



For Theatre Productions and Training

لإنتاج وتدريب المسرح

# ASHTAR THEATRE

*ANNUAL REPORT*

*2011*

Ramallah  
April 2012

## Contents

<b>About ASHTAR.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Activities and Programs - 2011.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>First: Forum Theatre.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Second: Experimental Theatre.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Third: Drama Training.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Forth: ASHTAR's Main Donors and Local Partners.....</b>	<b>16</b>

# ASHTAR THEATRE

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 the Palestinian 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 in East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, and the West Bank. **“If a marginalized audience is unable to come to our theatre in Ramallah, we take our stage and play to the audience.”**

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. Using the Forum Theatre methodology, ASHTAR Theatre stands as a lively agent of change in Palestine, brings theatre to all segments of Palestinian society, and engages communities in democratic dialogue on daily issues they face and social taboos. **The program creates a platform for social and cultural change, and gives a voice to the voiceless through its focus on underrepresented groups such as women and youth.**

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 conducts **intensive training programs for youth** aged 12 – 22, all year round, 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 has won many international theatre awards, toured worldwide, and presented its works in numerous international theatre festivals.**

# Activities and Programs - 2011

## First: Forum Theatre

### 1. Theatre of the Oppressed Festival - Third Season



*“Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.” (Augusto Boal, Founder of Theatre of the Oppressed)*

Inspired by the mentor of the Theatre of the Oppressed, ASHTAR Theatre paves its path using theatre as a tool of social change, transformation and cultural enlightenment. ASHTAR Theatre is the main venue of the Theatre of the Oppressed in the Arab world; once again, it embraced the world using the power of theatre in its Third International Festival of the Theatre of the Oppressed. In this year's edition, our message came to reassure the necessity of cultural dialogue, which sets us free from discrimination, marginalization and oppression.



The uniqueness of this Festival is that it invites the world to an eye opening experience in Palestine, a place suffering from occupation, discrimination and oppression. The Theatre of the Oppressed not only becomes an artistic festivity but also a global and cultural human experience, where the celebration of humanity and diversity is the seed of sociopolitical change. The perspective of this Festival is rooted in the belief that change

only happens through dialogue, communication, leadership, interaction and human expression. Theatre of the Oppressed is the main constructive pillar of such values whereby dialogue elevates to its highest level inviting transformative thinking to happen between different cultures and within the same society.

In this Festival, ASHTAR Theatre raised the slogan: “Yes for Positivity, No for Negativity.” This slogan derives from all the challenges that ASHTAR Theatre faces on its day-to-day level in a place full of hostility, oppression, rejection and perhaps fears from change. ‘Yes for Positivity’ addressed the Youth of Palestine and the World to always be fueled

with hope and to have the ability to break barriers in order to live in a world celebrating democracy, human rights and cultural understanding.

Eight theatre groups came together and bonded artistically and culturally through their performances in the third edition of the Theatre of the Oppressed. This Festival was continuity to the previous festivals in its missions and goals but for this season it was a unique experience whereas its main target was the Youth, reassuring the power and voice of the Revolution's of Youth that happen across the Arab World in parallel to this Festival.

The International and local groups had the opportunity to tour in different cities of Palestine, and not only performed but also witnessed closely the political and social reality and injustices in Palestine.



The Youth performed for youth in various locations and theatre venues creating cultural bridges with the globe and broke the political, geographical barriers and fragmentation that are imposed by the oppressive existence of the occupation. The Third International Festival of the Theatre of the Oppressed was much more than an artistic intervention, rather it aimed at saying, "No to Negativity, oppression and occupation."

The participating international groups shared their stories on issues of discrimination, racism. During this season of the Theatre of the Oppressed, a platform was given for the identification of several forms of oppression, which were challenged and changed. This is how ASHTAR Theatre believes of the ability of the participants to unite despite their diversity, cultural differences and different forms of oppression faced. The Festival provided an understanding to different forms of oppression and thus an opportunity to learn from each other's tools of change. The Festival participated in breaking the isolations of Palestine from the World through the empathy and understanding, using art and the deep genuine belief in change that is capable of uniting our spirits, despite of the Racist Wall of Separation and Occupation.



A Palestinian soul resisting solely against the Occupation can't remove or change the reality, but with a choir of Palestinians and Internationals singing for change, freedom will be achieved.



