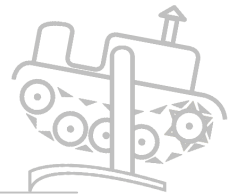


BRICUP
British Committee for
Universities of Palestine



AN OPEN LETTER TO BRANFORD MARSALIS

*from the British Committee
for the Universities of Palestine
info@bricup.org.uk*

17 June 2008

Dear Branford Marsalis:

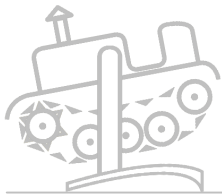
Inventive and independent musician that you are, it seems to us that you're constantly exploring aspects of black American experience. And jazz is one of the most triumphant expressions of African-Americans' resistance to forced removal, ruthless suppression, and murderous racism.

Yet you are reportedly going to play a concert in a country whose government and army are even now inflicting similar cruelties on another people. Is it possible that when you agreed to play in Tel Aviv on July 17, you did not think what message this would send to the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine, many of whom now live in refugee camps outside their homeland, or in exile across the world? They were driven out en masse in 1948 and 1967, and no Israeli government has ever allowed them, their children, or their children's children, to return.

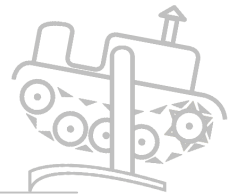
Palestinians may not have been transported in stinking, deathly slave-ships, but they are as unwilling a diaspora as the millions of Africans whose forced labour and intense suffering built the wealth of the 'New World' (and the old one).

We are writing to ask you to reconsider your decision to play in Israel. We are wondering how a musician with your sensitivity will be able to stand on a stage and play reflective, subtle jazz while less than an hour's drive away, a million-and-a-half people in Gaza -- two-thirds of them refugees -- endure yet another night of hunger, darkness and fear because of the iron-clad siege the Israeli government has enforced against them for years.

Perhaps you saw that in May, former archbishop Desmond Tutu described this siege as an 'abomination'. Maybe you read former US president Jimmy Carter's article in the UK paper *The Guardian*, describing what the Israelis are doing to Palestinians in Gaza as 'a terrible human rights crime'. How will you keep the echo of their words out of your head?



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When Ken Burns interviewed you for his television series, you said what drew you to jazz is that it's 'about freedom'. Yet you will be playing to an audience whose government and army operate a rigid system of checkpoints that keep several million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza de facto prisoners in their towns and villages. Many in your audience will be young Israelis who are inflicting this misery -- but Palestinian fans of Branford Marsalis from the Occupied West Bank and Gaza will not be allowed into Israel to hear you. Would you have agreed to play to a white South African audience under apartheid?

If you stand up on that stage in the Tel Aviv opera house you'll be telling the Palestinians their suffering -- the product of colonialism and racism -- doesn't matter. You'll be saying you don't care that Palestinian civil society has issued a strong call to artists to boycott Israel (you can see it on www.pacbi.org). You'll be giving a slap in the face to the Palestinian musicians, artists, film-makers, writers and poets, who keep hope alive in circumstances meant to suffocate and crush them.

How can you, in all conscience, play Sonny Rollins' 'Freedom Suite' in Tel Aviv? Please don't go.

Yours sincerely,
Professor Haim Bresheeth
Professor Jonathan Rosenhead

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