



**ASHTAR FOR THEATRE
PRODUCTIONS & TRAINING**

Annual Report

2009

Ramallah, February 2010

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About Ashtar

Ashtar For Theatre Productions & Training is a non-governmental theatre organization which was founded in 1991 by two Palestinian actors, Edward Muallem and Iman Aoun, who worked in theatre since 1977.

Ashtar began its work in Jerusalem as the first drama training program in Palestine targeting children and youth. The institution soon became a dynamic theatre with a local flavor and international orientation, whose objective is to spread creativity and commitment to change through a unique mix of training and acting programs and professional theatre performances.

Ashtar Theatre works in three main streams (below) and tries to reach the Palestinian audience in all its localities. "If a marginalized audience is unable to come to our theatre in Ramallah, we take our stage and play to the audience."

Ashtar Theatre conducts **intensive training programs for youth** aged 12 – 22, all year around, from which many theatrical performances result. These programs offer youth essential skills that reach beyond acting and contribute to raising their level of self-awareness, enhancing their self-confidence and giving them leadership skills and dynamic ways of communicating and working in a group.

Ashtar Theatre specializes in the technique of the **Interactive-Forum Theatre** founded by the Brazilian director Augusto Boal, which aims to spread effective dialogue and a commitment to change within society. This theatre form pushes the audience to interact with the actors on stage about important social and political issues, transforming the audience from the character of receiver to a role as participator. Through the use of the Forum Theatre methodology, Ashtar Theatre stands as a lively agent of change in Palestine.

Ashtar Theatre annually produces **joint international theatrical productions** with theatres and theatre professionals from different countries, presenting new and varied theatre forms in Palestine to enhance the professional development of the actors and the general audience of Palestinian theatre.

Ashtar Theatre has won many international theatre awards, toured worldwide and presented its works in numerous international theatre festivals.

Activities and Programs - 2009

First: Forum Theatre

1. Performances of the play “The Story of Said Al Masoud”

The play: “The Story of Said Al Masoud”, produced at the end of 2008 with the support of the Welfare Association, uses Forum Theatre, a form of the Theatre of the Oppressed technique, to deal with the phenomenon of drug abuse in Jerusalem. It sheds the light on some factors that lead to the delinquency of youth and their entry into the world of drugs, giving the audience, through its direct interaction with the play’s events, the opportunity to search for solutions that may help to impede the spread of this phenomenon.



The play has been performed more than 85 times to date and seen by an audience of more than 9000 people, most lately in a series of 32 performances, partially funded by UNICEF, that were presented to school students in Hebron, Nablus, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah in the fall of 2009.

2. Ashtar moves Forum Theatre to television – the play “The Story of Mona”

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For the first time, Ashtar Theatre moved the idea of Forum Theatre to television, in an attempt to bring Palestinian social issues to every Palestinian home for live participation in problem solving.

With partial funding from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Ashtar Theatre produced the play: “The Story of Mona” in the fall of 2009 using the technique of Legislative Theatre, and the play was performed in five Palestinian towns and refugee camps then produced for television with a live audience in the studios of Ma’an Network in Bethlehem. Ma’an Network broadcast the play in 8 local television stations, in talk shows that hosted decision makers and influential women relating to the subjects under discussion. The direct television performances attracted notable attention from the audience and from local television stations.

3. The play: “A Hot Summer” using the Forum Theatre technique In co-operation with Ahlam Theatre, Mi’ilya

With the support of Naseej youth project, the artist Edward Muallem supervised the directing of the play “A Hot Summer” in Mi’ilya village, Galilee, one of the Forum Theatre training points, with the participation of a group of youth trainees from Ahlam Theatre and some neighboring villages.

In the first week of the program, the participants trained on some of the main concepts of the Theatre of the Oppressed before starting to work on the Forum play whose themes were inspired by the reality that most of the group’s participants live in, such as the excessive use of mobile phones by youth segments in different areas of their daily lives, poverty, family disintegration and youth delinquency.



The audience praised the show and the artistic form in which the different subjects were presented, which helped for the first time to generate an honest dialogue in the theatre hall between the audience, actors and decision makers.

