



ARTISTS OF THE MONTH

Typo

Although Gaza is no stranger to music, this band is different. Typo is Gaza's first group to specialize in rock music and release a full album. Living under siege, the band members take their inspiration from Arab streets in general and Palestinian streets in particular to write and produce almost exclusively their own songs.

The idea of forming Typo began in Gaza City in 2012, when guitarist Alaa Al-Hamalawi and singer and guitarist Mohammed Zohud decided to set up a small group to write songs that reflect on the reality in which they live. They chose the name Typo because "Typos are arbitrary, just like everything in Gaza. We didn't plan to have a band, it just sort of happened without a plan, like a typo."

Rock music not being a genre familiar to average Gazan audiences, the band had to search for its niche and initially found it at the French Cultural Center in Gaza City. Unfortunately, the first two

concerts in Gaza that had been planned for 2014 had to be cancelled due to Israeli air strikes and an attack on the center by an Islamist fundamentalist.

At various times the band has included seven people, but it produced its first song titled "Dream of Dawn" as a trio, with Mohammed and Alaa being joined by Islam Shanghan on drums. It was written after the 2014 assault on Gaza with the intention of sending a message of hope after the destruction caused by the war. Released with success in 2015, the song resonated well among interested local listeners.

As Typo advanced in the A. M. Qattan Foundation's competition for contemporary art productions,* it won enough money to produce its first album. Called *First Mistake (Awal Khata'a)*, it consists of eight songs that evoke the experience of any Palestinian living in Palestine in general and the Gaza Strip in particular. The songs explore social conditions in the Arab

world, especially in Palestine, such as poverty, child labor, hope, love, and youth migration. Typo's unusual musical style mixes Arabic rhythms with rock music. As Islam explains, "Arab audiences like to clap along, and they tend not to respond very well to Western rhythms."

Currently, Typo features five members: Mohammed Zohud, vocals and guitar, Mohammed Al-Balawi on bass guitar, Samir Alborno on keyboard, Islam Shanghan on drums, and Eissa Allouh as coordinator and public relations officer. The group has participated in numerous local celebrations and musical events but unfortunately was twice prevented by Israel from traveling to hold concerts in West Bank cities. Thus, it could not perform live at the Palestinian Music Expo in Ramallah in April 2017, but participated via video-conferencing instead.

Due to the difficult situation in Gaza, Typo lacks a place for rehearsals. Initially, Mohammed and Alaa used to rehearse under the burning sun on the rooftop of Alaa's home, taking breaks by smoking some shisha. Now, however, they practice in a rented room in a local school. The band suffers from a lack of equipment, and some band members have to borrow instruments from friends, which impedes the

band's musical development. Lack of electricity is another difficulty with which the band has to cope, as it has to use a generator – which poses a financial burden. Nevertheless, Typo is preparing the production of its second album, searching for ways to get around the lack of financial and logistical resources that is so prevalent among many enterprises in Gaza.

Typo band members dream of making a name for themselves and of bringing the voice of Gaza and Palestine to the outside world in rock style, which they consider to be one of the most beautiful types of musical expression.

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