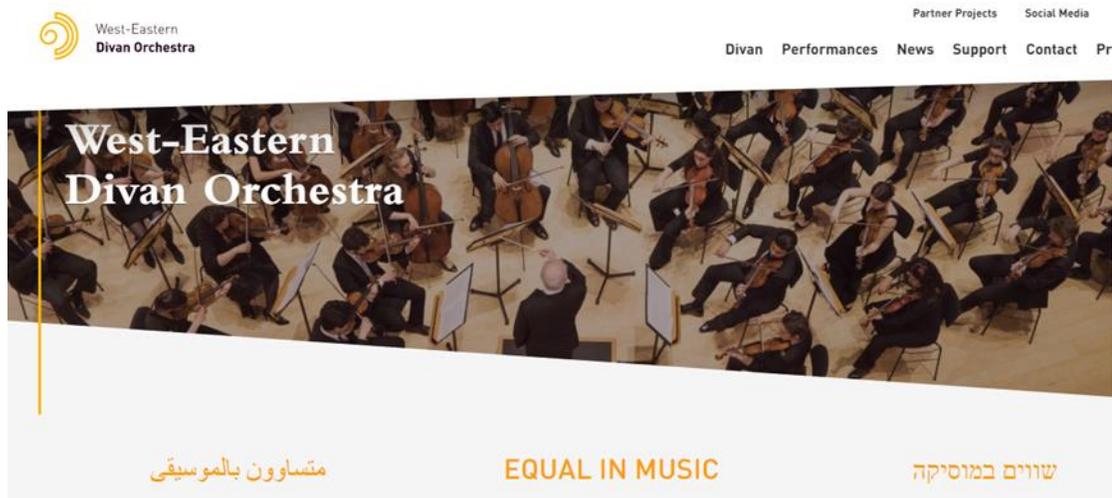


### 1.11 Social Media

Most of the social media content of the orchestra is covering concerts and media images. The vast majority of imagery is western in nature since the concerts, outfits, and concert halls are western in style and design.

### 1.12 Analyzing the orchestra's logo: "Equal in Music"

According to the visual findings, the term "Equal in Music" in fact references western music strictly. While the musicians are "eastern-western", it seems the option of bridging the gap and the musical education on display is explicitly western music.



### Conclusions out of the visual study

This study examined the ways in which cultural interpretations are constructed, translated, and exposed through the relationship between visual and literal imagery. Additionally, I observed what is the social function of visual imagery and how it might reflect and apply a certain power structure that the organization, through its website, wishes to expose or hide. In this study I analyzed the visual dialogue the orchestra defines and represents itself with, through the website. By utilizing a visual study based academic approach, I analyzed the visual imagery in a wide social context within which such imagery is constructed and consumed. This approach allowed me to examine how the orchestra represents, brand, and market itself through its online presence. This visual study lens allowed me to study how the orchestra's website functions as a carrier of policy and vision, as well as how the orchestra would like to be perceived. At the same time, this

allowed me to point out the differences between the literal and visual dialogue on display. If meaning is constructed through the relationship between the visual and literal, one can perceive that the visual component is aimed at a mid-to-high socio-economic class of western heritage.

Contrasts with the visual component that emphasizes equality between west-east.

According to the ethnographic observation method developed by Tamar Liv and Susunia Livingstone, text limits the observer to some extent due to framing (Mann et al., 2000). The content on-site is supposed to represent the ideal vision, which is represented by the literal logo "Equal in Music". Weighing the visual and textual imagery, which includes placements, word count, title and image placement, performances across the western world, terms, opinions, and ideas, there is a contrast between the literal logo and the visual display. Both content and accessibility wise, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra's website is overwhelmingly representing its western audience demographic.

In conclusion, even though the virtual space creates unique patterns of interactions that might not represent the "real world" outside it, and while there are certain social nuances that might be lost in such a space, it seems there is a weak connection between the literal ideal and the visual display for the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra's website.

## **Interviews**

In the second step, I took a closer look at the orchestra members in order to learn about the experience of being in the orchestra and made two interviews with an orchestra member, based in Berlin, originally from Israel, to find out what the shared or contradictory heritage is, that comes together in the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra.