Second: Experimental Theatre



1. The play “I am Jerusalem” A new play of Ashtar Theatre

“I am Jerusalem” is a theatrical performance which deals with the history of Jerusalem from the perspective of the city, in an attempt to humanize it through the spirit and personality of a woman who reviews the different periods of her life that are full of events and contradictions, in parallel with the life of the city. It is a critical stance towards the political events that have happened and are happening, leaving their imprint on the city’s face and carving its features since more than five thousand years ago.



The three opening performances of the play were in the theatre of the Royal Cultural Center in Jordan, after which the team came back to Ramallah to open the play officially among the activities of “Jerusalem, Capital City of Arab Culture”. The play was performed in each of Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem among the activities of the Manara festival, in addition to other performances in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Haifa and Nazareth in the summer and fall of 2009.



The play also represented Palestine in the Carthage International Festival of Theatre in Tunis, which was held in November 2009.

Third: Drama Training

1. “Training of Drama Facilitators” program in Jerusalem

With the support of the Welfare Association, Ashtar Theatre carried out a first training program in August 2009 for drama facilitators in summer camps. The program took place over 10 months in the YMCA in Jerusalem. 16 participants, male and female, took part in the program under supervision of three trainers from Ashtar Theatre: Edward Muallem, Mohammed Eid and Faten Khoury.

Participants in the program trained on the principles of acting and training, and on analyzing theatrical texts and using the techniques of sport theatre. At the last stage of the program, the summer of 2009, the practical application was in the summer camps in Jerusalem. The participants were spread among 10 summer camps in Jerusalem and its vicinity, and led the drama training in these camps under the direct supervision of Ashtar’s artistic team. At the end of the training program, after its evaluation by all participants, certificates were awarded to its graduates.



2. “Training of Drama Facilitators” workshop in summer camps, Mi’ilya

With partial support from the “Naseej” youth project and as part of the partnership agreement between Ashtar Theatre and Ahlam Theatre in the village of Mi’ilya, Galilee, Edward Muallem supervised a training program with a youth group from the theatre and some neighboring villages. The training program ran for one month in order to equip the group with skills in leading drama clubs in summer camps.

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11 youth, male and female, took part in the first part of the program which spans two years and ends in the autumn of 2010. The training program focused, in the first stage, on leadership techniques, team and trust building, through a large group of theatrical games and exercises which can be used in summer camps. In the first week of August, the students trained on Theatre of the Oppressed techniques through an intensive introductory workshop before starting to produce a Forum play with members of the youth group.



3. Drama Club in Ashtar Theatre

In the summer of 2009, 12 students, male and female, of the second and third years of the drama club in Ashtar Theatre, trained on a play inspired by the poems of Mahmoud Darwish, under the supervision of Galborz Gandilari from the United States, and the play was performed in mid-August 2009 to the students' parents and the general audience.



In the period between October – December, the British trainer Rhian Price led the training of the group for two months on a play in English, written by the trainer: "Drunken Mistake". The play was a theatrical workshop to test and select a group of school students to participate in acting the play: "Romeo and Juliet". It was performed in Ashtar Theatre to an audience of parents, students and friends.

4. Training program to activate youth centers in the West Bank and Gaza

As part of the partnership program between Ashtar Theatre and UNICEF, and in partnership with Ma'an and Tamer institutions, Ashtar Theatre supervised the first training program, over 6 months, to equip 73 facilitators to use drama in 73 youth clubs in the West Bank (Ramallah, Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus and Bethlehem) and Gaza Strip.



At the end of the training segment which was 80 hours of training in 3 months, per group, each group participated in acting in some short drama segments, directed by the trainers, as part of the practical segment before the program was launched in the various youth clubs.

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At the start of October, the facilitators were spread among the various clubs to transfer their skills to the students. At the end of 2009, the students performed several small play scenes to a local audience in the different Palestinian areas.

Fourth: Second Season of the Theatre of the Oppressed Festival

This year, Ashtar Theatre conducted the second round of its Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) Festival with the theme: "Raise Your Voice: Reserve Your Rights". Throughout the season (April 28 – May22), 45 performances: 35 international and 10 local, were conducted as follows:

Who you think you are? – South Africa
Superfluous people – Germany
Mostar Gymnasium – Bosnia and Herzegovina
Black Ink Disguised in white – Portugal
Silk, Rag, Blot – Sweden
A Game of Tag - Norway
Story of Said Al Masoud – Ashtar theatre
Day from the Past and a Day from the Future - Palestine

These plays were performed to audiences in Hebron, Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Al Quds University – Abu Dees, Jerusalem, Jericho, Ramallah, Birzeit University, Nablus, Tulkarem and Jenin.

