

HOMIE

THE SOUL OF LEBANON

**MARLO
THOMAS**

THE LEBANESE-AMERICAN MEGASTAR BEHIND
ST. JUDE CHILDREN'S RESEARCH HOSPITAL



LEBANON THROUGH THE EYES OF
FRENCH AMBASSADOR
H.E. BRUNO FOUCHER

RAGHIDA DERGHAM
THE COURAGE TO COME HOME

DR. MOHAMED
H. SAYEGH
AT THE HELM OF AUBMC

LEBANON'S CHAMPION
CHIRINE NJEIM
OLYMPIC SKIER TO
OLYMPIC RUNNER

PIERRE RABBAT
LIGHT-HEARTED HUMOR,
SHAKING THE STATUS QUO

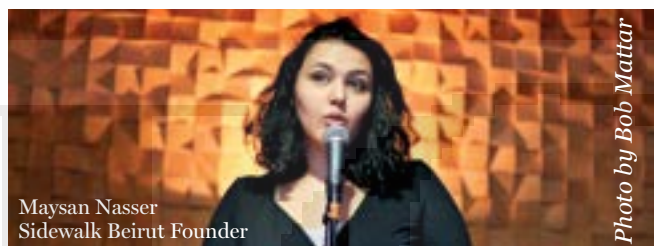
Photo by Comedy Central Arabia



Comedian
Wissam
Kamal

THE MIC IS YOURS TO GRAB AT SIDEWALK BEIRUT

When performers step on the Sidewalk stage, they find a supportive and warm audience. As Beirut's only weekly open mic, it has created a comfortable atmosphere for self-expression.



Maysan Nasser
Sidewalk Beirut Founder

Photo by Bob Mattar

"It's a family. Each enters with their own dynamic, bringing what only they can bring to the table," said poet Lisa Luxx, defining the Sidewalk experience. The open mic provides performers a stage for sharing themselves with the audience, be it in poetry, comedy, drama, music or storytelling. The weekly forum is part of a recent wave of creative expression in Beirut, manifested in the mushrooming of artists' cooperatives, and poetry, storytelling and music venues, that has blossomed in the past three or four years.

Sidewalk Beirut, created by spoken-word poet Maysan Nasser, takes place every Wednesday night, 8 - 11 p.m., at Riwaq, a venue in Mar Mikhael's Geitawai neighborhood. When Nasser lived in Paris, she participated in Paris Lit Up; when she came back HOME, she felt she was missing something. So, she decided to create the same experience in her beloved Beirut.

"I think Beirut's cultural scene is old and withstanding, but I feel that there

is now a surge of many different events that are coloring the city with spaces for self-expression," she said.

Sidewalk, which started as a four-week trial with Riwaq, has now become a regular event, running since fall 2017 to packed houses.

The poet

Spoken-word poetry is one of today's young generation's leading art forms. It's a style of poetry that celebrates freedom. At Sidewalk, there are no restrictions to what performers can say or how they say it.

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We can step more into our individualism because we respect our differences.

Luxx, a Sidewalk regular, identifies herself as a poet, philosopher and activist. She has toured the world for more than seven years as a performance artist.

She likes Sidewalk because it "fosters a safe space to explore parts of the human experience that otherwise feel taboo.

"Through Sidewalk, we see that we are not on islands of feelings; feelings are the oceans that we share between us," she said. "We can step more into our individualism because we respect our differences."

The comedian

Wissam Kamal, the first Lebanese comedian to perform on Comedy Central Arabia, called Sidewalk "a miracle." Stand-up comedians in Lebanon find it difficult to get constructive criticism or test out their material; they also struggle to find exposure, explained Kamal.

"The lack of mics forces us to produce full hour shows with untested material, and there's lack of experience" he noted.

"Comedy is a unique medium, it doesn't always come out the way the performer wants and having that happen on a main show can be debilitating," he added.

"Sidewalk provides the platform and the audience for you to test, correct, edit, add and remove material," said Kamal. You can express freely for 10 minutes. This platform is allowing me to fail, so I can succeed in the future; that's the most important thing."

Sidewalk supports Wissam in all his future endeavors, such as Lebanon's first full sign language stand-up comedy set.

The musician

Sidewalk has begun organizing separate music events, yet its main weekly open mic has also included many musicians. In fact, many of the event's main features have been musicians like Tarabeet and singer-songwriter Peter Chouchani, and bands such as Taxi 404.

Taxi 404 call themselves the "young members who want to express themselves, and pour their frustration and anger at the deranged world out onto the stage."

