



years of continuous
training & producing
25

ANNUAL REPORT

2015



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ASHTAR for Theatre Productions & Training is a non-governmental theatre organization. ASHTAR Theatre 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, 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 production 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.

ASHTAR FOR THEATRE PRODUCTIONS AND TRAINING

ENHANCING CREATIVITY AND COMMITMENT FOR CHANGE

VISION

“ASHTAR for Theatre Productions and Training, looks towards a creative and developed Palestinian society that embraces theatre as an essential engine of culture and development.”

MISSION

“At Ashtar, we aim for theatre to be a tool for change to serve cultural and social development, and to promote and deepen the creativity of Palestinian theatre.”

CORE VALUES

Ashtar’s core values shape its approach to all services and activities, and act as a reference point for its staff and beneficiaries, and. Those are:

- Freedom of creativity and expression as a universal right
- The value of theatre both as a form of art and as a tool for social change
- Truth, honesty and trustworthiness
- Pursuit of a unique artistic identity

The internal code of conduct emphasizes:

- Teamwork
- Equality
- Communication and exchange
- Mutual respect
- Encouragement and support

TARGET GROUPS

- Youth and Women
- Marginalized social groups
- Palestinian Theatre Community
- Palestinian general public
- International audiences

Executive Summary

The year 2015, witnessed many activities, which were implemented by ASHTAR Theatre.

The Fifth International Theatre of the Oppressed Festival was implemented with the participation of national and international theatres under the theme “Together for a Dignified Life”, reaching around 3,00 audience members mainly from marginalized communities in the West Bank.

ASHTAR Theatre launched a project with the objective of empowering the Jordan Valley communities and advocating for their economic and socio-political issues locally, using theatre as a tool for public awareness and advocacy. The project was implemented in cooperation with the Jordan Valley Solidarity Campaign and the participation of young men and women from the Jordan Valley and young professionals from Ramallah. The group got trained on drama and Forum Theatre techniques to enable them to raise their voices and advocate for issues affecting them and their communities. The group performed their play “A Court” 18 times in the West Bank and 3 times in Jordan. The play was also televised and broadcasted by Ma’an TV and was followed by a talk show with the participation of stakeholders and key decision makers, who discussed the issues raised in the play which are the health services, education, and work in the Israeli settlements.

The Forum play “Al Merya’a Wal-Qourqa’a”, which was produced in 2014, highlighting three main topics: the challenge that Palestinian farmers face in marketing their produce; the crisis of water resources and reservoirs; the crisis of agricultural land confiscation by the Israeli military, and its effect on farming and people’s lives, toured with 18 performances in the West Bank.

ASHTAR team in Gaza produced the play “The Cage” and performed it 9 times. The play is based on real stories from Gaza, and presents the case of the Palestinians in shelters post the last Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip in 2014. The play was also screened in live broadcasting at Edinburgh Film Festival.

The Drama Clubs Program continued its training and productions, and a fourth year was added to the program before participating students get graduated. The Drama Clubs were not implemented this year in Gaza since ASHTAR decided to implement its Psychological Support Program with the objective of helping youngsters and adolescents to cope with the traumas they have witnessed and help them achieve a psychological balance. This program reached 2,418 students from 10 schools in the Strip.

A major project for teaching school teachers on how to implement drama in the classroom was implemented reaching 64 public schools from all the governorates of the West Bank. Teachers were able to deliver drama classes in 44 elementary schools reaching 3,000 students.

ASHTAR, was selected to train 150 Syrian refugees in Jordan by Care International. The training resulted in the production and performance of the Forum play “Until Further Notice” and the writings of the “Syrian Monologues” and performing it twice.

As for the Professional Theatre Program, ASHTAR toured with its production “Sinbad and the Monster” which tackles the issue of environmental pollution caused by mankind to school students. The play “48 Minutes for Palestine” participated in Oxford Festival with three performances and also in Ramallah.

Several other activities were implement such as the Commedia Dell’arte Workshop, TAMAM Association Master Class, performance of “Globe to Globe”- “Hamlet”, and the performance of Gaza Mono-logues in France. Also for its work in the Theatre of the Oppressed, ASHTAR Theatre was between the top three candidates for the Euro-Mediterranean Award for Dialogue between Cultures.

