

Reel Festival Showcases the Real Iraq



Set up to to enhance bonds of connection and harmony between Iraq and the rest of the world through culture, the Reel Iraq Festival is due to take place in Edinburgh to mark the tenth anniversary of its invasion. It will take place between the 16-24 March 2013 at various venues in the city, as well as at different parts of the country.

The festival aims to showcase the cultural heritage of Iraq, it is a means of building bridges, raising awareness and showing Britons the ancient culture which was at the forefront of civilisation. It is also a means to empower Iraqis, and for people to learn from and connect through their arts, according to organiser Lynn Pynott. A variety of events are listed, targeted at different audiences, from a serious panel discussion to a reading by the renowned writer Hassan Blassim's who reads from his book *The Iraqi Christ*, and Bressm and Lord Erregal, who on the opening night play a mixture of emo, punk, and metal. There is also an oud workshop, a traditional Iraqi instrument.



Pynott said:- "The idea is to shed some light behind the headlines, we would like to mark the anniversary, and for people to understand a bit more of the culture and go behind the invasion."

Portraying this culture, and the loss of it due to the war is Parine Jaddo, one of the featured artists, with her documentary, *Broken Record*. She said the film was made as a tribute to her mother who died in 2008, and who had been a teacher as one of the first generation of women to work in

Iraq. She had been a daring woman, recording songs with her brothers in the 1960s. During the film, Parine goes in search of this recording, travelling around Iraq and in Kirkurk, at her home city of Turkmen. She explained :-“The rich heritage of music and culture was ‘burnt and lost, the beautiful cities destroyed. It was very painful.” She said that some paintings and museum artefacts are being returned, but nothing is being done about music. She described this loss as a “Broken Record”, hence the title of her film.



Of the changes which took place in the country, Jaddo said:- “It does not make sense because I don’t recognise the Iraq I know. Although Iraq is rich in oil, there are many problems such as lack of infrastructure that was fully functioning before, things like electricity, roads that are full of pot holes, and a dysfunctional medical care system, to list a few.”

“However there is hope, there seems to be a cultural resistance taking place in the country, there are a whole bunch of young musicians and all the old instruments are still alive.” Parine sees herself as part of that resistance, by creating awareness of the cultural loss, through a personal film which also relates to the universal, for the cultural loss concerns the “human family” of which everyone is a part. She explained:-“Funds are needed to enable increased awareness of the culture and its loss, and ultimately I keep a positive attitude and hope to make as many films as I can.”

Parine’s film emphasises a global shared understanding through the vehicle of the universal language of music, through which people can relate to culture as well as the pain of loss. Although a personal film, she hopes that it emphasises what is most important to human beings, and that is their uniqueness

and the ability to express themselves as individuals and as part of a community, and it also highlights the importance of connections between communities.

The Festival is organised by Reel Festivals, which run annually. It started with Reel Afghanistan in 2008. The organisers comprise of a team of 8 volunteers, It is funded by various NGOs including the British Council and Firefly International. The first leg of this year's festival took place in Iraq, said Pynott, with a combination of British and Iraqi poets who translated each others' work in the context of the 'ugliness and violence' of the war expressed terms of a culture and a shared empathy.

For more information, visit <http://www.reelfestivals.org/>