

Baalbek Festival brings its 'Sound of Resilience' to TV, social media

Maestro Fazlian said on Twitter: "Despite the difficulties and challenges, Jupiter's pillars will sway and Bacchus Temple will shine bright".

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Roman columns at Baalbek. (Photo credit: Sleiman Amhaz)

BEIRUT--Lebanese will not be able to attend the Baalbek concert festival this year due to the coronavirus pandemic and economic crisis. Instead, a single concert with no audience will be broadcast on local, Arab and international TV channels and social media platforms on July 5.

"This year, we are bringing the Baalbek International Festival to you. Coming soon, a live broadcast concert from the heart of the Bacchus Temple," said the festival's organising committee on its official website.

The concert, entitled "The Sound of Resilience," will be held on the 100th anniversary of the Great Lebanon Declaration and the 250th anniversary of the birth of Beethoven, the committee added.

"It is essential the festival go on. We want to tell everyone that culture is the foundation of our lives. This is a survival concert. Culture is a message of resilience, unity and hope," chairwoman of the Baalbek International Festival Committee Nayla de Freige told media.

Founded in 1956 by then-President Camille Chamoun, the Baalbek International Festival is a popular annual cultural event attracting a worldwide audience. It presents classical music, dance, theatre, opera, ballet, and jazz as well as modern world music by both local and international performers.

The festival was halted during Lebanon's 15-year civil war. It was also suspended during a war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006, when the modern part of Baalbek was heavily bombed. Baalbek, 70 km (40 miles) east of Beirut and 10 km from the border with Syria.

"Before the pandemic, the Baalbek festival was to be limited to two parties, local and foreign, through which we prove our continuity, but due to the health crisis we are unable to bring in artists from abroad. (...)we took the suggestion of Maestro Harout Fazlian (the Principal Conductor of the Lebanese Philharmonic Orchestra) to perform a concert and lyric without an audience," de Freige added

Maestro Fazlian, who will conduct the concert, said "music gives hope. It is a universal language that unites peoples. He added on Twitter: "Despite the difficulties and challenges, Jupiter's pillars will sway and Bacchus Temple will shine bright".

The 170 musicians will be distributed in the courtyard of the Bacchus Temple, observing appropriate social distance guidelines, presenting a programme consisting of various musical styles. "It will satisfy the audience of the festival," said de Freige.

The programme includes classical and Lebanese music from the works of the Rahabani brothers, in addition to rock music. The scenography of the concert was written by Jean-Louis Mange and Rafik Ali Ahmed, interspersed with a choreography by Charles McCris band.

Fazlian noted that he hopes the programme will "show the presence of youth and equality between men and women, by having two teenagers play electric guitar", adding that he chooses to end the concert with Beethoven's ninth symphony 'The Song of Joy', reminding that it "expresses unity, solidarity and solidarity."