

# Sama' Abdulhadi

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Free Palestine

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## biography

Although Sama' Abdulhadi is the first Palestinian DJ to gain international recognition, her career really began when she left home for Beirut's burgeoning techno scene. Plunging into Lebanon's nightlife, Abdulhadi gigged, practiced, and got inspired by the many local and international DJs gigging on the scene, while refining her trademark set: high-octane full-bodied techno with a distinct ark, a spectrum of moods, or as she says: "Berlin techno, but I perceive it in a Lebanese way."

Abdulhadi's story begins in Ramallah, Palestine's de facto capital. Moving there from Jordan, her place of birth, she first connected with hip-hop and rap, the region's foremost alternative genre. A penchant for music was evident at an early age, but it was the technical side that drew her in first, leading her to study in Beirut. She returned to Palestine with a new understanding of electronic music, and brought with her the techno genre, inspiring a local community of artists that continues to flourish in the face of the geo-political restrictions imposed upon it as documented in the Boiler Room 4:3 short, Palestine Underground.

Intent on pursuing a career in Music Production, Abdulhadi studied Audio Engineering at SAE Institute London, the basis for two albums as Skywalker, her former alias, and a job in Cairo, Egypt, where she began working with bands and designing sound for moving picture, including Egyptian films like "The Builders" and "Thread and Wall." It was during this time in Egypt that Abdulhadi also trained with Oscar-winning sound designer Nicolas Becker (Sound Of Metal), and later partnered with Arabic music incubator Eka3 to start her own publishing agency, Awyav.

Beirut was both her training and testing ground, but she was back on home turf in Ramallah when she played the 2018 Boiler Room debut that would make her a

household name among international techno fans. Her 58-minute set has over ten million views to date, an achievement shared by a very small group of DJs, all the more impressive for a Palestinian DJ who was virtually unknown outside the region when it first broadcast.

The set was a window into the rare electric energy of Arab techno parties; the energy of people living in the moment. Abdulhadi saw the same attitude in western audiences after lockdown ended. She said in a recent interview with The Face: "It's always been like this in the Arab world. We don't know what tomorrow holds so you feel this really intense energy from the crowd. I love how parties and festivals can disconnect you from reality. They can create this utopian bubble and just put you in a different world." Abdulhadi leverages her status as an international touring DJ to support the growing number of musicians and creatives in Palestine in a number of ways. She has set up Union, a collective in Ramallah that serves as a hub for DJs, producers and creatives of all stripes to meet, collaborate and hone their craft together whilst also advising them on the challenges they'll face. In honour of the Boiler Room set hitting 10 million streams, there was a re-sale of the highly-sought after Palestine t-shirt to raise money for the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, Palestine's leading arts and culture non-profit organisation and a place very dear to Abdulhadi.

However, her efforts have not been without controversy. In 2020 during lockdown, she was commissioned by online electronic music store Beatport to create a monthly music stream to promote the country's heritage sites and emerging local talent. While recording her stream in a bazaar near a mosque, she was illegally detained by Palestinian authorities on December 27 and spent eight nights in jail, charged with "desecrating a holy site" despite having a permit from the Ministry of Tourism. Two days in detention, a judge ruled to extend her

punishment by fifteen days, but she only remained in custody for six more days thanks to a Change.org petition that amassed over 101,000 signatures from the international DJ community. Pink Floyd's Roger Waters and political activist Angela Davis were among the signatories. On New Year's Day 2021, while still incarcerated, Abdulhadi released a Jane's Addiction remix with a vocal sample from Jim Morrison.

Her first full recording as Sama' Abdulhadi came out in June 2021 on the new Circoloco label / compilation in partnership with Rockstar Games. She also collaborated with Rage Against The Machine legend Tom Morello, a frequent advocate of DJ culture and solidarity with Palestine, on his album The Atlas Underground Fire. She is now working on her debut EP slated for release early 2023.

Abdulhadi focus continues to be on the Middle East and through Bring Back Beirut, her fundraise initiative for a liquidity crisis-afflicted Lebanon, she set up events in London, Paris, Berlin and her "second home" Beirut. As part of the initiative, she released an eclectic NFT compilation of Lebanese artists through Bolero Music in May 2022. April 2023 saw Abdulhadi launch Resilience, a global platform for artists and creatives to share their stories and artworks that depict experiences of marginalisation, displacement and oppression. The platform aims to create a space for expression and advocacy, where artists can tell their stories and amplify the voices of individuals and communities often ignored in mainstream narratives. With the funds from the Bring Back Beirut initiative, the

platform will be launched in Beirut with a free party over two consecutive nights (Abdulhadi bringing Richie Hawtin back to the city for the first time since 2017) to raise money for the beleaguered people of Lebanon.

Abdulhadi now stands as one of the world's most exciting DJs (and fearless cultural activists). She has played all over the world including Coachella, Glastonbury, Fusion, Circoloco, Lost Village, Primavera and Belfast's AVA festival, Brazil's Warung and Serbia's Exit Festival legendary Dance Arena. Her close connection with Richie Hawtin has seen her tour extensively across South America and likewise her 2019 b2b with Lebanon's Nicole Moudebar at IMS Dalt Vila In Ibiza holds huge significance. In London, January 2023 saw Abdulhadi sell out the first 4 Friday's with her own residency at Phonox nightclub.

She has also done her first BBC Radio 1's Essential Mix, significant for Abdulhadi as the platform served as a source of huge inspiration for her whilst living in countries with no international guests. Additionally, she contributed to BBC Radio 4's Documentary: 'Techno: A Social History' and graced the cover of DJ Mag UK and Resident Advisor. A documentary film about Abdulhadi's journey is currently being created by highly-respected Middle Eastern producers & directors and will premiere in 2024. Barely four years into her international career, Sama' Abdulhadi's story is at the forefront of a powerful movement. Her goal has always been to put Palestine on the musical map and in doing so she continues to garner international solidarity and a new level of understanding of the Middle East as a whole.