ASHTAR Theatre Activities in 2015

FIRST: Theatre Of The Oppressed Program

A) The Fifth Edition of the Theatre of the Oppressed Festival

The uniqueness of this Festival is that it invites international theatre groups to an eye opening experience in Palestine, a place suffering from occupation, discrimination and oppression. It also gives other Palestinian theatres the chance to perform their plays in front of international groups and audiences in remote areas. In this Festival, Palestinian audiences are exposed not only to plays that deal with regional challenges in Palestine and the Middle East, but also with difficulties that people in other parts of the world are witnessing.

The Festival is both an artistic festivity and 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. The Festival emphasizes the need to extend cultural bridges with the world, and asserts the importance of cultural dialogue that liberates us from discrimination, marginalization and oppression through the gathering of international and Palestinian theatre makers.

Theatre was and still is one of the oldest, most sophisticated and expressive means in the art of communication. It is a direct interaction between actor and audience. Since the dawn of civilization, theatres were built, plays were produced and developed to a point where theatre projected goals particularly in the essential role of advocating freedom versus existing oppression.

This is why ASHTAR Theatre adopted the Theatre of the Oppressed and introduced it in Palestine. Despite all the difficulties and stymies it carried on with this message to organize the fifth edition of ASHTAR's Theatre of The Oppressed Festival under the



theme: “Together For A Dignified Life”, with the participation of a number of local and international groups.

The Festival’s activities were launched at the end of April. The activities took place between 30 April and 16 May 2015, and its performances reached different locations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, allowing more than 2,500 people to view the work.

ASHTAR’s Fifth International Theatre of The Oppressed Festival emphasizes the need to extend cultural bridges with the world, and asserts the importance of cultural dialogue that liberates us from discrimination, marginalization, and oppression through the gathering of international and Palestinian theatre makers.

At this year’s Festival, ASHTAR Theater hosted four European groups from Norway, Germany and Greece, in addition to four local plays presented by ASHTAR Theatre and Al Harah theatre. These plays tackle issues that concern women, workers, farmers, and marginalized youth groups. ASHTAR Theatre participated with three Forum Theatre plays and the groups from Norway, Germany, and Greece presented their plays in Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem.

The Festival included a workshop on “The Esthetics of the Theatre of the Oppressed” conducted by Barbara Santos from Brazil. Santos is an expert on Theatre of the Oppressed who has worked with the founder of this genre of theatre, Augusto Boal. Furthermore, a Joker’s Symposium was held under the title “The Role of the Jokers in Changing Political Situation,” and was moderated by the artist Bayan Shbib.

This year’s Festival was funded by the European Union, V-Day International, A. M. Qattan Foundation, and with the support from Emerezian Est., Al Nasher, and Al Masrouji Group.

The Festival Activities:

1) “Al Merya’a Wal-Qourqa’a”

Produced by: ASHTAR Theatre – Palestine

Directed by: Iman Aoun

“Al Merya’a Wal-Qourqa’a” is a Forum Play based upon a field research conducted by members of the production team with private organizations, government officials and Palestinian farmers. This theatre piece sheds light on important and urgent issues in the field of agriculture, and the many and varied obstacles Palestinian farmers have to face. The play aspires to stimulate the audience to think about their responsibilities towards the agricultural sector, motivating the public to suggest means and legislation proposals with an aim to improve the agricultural sector in Palestine; particularly that agriculture represents one of the most important means of resistance for Palestinians under occupation.



2) “WOMB”

Al-Harah Theatre – Beit Jala/ Palestine

Director: Raeda Ghazaleh

Our lives on this planet run according to a certain routine, and are governed by a law which is by far greater than us all ... At times, the laws of nature inter-mingle with man-created social order to control the daily lives of people with all intricacies to a point where we lose ourselves in the maze of the “natural and unnatural.”



