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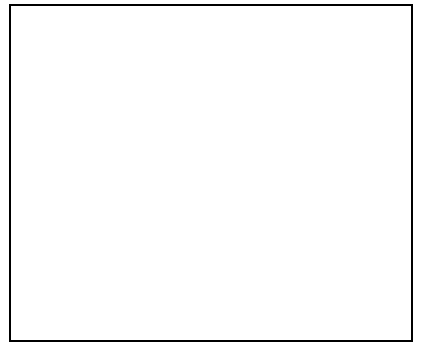
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Spearheading the UAE's Live Music Scene

Explorer speaks to Ismat Abidi about her vision to nurture the culture of live music in the Emirates and draw on underground musical talent that is waiting to bloom.

by Kirsty Tuxford

Freshly Ground Sounds is the brainchild of Ismat (Izzy) Abidi. Simply put, it's a live acoustic musical event for amateur musicians to jam together in front of an audience that truly appreciates real, heartfelt music and expressive talent.

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When did you get the idea for Freshly Ground Sounds?

A few months ago when I moved back to the UAE, I left behind a raw live music scene in East London which I was actively a part of. Local musicians in the area just picked up instruments, jammed in their living rooms, played short sets in local coffee shops and played in markets on a Saturday afternoon. I wanted to continue to be able to play my music in a non-commercial environment, collaborate with others and find a similar music community in the UAE.

Whilst there is a huge commercial sphere for live music in the UAE, there is very little focus on the acoustic, lo-fi sphere where musicians are playing for fun or to practice performing their sound live. These sorts of live performances are not always suited to large venues or hotel bars. I also wanted to encourage the younger generation in the UAE to perform their music without having to worry about filling up a large venue or having to audition for a hotel event.

My interest in music began when I was growing up in Abu Dhabi and learnt to play the piano at a local music school as a teenager. I didn't really find an outlet to perform so I gave up on playing live until I moved back to London for university where I picked up a guitar began practicing in the local student union. I created Freshly Ground Sounds as a platform and community to bring together musicians and music-lovers like myself, as well as to discover and promote local raw talent in the UAE.

The event wouldn't work without the help of our superb sound engineer, Tareq Korsheed, who is present at all events – I really appreciate his help.

How is it going? Are there a lot of musicians and singers out there who are turning up?

Within 12 days of kicking-off our email sign-up list, we had 22 artists on our books already. We officially launch in January/February 2014 and between now and then we are scoping out musicians, venues and attendees. The response so far has been overwhelmingly positive. Pre-launch events are currently taking place both in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

What's the vibe like at the event?

Freshly Ground Sounds has a few key characteristics that are apparent at all our events. It's very easy-going. Rough-around-the-edges is actively encouraged. Freshly Ground Sounds is strictly non-profit so none of the artists ever get paid. The only currency is enthusiasm. It's full of enthusiasm from venues that are passionate about the culture we are trying to create, musicians who want to play without any commercial pressure and a wonderfully supportive audience who are looking for this refreshing, laid-back way to enjoy live music in the UAE. This combination attracts a certain crowd and creates a vibe that does not yet exist in the UAE.

Can people go even if they don't want to perform?

Freshly Ground Sounds have no rules. Anyone can attend the event and anyone can play. We currently have more artists that we have time slots for our event, so we usually operate on a first-come-first serve basis, alongside a waiting list.

What does Freshly Ground Sounds hope to achieve in the future?

Through some supportive sponsors, we plan on eventually recording seasonal EPs with a few original

tracks from local artists who have performed with Freshly Ground Sounds. These will be used to promote the Freshly Ground Sounds initiative.

Freshly Ground Sounds non-profit initiative to create a community and platform for spreading independent acoustic sounds across unassuming venues in the UAE. We are providing a platform to local artists, an opportunity for venues to create an acoustic live music culture and a community for an audience who enjoy independent, non-commercial live performances.

Contact:

If you are interested in finding out more or being part of the initiative, please
 email: FreshlyGroundSounds@gmail.com
 facebook.com/FreshlyGroundSounds
 Instagram: @FreshlyGroundSounds
 Twitter: @FreshSoundsUAE

Bio:

Ismat is a media lawyer who has recently moved from the wonderful curiosities of East London to Dubai. She grew up in the UAE and her passion for music began as a teenager when she learnt to play the piano at a local music school. Prior to qualifying as a lawyer, Ismat was a weekly travel columnist in The National newspaper, documenting her round-the-world journey across 16 countries in eight months. She now freelances for various publications on travel, culture and food. In an effort to re-create her music community she left behind London, Ismat is in the process of carving a niche independent music scene in Dubai via her non-profit initiative called Freshly Ground Sounds. Most weekends, you'll find her playing acoustic folk rock on her guitar and ukulele at various coffee shops around Dubai
 Twitter/Instagram: @izzyabidi

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