

Acre's tambourine man

WAKE UP CALL

For more than 13 years, Michel Ayoub, a 39-year-old Christian construction worker from the old city of Acre, has been carrying out the ancient tradition of waking up Muslims for suhoor

AFP | Acre, Israel

Michel Ayoub begins each day at 2am, stepping on to the cobbled streets of Acre's old city with tambourine in hand, awakening Muslims for Ramadan.

His role as the city's "mosaharaty" is a traditional one during the holy month, but Ayoub is by no means a traditional holder of the position. He is Christian.

The 39 year old sees no contradiction in that, and neither do the Muslim residents of this ancient city in north-western Israel, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.

"We are the same family," says Ayoub, who wears traditional Levantine dress as he meanders the alleyways, a kaffiyeh draped over his shoulders, baggy sirwal trousers held around his waist with an embroidered belt, a black-and-white turban tied around his head.

"There is only one God and there is no difference between

Christians and Muslims."

His voice rings out as he chants, piercing the silence of the empty streets decorated with traditional colourful lamps for Ramadan.

"You, sleeping ones, there is one eternal God," he chants.

Houses begin to light up one by one. Some stick their heads out of their windows to greet him and tell him they have heard the call, awakening them for the suhoor.

Acre's population of more than 50,000 includes Jews, Muslims, Christians and Baha'is.

It has been continuously inhabited since the Phoenician period, which began around 1500BC.

It was the main port of the medieval Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem and a major Ottoman walled city.

Napoleon tried to conquer the heavily fortified town in 1799 but was repelled by the Ottomans and a small British Royal Navy force.

The walled old city, complete with a well-preserved citadel, mosques and baths, is listed by Unesco as a World Heritage site.

Today it is part of Israel, which captured it in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war surrounding the state's creation.

About 28 per cent of its population are Palestinians and their descendants who remained after the 1948 creation of Israel.

Most of the city's Arabs are Muslims, but a minority, like Ayoub, are Christians.

The mosaharaty tradition had disappeared from Acre until Ayoub, who usually works in construction, revived it 13 years ago. He says it was his way to preserve his grandfather's heritage.



Michel Ayoub (L) may even be training a successor to ensure

He says his grandfather, a fervent Catholic, listened to readings of the Quran every Friday during the main weekly Muslim prayers.

Partly for that reason, Ayoub says he grew up with the idea of coexistence, respect and knowledge of other religions.

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Michel Ayoub

LUGH O

Arab stand-up comedians star in Netflix series

Adi Khalefa

Comedians of the World is the first of its kind to feature Arab comedians

Arab News | Dubai

Netflix introduced a new show that features stand-up comedians from the Arab world.

"Comedians of the World" - debuted on January 1 - was the first of its kind to feature Arab comedians, according to Netflix.

The series brought together 47 comedians from 13 regions around the world and was filmed in eight languages. Four comedians from the Middle East made the cut - Moayad Al-Nefae and Ibraheem Al-Khairallah from Saudi Arabia, Adi Khalefa from Palestine and Rawsan Hallak from Jordan. Each of the talents had a 30-minute stand-up special dedicated to them.

"After 12 years of doing stand-up comedy, this was like a big reward for me and I hope this is just the first step," Khalefa told Arab News.

From Nazareth - commonly known as "the Arab capital of Israel" - Khalefa has performed in multiple comedy festivals around the world and his latest show, "Billiat-Show" - inspired by his personal, social and political experiences - sold out more than eight times.

For Al-Khairallah, being part of a platform that showcases internationally acclaimed comedians such as US funnyman Dave Chap-



Ibraheem Al-Khairallah