What relationship does time have towards us and our lives? Almond trees blossom in spring ... We pick grapes in summer ... We press olives in autumn and oranges ripen in winter ... then spring, once again returns to give us almonds. Is this the cycle of natural life? The play “Womb” portrays two important stages in the lives of two families of different age-groups, backgrounds and composition, but have one common social condition, the same predicament ...

How do reproductive complications effect their married lives and their psychological state? These complications put them at a crossroads ... Where do they go?

3) “WOMEN’S SCHOOL”

MADALENA – BERLIN/ Germany.
Directed by: Barbara Santos

In October 2010, KURINGA-Berlin with the support of the “Women Association S.U.S.I. and Rudi Neighborhood Centre” organized an innovative aesthetic experience: Madalena Laboratory. Twenty women of different ages, backgrounds and stories participated in it.



After that, a group of these women initiated regular meetings, prompted by the desire of analyzing social and cultural patterns that influence and determine the gender relationships. This is how the group of Madalena-Berlin was born.

Since then, a rich research process led to the Forum Theatre piece “Women’s School”, a play which talks about the patterns of the social construction of gender and the risks and penalties that a woman, who challenges the paradigms, could be subjected to.

The objective is to analyze, with the public, the consequences of oppression and gender inequality and look for alternatives to overcome the injustices that arise from it.

4) “# SUSAN”

Charlottenlund School – Trondheim/Norway
Directed by: Edward Muallem

“Suzan” is a 10th grade student in a Norwegian school.

“Suzan” lives with her divorced middle class father, after her mother left the house.

“Suzan” is continuously bullied at school by her classmates on the pages of various means of social media, despite that she is a first class student. This puts her under great pressure, makes her feel lonely, and effects both her grades and her relationship with her classmates.



One of her classmates tries to get closer to her and offers her help, but Suzan’s refusal to that increases her feeling of loneliness and suffering.

"# Suzan" is a co-production between ASHTAR Theatre students and a group of students from the Charlottenlund School in Trondheim, Norway.

The two organizations have been involved in a cooperative programme since 2009, where once every two years a joint play is produced and is toured in Norway and Palestine. Two of ASHTAR Theatre's 4th year students participated in this exchange program, where they stayed in Norway for 2 weeks, attended theatre classes in Charlottenlund School with students their age, and produced and performed this play several times in Norway and Palestine.

5) "ESCAPE... FROM ALL DEPENDENCE"

Diafyges group – Greece

Directed by: Nikos Gkovas and the group

Young "Christina" has to overcome some difficulties as her boyfriend struggles with "drug problems". In an effort to help him, she enters into conflict with her classmates and her teachers when she fails exams and misses classes. Also, she develops problems with her parents because of her constant lying. The action stops at the point where, in despair, she asks for the help of the audience to advise her of what she should do.



The play was created in 2000, by ATRYTON Group and the National Association for Theatre in Education. Various groups have since, staged it. The current presentation is performed by the group.

6) " A COURT"

ASHTAR community group - Jordan Valley

Directed by: Iman Aoun

A play that is designed to be performed on the streets and in public places. It brings up issues and concerns of the Jordan Valley inhabitants to the attention of the general Palestinian public.

A youth group exposes critical problems that relate to marginalization and occupation, while highlighting the educational system, health conditions, work in settlements with a view to make the voice of the inhabitants of the Jordan Valley heard and requesting the audience and law-makers to interfere and find solutions to problems at hand.



7) "THE CAGE"

ASHTAR Theatre – Gaza/Palestine
Directed by: Ali Abu Yaseen

The play reflects the social, political, and economical conditions of people at the time of the latest Israeli war on the Gaza Strip as they were hiding in so-called shelters.

"Haneen" is a Gazan girl injured in the legs during the attack. "Haneen", to obtain proper treatment, has to go abroad for that due to the lack of the appropriate equipment and specialists; but the siege prevents her from traveling.

A journalist appeals to several international and local organizations to help "Haneen".

"Haneen" is not the only person who is in need of help, yet, many suffer as a consequence of the latest and several previous attacks on Gaza.

"The Cage" is an attempt to represent the reality, and invites the audience to look for solutions to break the siege.



8) "HOWEVER..."

