

## ARTIST OF THE MONTH

### Rana Khoury & Darwish Darwish



*Interviewed by Ahmad Damen*

The musical duo, Rana of Haifa and Darwish of Rameh, were joined together by their passion for music and their love and bond of marriage. Their official start was in 2004 when they formed their band, "Junoon" (*craziness* in Arabic).

Rana started singing as a child and found support and encouragement from her family. She went on to study music at the University of Haifa and later became a vocal training teacher for passionate students.

Darwish also grew up in a musical family with a father who was a musician. He was surrounded by music and musical instruments and decided to learn to play the *oud* at a young age and then to study *oud* formally in Jerusalem. Darwish was awarded first prize at an international competition at the Cairo Opera House.

Being in the same business, Rana and Darwish had heard each other's names, but they didn't meet until a mutual friend

suggested they do a song together. It was the first time Darwish composed a song especially for Rana, but it was not the last.

They recently started to work on combining the vocal talents of Rana with compositions by Darwish to create a fusion between the two. In these compositions Rana's voice is integrated as if it were a musical instrument, adding its own timbre to the overall ensemble. This fusion approach is different from the usual Eastern song arrangement where the musical instruments are a means to express a melody designed to accompany the song lyrics. Both Darwish and Rana contributed to the development of their musical relationship to come up with their own unique style.

The musical duo was interested particularly in Eastern melodies and

singing varieties. They have performed in a variety of Arabic classical musical styles: Palestinian, Algerian, Moroccan, Iraqi, Lebanese, and Egyptian. In their collaborative work, *Rah Nib'a Sawa* ("We will stay together") they were joined by 20 other musicians in addition to special appearances by collaborating dancers and singers. They have already performed this new show in Haifa and Nazareth. They were planning a concert in Jerusalem this August at the Palestinian Music Festival, but the festival was cancelled abruptly due to the recent instability caused by Israeli settlers.

The young musicians don't want to deviate too far from the mainstream tastes and the music that audiences are accustomed to. They are striving to find the balance between satisfying mainstream tastes, which is greatly influenced by Western culture, and still preserving the melodic attributes of Eastern music.

When asked about what goes through her mind when she is on stage, Rana commented: "In the first few seconds I feel anxious and worried. I'm standing on stage facing an audience, unaware of their musical tastes. I have no clue beforehand if what I'm about to sing will please them or not. I'm overwhelmed by all these worries until I finally decide to let go and withdraw to my personal

world and perform the best way I can.

"I'm usually proud of what I do on stage, but I don't forget to be artistically critical of my performance. The best feeling ever is to get favourable reactions from the audience and to feel their love and support. They are the reason I continue in this profession."

The musical couple does not think that the Western culture invasion of our music is necessarily a bad thing. They want to search for new forms that are not limited by the traditional mould. They embrace and trust that their approach will leave a unique impression on the development of contemporary Eastern musical styles.