In this Festival, we were delighted to host five local groups as well as four International groups. We hope that the Theatre of the Oppressed Festival achieved its goal and participated in the creation of a youth generation capable of building a brighter future that voice their needs and aspirations.

Theatre of the Oppressed as Augusto Boal believed is a sustainable and continuous hard work of people that are persistent and resistant to oppression willing to transform their own world. We welcome you and we welcome ourselves to change and to a new world colored with theatre and hope.

The “Third Intentional Festival in Forum Theatre” was reached more than 5000 people comprising elementary and secondary school students from the three different school types (UNRWA, private and governmental schools), students at universities and colleges as well as Palestinian youth from youth clubs and the general audience from all over the West Bank.

The performances took place in 21 different locations all over the West Bank and the Galilee. The festival included an overall number of 37 shows and 3 workshops from 9 different local and international theatre groups.



## 2. Training of youth in Theatre of the Oppressed – Ramallah and Gaza.

The project’s specific objectives are to build leadership among the youth; enhance positive self expression; provide youth with a setting in which to have their voices heard and their opinions discussed; teach and increase life skills such as teamwork, care of peers, inclusion and awareness of the varying roles of individuals in society; build cultural debate and bridges with internationals during the festival; learn by involvement; think critically to solve problems; self-respect; emotional control and learning acting skills. There were two youth groups which got trained as follows:

### **Ramallah:**

This group was trained on the Forum Theatre techniques and produced one play (The trained group consisted from 2 males and 6 females). The play “We Care for Your Health” was performed 20 times; in the following locations: Youth Club - Jalazon Refugee Camp, Children’s Club - Qalandia Refugee Camp, Arab American University of Jenin - Jenin, Al Tireh College – Ramallah, two performances at the Young Men’s Christian Association,

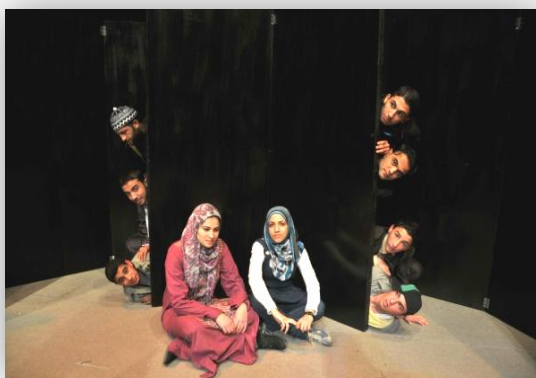


Jericho, Women's Centre – Shu'fat Refugee Camp, Freedom Theatre- Jenin Refugee Camp, and in Deir Ammar Refugee Camp – Ramallah. The performances attracted lots of attention and there were many audiences.

Each performance attracted around 70 persons, with a total of 930 persons watched the play during the tour, and the majority participated on the forum session, around 40% of the audience participated in the forum session, by either taking the stage, or giving comments while seated.

### **Gaza:**

The group was composed from 11 youths (2 females and 9 males). The play "Apartment, unemployment, drugs" was produced and performed 15 times with a total audience of around 4,000 persons performed in different locations in Gaza Strip. The plays mentioned above are produced in a Forum Theatre form (FT), which gave the audiences the chance to look in depth into their conflicts and social problems and motivated them to bring about a change.



The FT is considered as one of the most significant progressive social developmental tools, in that it stimulates the audience to interact and find solutions for the discussed matters in the play, and give them the chance to take a role on the stage, propose corrections, and solutions. Hence, the audience is transformed from a passive recipient of ideas in the play into an active participant who has to demonstrate the proposed change on stage.

During the performances there was active participation by the audience, they were invited to replace the oppressed characters against the oppressors to reinforce the characters' strive for change and help establish justice, thus experiencing the transformation from being into becoming.

### **3. Theatre of the Oppressed Training program in Iraq**

ASHTAR Theatre is considered the only theatre that is concerned with training and spreading the Theatre of the Oppressed techniques (TO) in Palestine and the Middle East since 2006. This is done through four trainers (jokers) who received intensive training over several years. They were trained by Barbara Santos -from the Centre of the Theatre of the Oppressed / CTO –Rio, who is a trainer and has worked for many years

with Augusto Boal the founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed, in addition to other trainers from Britain and Switzerland.