Theatre of the Oppressed Activist Group - Greece
Directed by: The group

"Are you prepared to give up everything, just to keep your job?"

On the one hand, employers act arbitrarily, as they demand all that comes to their mind, ignoring labor laws and human rights. On the other hand, employees suffer medieval working conditions, because they are afraid of losing their job and join the ranks of the unemployed.

Is there a response to that?

This play attempts at providing means of how to reinstate the basic rights of the labour force, which employers consider as being a luxury.

The Theatre of the Oppressed Activist Group, Greece was created in May 2010. The team members perceive their participation in the group as a means to promote social and political identity. They are mostly non-professional actors.



Joker's Symposium

1) "Jokering in a Political Context"

Facilitator: Bayan Shbib

ASHTAR Theatre foresaw the need for dialogue, reflection, exchange of experiences and learning from each other, from the Jokers' perspectives and experiences in the Theatre of the Oppressed. A conference platform which gives voice to the Jokers to share and reflect will create this space to investigate what role and impact can the Theater of the Oppressed play on a social and political level.

In this platform, as Jokers, we aim at seeing our relationship with the wider political contexts we are experiencing and how we play the role of the 'midwife' assisting the birth of actions and ideas for change.

Workshop

"Aesthetics of the Oppressed"

Led By: Barbara Santos- Brazil

The Aesthetics of the Oppressed is based on three elements: Image, Word and Sound. This workshop aims at developing sound and rhythm in the Theatre of the Oppressed: the sound of the voice and the body, the sound of objects and their possible combinations, the rhythm of the created sounds, the rhythm of the characters and rhythm as dialogue. This experience promotes a collective investigation about possibilities of rhythmical expression with regard to daily-life oppressions.

B) Local tours of the Forum Theatre plays

1) "Al Merya'a Wal-Qourqa'a"

Joker: Bayan Shbib and Iman Aoun

ASHTAR Theatre produced "Al-Meray'a Wal-Qourqa'a" Forum play at the end of 2014; the play is delving deeply into a social, economic and political discourse to reveal the real challenges and obstacles the farmers in the West Bank face and especially in the Jordan Valley.

The play highlights three main topics: First: The challenge that Palestinian farmers face in



marketing their produce, when facing the fierce competition of Israeli products. Second: The crisis of water resources and reservoirs, especially in the Jordan Valley, since area C is under complete Israeli control and the occupation controls all the water in favor of the settlements. Third: The crisis of agricultural land confiscation by the Israeli military, and its effect on farming and people's lives.

This year the play was presented 18 times in a number of towns and villages and community groups in the Jordan Valley.

The play is in partnership with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

2) "A COURT" Street Theatre Play from the Jordan Valley

Trainer and Director: Iman Aoun

Joker: Mohammad Eid

With the objective of empowering the Jordan Valley communities and advocating for their economic and socio-political issues locally using theatre as a tool for public awareness and advocacy, ASHTAR Theatre, launched a project in cooperation with the Jordan Valley Solidarity Campaign with the participation of 8 young men and women from the Jordan Valley and 2 young professionals from Ramallah, who got trained on drama and Forum Theatre techniques to enable them to raise their voices and advocate for issues affecting them and their communities.

The training resulted in a play that tackles 3 main issues which are health services, education, and work in Israeli settlements. The play which is titled "A Court" was toured in the West Bank and was concluded in November with a televised performance which will be screened on Ma'an TV. The play's opening performance was on the 7th of May 2015 in Al Auja in the Jordan Valley. The play is the outcome of an intensive training (utilizing Theatre of the Oppressed techniques) over a period of two months with 8 youth from the Jordan Valley, and two actors from ASHTAR Theatre. "A Court" tackled three main problems people in the Jordan Valley face; working in the illegal settlements, the shortage of schools and the absence of transportation to reach them, and the lack of health care; the play carried the stories of the participants to the streets and general public of the West Bank.



