

**CANCER IS MY ENGINE MUSIC VIDEO
Comprehensive Press Info Packet**

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Iraqis in Pajamas Bio

In turn vulnerable and angry, haunting and inspiring, Seattle-area band Iraqis in Pajamas (IraqisInPajamas.com) disarms audiences, opening them to deep contemplation about trauma, healing, and transformation. Featuring front woman and bass player Loolwa Khazzoom, guitarist Sean Sebastian, and drummer Robbie Morsehead, with songs in English, Judeo-Arabic, and Hebrew, the band has a unique sound - an innovative blend of ancient Iraqi Jewish prayers, alternative rock, and personal storytelling about topics as varied as cancer, domestic violence, racism, mental illness, street harassment, family caregiving, and national exile.

Khazzoom has had a meandering career as an educator, writer, health coach, and more, all with the central organizing principle of individual and collective healing. Her work has been featured in top media including *The New York Times* and *Rolling Stone*; she has presented at leading venues including Harvard University and the Simon Wiesenthal Center; and she has published two books, taught throughout the Ivy League and at universities nationwide - *The Flying Camel: Essays on Identity by Women of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Heritage* and *Consequence: Beyond Resisting Rape*. Ultimately ditching her power suit and power point in favor of combat boots and cat glasses, Khazzoom now offers bold songwriting as the catalyst for deep and heart-centered conversation.

Guitarist Sean Sebastian is a professional musician, as well as an audio engineer, film maker, founder of Off the Wall Artists Collective, and owner of Bard Rock Studios - through which both the audio track and music video were recorded and produced. Drummer Robbie Morsehead has been a professional musician for decades – touring nationally, recording numerous albums, and performing for notables including Seattle Supersonics and Microsoft.

"Cancer Is My Engine" Sponsorship

In December 2019, Iraqis in Pajamas was fiscally sponsored by nonprofit Healing Journeys, and funded by the Lloyd Symington Foundation - both supporting innovative programs for people living with and healing from cancer - to produce the audio track and music video for "Cancer Is My Engine," the personal story about Khazzoom 's choice to approach a cancer as an opportunity for whole-Being, whole-Life healing and transformation.

Song Back Story - Synopsis

Following a thyroid cancer diagnosis in 2010, Loolwa Khazzoom seriously considered the option of surgery - going so far as to meet with two different surgeons. Ultimately, she decided to reject that option, and instead, she radically overhauled her diet and lifestyle. In doing so, she cold-stopped the growth of the nodules, which remained stable for five years. When she then moved to Seattle and returned to her lost love of music, launching Iraqis in Pajamas, the nodules started shrinking - demonstrating not only the healing power of music but also the healing power of being in our "happy place."

For more details, please see the following:

- A Call for Intelligent Medicine
<https://khazzoomusic.com/2020/11/12/a-call-for-intelligent-medicine/>
- Full Back Story and Song Lyrics
<https://khazzoomusic.com/2020/11/05/back-story-and-lyrics-for-cancer-is-my-engine/>
- My Grand Healing Adventure
<https://khazzoomusic.com/2020/11/05/my-grand-healing-adventure/>

Music Video Storyboard

Through magical realism and metaphor, the music video reveals how, by listening to her inner voice, Khazzoom self-healed through her actual voice, by singing – the ability of which ironically may have been destroyed by a thyroidectomy, given the proximity of the thyroid gland and vocal chords.

The video begins with Khazzoom standing at the edge of a cliff, singing the opening line of the song, "Cancer is my engine." As she sings it, a candle is lit by her voice. Suddenly she is transported to a forest, where she is searching in the dark with the light of that candle. She comes across a bear – representing Khazzoom's mother – and picks it up, then continues on her quest. An insurance agent and doctor appear and begin chasing Khazzoom through the forest. As she runs away from them, carrying the bear, she comes to a fork in the road – with the doctor on one side and the insurance agent on the other, coming toward her. She stops, looks in each direction, then runs forward, through the part of the forest that has no path, heading toward the light. She keeps running until she comes to a cliff and jumps off it.

She lands in the middle of a drumming circle and starts dancing wildly. A few scenes later, she is drumming in the middle of the circle, and everyone else is dancing around her. Both circles represent the pivotal importance of music and dance in Khazzoom 's healing. The video then starts to shift from magical realism and metaphor to real life shots, with the band playing music in a vegetable patch in Khazzoom 's garden, representing Khazzoom 's regimen of juicing daily and eating a whole-foods, plant-based diet. The video ends with Khazzoom standing on the edge of the cliff and singing the last words of the song, in the original a cappella Iraqi Jewish prayer that exalts the power of the Divine.

