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“Dance or Die”: Syrian Refugee, Ahmad Joudeh, to attend the International Emmys Awards in New York City

I came to this world out of love. I was kept in the dark till I found the light within, Dance or Die...



Syrian Ahmad Joudeh dancing in Palmyra

United Voices 4 Peace and the City of New York have successfully supported Ahmad Joudeh’s journey to the United States. The **documentary ‘Dance or Die’** about Ahmad Joudeh’s remarkable life by Roozbeh Kaboly, a Dutch journalist and filmmaker, is nominated for the 47th International Emmy Awards: Arts Programming. The Emmy Awards’ ceremony will be held in **New York on November 25, 2019**. His journey to New York is an important milestone in Joudeh's mission to raise awareness on the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

Ahmad Joudeh, a Syrian refugee now living in The Netherlands, is an internationally recognized artist and a tireless advocate of peace. Joudeh grew up in Damascus in Yarmouk, a Palestinian refugee camp. As a child, his dream was to be a dancer. Despite opposition from family and his community, Joudeh attended dance lessons. The civil war that broke out in Syria in 2011 had a devastating impact on his life – five of his relatives lost their lives, and his home was destroyed by bombings. In defiance of extremists in July of 2016 Joudeh danced at the Roman amphitheater of Palmyra, to honor the victims of the civil war and the mass executions that were held there.

In 2016, the Palmyra performance was filmed by a Dutch documentary filmmaker, Roozbeh Kaboly, and broadcast in the Netherlands and several other countries. When this first TV report about Joudeh’ story was aired it captured the attention of the Dutch National Ballet Company. The company then set up the Dance for Peace Fund to bring Joudeh to the Netherlands. In October of 2016, Joudeh fled Syria.

From that moment onwards, Kaboly followed Joudeh for two years, resulting in the Emmy nominated documentary “*Dance or Die*”. Watch the trailer :

<http://upload.iemmys.tv/public/iemmys/FlashPlayer.aspx?mid=600699&nc=C>

His story was also covered in the documentary *Dance for Peace*, and Joudeh published an autobiography, Danza O Muori (Dance or Die), in November of 2018.

As a result, Joudeh has amplified his voice in Europe and now in the US with the support of United Voices 4 Peace. United Voices 4 Peace is a platform that creates collaborative artistic projects and initiatives to spread peace through music and the arts. Veronica Sabbag, Founder and President, reached out to a number of partners, institutions and organizations to bring attention to the importance of his attendance to the Emmy Awards at this moment in time.

As a result of United Voices 4 Peace’s efforts, Bitta Mostofi, Commissioner of the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, and Tom Finkelperal, Commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs, supported Joudeh’s application for visa to travel for the event.

In the letter to the US Consulate General in Amsterdam the Mayor’s office stated:

“New York City is proud to host these awards, and has a strong interest in supporting the arts and welcoming extraordinary visiting artists from around the world who strengthen New York City’s vibrant cultural life. New York City would be honored to welcome Mr. Joudeh for his visit. Mr. Joudeh has used the art of dance to raise awareness for the refugee crisis in Syria, and he has made it a point of emphasis to support children in Syria.”

Joudeh and Sabbag have collaborated before, most notably on International Peace Day in September 2017 in Madrid and on World Refugee Day, 20 June 2018 for the event *Together in Solidarity*. Joudeh performed in the Simon Veil Esplanade, in front of the European Parliament premises in Brussels. He was welcomed by European Union and UNESCO representatives and hundreds of spectators of this moving outdoors performance.

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About Ahmad Joudeh:



Ahmad Joudeh, born in 1990, is a dancer/choreographer from Syria. Under the civil war, he encountered not only life-threatening situations, but also threats by extremists, simply because of his dance activities. As a response, he had the words "Dance or Die" tattooed on the back of his neck, the spot where a blade would fall in decapitation. In 2014, he became known in the Arab world through his prominent performances in the Arab version of "So You Think You Can Dance", a TV dance competition. In August 2016, Dutch National TV broadcasted a documentary about him, including a footage of his dance at the Roman amphitheatre of Palmyra, probably the last art performance there before destruction. In October 2016, he moved to Amsterdam with the help of Dutch National Ballet. Since 2017, he has been active as an artist in many counties in Europe. He has also contributed to events for raising awareness of the refugee situation. + info: <http://www.ahmadioudeh.com/>

About United Voices 4 Peace

Founded in 2017, the platform **United Voices 4 Peace** fosters the creation of a Universal Culture of Peace through music and the arts. The organization stimulates citizen activation and engagement to Cultural Diplomacy by supporting joint performances and co-creations, artistic trainings, music therapy activities and preservation of cultural heritage. To know more about the organization and support our mission : <http://www.uv4peace.org>.