

NOCTURNE IN BLACK

EXPLORATION GUIDE

1

The filmmaker, Jimmy Keyrouz, was inspired to tell this story after hearing reports in 2014 that music was being banned in Syria by the ISIS authorities. He thought it was inconceivable that something as beautiful as music along with many other daily pleasures could be outlawed. After doing further research Jimmy discovered the true story of Aeham Ahmad, the "Pianist of Yarmouk", who was known for playing the piano in the midst of the rubble on the streets of Damascus and in a Palestinian refugee camp in Yarmouk where he was living to escape the Syrian conflict.

Reflect on the importance of music in your own life. Describe the impact music has played during seasons of joy and celebration or when you have gone through experiences of pain and sorrow?

2

Over the course of the film we see the hope of various individuals slowly slip away surrounded by the ravages of the civil war and random threats of violence. Simple daily tasks serve as a reminder of the humanity of the victims of this war (Ziad wanting to learn how to play the piano, the shopkeeper protecting his glass window with tape, the grandmother knitting, the children playing soccer). We become aware that playing the piano was something that once brought tremendous joy to Karim, but over the course of the film repairing his piano simply becomes a way for him to secure enough money to escape these circumstances.

What are some of the events and exchanges with other people that break through Karim's cynicism and discouragement to motivate him to keep fighting? Can you recall a time when you experienced a sense of hopelessness and despair? What gave you hope in this situation?

3

The film ends with an act of defiance where Karim is able to once again find his voice by playing the piano in public to express his unwillingness to be dehumanized by the war and the threats of violence by the ISIS soldiers. It is also a way for him to offer hope to the others in the neighborhood who are inspired to join him in an expression of defiant solidarity.

Artists play an important role during difficult times to give a voice to those who are oppressed and offer hope to those who are discouraged. Where have you experienced this role of art and artists in your own life or in the circumstances of the broader society or the global community?

4

In his interview in "the W", Jimmy speaks about our current situation and the ways that we are feeling discouraged and trapped because of the coronavirus lockdown. He reminds us about one of his favorite quotes from Vivian Greene, "Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning how to dance in the rain."

What are some of the ways that you have learned to "dance in the rain" in the midst of challenging circumstances?