Areas of Expertise

- Healing through Music and Lifestyle Medicine
- Original Songwriting and Music Performance
- Iraqi Jewish Heritage and Jewish Multiculturalism

Sample Interview Topics

- **Darkness Becomes Light**
When Loolwa Khazzoom first brought the lyrics, melody, and bass line of "Cancer Is My Engine" to her Iraqis in Pajamas band mates, to flesh out the song together, they perceived the song as being "dark" - reflecting the common fear-and-dread responses that people get when thinking or talking about cancer. Through the process of developing the song and music video together, however, bandmates experienced the song in a radically different way, understanding not only that it is about Light, but that it is an inspiring testimony to the power and potential of the human mind, body, spirit, and will.
- **Meaning and Metaphor of the Olympic Peninsula**
Iraqis in Pajamas filmed the music video in Washington State's Olympic Peninsula, where Iraqis in Pajamas band members live, and where Khazzoom relocated in 2016, as part of her radical lifestyle shift and healing - leaving behind big city life and settling in a home on five acres of rural forest. The music video showcases the local beauty of the region, including Khazzoom's backyard - using trees, cliffs, and water as metaphors for light and darkness, forging one's one unique path, and taking a leap of faith into the great unknown. Location shots included Ilahee State Preserve in Bremerton, Buck Lake in Hansville, Point Julia in Hansville, and Bainbridge Aquatic Center in Bainbridge.

- **Purpose During the Pandemic**

Volunteer cast and crew drove in from across Washington state, to participate in filming during the pandemic - wearing masks, practicing social distancing, and filming in pods. Participants felt an instant sense of community, meaning, and purpose, as they united in sharing with the world a message of hope and healing.

- **Surgery and Serendipity**

Shortly after the cancer diagnosis, Khazzoom was seriously considering the recommended thyroidectomy procedure. During this time, she gave the first in what was supposed to be a series of workshops on public relations strategies for entrepreneurs. At the end of the workshop, when she announced that there would be no workshop in the coming month, someone in the audience asked why; and Khazzoom answered honestly that she had been diagnosed with cancer and was likely getting surgery the next month. A long line of participants formed at the end of the workshop, each individual offering Khazzoom messages of strength and hope. One woman in particular shared how she had eliminated breast cancer through a spontaneous mind-body dialogue. That encounter, plus a follow-up coffee meeting with this woman, gave Khazzoom the courage she needed to follow her intuition, instead of following medical convention - leading Khazzoom to design her own road map for healing.

- **Healing as a Byproduct of Wellness**

During the time of the cancer diagnosis, Khazzoom was active on social media. She wrote a long blog post, sharing her thinking and research to date, and posing to the Universe the question, "How do I self-heal from cancer?" A follower answered in a comment, "The answer is in the question: You self-heal." After contemplating the response, Khazzoom wrote the question on poster paper, with the words "you self-heal" in a different color. She then hung the poster paper on the wall, put on meditative music, and contemplated the question and the "answer in the question." Suddenly, she understood: The focus was not to be on eliminating cancer, but rather, on healing her life on every level. Following this insight, Khazzoom made radical changes in her diet, lifestyle, and mindset - ultimately returning to her lost love of music and starting her band, following which, the nodules began shrinking.

Sample Interview Questions

- What inspired you to write the song, "Cancer Is My Engine"?
- Why did you include a purple bear throughout your video?
- Who is chasing you in the music video, and what do those scenes represent?

- Talk about when you came to the crossroads in the music video.
- Talk about the significance of the cliff in the music video.
- How did you film the scene where you jump off the cliff?
- Where did you film the music video, and why?
- What do the drumming and dancing circles in the music video represent?
- Talk about your choice of style and color for your music video wardrobe.
- Talk about filming the music video during the pandemic.
- Why did you film a scene in a vegetable patch?
- Why did you choose to heal from thyroid cancer naturally, instead of pursuing the recommended course of surgery?
- What were some of the lifestyle changes you made, following the cancer diagnosis?
- Why do you think the nodules started shrinking after you started your band, Iraqis in Pajamas?
- You seem fearless in your conviction. Did you ever doubt your decision?
- What were some of the hardest parts of your healing journey?
- You've been on this healing path for 10 years. What have been some of the highlights of what you call your "cancer healing adventure"?
- What do you hope people take away from your music video?