

Sadat Wants Peace In Sinai to Be More Than Run of de Mille

Hollywood Promoters Create Music Spectacle to Follow Ceremonies on the Mount

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HOLLYWOOD—Fireworks light up the night sky.

Suddenly, a squadron of aircraft flies low over Egypt's majestic pyramids, and battalions of Egyptian and Israeli paratroopers drop out of the darkness and wave national flags illuminated by immense, arcing torchlights.

Zubin Mehta strikes up a combined Egyptian-Israeli symphony orchestra, and dozens of the world's leading statesmen and politicians, joined by scores of international superstars and thousands of invited guests, stand for the playing of national anthems.

Welcome to the World Peace Festival, as envisioned by its Hollywood-based producers. They are busy concocting a live spectacle that they hope will rival anything Cecil B. de Mille ever put on film. While some of the plans seem farfetched, there's more to them than the usual show-business hype. That's because the moving force behind the festival is one of the world's shrewdest and most-powerful promoters: Anwar Sadat.

Concert-promoting might seem an unusual sideline for the president of Egypt. But Mr. Sadat, who once considered becoming an actor, has always had a flair for the dramatic. Take his unprecedented peace-seeking trip to Jerusalem on Nov. 19, 1977, an event that the festival will commemorate exactly two years later. The festival, in turn, will kick off a month of celebrations in Egypt.

Still Under Negotiation

Mr. Sadat has formally commissioned the Hollywood group to produce the entertainment extravaganza, and although final negotiations still are going on, he already has promised the full support of the Egyptian government. "You can count on our cooperation to make this concert a great event," a top cultural aide to the president wrote the producers.

Actually, the nighttime concert is almost an afterthought. For President Sadat, the main event on Nov. 19 will take place that morning, 220 air miles from Cairo; an hour-long ceremony will be held at Jabal Musa (better known as Mount Sinai), one of the most desolate spots on earth and also one of the most sacred to the world's major religions. There, the Bible says, on the 7,500-foot mountain of pinkish granite near the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula, Moses received the Ten Commandments.

Israel, which has occupied the peninsula since 1967, wasn't due to return Mount Sinai to Egypt until the start of next year. But the deeply religious and very determined Mr. Sadat, who originally wanted the Camp David accords signed there last year, persuaded the Israelis to return the mountain officially at the ceremony, which Prime Minister Menachem Begin has agreed to attend.

Mr. Sadat made it clear to Ezer Weizman, Israel's defense minister, that he wasn't kidding when he said he planned to get Mount Sinai back. "The mountain where our Lord spoke to Moses is my land. I will go and pray there," Mr. Sadat says he told Mr. Weizman last year after peace talks had broken off and before their successful resumption at Camp David. When the defense minister expressed some skepticism, Mr. Sadat says he replied, "What would you do if you find me one day riding in a Jeep and going (there) to pray? You wouldn't be able to get rid of me unless you shoot and kill me, but if the car keeps going, I will definitely (get there)."

Available: an Army

Mr. Sadat will clearly have a leading role in guiding the festivities, and it is his clout that will get things done. "When you think that the entire Egyptian army is at your beck and call to build a stage or whatever you need, it's mind-boggling," says a public-relations man associated with the project. "It isn't like using the Teamsters and having them tell you they won't work weekends."

The actual planning and production of the main events, however, have fallen to an unlikely cast of characters. They include French film director Roger Vadim, as well-known for his marriages to Brigitte Bardot and Jane Fonda as for his movies; Mitchell W. Roth, a real-estate lawyer, and his Egyptian-born friend Wahid Gabriel Bactor, both in their late 20s and co-owners of a film company that has produced just two short subjects to date; and Sanford Feldman, whose credentials include work as a staff lawyer for the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, as a television producer and as co-promoter of what is said to be the most financially successful rock concert in history.

"Although I've been a participant in this since the start, I still expect to wake up and find it's all an hallucination," Mr. Roth says. The lawyer says he and his friend, Mr. Bactor, were so amazed and awed by the events at Camp David that they decided to try to pull together some sort of spectacle

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"to show the entertainment community's support of the peace process." Their first thought was to get the Beatles together. When that failed, they approached Egyptian and Israeli officials in Washington last November with the idea of an all-star concert.

