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Children Of The Stone: The Power Of Music In A Hard Land



Synopsis

It is an unlikely story. Ramzi Hussein Aburedwan, a child from a Palestinian refugee camp, confronts an occupying army, gets an education, masters an instrument, dreams of something much bigger than himself, and then, through his charisma and persistence, inspires others to work with him to make that dream real. The dream: a school to transform the lives of thousands of children--as Ramzi's life was transformed--through music. Musicians from all over the world came to help. A violist left the London Symphony Orchestra, in part to work with Ramzi at his new school. Daniel Barenboim, the eminent Israeli conductor, invited Ramzi to join his West Eastern Divan Orchestra, which he founded with the late Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said. Since then the two have played together frequently. Children of the Stone chronicles Ramzi's journey--from stone thrower to music student to school founder--and shows how through his love of music he created something lasting and beautiful in a land torn by violence and war. This is a story about the power of music, but also about freedom and conflict, determination and vision. It's a vivid portrait of life amid checkpoints and military occupation, a growing movement of nonviolent resistance, the prospects of musical collaboration across the Israeli-Palestinian divide, and the potential of music to help children everywhere see new possibilities for their lives.

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Customer Reviews

This was a remarkable book in nearly every way. It was one of the most well researched books I've ever read. About 25% of the book is notes regarding source materials. Tolan (who's actually a man

despite the first name Sandy) goes to great lengths to document his research. He spent quite a lot of time in Palestine interviewing people and experiencing what he documents first hand. He truly immersed himself in the struggle in order to understand and then write about it. I thought that book was incredibly well balanced. Tolan writes like a journalist and it reads like a 315 page newspaper article (from the BBC). The emotions he portrays are well explained with history, personal trauma and personal thoughts all combined in a coherent way that allows you to understand the motives behind why people were behaving the way they were. Truly you could see both sides to every conflict, even Israel's perspective though he does not skirt around the issue of power and international funding. He does not cover the Israeli perspective in much depth, but it is clearly beyond the scope of the book. He does make effort to point out that because every Israeli is required to serve for two years in the military, no one is truly innocent or oblivious. Tolan touches on how the culture of Palestine affects their response and I found myself thinking about how terrorism as a response has been more of a retaliation than I understood. So many people groups accept their oppression and while I'm not supporting terrorism, it makes you wonder why this response has been so poorly understood. There are some parallels here to the Revolutionary War. He does explain that most Palestinians did not support violence and I did appreciate the shift to non-violent means at the end.

What a sprawling history this is - managing to achieve the very difficult feat of telling the personal story of Palestinian musicians mixed with the on-going tragic history of Israel and the Palestinians. Author Sandy Tolan can not be accused of having set small goals for himself! If I have a criticism it's that the detail is so tight and specific, and storytelling so immersive, that I had to set the book down for days at a time. I was overwhelmed by the information on one end, and the intense personal story on the other. While I think Tolan has done a great job of being objective to all sides in this conflict, in the end my sympathies stayed with the Palestinians. For all the mistakes of their leadership, the average citizen of Gaza or the West Bank is given no break - between the Palestinian informers and revenge killings, and constant threats from the Israeli police and military, there is no way to keep their head down and move forward. The attempt by Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim to bring a musical common ground works - sort of. But the musicians are never able to separate their nationalities enough to find complete common ground with each other. I can't help but compare it to the US. Here, we face no day-to-day threat from anyone, except the boogeymen we've created in our minds, and yet we're still irrationally afraid of some faceless Islamic threat. In Israel, acts of violence are a legitimate risk. If we see how crazy we've gotten with NO threat, it's understandable -

though not excused - how Israel has decided to behave so vengefully. Any student of history knows that most of the techniques used by Palestinians today were first used by Zionists fighting the British occupation. Meet the new boss, and all that.

CHILDREN OF THE STONE is a painful book to read. The plight of the Palestinians - most of them innocent of wrongdoings against the Israelis - is heartrending and an international tragedy. Yet Sandy Tolan's courageous and eloquent account of the Palestinian boy Ramzi and how he, with the help of many others, gave meaning and hope to Palestinian children by teaching them to play musical instruments and perform, is deeply inspiring. It also reveals that Israelis and Palestinians can cooperate in actions for the good of both people - if only the extremists on both sides had such a mindset! CHILDREN OF THE STONE focuses upon the true story of Ramzi Aburedwan, who grew up under restrictive conditions in a Palestinian refugee camp. Like many Palestinian children, he witnessed other children being killed, and knew many adults who were also maimed or killed by Israeli weapons. Young Ramzi protested the occupation by throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. A famous photograph of him as a child throwing stones received considerable publicity worldwide. Fortunately, when Ramzi was still a child he was given the rare opportunity to learn the viola. His love of music and dedication to developing his skill led him to eventually receive scholarships to study music in the U.S. and France, and later to perform with the West-Eastern Divan orchestra of Daniel Barenboim. Argentinian Israeli Barenboim was devoted to maintaining an orchestra that included Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Muslims.

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