

David D'or performs
at the Shanghai Expo
last year. Photo: IC



By Jiang Yuxia

Brimming with compassion and love, Israeli countertenor, composer, and song-writer David D'Or is generous with his music and always ready to share it. When asked by enthusiastic audiences to sing another song at a lecture at the National Centre for the Performing Arts Sunday, he gave three more, ranging from opera, to pop to traditional Jewish song.

Gifted with a versatile and flexible voice with a vocal range of over four octaves, the 45-year-old has not only charmed the world with his unique tones but also a message of love, peace, and compassion for people suffering via his music, earning him the sobriquet the "Voice of Heaven" from critics and audiences.

"Since I was very young, I was singing everywhere. I expressed my feelings through music. From then till now for me, this is the best way to share with people what I feel," D'Or told the Global Times.

"Music touches the heart. It's the language of the heart and the language of the soul," D'Or, coming to Beijing for the fifth time and expected to tour China in October, added.

A star is born

Born to a family of Libyan Jewish cantors, D'Or was educated at the Music Academy of Jerusalem. He began his career by playing small roles in the Drama Theatre Habima and quickly graduated to bigger musicals.

Starting his musical career as a classical tenor, thanks to Zubin Mehta, music director of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, who invited him to perform as a soloist in Orff's *Carmina Burana* (Latin for *Songs from Beuern*) and in a series of concerts, he grew famous in Israel.

Following his domestic success, he has sung with Philharmonic Orchestras from Israel, Budapest, Baltimore, Jerusalem, and Rome, released 12 platinum and has performed all around over the world and for world leaders, including Israeli Presidents Shimon Peres, King Bhumibol Adulyadej and former US President Bill Clinton.

When it comes to music, which has the power to unite people of diverse backgrounds, D'Or refuses to be defined or limited to a genre or style.

Indeed, his range is stunning; equally adept at classical, pop, rock and ethnic music, he can sing tenor, soprano, countertenor and lyrical baritone in Hebrew,

English and Italian.

"We should not put any borders [on music]... I don't like to define [it]...It has no gender, but you just have to experience it. It's like love," D'Or said.

"If you haven't experienced love, you don't understand what you are thinking about. But you can understand only with your experience of that. That is exactly like music."

The most important thing about music "is to share with other people [who] come from different cultures, to share what they have in common."

"To show how close we are, [that] even though we are far away geographically, we share the same feelings, the same emotions. We are brothers and sisters," said the countertenor.

D'Or recalled a concert held during the 2007 WOMAD (World of Music, Arts and Dance) Festival in the Canary Island in Spain where he was to perform for 20,000 people; he noticed a group of young Palestinian with a huge flag of their nation in front of them.

With little security present, D'Or was apprehensive and feared a violent protest due to his nationality.

So he closed his eyes and told himself, "David, pray...

let the power of music influence them." In mid-song, he was relieved to witness the Palestinians singing and dancing with him, flag in their hands.

Although he sings in three tongues, language is not a barrier for people to share in his feelings.

"You can feel the meaning...You can sing a very short song and people can understand you perfectly."

D'Or has also researched his roots and brought many traditional Jewish songs, some up to 4,000 years old and on the verge of disappearing, back to life again.

Roots and branch

With a Spanish background, D'Or discovered his great-grandfather was one of the most important rabbis in Libya, so he visited modern rabbis from the Libyan community, searching for the source of prayer songs he heard as a child. D'Or collected these holy songs, ancient chants, Yemenite Jewish songs of prayer, now sung by the Libyan Jewish community on Yom Kippur and the Holy Days.

With a diversified sound, rhythms and color, and using traditional instruments such as the *gumbush* (Turkish banjo-like instrument), accordion, and *duduk*, the ancient

hymns came alive again.

"In order to have a future, you must learn your past, understand your past," D'Or said, discussing his rearranging of old songs. "I see it like a tree. You can see the blooming flowers above the tree but the whole power is coming from the roots. We need to connect to our roots in order to bloom."

To him, the most important thing about ancient music is to keep trying. "To try, to bring it to the new modern age, to find ways how to communicate with that, how to find similar things from the past into the present, the future," he explained, adding that education is also essential. "Educate people to understand they have to study their past to know the future."

An avid admirer of Jewish tradition, D'Or shows reverence for these ancient tunes. "When I touch songs from the past, I touch them very carefully, I respect them, I respect the words, the music. I'm not trying to make them into a whole show... I give them a new arrangement but still with a lot of respect...it's not a joke."

