The hidden story of Iraqi music...

On the Banks of the Tigris

A feature-length documentary

Majid Shokor, an Iraqi of Shi'a Muslim background, seeks the source of the songs he loves and discovers a hidden history – the Jewish contribution to Iraqi music.

A celebration of the cultural ties that link all Iraqis. Featuring top performers from around the world.

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Ahmed Mukhtar

Iman

Abraham Salman

Elias Shasha

Alber Elias

Yair Dalal with Majid

When Majid Shokor escaped from Iraq he discovered a hidden history – that many songs Iraqis love to sing were written and performed by Jews. The Jews lived in Iraq for over 2,000 years and made a great contribution to Iraqi music and culture.

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This story is Majid's search for the creators of the songs he loves and the performers who still sing and play them today.

His journey begins in the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan, which is 80% Iraqi Jewish. Majid makes instant friends with everyone he meets – from musicians at their weekly rehearsal to sweet sellers in the "Little Baghdad" market.

The musicians are delighted to meet an Iraqi Muslim who sings along with all their songs. The scene takes us back to old Baghdad, where Muslims, Jews and Christians played together in cafes and concert halls.

Elias Shasha, Abraham Salman, and Alber Elias, now in their 80s, welcome Majid to their homes. They play music and tell stories about the good life in Iraq - playing in the radio orchestra and eating masgouf on the Tigris. Photos and archival footage show the happy times that ended when they fled in the 1950s.

World music star Yair Dalal teaches Iraqi music to young Israelis at the Rimon School of Jazz. The students improvise clarinet and saxophone solos from the tunes. Yair and Majid discuss their dream of a concert to bring Iraqi musicians of all traditions together.

In London, Majid meets the great oud player Ahmed Mukhtar, another refugee from Saddam's regime who believes in music's unifying power. In Amsterdam, he finds Farida, the greatest living interpreter of Iraqi maqam singing. Her son Latif takes Iraqi music into new realms with Orient Express, an Arab-jazz fusion band.

In New York and New Mexico, Sydney and Stockholm, Iraqi music is played and sung. The Jewish contribution, censored by Saddam, will be celebrated when musicians from all Iraqi traditions perform together in concert.

On the Banks of the Tigris is a musical journey and story of cultural connection that offers hope for peace and reconciliation in a new Iraq.

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