

Caged Songbirds

Australia's hardline treatment of refugees is under fire as high-profile artists join the campaign in support of two detained Kurdish musicians: Farhad Bandesh and Mostafa 'Moz' Azimitabar. **Jane Cornwell** reports

As a boy growing up in Ilam, the third largest Kurdish city in Iran, Farhad Bandesh remembers the sound of the *saz* (a long-necked plucked lute) emanating from open windows and shop doorways, from the villages in the nearby mountains where he used to hike, camp and pick wild berries. Ubiquitous in Iranian Kurdistan, the *saz* – which is also known as the *bağlama* – provided a melodic soundtrack to Farhad Bandesh's early life.

"Saz music connects people," says Bandesh, 37, speaking on his phone from Melbourne, Australia, where he is being held in the notorious Melbourne Immigration and Transit Accommodation Centre (MITA) in the northern suburb of Broadmeadows. "It is very old, very patient, used in folk songs that have been passed down through generations. The saz

shares sorrow and happiness. It is music that makes you want to create."

Bandesh mastered the instrument as a child, plucking strings grouped in threes, playing scales made up of quarter tones, and took up the guitar aged 15. Music came easily to one whose creativity would spill over into singing, poetry and painting, into calligraphy, jewellery and furniture making. He became a luthier: "I'd make guitars from maple wood, and play them the way I played the saz, strumming and hitting the body with