**In the first interview** the orchestra member talked about his personal experience. He said that he is not connected to eastern music and that generally it does not represent his heritage: "It was more like Led Zeppelin or Pink Floyd or stuff like this and not so much of classical music". Also, that classical music is for all but at the same time it relates to Europe's origin heritage:

I mean yeah, also in the middle east in Lebanon and Syria from what I understand it's kind of the same they also don't come from a really, I mean basically whoever is not from Europe will probably not come from these surroundings like only people from Europe have these foundations like that they really grow up with this

kind of music and they really know a lot more about those kinds of stuff. But maybe this is what connects us in the orchestra because we come from this not these typical places, which this kind of musicians will become.

The member's shared narratives and shared heritage according to the interview is their similarity: they are a group of musicians that plays in a big orchestra abroad:

It's always this feeling of connection that we all come from different places but we have the same destiny, but the truth is we are just people and we play for fun and we don't care about politics and stuff like this so it does happen, but also Barenboim when he said in those interviews so he said it's like kind of this orchestra is kind of utopia, so I mean it will not, I think like Barenboim also from one side he tries to show, look it can happen, like peace can happen and its possible, but also on the other hand he says he is realistic and he says like it's kind of heaven this orchestra because it's not really related to reality in some way, like of you look at politics, especially in the short term, I guess that in the long term like it's of course it's possible and it will happen eventually but I mean of course in the next years it will probably not happen like this kind of peace or, but yeah inside the orchestra its completely peaceful there is no hard feelings from anyone.

He believes that music and arts are the glue that keeps them together, and that classical music is relatable for everyone, even if their own roots are from different places and traditions:

I mean classical music it has also this stereotype that it's only for people who really know, like you need to know a lot in order to enjoy it and need to be sophisticated and smart and stuff like this, but I think it's like a real stigma", " the main reason why we get along so well in the orchestra is because we have this music, I am sure that also if we would meet in another occasion it would have been completely fine. It's hard for me to imagine this happens without music. think if it would be another kind of art it would probably be the same chemistry but yeah definitely the music has a role in this kind of heritage because also every

job is important in the orchestra, so I also think this kind of relationship connection inside an orchestra amplifies this kind of connection between us like between, like this heritage, that we feel connected more easily.

The second interview focused on the place of the East in the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. To understand how the rich human diversity is represented in the orchestra, the interviewee was asked about the origin of the orchestra's name, why does he think there are no sponsors from the Mideast or concerts in the region, and what is the practical place of the Middle - Eastern music in the orchestra. The interviewee mentioned he has no part in these matters since he is just a player. When asked about Mideastern music, he replied that they played a modern-western piece by a Mideastern composer. The conclusion from the second interview is that the part of the east in the orchestra is the fact that most of the musician's origin is in the Middle East. Farther than that, they play western classical music in western countries for western audience.

## **Conclusions**

It seems the orchestra provides an opportunistic chance to classical trained musicians that happened to grow up in the middle east. The concept of "shared heritage" seems to be reflected in the positive experience the musicians experience in the project. According to the interviewee, it seems the social climate is warm and accepting, especially in comparison to other professional orchestras. The opportunity to play in a world-renown orchestra seems to be a source of pride for the young musicians that have a shared experience and get to work together. However, it seems there is no reference to middle eastern music, political dialogue, or any expectation from said musicians to return to their home countries and develop similar initiatives afterwards. As mentioned in the first interview - the orchestra feels like a utopia. It is my opinion that the term of opposing heritage is not being expressed either, since as in utopias, the chance for friction or debate does not come up .

Additionally, as previously mentioned, there is no reference to Eastern music which represents the cultural heritage of the musicians in the orchestra, so the difference and the dialogue about the difference between the different people is not being expressed as well. The focus is on the similarity of the participants of the program as classically trained musicians, the majority of

which are immigrants from the middle east, that received an excellent professional opportunity to develop as individual musicians.

To summarize, the emphasis is on the similar, through art and music, even if it a somewhat shallow connection, as it does not bring into attention the richness and diversity of the different cultures. In that way, multiculturalism is not really being expressed, as far as musical representation is concerned. The orchestra brands itself as a symbol of co-existence and multiculturalism. It displays to its audience a utopian vision of members of hostile countries coming together through creative, cooperative, musical work. In practice, the connection is made through one cultural heritage, that does not represent its middle eastern members. The middle eastern representation is not through the end-product of the project, which is the music, but by the origin of the different musicians. The conclusions from the interview match the conclusion from the visual study of the orchestra's website - there is a wide gap between what is outwardly presented and what is applied in practice.

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