



Musical diamond

Ruba Saqr, currently a Jordanian component in a Middle Eastern music cocktail on tour across the region, will shortly be releasing her debut solo album

Story by **Eddie Taylor**

Ruba Saqr is a name that has been floating around the Amman music scene for a number of years, usually whispered with the reverence of a secret no one really wants to share. 'This girl has such an incredible voice,' says Hanna Gharghour, a musician and producer who has been working with her for several years. Maybe it's because she has supplemented her musical career with bill-paying journalism, or perhaps more likely that Jordan still doesn't quite know how to polish musical diamonds yet, but Ruba Saqr is only now gaining international recognition. The singer and *oud* player was selected for a pan-Arab collaboration called Music Matbakh, and after several highly successful gigs in the UK, they're currently taking their nine members on a tour of the Middle East.

'We're excited to present to Arab audiences,' Ruba says. 'It might sound like over-confidence, but we're going to give a unique show. We're hoping to give faith to all musicians in underground scenes, tell musicians here not to give up! In the UK, we had several standing ovations, which we're told is quite unique...'

The man behind Music Matbakh is Justin Adams, a former guitarist in Led Zeppelin frontman Robert Plant's band, who grew up in North Africa exposed to Arab sounds and rhythms. He brought nine musicians together to blend their styles in a collective whole.

'He once said that Music Matbakh is a miracle, because so many people from so many backgrounds are working together, and his leadership really made it work,' she says. 'I did this piece with Moroccan rapper Bigg, and it was fantastic. That was the beauty of it; you were breaking out of your limitations and trying something new. The experience was unbelievable.'

In terms of her solo work, Amman should be hearing her debut album sometime in the autumn. All of the songs have been written, but the tour and the collaboration have delayed its release – and several songs have been reworked to incorporate her sudden input of new influences. 'When I came back from Music Matbakh, I had so many ideas that I'm incorporating into the new album. I learned so much, so it was really a crash course!' We look forward to the results. ■

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