Since the opening of the play in May 2015, it was performed 19 times in different cities in the West Bank, and reached more than 3,000 viewers; 6 performances were during the 5th edition of ASHTAR Theatre's International Theatre of the Oppressed Festival. The play was

also presented three times in Jordan in Amman, Al-Baqa'a Refugee Camp, and Al- Shuneh Al-Janoubiyeh in the Jordan Valley in cooperation with Sisterhood is Global Institute in Jordan.

Mohammad Abu Hanniyeh, one of the participants was especially grateful for the opportunity. He said, "I am very happy with this experience and its outcome. I feel that theatre has changed me".

The project comes as part of the Drama, Diversity and Development programme, funded by the European Union in the framework of the regional programme MedCulture, Prince Claus Fund, the Swedish Postcode Lottery, and Sida - Sweden as part of Performing Arts Network Programme; and is implemented by Minority Rights Group International, in partnership with the Civic Forum Institute and Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-violence Studies.

3) "THE CAGE"

Joker: Ali Abu Yaseen

8 members of ASHTAR youth group in Gaza produced the play "The Cage." The play is based on real stories from Gaza, and presents the case of the Palestinians in shelters post the last Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip in 2014. The play received unmatched reception by the audience of Gaza. It was showed for the last time on June 3, 2015 after nine amazing performances. The play was also screened in live broadcasting at Edinburgh Film Festival; the screening was upon the wish of the British Council in Gaza and took place on August 17, 2015. Almost 100 people attended the show which was concluded with a mobile phone from David Greig, the famous British playwright, transmitting to us the applause and the whistles of the fans in Edinburgh.



The play follows the story of Haneen, a girl from Gaza whose feet are badly injured during the Israeli attack on Gaza. However the blockage that has been going on for the past eight years in the Gaza strip prevents her from getting the right treatment abroad. A journalist appeals to several national and international organizations to help her, which creates a huge solidarity movement concerning her.

Yamish Abu Amr (18 years), one of ASHTAR Theatre graduates in Gaza and the actor who plays Haneen, the main character in the play, said in an interview: "We need someone to raise Gaza's voice to the decision makers in order to end the tragedies which face the Gaza Strip. This play is a reality that we present on stage for people to take a look at their lives and reconsider how they are living. It is our voice which rejects humiliation and torture; it is our hope for change and creating the life that we want"

The play is in partnership with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

4) "ISOLATED"

A forum theatre play by youth group

ASHTAR Theater presented in August 2015, the Forum Play- "Isolated", with a group of youth from Al Jalazon Refugee Camp, Ramallah and Nablus, trained by Razan Al Azzeh. The play "Isolated" tackled different forms of isolation in Palestine, such as: the female harassment in the streets; the prejudice actions between refugees and city dwellers, and the social problems between Palestinians as result of the apartheid wall.

It was planned that the play be performed via live streaming in Paris in November 2015; however, this goal could not be achieved due to the deteriorated political situation in Palestine and the inability of the youth to meet for a performance, instead the play was showed in video streaming in Paris in the same date.

The play is part of the project "ISOLAT" initiated by the Center of Theatre of the Oppressed- Paris and focuses on training youth groups from France, Italy, Portugal, Palestine and Romania on how to use Forum Theatre techniques to talk about their problems.



C) Forum Theatre in Amman/Jordan

1) Forum Play "Until Further Notice" and "The Syrian Monologues"

ASHTAR presented the forum play "Until Further Notice" in September 2015, in Amman - Jordan. The play was directed by Mohammed Eid, and played by 18 Syrian refugees as part of the psychological support program they receive at Care Jordan.

The play tackles the problems facing the Syrian refugees living in the city of Amman concerning their work and housing. The participants' ages

ranged between 25 and 55 who arrived to Jordan between 2012 and 2014.



ASHTAR's first phase of training with the Syrian refugees started in February 2015 with Edward Muallem who trained 150 refugees; then 25 of them were chosen to continue the second phase which was divided into two parts: the forum play "Until Further Notice" and "The Syrian Monologues" whereby 20 refugees had written their personal testimonies about their last hours before the journey to Amman, the writing was supervised by Iman Aoun.



The Syrian Monologues were performed twice in Amman:

At the International Day of Refugees, and during the 16 Days of Activism against Violence as part of "Karama Festival".

