

Al Bustan Festival Music from Latin America: Photography Exhibitions
Tuesday 21st February 2012, Al Bustan Hotel, Beyt Meri
Reported by Victoria B. Huerta

The Lebanese Emigration Research Center in collaboration with the Latin American Studies and Culture Center of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik presented the exhibition “Mahjar, Lebanese Emigration to Latin America”, old pictures from Roberto Khatlab’s collection, Director of the CECAL-USEK. These photographs form part of the Lebanon Migration Nucleus Museum at Notre Dame University, capturing with them the spirit of the Lebanese Diaspora in Latin America. LERC was represented at the opening night of the Al Bustan Festival by Victoria B. Huerta, international intern. For the first time, the 19th edition of the Festival brought music from Latin America to the Al Bustan Hotel.



Mahjar Lebanese Emigration to Latin America
CECAL-LERC, Photos Exhibition Al Bustan International Festival 2012

The event was honored with the presence of Ministers, Deputies and national politicians. The Emile Bustani Auditorium also welcomed the Ambassadors of Latin American countries in Lebanon such as H.E. Jorge Alvarez from Mexico, H.E. Zoed Karam from Venezuela, H.E. Rida Aljure Salame from Colombia, H.E. Paulo Roberto Da Fontoura from Brazil and H.E. Jose Gutierrez Maxwell from Argentina, as well as H.E. Juan Carlos Gafo Acevedo from Spain.



Photos Exhibition Al Bustan International Festival 2012, (From left to right) H.E. Z. Karam Ambassador of Venezuela in Lebanon, Mr. R. Khatlab (Director of CECAL-USEK) and V. Huerta (LERC International Intern)

The Festival was opened by Spain's Paco Pena Dance Company performing "Flamenco without borders". It is important to remember that although Spain does not form part of Latin America, never the less it does have a great influence in American rhythms due to the conquest period. Therefore, Paco Pena's dancers and singers were accompanied by a Venezuelan group that played beautiful Afro-inspired music, bringing us back to the native flavor of the Latin American region.

During the intermission the audience viewed the exhibition of photographs taken in the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century shown in the Gallery of Al Bustan Hotel. This collection represents the essence and history of the first Lebanese families who immigrated to countries such as Venezuela, Argentina, Mexico or Brazil. Even though the pictures may be somewhat old, some Latin American people of Lebanese origin did recognize their ancestors and had their pictures taken next to them, as a way of capturing the moment. The exhibition is taking place as from February 21st until March 25th, 2012 at the Gallery in Al Bustan Hotel at Beit Mery.

Later that night, the six musicians, the two singers and the four dancers created an atmosphere that was absolutely engaging. If you were sitting in the audience it was almost impossible not to mark the rhythm of the music with your feet. It was easy to forget we were in Lebanon. We felt that we could have been anywhere in Venezuela. The actions of the dancers where breathtaking, the perfect mixture between Spain's flamenco and *criollo* movements represented perfectly the diversity that the Latin American region has to offer: a blend between Spaniards, natives and afro descendants.

By bringing the music of the region, we Latin Americans hope that it will create enough interest among Lebanese for them to approach this part of the continent with a renewed interest, creating long-lasting bridges supported by all that culture has to offer.

The Al Bustan Festival made an excellent choice by bringing to Lebanon a piece of our identity, one that is very close to our hearts, music; in addition, by incorporating Roberto Khatlab's photography collection from LERC's Museum, it wrapped up perfectly the spirit and message that the Festival wanted to offer to the Lebanese people.