

Blacklisted on the West Bank, Basel Zayed has settled into his new musical home in Boston

By **Noah Schaffer** Globe correspondent, Updated January 10, 2024, 2:23 p.m.



Oud player Basel Zayed's show at the Crystal Ballroom Jan. 18 is sold out. KIM CONANT

Ask Palestinian singer, songwriter, and oud player Basel Zayed what brought him to Boston, and he talks about an album he made in 2009. One song, “The IDF are

Victorious,” was a critique of the Israeli military. When his producer was driving the new CDs from Israel to the West Bank city of Ramallah, where Zayed lived at the time, Zayed says an Israeli soldier saw the title and confiscated the CDs. Things were not any easier on the West Bank. Zayed attempted to play his song “Doleh (Statehood),” a sardonic jab at the Palestinian Authority, at a New Year’s festival at the end of 2011. He says authorities stopped him mid-song and gave him a choice: Stop singing or go to jail.

Once courted to be a Palestinian Authority-sponsored pop star, Zayed found himself on what he calls a “very long blacklist.” In 2016, he and his family moved to Boston, where his wife is from. Zayed was surprised and delighted to discover that the region is full of musicians who are fellow masters of Middle Eastern music, and he’s started to collaborate with them in both traditional and Middle Eastern jazz contexts. His highest-profile Boston show to date is a sold-out [Global Arts Live](#) presentation at the Crystal Ballroom at the Somerville Theatre on Jan. 18 that will combine his own poetic songs with the virtuosity of the traditional improvisatory Arabic musical form [maqam](#).

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arfentine

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Wish we could be there...
Sending blessings and prayers for Peace.
R. & T., NYC



localjake

Absence, the inevitable consequence of violence. Peace!

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