

# NOCTURNE IN BLACK

## EXPLORATION GUIDE

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*The W* with John Priddy & Jimmy Keyrouz

# 1

The filmmaker, Jimmy Keyrouz, was inspired to tell this story after hearing reports in 2014 that music was being banned in Syria by ISIS authorities. After further research, Jimmy discovered the true story of Aeham Ahmad, the “Pianist of Yarmouk,” who was known for playing the piano in the midst of rubble on the streets of Damascus and in a Palestinian refugee camp in Yarmouk where he was living to escape the Syrian conflict.

**Reflect on the importance of music in your own life. Describe the impact music has had during seasons of joy/celebration or experiences of pain/sorrow. How would you feel if music were banned?**

# 2

Throughout the film, the hope of various individuals slowly slips away in the midst of the civil war and threats of violence. Simple daily tasks serve as a reminder of the humanity of the victims of this war (Ziad wanting to learn to play the piano, the shopkeeper protecting his window with tape, the children playing soccer, the grandmother knitting). Playing the piano seems to have once brought tremendous joy to Karim, but repairing his piano simply becomes a way for him to secure enough money to escape these circumstances.

**In the film, what events/exchanges with other people break through Karim’s cynicism and discouragement and motivate him to keep fighting? Can you recall a time when you experienced a sense of hopelessness and despair? What gave you strength and courage in this situation?**

# 3

The film ends with an act of protest. Karim plays the piano in public to express his unwillingness to be dehumanized by the war and threats of violence by the ISIS soldiers. It also offers hope to others in the neighborhood who are inspired to join Karim in an expression of defiant solidarity.

**Artists play an important role during times of civil unrest and social change. They often give a voice and hope to those who are discouraged and oppressed. Where have you experienced the role of art and artists in your own life, in broader society or in the global community?**

# 4

*Broken Keys*, the feature-length version of *Nocturne in Black*, faced numerous unanticipated obstacles during the production process, including social unrest in several filming locations and an industry shut down due to a global pandemic. Keyrouz believes that the message of “never giving up” in both the short film and feature-length version will resonate with audiences during difficult times.

**Reflect on the substantial challenges you have observed in the world recently. Where have you seen examples of resilience and how have you found the strength to never give up?**