Since 2006 ASHTAR Theatre organized intensive workshops for this theater form in Palestine and some Arab countries. The most recent were two programs. The first was in the year 2010 which was spread over a period of one year in the city of Al-Hudaydah in Yemen and was supervised by the TO expert and Joker Iman Aoun. The program targeted 36 female and male trainees with the objective of spreading TO form in Yemen. The second began in the year 2011 under the supervision of the expert trainer and Joker Edward Muallem by training two groups of 30 female and male actors who came from the regions of Kirkuk and Nineveh to the city of Arbil in Iraqi Kurdistan to receive intensive training spread over the whole year, and the goal to transfer the experience of Ashtar Theatre and spread this TO form to the Iraqi theatre.



During the intensive training on Forum Theatre and Image Theatre techniques which are forms of Theatre of the Oppressed, 4 jokers were trained as well from the two groups on how to lead youth and/or theatrical groups and producing Forum plays with them. It is worth noting that four different plays were produced during the year 2011 with the two groups. These plays were performed 80 times under the direct supervision of Edward Muallem.



At the end of the year, two groups specialized in the Theatre of the Oppressed were established. The first team's name is "Shams Al-Iraq – Sun of Iraq", in Kirkuk. The second team named itself "Ashtar Al-Rafidein - Ashtar Mesopotamia" in Nineveh.

This newly introduced theatrical form in the Iraqi scene is becoming very popular and is attaining interest from the different forms of media, since this form of theatre presents current and hot socio-political issues that concern the different segments of the Iraqi community and its multi-ethnic groups. Among the topics raised in the produced plays in the year 2011: the problem of widows in Iraqi society, child labour, early marriage, embezzlement and nepotism, health, the environment, unemployment and migration.





#### 4. The play “Beit Yasmine” (House of Yasmine) A new play of ASHTAR Theatre

In the first half of the 2011, ASHTAR Theatre produced its new play “Beit Yasmine” directed by Iman Aoun, ASHTAR’s Artistic Director. The production was funded by Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. ASHTAR Theatre partnered with Al Hara Theatre Company for this play. From August to December 2011, the play of “Beit Yasmine” was performed 19 times (18 at ASHTAR Theatre in Ramallah and one in Deheisheh Refugee Camp). In October the Palestinian satellite TV broadcasted the play.

The play was based on the Theatre of Oppressed / Forum Theatre technique, which uses theatre as a tool for change, to serve cultural and social development and to promote and deepen the creativity of Palestinian society and the theatre community. The play shed light on the obstacles, challenges, deficiencies, negative and positive role

of the NGO sector in Palestine. The dialogue Theatre technique of the play succeeded in stimulating self-assessment for the NGO workers and institutions, as well as reflections on their practices. We hope that this provoked some organizations to rethink of new strategies and agendas that reinforce their positive role in the Palestinian society. (e.g. the performance that was



attended by Sharek Youth Group along with university students, some of which are affiliated to “Al Hirak Al Shababi”; heated the debate on whether accepting funds from the USAID is a rightful practice or not? The debate that started at the theatre, we later heard that it continued outside the theatre and shed waves on their preparation for the youth conference that Sharek was organizing.

Also the audience discussed the PNA limitations, which perpetuates the situation for the NGO sector leaving them somehow vulnerable to the foreign aid agendas. Corruption was another point of the matters discussed. This created a debate between those opposing and those agreeing with the existence of corruption in the PNA and how it affects the persistence of conditioned funding to Palestine, on both ends of the PNA and the NGO sector. One of the suggested solutions that resulted from the discussion was the importance of raising political awareness among the rising new generation. The importance of the youth understanding of the different agreements such as the Oslo and Paris agreements, and the positive role of cultural activities in raising such critical issues.

On the other hand, the play questioned several values such as economic independence; how the Palestinian community can return to producing its own agricultural products, boycott Israeli products, and achieve some sort of food security. This was discussed as an option for achieving financial independence instead of totally relying on donor funding.

Furthermore, the audience discussed how the NGOs can create a pressure group which is capable of lobbying and advocating for unconditioned funds for the development of Palestine in accordance with the Palestinian perspective. This of course requires a systemized networking and organization of work among the NGO agencies, instead of irrational competition on projects without achieving any development of the Palestinian society.

