Roger Waters reimagines the Pink Floyd classic “Comfortably Numb” as appeal for Palestinian rights

Kevin Reed
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Roger Waters’ new nine?minute remake of the popular Pink Floyd track “Comfortably Numb,” recorded with Palestinian singer Mona Miari, is a powerful creative reworking of a classic rock music lament into an indictment of the Gaza genocide and an appeal for international solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Across several new English and Arabic verses, the song modifies the original, satirical refrain of resignation, “I have become comfortably numb,” into a vow: “I will never become comfortably numb / ?? ????? ?? ?????? ????????? ??????.” Waters closes the new version with, “Palestine must be free… with equal rights, for everyone, from the river to the sea.”

“Comfortably Numb–Reimagined,” released on June 12 and credited to both Waters and Miari, is an arrangement built around piano, strings, percussion and layered vocals. The project is explicitly framed as a response to what Waters and Miari describe as the “continued genocide in Gaza.”

The release is also raising funds for the Palestine Children’s Relief Fund and is linked to a network of political education, grassroots organizing and independent media projects centered on Palestine.

The film version of the song splices video of Waters in New York and Miari in the studio with black?and?white footage shot by Palestinian photographer Suhail Nassar and his crew amid the rubble of Gaza. It presents the visuals of the project as belonging to those living through the war.

For Miari, who grew up under Israeli occupation, the collaboration is an act of narration. As she explains, “I am my people. I am telling my story.” Waters has described the composition as an “organic” correspondence between “an old bloke in New York City” and a Palestinian artist across the sea.

Waters has described the shift from the original’s most famous line as a message and conscious refusal of the pressure to tune out, depoliticize and retreat into numbness in the face of the atrocities being committed against Palestinians.

In an interview with *Wired*, Waters says he hopes listeners will eventually recognize that “there is a right and a wrong. This is not complicated, and this song is on the right side of history,” connecting the refusal to be numb with moral clarity and political awareness.

In the new English lyrics, Waters modifies the song’s perspective with spoken word-style singing:

I feel your pain from New York City / I feel your pain across the sea / That distant ship on the horizon / Is calling out to you and me.

And later, he sings:

We never knew about the Nakba / I was only five years old in ’48 / We were unaware, what was happening over there / It breaks my heart I came on board so late / You reached us all with your rallying call / Now we stand at the gate.

The official project site publishes a complete bilingual text and translation of the new lyrics, which allows the listener to follow Miari’s Arabic verses as a continuous thread running through the re?imagined piece.

Miari enters after Waters’ opening lines with an answer from the ruins of Gaza:

After all that’s happened / There’s no one left / No words are left / Why ask at all? / All that is gone / Home… beloved home.

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In her second major Arabic passage she replaces the introspection of the original with a generational declaration:

When I was young, I dreamt of freedom / Today it is hope that fuels who I am / We are roots breaking through rocks / From under the rubble, we birth our fate / We are the light after darkness / We are what's promised, we are the dream.

Waters says the project falls within the Palestinian political concept of "Sumüd," an Arabic term that translated as "steadfastness" and carrying a deeper connotation of rooted, collective perseverance. He has said the song is "part of 'Sumüd'… the perseverance to resist the occupation of Palestine completely, all of Palestine, not just… Gaza and the West Bank, we're talking about the whole thing from the river to the sea."

Looking ahead a decade, Miari has said she hopes that "whoever listens to 'Comfortably Numb–Reimagined' could also experience a free Palestine and look back at it as a testament about the truth and what happened and just cherish that sense of resistance and urgency for freedom."

She stresses that the work is not intended as a protest song but functions as "a call to action… forcing everyone to confront and to understand, to even sit with their discomfort about this truth."

Waters' collaboration with Miari is the latest in a series of actions going back two decades, during which he has become one of the most prominent popular Western musicians to publicly support Palestinian rights and describe Israel as an apartheid state.

Waters has increasingly characterized his creative works and statements as a defense of universal human rights, referenced the United Nations Charter and opposed ethnic cleansing and military occupation.

Responding to persistent smears that he is antisemitic, from apologists for the mass murder in Gaza, Waters told an interviewer this year: "I don't have an antisemitic bone in my body, I never did and I never will have. … I'm interested in human rights for my brothers and sisters, whoever they are. Color of the skin, religion, nationality, politics—I couldn't care less."

Waters has linked the attacks on him directly to organized efforts by the Israeli state and its allies to equate opposition to Zionist policy with antisemitism, correctly insisting such campaigns are designed to intimidate and silence dissent.

In discussing the new song, Waters said he and Miari understand themselves as "part of an existential battle for the whole human race, for the soul of the human race," and invites listeners "to join the resistance to the occupation."

"Comfortably Numb–Reimagined" is Waters' second reworking of the track. In 2022, during what he called the "Lockdown Sessions," Waters issued a stripped?down version of "Comfortably Numb" built around voice, synths, and strings, and removing the original's electric guitar solo.

When "Comfortably Numb" first appeared on the Pink Floyd album "The Wall" in 1979, its lyrics were intended to bring out and criticize the condition of a rock star so psychologically damaged that he must be medicated—drugged into a functional stupor—to perform. The "numbness" in question was an anesthesia produced by the reality of a "star" alienated from his audience and from his own body.

In "Comfortably Numb–Reimagined," Waters and Miari pivot and the "numbness" they reject is not merely the self?protective shutting down of an individual artist, but the cultivated indifference of publics, governments, media and cultural institutions confronted with live?streamed war crimes in Gaza.

The haunting melody and familiar refrain are deployed to highlight the need for those who watch, read and listen to take action against the bombing, starvation and displacement of Palestinians in Gaza. Waters and Miari counterpose sumüd—steadfastness—to passivity and inaction and appeal to the public to overcome "comfortable numbness" and join the global movement to fight for the Palestinians.

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