



Palestinian Jamal Hemmou shows vinyl records in his shop in the occupied-West Bank city of Nablus. — AFP photos



Palestinian Jamal Hemmou checks a portable record player as he sits in front of his shop in the occupied-West Bank city of Nablus.



Palestinian Jamal Hemmou checks an antique gramophone (phonograph) record player in front of his shop in the occupied-West Bank city of Nablus.

IN WEST BANK, LAST VINYL REPAIRMAN PRESERVES MUSICAL HERITAGE

From Jamal Hemmou's ramshackle workshop in Nablus's Old City in the occupied West Bank, classic Arabic songs blare into the surrounding cobbled streets. The 58-year-old is the last of his kind in the city—he runs the only shop in Nablus repairing and selling vinyl records and players. Like much of the world, Nablus is attuned to digital music, but Hemmou told AFP working with vinyl was about preserving Palestinian "heritage". Elderly people regularly pass by at the end of the day and, "when I turn on the record player, they start crying," he said.

Hemmou began learning how to repair record players when he was 17, listening to the great Arab artists of the time as he worked. "I have more experience than the people with the certificates," he joked, adding that he is entirely self-taught, and acquired his passion for music from his father. "My father was a singer, he used to sing because he loved those old singers... almost everyone in my family is a musician," he said.

He said he enjoys Lebanon's Fairuz and Egyptian superstar Abdel Halim Hafez, but his favorite is Shadia, an Egyptian diva who released a string of hits between the 1940s and 1980s. "She sang from the heart, she sang with emotion, she told a story," he said. Strewn throughout his workshop, in various stages of repair, are record players from

the 1960s and 1970s. There are even several gramophones from the 1940s. He estimated that he sells an average of five record players per month.

'You're transported back'

Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War in 1967. A surge in violence in 2022 made it the deadliest year in the West Bank since United Nations records began in 2005 — with Nablus having been at the forefront of the bloodshed. But Hemmou said it's not the military raids that hurt business—it's the strikes regularly called by local authorities in response to Zionist operations.

"We close all the shops when the Zionist raids kill someone in Nablus, especially the Old City," he told AFP. For Hemmou, the machines and the music they play are more than just songs, they are an essential part of Palestinian and Arab heritage. "When you play the record, you're transported back 50 years," he said.

"You listen to this music, and you remember what it means to be an Arab or a Palestinian," he added. Hemmou said that today's artists don't match the emotion of the great Arab singers of the 20th century. "The modern singers do not know what they sing. The old singers, they summon what is deep within us and



Palestinian Jamal Hemmou displays old record players in front of his shop.

they revive our heritage," he said.

Music as resistance

Known throughout the old city as Abu Shaadi, he has developed a reputation beyond Nablus. Music enthusiasts will travel from afar to buy from him. "My customers are from all over the West Bank, from Jerusalem, from Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jenin, Qalqiliya," he said. "They come from all of Palestine to buy

from me." Hemmou said he has tried to bring his two sons, aged 26 and 27, into the business.

"They aren't interested," he told AFP. "They tell me to turn it off, they don't want to listen." The street on which his shop sits has seen fierce battles during the last year, as Zionist forces conducted raids targeting a nascent militant group called "The Lions' Den", based in Nablus's Old City.

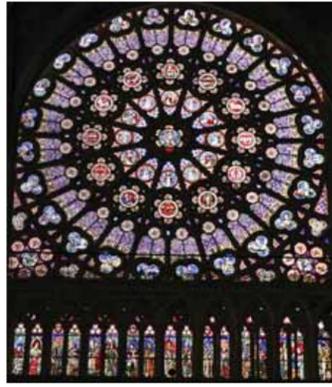
The shop bears reminders of the conflict-plastered on its shutters are the images of Palestinian fighters killed in recent months. "When there are clashes we have to close the shop, of course, but what can I say, I am still alive, thank God," he said. "I play some national songs, that is my way of resisting." — AFP

LIGHT RETURNS TO THE STAINED GLASS OF THE SAINT-DENIS BASILICA

The Basilica of Saint-Denis on the northern outskirts of Paris may be less famous than Notre-Dame, but when Emmanuel Putanier was asked to restore the historic monument's stained glass windows to their former glory, he jumped at the chance. "This is something that you only do once in a lifetime," the master glassmaker told AFP.

For a year now, his team has been working in the Basilica to restore the windows, which date back to the 12th century, to their former, distant splendor. Just down the road from that cathedral to sporting excellence, the national Stade de France, the Basilica is nestled in a Paris suburb with more of a reputation for crime, religious sectarianism and poverty than for medieval architecture.