In some performances the audience debated the issues raised in the play; the conditioned funding, what can be done? Even when the audience looks at Yasmine as Palestine, they sometimes prefer Yasmine to die than to be conditioned.



## Second: Experimental Theatre

### 1. The play “48 Minutes for Palestine”

The play “48 Minutes for Palestine” which was produced during 2010, continued in its international tour. The play was directed by Mojisola Adebayo from the U.K. The production was funded by the British Council in Palestine as well as other local donors. After the opening in Ramallah, Palestine in May 2010, the play toured locally in Palestine, with 11 shows in the West Bank, then internationally in Valencia, Spain and the IDEA conference in Belem, Brazil. The play was met very positively and enthusiastically everywhere that it toured, and ASHTAR Theatre plans to continue touring it at other international theatres and festivals. It explores inequality in gender relations and is an attempt to talk about historical events and contemporary issues, through images and without words.

In July 2011 the play was published in London in a new drama anthology from Methuen under the title of “Theatre in Pieces: Experimental Theatre from 1968-2010.”

During 2011 the play was performed in 7 times in Cape Town in South Africa in Cooperation with British Council and toured 3 weeks in 6 cities in Sweden and was performed 18 times for High school students and for the general audience. The tour was organized by Riksteatern and TeaterReagera.

*‘it’s an amazing, magnificent piece of work. In fact, it is all of a piece, as there is no way of separating conception, visualization, staging, performing – and meaning. If there is any very positive and hopeful message, as some of the audience in the discussion were looking for – it is there in the fact that your work is an affirmation that unity – even for 48 minutes and encompassing the spectators – is real’*

**Peter Brook.**

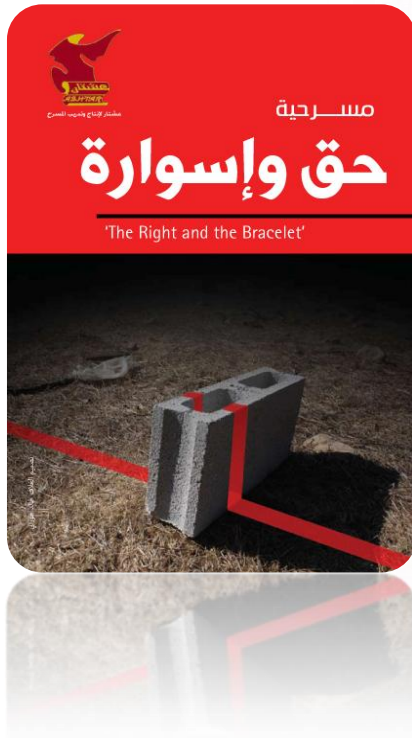


## 2. The play “The Right and the Bracelet”

A new play of ASHTAR Theatre for TV

The play of “The Right and the Bracelet” was produced during October 2011, directed by Bayan Shbib – actress, director and theatre trainer from ASHTAR Theatre. The play was produced in partnership with DANChurch AID and the YMCA in Ramallah through the fund from the European Union to support women in fighting for their legal right to inheritance. The play was premiered in November at ASHTAR Theatre. Furthermore, the play was then produced for television in 3 series.

“The Right and the Bracelet” highlights a controversial issue in Palestine especially that the Islamic Shari’a gives the women the right to inherit, yet socially this right is denied or undermined by different means and methods. This play is an outcome of research and artistic work to reinforce the right of women to inherit and to give voice to many voiceless women who are afraid of demanding their rights!





## Third: Drama Training

### 1. Drama Training for Teachers.

This project is for training UNRWA teachers on drama in cooperation with Yes Theatre. The project aims at training 70 teachers from 45 schools in drama. The project covers 8 governorates which are Bethlehem, Hebron, Ramallah, Jericho, Nablus, Toulkarem, Qalqilia, and Jenin.

Through this project, we aim to develop the communications and learning skills of the students, increase their creativity, and improve their academic achievements. The project will reduce the violence at schools between students, since dram will teach them how to peacefully solve their problems. In addition, they will acquire problem solving skills, and promote self expression. Furthermore, drama clubs will be created in the schools which will provide opportunities for several students.