"We were encouraged by the Egyptians, but the Israelis said they couldn't lend support to any event until peace was actually achieved," Mr. Roth says. Mr. Boctor, who was in Egypt on a film project, finally succeeded in seeing Mr. Sadat earlier this year after a four-month wait. Several other proposals were before the president, but he picked Mr. Boctor's, largely because Mr. Vadim had agreed to be artistic director of the festival.

"Roger is a friend of ours, and he's regarded as something of a god in Egypt," Mr. Roth says. "He and Sadat talked for hours in Alexandria, and they really hit it off." Despite the verbal go-ahead, it wasn't until last month that the producers received confirmation in writing from Rashad Rushdi, Mr. Sadat's counsellor for the arts.

"Open Theater" Planned

In his letter, addressed to Mr. Vadim, Mr. Rushdi said he was pleased to "confirm that President Sadat has decided to celebrate the date of Nov. 19, 1979, with a peace concert" with Mr. Vadim as artistic and technical supervisor and Mejika Co. (the firm of Messrs. Roth and Boctor) as producer. "We confirm also that we will build an open theater for this special night, following your instructions."

The original plan was to have a five-hour concert at Mount Sinai, but the oppressive heat and logistical problems have led to separation of the ceremony and the entertainment. Plans currently call for dignitaries to be flown by military helicopters to Mount Sinai early in the morning.

There, Mr. Roth hopes, a noted film star will read from the Bible while choral groups sing. Egyptian, Israeli and Moslem opera stars will sing unaccompanied "like pure, symbolic voices in the wilderness," Mr. Roth adds. There will be speeches, of course, and President Sadat will unveil plans for his dream monument.

Chapel Complex

The Egyptian president will lay the cornerstone for what he envisions as a multi-million-dollar complex of chapels, representing the major faiths, and a tall, central spire with a symbol for all religions at its peak. To help finance his dream, diplomatic sources say, Mr. Sadat is likely to make a subtle pitch for contributions to build the combination church, mosque and synagogue at the base of Mount Sinai, near the 1,500-year-old St. Catherine's monastery. He also hopes to use the occasion to push his case for somehow resolving the Arab-Israeli dispute over East Jerusalem, which contains the holy Moslem mosque, Al Aksa, the sources add. The ceremony probably will be televised live world-wide.

Then it's back to Cairo's suburbs for the first of two nights of the World Peace Festival. Tickets will be limited to about 3,000 invited guests. While names such as Barbra Streisand, Bob Hope, the Bee Gees, Liza Minnelli and Donna Summer have been bandied about, Mr. Feldman, the concert's producer, says he hasn't signed anyone yet. (For example, Zubin Mehta, music director of the New York Philharmonic, is considering an offer to conduct, but a spokeswoman noted that an orchestra of Egyptians and Israelis "couldn't be pulled together by then.")

"I've only had the official word on the concert a couple of weeks, but I have gotten verbal commitments from some top stars," Mr. Feldman adds. In fact, he says, the difficulty will be in holding down the number of celebrities to about 50, since the concert also will feature such acts as Egyptian belly dancers and Israeli folksingers.

Immortality Pitch

"Everyone who participates will have his or her name carved in the cornerstone on Mount Sinai," Mr. Feldman exults. "What I'm selling these performers on is immortality!" He has to, since the fee being offered will barely cover expenses and the purchase of a few nice trinkets.

The producers estimate that the Egyptian government will pay about \$1.5 million in transportation, construction and other expenses. It will cost about another \$1.5 million to put on the show and videotape it. Half of any profits would go for the Mount Sinai religious complex.

The producers, however, worry that if they can't interest the U.S. networks, syndicators or sponsors, their plans for a grandiose concert could prove too costly. They are in Egypt now discussing financial arrangements, but Egyptian officials in Washington say that because of President Sadat's strong backing, there will almost definitely be some sort of celebration at the foot of the pyramids about two months from now.

"Sure, the time is short, but this thing is so big that I don't think we could do any better with six months of preparation," Mr. Feldman says. Adds Mr. Roth: "If President Sadat could take all the risks he did, we think we can take a few. It's the power and force behind the event itself that will make it a success."