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A SUMMER OF MUSICAL DIVERSITY EN ROUTE TO LEBANON

A summer of musical diversity en route to Lebanon

BEIRUT: The summer season has officially started. Beaches and rooftop venues are opening and, now, Lebanon's major summer festivals have announced their lineups.

The public – whether Lebanese, local foreigners, returning expats or sunburnt tourists – will have a wide choice of performances and locations as far afield as Jounieh, Beiteddine, Baalbek and Jbeil.

The Jounieh International Festival has issued what it calls an "event-packed" (June 29-July 8) program. Two of the highlights will be shows by Armenian-born French singer Charles Aznavour (on July 6). The 88-year-old Aznavour will be in Jounieh as part of his Aznavour en Toute Intimite tour, which started last year. He promises to belt out much-loved tunes like "La Boheme," "She" and "Emmenez-Moi," among others.

Lebanon will also host a concert by Anglo-Irish crooner Chris De Burgh. His name may not ring a bell for some but most have likely heard "Lady in Red," his 1986 hit that went No. 1 worldwide. De Burgh will have a one-night stand in Jounieh (on July 8), and likely demonstrate that his romantic side has faded little since the mid-'80s.

The Beiteddine Art Festival (June 28-July 28) promises an eclectic program, from opera, to rock'n'roll, from jazz to dance. Lebanon's Caracalla Dance Theater will return for a three-night gig (June 28-30), performing a trilogy of "Scheherazade," "Bolero" and an evening of Lebanese folk dance.

For those more interested in contemporary dance, Beiteddine will host the award-winning show "Pash," featuring dancers Sylvie Guillem and Russel Maliphant on July 7.

The surprise show of the festival will feature the iconic Irish indie rock band The Cranberries (July 14), who will likely perform such hits as "Zombie," "Salvation" and "Just my Imagination."

The highlights include a show by French singer Charles Aznavour

"La Boheme," the much-loved opera of Giacomo Puccini, is also on the program (July 26). Diva Inva Mula will play "Mimi" and Paolo Fanale will stomp the boards as Rodolpho, accompanied by the Lebanese Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Maestro Jean-Yves Ossonce.

This year's Byblos International Festival will also welcome some pop cul-

ture iconography in legendary bluesman BB King – with his beloved guitar, Lucille – on July 5, giving audiences a chance to hear "Lucille," "Payin' the Cost to be the Boss" and "Why I Sing the Blues," live.

Another guitar hero, former Guns n' Roses guitarist Slash, promises to electrify audiences with his ferocious riffs on June 25.

Fresh from their European tour, rockers Snow Patrol promise to deliver a mind-blowing July 17 show, performing hits like "Chasing Cars," "Called Out in the Dark" and "In The End." Given the massive number of fans they have in Lebanon, Snow Patrol's Lebanon debut will, one hopes, not be the last.

This year's Baalbek International Festival (June 29-July 15) has bet on diversity, setting a program of Latin-American, Arabic, Lebanese and Italian

music at the so-called Bacchus Temple.

Among the slate of performers will be Chico and the Gypsies, who will open the festival. Originally known as The Gypsy Kings, this Latino ensemble will try to enchant their audience with such famous tunes as "Bamboleo" or "Djoubi Djoba."

For pop music aficionados, Italian crooner Zucchero, who gained notoriety with his hit "Sensa Una Donna," will be on hand for one-night only on July 5, as part of his Chocabeck World Tour.

Closing Baalbek on July 15 will be a show by the Lebanon's hottest indie band nowadays, Mashrou' Leila. Setting the ensemble's urban cool – marked by witty lyrics and muscular vocals, accompanied by violin, percussion, bass and keyboards – in Baalbek's ancient ruins will mark an unusually incongruous end to this ancient festival. – *Chirine Lahoud*