As Hana Yazbeck of Taxi 404 said, "We think Sidewalk, as part of a cultural hub growing in Lebanon, is doing an important job in creating a platform for

artists to express themselves and expose their creative work."

The goal

Sidewalk is part of "a worldwide movement of artistic organizations bringing people together in a fear-dominated world," said Nasser. Their efforts to create more space for self-expression are also promoting empathy and compassion.

"Sidewalk endeavors to take care of its people. No matter what happens, Sidewalk is here," said Beirut-based writer, professor and actor Dima Matta, dubbed "the storyteller of Beirut." "Come rain or come shine, every week."

By Bob Mattar

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Poet
Lisa Luxx

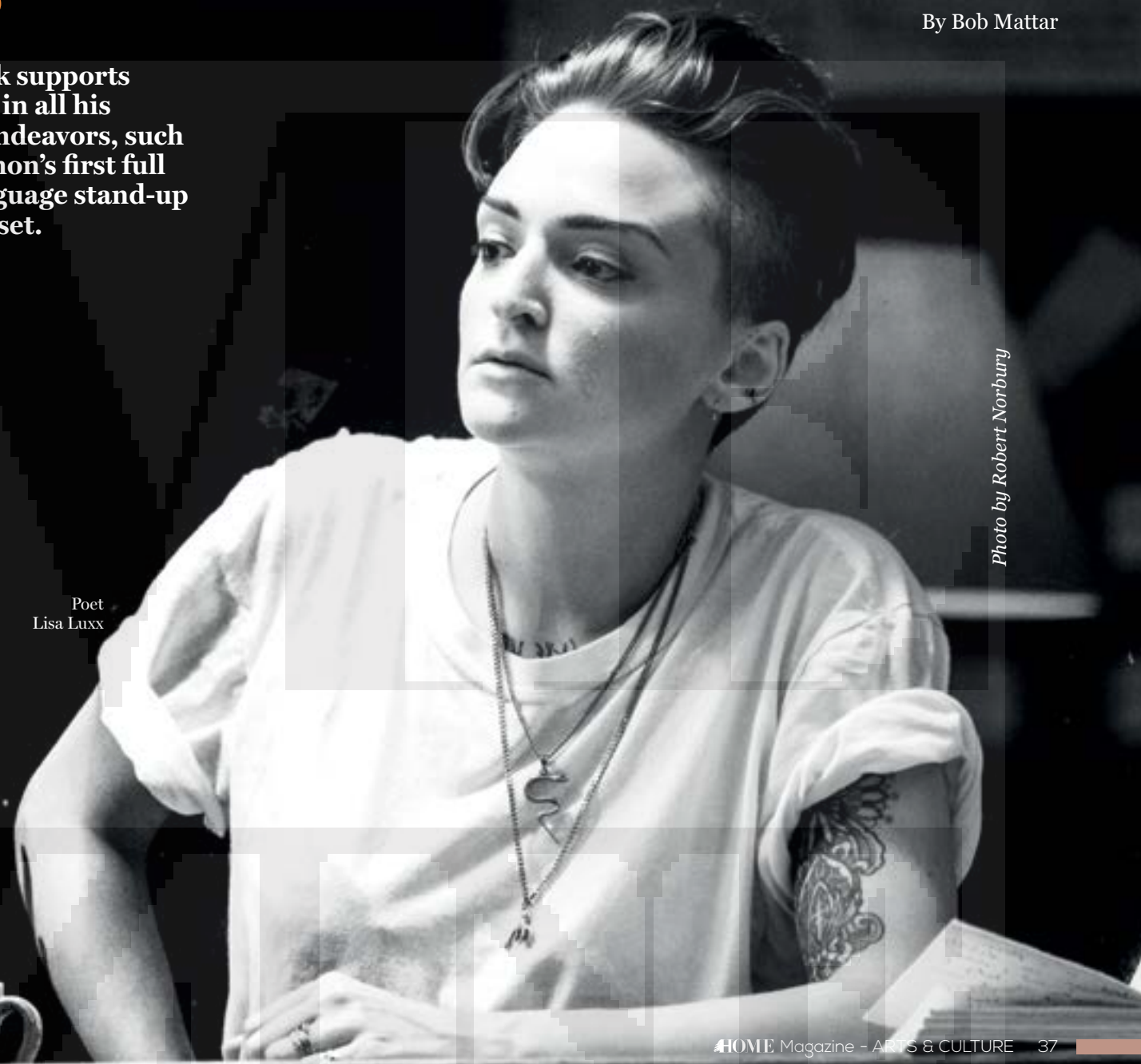


Photo by Robert Norbury

