



AZADOOTA



TEACHER'S RESOURCES

"Iraq-n-Roll!"

Demystifying Iraq Through Music.

Discover the culture of Iraq as you take a musical journey from modern day Baghdad back through time to Ancient Assyria. Azadoota will show you Iraq behind the scenes, with songs about good times and celebrations on the banks of the Tigris River. Meet Assyrian musicians whose language and culture dates back 4000 years, and find out about Iraq's different communities. See a high-energy show featuring Arabic and Assyrian songs and learn some traditional dance steps. Azadoota means Freedom.

1. Background info on Azadoota's performance

The band name Azadoota means "freedom", and Azadoota's music celebrates freedom on many levels.

- The freedom we have here in Australia to express and share our cultural identity.
- Freedom from cultural and ethnic prejudice, which we hope to encourage through our performance.
- Freedom for the Iraqi people in a new democratic Iraq.

Media coverage of Iraq inevitably paints a picture of war and turmoil, and shows little of the country's rich and vibrant culture. Azadoota was created with the goal of using music to present an alternate view of Iraq and its people.

The Assyrian people are a small minority group from Iraq, whose cultural roots stretch back to furthest antiquity. Descendants of the Ancient Assyrians who dominated the civilised world 4000 years ago, Assyrians still speak the language of their ancient forefathers. But because the community is so small, most Australians either haven't even heard of Assyrians, or they assume they no longer exist. Azadoota aims to introduce Australians to the fascinating Assyrian culture and language.

Because the situation with the war in Iraq tends to have a polarising effect on people, we specifically try to take people beyond politics with our performance. Coming from a country that's been torn apart by extremist attitudes, we know first hand the damage those attitudes can cause, so Azadoota advocates tolerance and understanding in all situations.

As migrants, we truly appreciate living in a country where we can express ourselves freely. The beauty of performing an Azadoota show is in the knowledge that we are entertaining an Australian audience by expressing our culture with a freedom we never had in our country of birth.

Azadoota presents Assyrian and Iraqi culture in a lively and contemporary musical show. Despite unfamiliar language and rhythms, our high-energy performance draws the audience in, encouraging them to appreciate alternative styles of music as they participate in a musical celebration of freedom.

Azadoota's songs show a personal and sensitive view of Iraqi life, engaging the audience, demystifying Iraqi culture and influencing people's perspective. Through our musical performance, Azadoota aims to counteract the negative image of Middle-Eastern immigrants seen so often in the media; to break down stereotypes and to promote cultural tolerance.

Our cross-cultural band is made up of musicians from all corners of the globe, and the different ethnicities work in harmony to create a fresh and entertaining show. We hope that our music will transcend cultural barriers and encourage our audience to embrace diversity.



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Azadoota in action

Cultural Background

THE ASSYRIAN PEOPLE are the indigenous people of the Mesopotamia and have a history spanning over 6700 years. Today's Assyrians are descendents of the Ancient Assyrians who built the mighty empires of Assyria and Babylonia in ancient times. The Assyrians were a major power in the Middle East from 2000 BC until 612 BC when the Empire was destroyed by the Babylonians. After the fall of the Assyrian Empire, the Assyrian people continued to live in the Middle East, mostly in the area that we now call Iraq, but they had no power and were at the mercy of whichever nation was ruling at the time.

In ancient times the Assyrians worshipped a god called Ashur, but when the church was established in the first century AD, the Assyrians adopted Christianity as their national religion. The church was known as the Apostolic Church of the East, and had the dual role of attending to the people's spiritual needs as well as being recognised as the holder of temporal power and leadership over the Assyrian people. Assyrian church services are still written and conducted in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus, and the liturgy and services are those handed down from the time of the Apostles.

During World War I, Great Britain approached the Assyrians to be their allies against the Ottoman Empire. The British promised that if the Assyrians were dispossessed of their land, then new territory would be found for them. During the war the Turkish army devastated the Assyrian lands and many people died of hunger and disease. The remnants of the Assyrian people gathered together to be placed in a temporary camp in Baqubah in Iraq where Britain held the mandate. Soon villages were created.