13

### 2. Drama Training for students:

#### a. *First Year Students*

10 young people 7 girls and 3 boys were trained for 9 months on the techniques of sport theatre. The training took place at ASHTAR Theatre once a week, with trainer Iman Aoun. At the end of the training the group performed three times in Ramallah, at the Authoman Court, at Qadoura Garden as part of the Ramallah Spring Festival and at the marathon 5 KM run by Amid East at Abu Rayya Center.





**b. Second and Third Year Students:  
"For Adults only" production**

"For Adults only" is a standup comedy show, directed by Bayan Shbib and performed by ASHTAR Theatre students.

The show's idea has started when the Theatre students were bored and there was nothing new or interesting for them to do during the summer vacation. Bayan Shbib who is an actress/ director had previously worked with these students on several occasions; knew them, their abilities and the enormous amount of humor and sarcasm they have inside of them. Therefore, she started a creative writing workshop, where each student started writing his/her own monologue. The workshop's outcome was fascinating; the students came out with amazing pieces that were all transformed into acted sketches and scenes. Some of these sketches and monologues speak about society, love, relationships, oppression, sex, knowledge, family, society's weird habits, and many other themes.



The show was first performed for four times, many people came to the Theatre to watch it and a big majority of them watched it for a second and a third time.

**c. The Gaza Mono-Logues**

*The Gaza Mono-Logues* continued during the year 2011. Twenty of the Gaza Monologues writers from Gaza students were able to participate in three festivals around Europe during 2011. *The Gaza Mono-Logues* participated twice this year in Toulouse, once at the FITE – Le Festival International de Theatre d’Enfants - in June, with 11 youth from ASHTAR Theatre - Ramallah and the other time when actors from - La Comedie Francaise read the monologues at “Le Marathon Des Motes” in June 23<sup>rd</sup>. At the Brave Kids Festival, six youth from Gaza with the psychologist Nadel Shaath spent three weeks in Wroclaw – Poland from June 16 to July 9. Then 12 other

kids from Gaza accompanied by director Ali Abu Yaseen and administrator Wael Afaneh, and spent 10 days at Mesh Festival from July 20 to 30 in Pegasus Theatre, Oxford – UK. Also in Greece over a period of two weeks Wael Afaneh, accompanied two other youth from Gaza who participated at the summer camp workshop organized by the TeatroEdu at the Spetses Island.



#### **d. Access Talent Show**

Around 40 trainees were selected to take part in Access Talent Show. The selected students were coming from different backgrounds from the West Bank. The students were categorized in the following groups: Singing, dancing (modern and dabkeh), poetry, Rap music and dancing, Drama/Acting. This project provided access for participants to learn artistic skills and also to demonstrate values of team work, commitment, communication and group understanding, leadership and of course stimulating all of them to take part equally in a creative process of building an artistic project.

## **“Forth: ASHTAR’s Main Donors and Partners in 2011**

### **Supporters for 2011**

- Palestinian National Authority
- Rosa Luxemburg
- Welfare Association
- SIDA - Sweden
- AM Qattan Foundation
- Foundation for Future
- EED – Germany
- British Council
- GTZ
- A. M. Qattan Foundation
- European Union
- Save the Children U.K.
- AMIDEAST
- Dan Church Aid
- Forum ZFD – EAK

### **ASHTAR’s Local Partners**

- Yes Theatre - Hebron
- Al Hara Theatre - Beit Jala
- Phoenix Centre - Dheisheh Camp, Bethlehem
- Arruwad Center - Aida Camp, Bethlehem
- Freedom Theatre - Jenin
- Ou’youn Theatre - Majdal Shams, Golan Heights
- Hanin Theatre - Nazareth
- Ahlam Theatre – Mi’ilya
- Qattan Centre for Children – Gaza
- PADAR Organization – Gaza

## Contact Us

ASHTAR For Theatre Productions & Training

P.O.Box 17170

East Jerusalem 91171

Sunrise Building, Al-Irsal Street

P.O.Box 2127, Ramallah

Tel.: +970-2-298-0037

Fax: +970-2-296-0326

info@ASHTAR-theatre.org

[www.ASHTAR-theatre.org](http://www.ASHTAR-theatre.org)



ASHTAR for theatre productions and training