

A Heartbeat away: How to engage youth through music

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Heartbeat founder Aaron Shneyer on the potential of music to engage youth in peace building.

Catchy melodies, groovy rhythms and striking lyrics about war, separation and the possibility of peace filled the air on a Sunday evening in late February at Busboys and Poets, the eclectic café, restaurant, book store and performance space in Washington, D.C.

On stage was a group of young Israeli and Palestinian musicians called [Heartbeat](#), an organization founded in 2007 in Israel to foster peace and understanding through music in a part of the world that has seen much devastating violence and conflict.

The group was playing its first in a series of U.S. shows, and they did not disappoint. Audience members leaned in, bobbing their heads and tapping their toes. Some wore hijabs, others sported yamakas; all were entranced by the music.

Founded by musician and Georgetown alum Aaron Shneyer with a grant from Fulbright and MTV, Heartbeat encompasses music workshops, camps, retreats and overseas exchanges for Israelis and Palestinians between the ages of 14 and 24. So far, more than 100 musicians from cities such as Haifa, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Bethlehem, Hebron and Ramallah have participated.

“I think the essence of the issue we’re facing in the world is that very few people have a voice,” Shneyer told Devex. “And music is one very powerful way for a silent majority of people to speak up, to be heard, to connect with others on the other side of conflict ... and really work together to find the commonalities and find the opportunities to create together.”

The musicians’ upbeat, danceable songs kept the café’s large audience moving that Sunday evening; stark and thought-provoking lyrics opened the door to a dialogue that lasted well into the night.

That conversation continued when two members of Heartbeat, 23-year-old Guy Gefen from Rehovot and 18-year-old Rasha Mahas from Haifa, visited the Devex office to perform and explain what the group means to them.

Heartbeat members Guy Gefen and Rasha Mahas talk about building bridges.

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