ASHTAR Theatre, also launched a call for its partners around the world to work with the Syrian refugees in their countries with the aim of collecting their stories in a book, in order to preserve the details of their personal experiences.



SECOND: Professional Productions

1) “Sinbad and the Monster”

A new tour for school students

In 2014, ASHTAR embarked on the production of the professional play “Sinbad and the Monster”. The play targets elementary school students and tackles the issue of environmental pollution which was caused by mankind, its effects on earth, and the different ways to avoid it through recycling.

“Sinbad and the Monster” is a play which encourages children to interact with the actors in order to provoke their thinking to give suggestions on how to avoid pollution and keep earth clean. The play toured in the Emirates in 2014, as part of the “Abu Dhabi Festival”, and was presented 8 times in the same year to UNRWA and private school students in Ramallah with the support of the EU and Sida – Swedish International Development Agency.

In October 2015, ASHTAR Theatre, concluded a tour of 14 performances for the play with the support of the EU and the Palestine Cultural Fund – Ministry of Culture. The performances targeted school children from the Jordan valley area, Jenin and Ramallah.

The play is directed by Mohammed Eid, and performed by Edward Muallem, Milad Kneibi, Rana Burqan, Yasmin Shalalkeh, and Fares Abu Saleh.



2) “48 Minutes for Palestine”

A Third tour in the UK

Two actors create a story without words (though with music and occasional sound), on a minimalist set of stones and oranges. She lives her life peacefully, writing a journal, tending to her garden – and one day He arrives, tired and old, with a suitcase and a rolled-up document, signifying his ownership of her house. What follows is a power struggle which is both childish and terrible – it provokes us to laugh and recoil in equal measure.

The two actors are always in contact, feeding off each other at every single moment. Even when the centre of attention is on only one of them, a quick glance confirms: the other is still present, reacting, maintaining the high energy of the performance. Good interaction aside, they have both created believable, engaging characters. She, as Palestine is vibrant, energetic, easy to laugh and anger; she will share her water with a stranger, but will not stand for him taking everything. He, symbolising Israel, is exhausted, easily scared and in turn aggressive; he feels entitled to the house and, once settled, will gladly offer bits and pieces of her former possessions to his “roommate”.



He, symbolising Israel, is exhausted, easily scared and in turn aggressive; he feels entitled to the house and, once settled, will gladly offer bits and pieces of her former possessions to his “roommate”.

ASHTAR Theatre toured the play “48 Minutes for Palestine” during June 2015 in the UK. It was presented three times, two of which were in Oxford City at Pegasus Theatre as part of the Oxford festival “Palestine Unlocked”, and one in the city of Hounslow. The play received great feedback from the audience, and was attended by around 450 persons.

“48 minutes for Palestine” was also performed in September 2015 at ASHTAR Theatre in Ramallah, and was attended by an audience of 50 French activists.

“@AshtarTheatre’s 48 minutes for Palestine & Gaza monologues: Intense, beautifully performed, heart-breaking. #PalestineUnlocked” (@Subat_B, twitter.com)

“48 Minutes for Palestine is an emotionally intense yet absurdly playful, compelling naturalistic drama that happens without a single word being uttered. It feels like a deeply atmospheric film that is all the more powerful for being live.” (Rich Mix – Cinema and Arts Center)

“It’s an amazing, magnificent piece of work. In fact, it is all of a piece, as there is no way of separating conception, visualisation, staging, performing – and meaning.” (Peter Brook, eminent theatre director)

THIRD: Drama Training

1) “Drama Inside the Classroom”

Starting August 2015, ASHTAR Theatre, with the cooperation of the Palestinian Ministry of Education and with the support of UNICEF, launched the “Drama Teachers Training Program” in schools, where it trained 64 public school teachers and educational supervisors from 44 elementary schools in the West Bank. The program aimed at employing drama inside the classroom.

The program was divided into two phases; the first consisted of training the school teachers on how to use drama as a tool inside the classroom, and the second was field visits by the trainers to the participating schools in order to supervise the teachers’ implementation of the training.