In 1932 the British relinquished the mandate of these areas over to Iraq. The Iraqi government promised that minorities under their care would receive the same treatment as they had received under British rule, but after six months the Iraqi army massacred 3000 Assyrians and destroyed many farms, houses and animals.

Prior to the Gulf War more than 400 Assyrian villages were obliterated by the Iraqi government and much of the Assyrian population in the north of Iraq were transferred to the larger cities such as Baghdad. In 1991 the Gulf War further aggravated the situation and more than 250,000 Assyrians fled Iraq. Since 1996 factional fighting has led to unrest in the region.

Assyrians started to leave Iraq at the beginning of the 20th Century, escaping from political, ethnic and religious persecution. As you can see from the table below, almost half the world's Assyrians are now living outside Iraq.

		Assyrian Population			
Iraq	1,928,000	Australia	33,000	England	9,000
Syria	815,000	Germany	31,000	Austria	8,000
USA	460,000	Turkey	24,000	Greece	8,000
Armenia	206,000	Canada	23,000	Belgium	5,000
Brazil	98,000	France	18,000	New Zealand	4,000
Iran	74,000	Jordan	15,000	Switzerland	3,000
Lebanon	68,000	Georgia	15,000	Italy	3,000
Russia	45,000	Holland	12,000	Dubai (UAE)	3,000
Sweden	42,000	Denmark	10,000	Mexico	2,000
		TOTAL	3,954,000		



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HISTORY - ANCIENT ASSYRIA

Assyria was an ancient name for that part of Mesopotamia on the upper Tigris River now included in the northern Iraqi provinces of Nineveh, Sulaymaniya, Tamim, and Irbil. Watered by the Tigris and its tributaries, the Greater and Lesser Zab, ancient Assyria stretched from just west of the Tigris to the Zagros Mountains on the east and from about 34 deg north latitude up to the hills of Armenia. With moderate rainfall that permitted farming without irrigation and with considerable resources of stone for building, Assyria had advantages over Babylonia, where irrigation was necessary and mud brick was the principal building material.

Assyria took its name from its original capital, Ashur, situated just north of the junction of the Tigris and the Lesser Zab. Its founders, who are now called Assyrians, were a Semitic people who arrived from the southwest shortly after 2000 BC. During the Old Assyrian period (c.1900-1550 BC) the territory was unified by a series of vigorous rulers, and its influence was felt along the middle Euphrates and westward into central Anatolia (modern Turkey), where Assyrian traders established commercial colonies. By 1800 BC, however, the coming of the Hittites drove the Assyrians out of Anatolia, and the rise of Babylon under Hammurabi soon afterward caused a contraction of Assyrian power in Mesopotamia. By 1550 BC Assyria was part of the Kingdom of Mitanni; it did not regain independence until the collapse of that regime about 1365 BC.

After a slow revival, Assyrian strength quickened after 1000 BC and reached a new peak in the 9th century BC under Ashurnasirpal II (r. 883-59) and Shalmaneser III (r. 858-24), whose campaigns brought plunder and tribute from little kingdoms westward all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. After 800 BC this mighty dynasty gradually declined and finally collapsed (c.748 BC), but a new era began with the accession of Tiglath-Pileser III in 745. Babylon was subjected to Assyria, and states to the west were once more made tributary. The formal organization of an empire began with the last Assyrian dynasty, founded by Sargon II. Sargon (r. 721-05), Sennacherib (r. 705-681), and Esarhaddon (r. 681-68) made conquests that brought Elam, Media, Persia, Babylonia, Syria, Palestine, and even part of Egypt under Assyrian rule. A recession commenced under Ashurbanipal (r. 668-26), and by 612 the Medes and Babylonians had destroyed the city of Nineveh and brought an end to the Assyrian Empire.

The four successive capitals of Assyria--Ashur (Qalat Sherqat); Calah (Nimrud), founded by Ashurnasirpal II; Dur Sharrukin (Khorsabad), the fortress city of Sargon II; and Nineveh, selected by Sennacherib--have all been excavated by archaeologists, revealing the brilliance of Assyrian civilization. Despite the notorious brutality (and efficiency) of the Assyrian army, which the Assyrians themselves assiduously publicized, the great accomplishments of ancient Assyria in art and architecture, and also in literature, are universally recognised.



The ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud



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2. Assyrian Flag



The Assyrian flag is designed with a white background on which three waving stripes emerge from each corner of a four-headed star. At its centre, the star encompasses a golden circle representing Shamash, the Assyrian sun-god who was believed to give life to all things on earth. The four wedges of the star are a bright blue colour and represent happiness and tranquillity.

The waving stripes protrude from the four joints of the star and stretch to the four corners of the flag. The stripes are narrow at the base and become wider as they distance themselves from the centre. They symbolise the three major rivers flowing through the land of Assyria. At the top we see the mighty Euphrates, represented in blue denoting abundance. In the centre the great Zab is in white portraying peace, and in the bottom we see the mighty Tigris in red, representing the Assyrian national pride. These three stripes also symbolise the rays of the centre star, and represent the dispersion of the Assyrian people to the four corners of the world. The manner in which these stripes emerge from the star also symbolically portrays the eventual return of the Assyrians to their ancestral homeland, which is represented by the centre of the star.

Hovering over the star and the emblem of Shamash, is the royal insignia of the famous Assyrian king Sargon II, signifying the might and great civilisation achieved by the Assyrians. The insignia features an image of the God Ashur, the ancient Assyrian supreme deity, standing in a circle with two eagle wings stretching out to the sides. Ashur has drawn a bow and his arrow is ready to fly. This emblem is in the same shape and colour scheme as the original ceramic work preserved in the British Museum.

3. Language

Assyrians have used two languages throughout their history: ancient Assyrian (Akkadian), and Modern Assyrian (neo-syriac). Akkadian was written with the cuneiform writing system, on clay tablets, and was in use from the beginning to about 750 BC. By 750 BC, a new way of writing, on parchment, leather, or papyrus, was developed, and the people who brought this method of writing with them, the Arameans, would eventually see their language, Aramaic, supplant Ancient Assyrian because of the technological breakthrough in writing. Aramaic was made the second official language of the Assyrian empire in 752 B.C. Although Assyrians switched to Aramaic, it was not wholesale transplantation. The brand of Aramaic that Assyrians spoke was, and is, heavily infused with Akkadian words, so much so that scholars refer to it as Assyrian Aramaic.

Key phrases in Assyrian:

Hello – Shlama lokhon.

How are you? – Dakhit?

Good thanks – Baseema spy.

My name is ... – Shimi eeleh ...

What's your name? – Moodileh shimukh?

See you later – Push p'shenah.



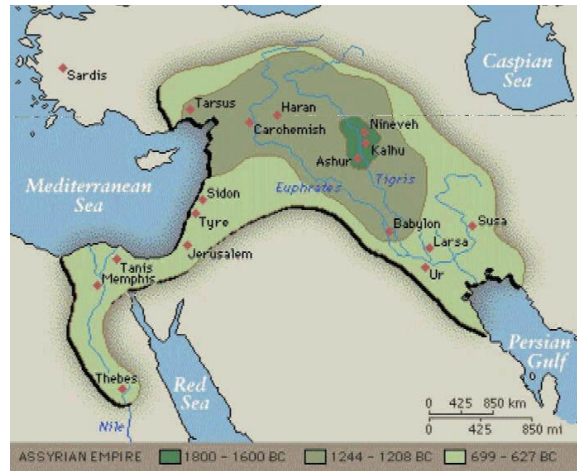
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4. Maps

Map of Modern Day Iraq



Map of the Assyrian Empire



5. Growing Up Assyrian In Iraq

Robin grew up in Dora, which is one of the outer suburbs of Baghdad, Iraq. Dora lies on the banks of the Tigris River and the land is very fertile, so all the local families grew heaps of fruit and vegetables in their back yards, and the kids used to swim and catch fish in the river.

Robin went to the local school, which was run by the Government so all the lessons were in Iraq's official language, Arabic. The Assyrian kids weren't allowed to speak Assyrian at school, they had to speak, read and write in Arabic. That's why most Assyrians today can read and write Arabic but not Assyrian.