However its architectural splendor, and the fact that it is the resting place of no fewer than 43 French monarchs, attracts 130,000 visitors each year. The major renovation works have been underway for



This picture shows renovated stained glass windows at the Basilique de Saint-Denis, in Paris' northern suburb of Saint-Denis.

several years already. Since last year, the building's stained glass windows have been the focus of the work at the Basilica, the culmination of 25 years of preparation work costing more than 2 million euros (\$2.2 million). "All things heritage take time," said Laurent Roturier, head of the Paris region branch of the office of cultural affairs (DRAC), which is in charge of the works. The project began to take shape a quarter of a century ago when the Basilica's oldest glass windows went

under the care of France's research laboratory for historical monuments (LRMH). "We're just the final stage of the journey," said Guillaume Uvroas, a glassmaker working in the Basilica.

Dating back to 12th century

When the project kicked off in 1997, the windows dating back to the middle of the 12th century and considered a milestone in the history of stained-glassmaking, were worn down by time and dulled by the elements. Duplicates made of polycarbonate were installed in their place. That move started a new conversation: should the original stained glass art be restored and reinstalled, or should perfect copies be put in their place? Experts decided to go with the latter option: more than 20 copies have been produced in total.

But getting it right has required deep research in the archives, going back to the French Revolution during which they were dismantled, said Thomas Clouet, an architect specializing in historic buildings. Some windows had been vandalized, and there were various bits and pieces scattered about.

"We needed to find the pieces and retrace their history and journey before we could proceed to the duplication phase," said Roturier. "What we do here requires insane precision, from the colour range to the composition," said Putanier. Because his team was not allowed to remove the

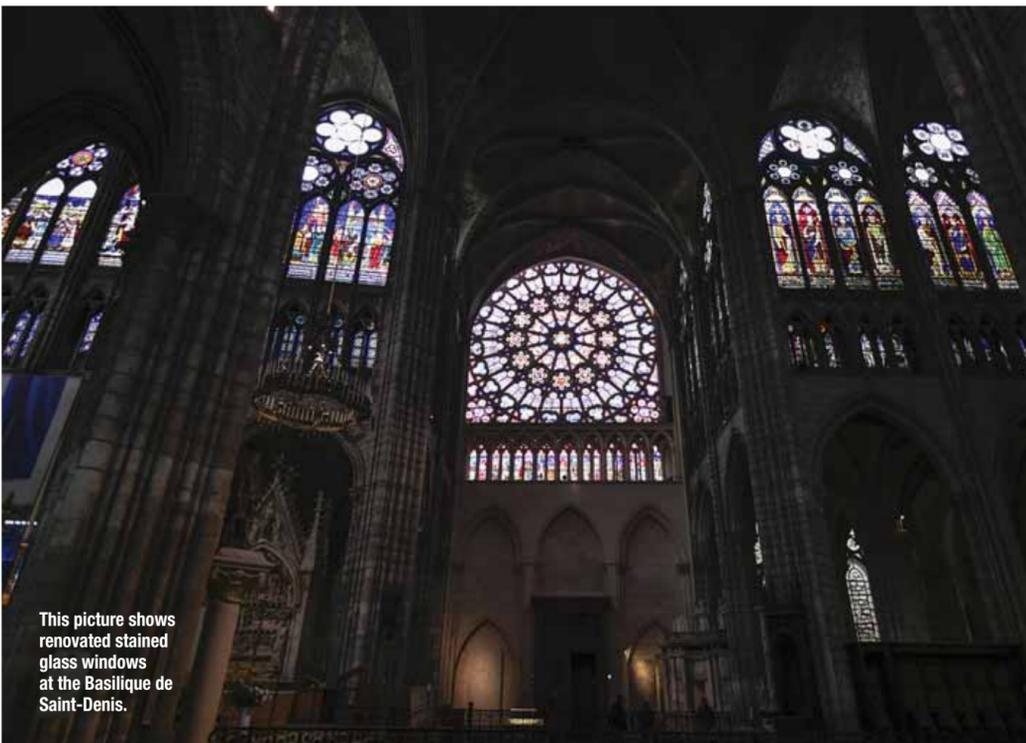


This picture shows the renovation site at the "Basilique de Saint-Denis" (Basilica Cathedral of Saint-Denis), in Paris' northern suburb of Saint-Denis.-AFP photos

originals from the laboratory, "we set up an operation plan to take measurements on site," he said. The most important task was to achieve consistency across the entire structure, a job made hard by the several restoration efforts the Basilica had undergone over the centuries.

"To make the copies, we took into account distortions that happened over time," he said, "They couldn't appear too new or modern-looking." The final step will be to fit the copies into glass panes that

date back to the 19th century. "The most important thing for us was to recover this relationship to light, because that's the spirit behind the construction of this basilica," insisted Roturier. "It's what the founders would've wanted. More restoration projects are planned over the next five years, including of the Basilica's tabernacles and its spire." — AFP



This picture shows renovated stained glass windows at the Basilique de Saint-Denis.



This picture shows a partial view of the "Basilique de Saint-Denis" (Basilica Cathedral of Saint-Denis).



This picture shows renovated stained glass windows at the Basilique de Saint-Denis.