The program reached out to more than 3,000 students from Jenin, Toubas, Toulkarem, Qalqilia, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron and Jericho. ASHTAR Theatre also prepared a Manual with all the activities and exercises, which were given to teachers during the first phase of the training; each teacher received a copy of this guiding booklet.

The training was led by Edward Muallem, Mohammed Eid, Munira Zuriqi and Mutasem Al-Atrash.

Ashtar Theater implemented a similar program two years ago with the support of Welfare association with UNRWA schools in the West Bank, where 63 teachers from 41 different UNRWA schools in the West Bank took part in it.



2) Drama Clubs

First, second, third and fourth year clubs

ASHTAR’s Drama Training Program, is a four-year program, which targets school students between the age 13 – 18 in both Gaza and the West Bank, and works on the development of students’ technical and artistic skills, developing their talents, and opening their horizons, especially for those interested in a career in acting and theatre work. This year ASHTAR

Theatre decided to extend its program for a fourth year for each student as the trainers perceived the need for that.

The Drama Training Program, which reached 49 youth, continued its activities in the training of students in Ramallah. The clubs concluded its activities for the year 2014-15 with a presentation of theatrical scenes. First year students presented a scene taken for the Palestinian folk story “Nus Nuseis” which talks about Nus Nuseis, who suffers discrimination from his society due to his small size. First year group was trained by Rana Burqan.



Second year students presented “The Elephant The King of All Times” by the Syrian writer Saadallah Wannous and a scene from “The Judge Zakzak” by Bertlot Brecht. The group was trained by Mohammad Eid.

Third year students presented the play “Phantom of the Theatre” – a compilation of theatrical scenes by international writers. The play was directed by Faten Khoury.



ASHTAR Theatre students, started with their new academic year in October 2015. 49 students are divided between four classes. First year students are trained by Rana Burqan, second and third year students are being trained by the trainer Mohammad Eid, While Forth year students are working with Iman Aoun on the international call “Dear Children... Sincerely” - based on the elderly’s stories; in addition to that, they are preparing for ASHTAR Theatre International Youth Festival - 3rd edition, which will be held in July 2016.

This year, the training in Gaza was put on hold; due to the last aggression in 2014, ASHTAR Theatre decided to alter its program and implement the second phase of “Psychological support program through drama in Elementary Schools” to make it reachable to more students in Gaza. However, the Drama Training Program will continue in Gaza as of the beginning of 2016.

3) “Psychological Support Program” in Gaza

In April 2015, Ashtar Theatre, finished the psychological support program using drama with elementary school students in the Gaza Strip, under the supervision of the artist Ali Abu Yassen, and ten of ASHTAR graduates in Gaza. ASHTAR started this project after the last Israeli attack on Gaza in the summer of 2014 in order to improve the students’ physiological status using drama. This project reached 2,418 students from 10 schools.

In the beginning of the training program 15 cases refused to engage in the exercise, and two students were transferred to the Gaza Community Health Program. However, according to Abu Yassen: “Students at the end of the program became more capable of participating and engaging in the program. We now see the joy and laughter on the faces of the students as if we are dealing with different students.”

Ali Al-Hassani, one of the trainers in the program also talked about his experience, saying: “While I trained some of the students in this program, my self-confidence increased, and I felt that I had a positive and effective role in my society.”

This Program was support by: The Pontifical Mission, Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung and the Swedish International Development Organization - SIDA, within the Performing Arts Network Program.



FORTH: Other Activities

1) Commedia Dell'arte Workshop

ASHTAR Theatre, hosted the Swiss Theatre director, Davide Giovanzana, for a Commedia Dell'arte Workshop. The workshop was held in January 2015, and was attended by a group of theatre actors from different theatres in Palestine. The workshop was concluded a presentation in front of ASHTAR's students.

2) Caryl Churchill and Jonathan Chadwick at ASHTAR Theatre

ASHTAR Theater, presented in February 2015, a theatrical text reading presentation of the play "Love and Information" by the British playwright Caryl Churchill. The text was translated into Arabic by Bayan Shbib and the presentation was directed by the British director Jonathan Chadwick.