In their spare time the kids would play soccer, basketball or volleyball. Families would organise big community picnics, where everyone would go to visit one of the local historic sites, and there would be lots of food, music and entertainment.

On Halloween, all the Assyrian kids would dress up in costumes and wear masks that they had made. They would go around to the houses in the neighbourhood, but instead of "trick-or-treating" for sweets, they would have to sing a song, and the people would give them money.

During July, Assyrians celebrated the festival called Nusardil. This day symbolised the baptismal water rite, and was celebrated with a huge water fight involving the whole community. Everyone collected buckets of water from the river and then the fun was on for young and old!

Assyrians have big families, so all the kids have heaps of cousins. In the summer holidays, all Robin's cousins, aunts and uncles would come and stay at Robin's house. The houses in Dora had flat roofs, and in Summer, families would pile up mattresses on the roof and all the kids would sleep on the roof under mosquito nets.

Robin's father was a guitarist and singer, and he used to perform every night in one of Baghdad's belly-dance clubs. In Baghdad city, the bank of the Tigris River was alive with cafes, restaurants and clubs.

6. Assyrians In Australia

Assyrians started to leave Iraq at the beginning of the 20th Century, with the first Assyrians coming to Australia in the 1930s. Contemporary Assyrian migration to Western countries increased dramatically during the Iran-Iraq war 1980–1988, when many Assyrians migrated to Australia under the Special Humanitarian Program or Family Reunion Program. Assyrians from Iraq suffered persecution on political, ethnic and religious grounds and Assyrians from Iran are persecuted mainly on religious grounds. Immigration continued to grow with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War in early 1991.



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In a comparatively short time that Assyrians have lived in Australia they have developed from a handful of families to full scale community with its own cultural programs including Assyrian language schools, churches, social clubs, youth groups, radio programs, sports teams and scholarships for university students. In 2003 the world's first Assyrian Primary School was opened in Sydney.

7. Assyrian Celebrations

Weddings form a big part of Assyrian culture. On the day of the wedding, all the relatives come to the bride's house to bring her out and escort her to the church. There is a lot of singing and dancing, which often goes on for about half an hour in the front yard before the bridal party get into the car – so it's a funny sight for all the neighbours to see!

It's traditional that when the relatives arrive to get the bride, her brother will block the door so she can't get out, and the relatives have to pay him a ransom so he'll let her go.

A lot of dancing goes on at Assyrian weddings. Everyone brings coloured scarves along to the wedding, and they wave them around while they are dancing, so it's a very colourful spectacle. The traditional Assyrian dance is called "Higgeh". Azadoota will teach the students some traditional dance steps.



Guests dancing the "Higgeh" at an Assyrian wedding.

The **Assyrian New Year** is the most important national festival, handed down through history from the remote past. Before the Assyrians embraced Christianity in the first century A.D, New Year was celebrated on the first day of the month Nissan in the ancient calendar. This date is the beginning of Spring in Iraq and the Northern Hemisphere. Spring represented new life, revival and resurrection, which were prominent themes in the ancient mythology and philosophy of Creation. New Year was the biggest festival in the ancient Assyrian Empire. It started on the first day of Nissan and was celebrated for 12 days. People from all over the Empire came to the capital to participate in the elaborate processions and celebrations.

After the Assyrians converted to Christianity in the first century and the Gregorian calendar was established in the Christian world, the Assyrians also accepted the new calendar and moved their new year to April 1st. The Assyrians of today all over the world celebrate for 12 days with parades, parties, music and dancing. They also gather in clubs and social institutions and listen to poets who recite the story of creation.

Another festival that derives from Ancient Assyrian ritual is **Nusardil**. On Nusardil, Assyrians ritualistically throw water upon each other in celebration of baptism. However in ancient times, the spraying of water on this festival celebrated the safe return of the god Tammuz from the Underworld. Tammuz was a god of "vegetation that is revived by the rains of the spring" and in Ancient Assyrian mythology was the lover of the goddess Ishtar. He is said to have spent half of each year in the Underworld, until he was "resurrected" and brought to life by Ishtar on the Autumnal equinox. His disappearance into the under-world is associated with the disappearance of vegetation under the midsummer heat, which revives again when the rain comes and the god appears once more on the earth.