

Hello again and welcome to As It Is! ... your daily magazine show from VOA Learning English. I'm June Simms.

The Arab-Israeli singer-songwriter Mira Awad is well known in Europe and the Middle East. In recent years, she has also become increasingly popular in the United States. VOA's Adam Phillips recently met up with the singer in New York. Today on As It Is, we'll hear what she had to say and listen to some of her music.

Arab-Israeli Singer Follows Her Passion

That's Arab-Israeli songwriter and pop star Mira Awad. Her father is Palestinian. Her mother is from Bulgaria. Here she sings a traditional mountain song from the Arab village in northern Israel where she was born in 1975.

"It comes from the belly. It does not come from thinking. It does not come from a planned way of singing like opera or like the Western kind of singing, which is very, very calculated. This is much more passionate like flamenco, like these things that really come from the blood. We say we have hot blood. It's not by accident."

There is an altogether different sort of heat in the soulful Europop songs that Awad's fans are most familiar with. Consider "All My Faces," the title song from her 2011 album.

"It only tackles the level of my womanhood. But it's like that about everything. We all have many faces. No one is one thing. That's boring. We are all made of many, many, many, many, many layers."

Awad says this style of music would have raised eyebrows in her home village. Yet her village, she says was relatively modern compared to many Arab communities in the Galilee region.

"But nevertheless, it's an Arab culture and still it is very patriarchal and the father decides for the family, the man decides for the woman. A woman is expected to go study, go work, have a career but choose the family life eventually. And I didn't. I wanted a career. I wanted to go and follow my passions. The word 'passions' is scary in a culture like the one I come from. A woman having passions, that's a woman that you can't control."

Breaking Away From Cultural Traditions

Awad's history of protest and activism began at the age of 16, when she started to play in her own rock and roll band. The neighbors would often gossip and disapprove when her bandmates, all males, would pick her up in the village square and drive to nearby Nazareth to rehearse.

"It was very difficult for them to understand how come my father is letting me do that and they started even to interfere with the upbringing, you know [saying], 'Take hold of your daughter. Put her in her place.' So actually that's the place that I started from protesting -- to have an equal say about my own life, to have a say at all about my own life and to choose differently if I liked to, as a woman."

Awad left her village as soon as she could and enrolled at a university in Haifa. The Israeli city is well known for its mixed Jewish and Arab population. Awad had never defined herself in ethnic terms. But on campus, her fair skin and green eyes did not fit the common idea of what Palestinians looked like. Jewish students thought she was Jewish, and what some would say about Arabs angered her.

“I suddenly started to realize how much racism there is against Palestinian citizens of Israel and I’m hearing this and my blood is boiling in my veins!”

Awad is well known in Israel and Europe for her songs about life and love. But she is possibly best known for her songs about peace, justice and equality. In 2009, she and Jewish Israeli singer Noa were chosen by the Eurovision Song Contest to sing her song “There Must Be Another Way.” The song is about building peace between their two peoples.

But Awad says her hopes go far beyond relations between Israelis and Palestinians.

“I believe that we have to go together as a human race and try to figure out how we share these resources of this poor planet that we’re on.”

days, one of Mira Awad's favorite instruments is a friend's cracked flute that she saved from the trash. The Arab Israeli singer says she has learned to honor life's imperfections. She says it is through such cracks that the light can shine through.

You are listening to *As It Is*, from VOA Learning English. I'm June Simms.

Today is a historic day for baseball fans across the United States. It was on this day in 1933 that Major League Baseball held its first ever All-Star Game. The game was held at Comiskey Park in Chicago, Illinois. Legendary baseball player "Babe" Ruth -- who was well known for his career records in homeruns, slugging percentage and runs batted in -- led the American League as they defeated the National League 4-2.

And that is *As It Is*. Thanks for sharing part of your day with us. We invite you to share your ideas with us as well. Email your questions or comments to learningenglish@voanews.com.

For the latest on what's happening in the world, VOA news is coming up at the beginning of the hour Universal Time.



Have a great evening.