In addition, four training workshops on various TO techniques were conducted in Jerusalem, Ramallah and Al Quds University – Abu Dees as follows:

- 1) Forum Theatre workshop at the YMCA: The workshop was run by Iman Aoun and 26 students from Jerusalem and Norway participated in this workshop.
- 2) Shadow Theatre workshop: This one day workshop was run by the Action theatre group from Germany. Ashtar students from Jerusalem participated in the workshop.
- 3) Rainbow of Desire workshop: This workshop was led by Barbara Santos from Brazil. The participants were from the Social Work faculty of Al Quds University.
- 4) Forum Theatre workshop: The workshop was held at Ashtar Theatre and was led by Mojisola Adebayo. 8 actors and actresses from Jerusalem and Tulkarem participated in the workshop.



Fifth: Miscellaneous Activities

1. “The Road to Jerusalem” – Street Theatre

Among the activities of the festival: “Jerusalem: Radiant in the Courtyard” and under the auspices of “Jerusalem: Capital City of Arab Culture 2009”, Ashtar Theatre joined with the Hakawati Theatre Group, the Ramallah Municipality and the International Academy of Contemporary Art to organize a parade in Ramallah with the title of: “The Road to Jerusalem”, where Ashtar Theatre and the “Jerusalem: Radiant in the Courtyard” festival hosted the “Bread and Puppet” international political puppet theatre group. The group worked with the students of the International Academy of Contemporary Art and of Ashtar Theatre to build dolls of a huge size, then they participated together with the students of the Palestinian Circus School and the scouts of Qaddura refugee camp in the great artistic procession that took place on Saturday the 10th October 2009 with the title of “The Road to Jerusalem”.



2. Ashtar takes part in the International Arts and Culture Conference in Johannesburg, November 2009

The artist Iman Aoun participated in the fourth round of the International Arts and Culture Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa in November 2009 with two working papers: “Culture and politics in Palestine and the concept of conscripting culture” and “The role of theatre in cultural and intellectual development in Palestine”. The conference was attended by more than 400 cultural activists from around the world, working in official and civic organizations.

3. Ashtar takes part in the Edinburgh Theatre Festival - July 2009

With the support and coordination of the British Cultural Center, the artist Iman Aoun and a number of Arab theatre professionals participated in the activities of the Edinburgh International Theatre Festival, where Iman Aoun met many of the participating theatre groups. The main purpose of this tour was for networking and looking for opportunities for future cooperation.

4. First international conference in Brazil for Theatre of the Oppressed professionals – July 2009

With invitation from the Theatre of the Oppressed Center in Rio de Janeiro, the artist Edward Muallem participated in the international meeting of the groups and directors working in the techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed, with more than 25 countries and 100 participants, in July 2009. The subjects discussed included: the Theatre of the Oppressed after the passing away of August Boal and the means of communication and cooperation between groups and individuals working in the Theatre of the Oppressed.

Sixth: Ashtar's programs in 2010

Ashtar's artistic plan for 2010 includes the following programs and activities, pending the availability of funding for them:

- Production of an experimental play: "48 Minutes for Palestine" (January 2010)
- Activating Ashtar's drama clubs (January – December 2010)
- Training in Yemen on the techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed (January – September 2010)
- Directing a Forum play in Trondheim, Norway (April 2010)
- Local and international tours of the play: "48 Minutes for Palestine" (all 2010)
- Training drama facilitators for youth clubs in cooperation with UNICEF / Stage Two (September – December 2010)
- Translation into Arabic and issuing of the book: "Legislative Theatre" by August Boal, developer of the theory of Theatre of the Oppressed (January – February 2010)
- Stage Two of the Naseej project for youth initiatives in Mi'ilya, Galilee (July – August 2010)
- Gaza Mono-Logues project (January – December 2010)

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