

Otherwise Jerusalem

• By BARRY DAVIS

People from the other end of Highway 1, and possibly from other parts of the country, too, often tend to think of Jerusalem as a divided city. Despite the physical reunification in the wake of the Six Day War, the talk is often about the deep fissures that run between, say, Arabs and Jews, or between haredim and secular Jerusalemites.

Then again, you could adopt a more positive approach and point to what makes this city so special.

Hagai Agmon-Snir is keenly aware of the doomsday school of thought, but veers decidedly in the direction of the rosier side of life in these here parts.

Agmon-Snir heads the Jerusalem Intercultural Center on Mount Zion, which, as its website states, "assists city residents, of various identities, in becoming active and responsible partners to the development of their communities."

The center has also provided the brains, spirit and drive behind an alternative Jerusalem Day program, which first saw the light of day last year and has lined up several dozen events for this year's capital city-centric goings on.

"This is our second year, which is really great," says Agmon-Snir. "Last year people thought we were crazy, but now we have made it clear that this is the right thing to do."

Agmon-Snir may be just an incurable optimist, or he may have a salient fact-on-the-ground point. He and his cohorts in sunny-side arms will endeavor to convey the latter mind-set in next week's Jerusalem Day: The Other's Day, which kicks off on Tuesday evening and goes through the morrow, with all kinds of gatherings, sessions, cultural happenings and other wholesome fare going.

One slot that exudes a sense of heart-warming bonhomie and togetherness is the "Katamon's Wisdom" program, which will take place in the Katamonim neighborhood on Wednesday, 4 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Danielle Natalie-Kind, who devised the cohesive initiative, says the idea came out of her own firsthand experience. "I used to live on Nikanor Street [in the heart of the Katamonim]. The festival came out of that, of the feeling I had there of meeting genuine people in the street, you know, people without masks."

Natalie-Kind, who earns a crust as a dance teacher, fully subscribes to the notion that art and everyday life have an unbreakable symbiotic bond. That is the base sensibility that runs through "Katamon's Wisdom," a nonliteral translation

of the original Hebrew title, Hochmat Hashcheinot, which would come through clumsily in English as Wisdom of the Female Neighbors. Linguistically unwieldy as the latter may sound, it conveys the essence of project.

"There has been a shift of approach towards the definition of art, and what kind of art we should consume," notes Natalie-Kind. "I identify with those who think that art comes from real life, and that we should take people into consideration when we formulate cultural content. And, because I fell in love with the neighborhood, I want to provide local people with a platform to express themselves, and who they are. If you go to the opposite extreme – reality TV shows – that relates to the lowest common denominator between people. That's the total opposite of what we are doing, but really from the same place. People like to get to know other people, people just like themselves."

There is the delightful and thoroughly encouraging idea that we could do away with a lot of our fears and bad vibes by getting to know "others," rather than just reading or hearing about them in the media. In so doing, they might become "Itzik" rather than "a haredi," or "Ibrahim," rather than "a Palestinian." That is a sentiment that lies at the

core of the center's cultural outlook.

"Jerusalem Day is the most important time to emphasize the need for a more tolerant Jerusalem for all of the various identities and groups living here," says the center's English blog. "Together we will reclaim Jerusalem Day via a variety of activities designed to promote tolerance, which will light up the city!"

While the Katamonim program sounds like a female-only affair, in fact, all and sundry are welcome to join in the fun. If you fancy doing a bit of grooving, you might want to mosey along to Beit Hoffman, at 4 Eliezer Hagadol Street at 6 p.m., for a Kurdish *hafla* get-together. There will be folk dancing as well as tasty sustenance. Then, at 7:30 p.m., San Simon Park will host a sing-along that takes in Israeli repertoire as well as numbers from all sorts of ethnic backdrops. Other offerings in the dizzyingly diverse lineup include a 60-minute hands-on photography workshop, which starts from behind the Tipat Halav family health clinic at 2 Eliezer Hagadol Street, at 4 p.m., and a 6:15 p.m. presentation by voice artist Faye Shapira, at the latter venue, called "Women's Song: Vocal Creation As a Factor in Change."

"The Katamonim women behind this project are mostly older women, and

one of them came up with what I think is a great slogan: "Let's get away from the WhatsApp and back to the balconies," says Natalie-Kind. "She said: 'We used to talk to each other from our balconies, and now we have WhatsApp groups.' Even for these neighbors, the most active [social] element in their lives is WhatsApp groups."

"So, for them, and certainly for us younger people who never really experienced that balcony communication, the festival will give us the opportunity to get to the streets and go into someone's home, then we come out and there's something else happening a couple of streets away. Let's get to know each other, really get to know each other."

Natalie-Kind says, for instance, that not many Jerusalemites are aware of the fact that there are lots of Ethiopians living in the Katamonim. "To begin with, I thought, That's incredible; it made me angry. Then I thought, How could they know? The Ethiopians there are so underprivileged, and so much just try to get through the day. We don't benefit from their cultural treasures. And they have so much."

All told, "Katamon's Wisdom" takes in around 20 events, with another 50 or so scheduled elsewhere around the city under the aegis of the center. And while, at first glance, the aforementioned events may appear to be off one's everyday beaten track, Agmon-Snir says that such reciprocally tolerant-designed and mutually supportive activities are not few and far between at all.

"Last year we called the program 'A Different Day in Jerusalem,' something like Alternative Day. There's official Jerusalem Day, and we sort of do other stuff. This year we changed the title because we realized that we are not offering something alternative. We realized that this is 'the day of the other.' We feel this is the mainstream."

"We have between 70 and 80 events lined up, spread over 36 hours. Last year we had 55. There are many activists here who do good things throughout the year, and we are highlighting that on Jerusalem Day."

Basically, says Agmon-Snir, all we need to do is shift our mind-set a mite.

"At the center, for years, we have been doing what we call 'to cope with the conflict.' You know, for example, there are Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, and they have to learn to live with it. "Tolerance" comes from the verb "tolerate." In Jerusalem we generally say, OK, we're all stuck here together, let's try and manage with it. But what we say is let's celebrate diversity. That's the line we take with our Jerusalem Day."

For more information: jicc.org.il and www.facebook.com/events/878640722275307/?active_tab=about



'The Katamonim women behind this project are mostly older, and one of them came up with this slogan, "Let's get away from the WhatsApp and back to the balcony."' (PR)



Jerusalem Intercultural Center head Hagai Agmon-Snir: Mind-set shift. (Kedem Snir)