The presentation was the outcome off a one-week workshop conducted by the writer and the director herself. Churchill takes about this experience: "It was wonderful to spend a week with Palestinian actors and to see the warmth and inventiveness they brought to the very open scenes in the play. Even after a few days' work, the final performances were memorable."



Churchill is one of the most important contemporary theater writers, known for her unusual techniques and her critical review of the society and the authorities.

Chadwick is a theater director and the Manager of the theatre group A to Z, and has worked with "Theater for All" in Gaza for the past five years.

The workshop was sponsored by Al-Qattan Foundation, and the Royal Court Theater in Britain, in cooperation with the British Council.

3) TAMAM Association Master Class

Rana Burqan, ASHTAR graduate, participated in the first master class of TAMAM Association as part of Avignon Festival – France in July 2015. The master class focused on watching

20 different performances at the Festival, discussing them, and writing critical articles about them. In addition to Palestine, the countries that participated in the master class were: France, Oman, Syria and Lebanon. The master class was led by the Syrian journalist and actor George Da'boul.



4) Globe to Globe “Hamlet” in Ramallah

Under the auspices of the Ramallah Municipality, and in partnership with the British Consulate-General in Jerusalem, The British Council, and Mövenpick Hotel in Ramallah, ASHTAR Theatre hosted in October 27, 2015 the play “Hamlet” that is touring the world as part of the Globe To Globe tour. The performance was held at Ramallah Cultural Palace, and was attended by more than 800 persons.

Ziayd Jayousi and Muna Assaf wrot about the performance:

“The performance was exceptional and successful, and you can see no mistakes in the performance, in terms of performance, production and directing. The performance continued for three hours with a 15 minute break, the audience watched the play and enjoyed it very much up until the last second of the performance, which really was astonishing to the actors”



5) ASHTAR Theatre Between Top Three Candidates for the Euro-Mediterranean Award for Dialogue Between Cultures.

ASHTAR Theatre was chosen to be one of the top three candidates for the 10th Euro-Mediterranean Award for Dialogue between Cultures by Anna Lindh Foundation.

46 European and Arab institutions applied for the award. This year's award was dedicated to initiatives which encourage cultural practices that work towards stopping hate speeches and not accepting others, and which contributes towards building alternative paths which relay on the positive understanding of diversity.

6) The Gaza Monologues in France

Théâtre Le Tiroir from Laval in France hosted Iman Aoun, Tamer Nijem from Gaza and Ashtar Muallem, in a special performance during the International Solidarity Festival; Nijem presented a new monologue he wrote after the latest aggression on Gaza in 2014, which was translated to French by Ashtar Muallem.

Le Tiroir launched a public call in seven French speaking countries to perform "The Gaza Monologues" last June.

The French group at Laval presented the monologues at the Festival and other youth groups participated in their show through presenting parts of their performances through Skype. The participating countries were Morocco, Tunisia, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Congo and Russia.



ASHTAR Theatre New Board Members

1. Nawwaf Hamed – President
2. Basima Abi Issa – Secretary
3. Fayez Al-Dumeiri – Treasurer
4. Muna Assaf – Member
5. Maha Mayo – Member
6. Yousef Aoun – Member
7. Hisham Jamjoum – Member

ASHTAR team in 2015

• Full time employees:

1. Edward Muallem – General Director
2. Iman Aoun – Artistic Director
3. Rula Giacaman – Executive Director
4. Nael Bisharia – Accountant
5. Mohammad Eid – Actor and Trainer
6. Rana Burqan – Trainer and actor
7. Lamis Shalalkeh – Administrative Assistant
8. Mohammad Ali – Technician

• ASHTAR's Gaza Team:

1. Wael Afana – Projects Coordinator
2. Ali Abu Yaseen – Trainer

Networks

- * Palestinian Performing Arts Network (PAN),
- * Anna Lindh foundation Network

FIFTH: PARTNERS and DONORS

ASHTAR Main Partners in 2015

1. British Council- East Jerusalem
2. Jordan Valley Solidarity
3. Rosa Luxemburg Foundation
4. UNICEF
5. Municipality of Ramallah
6. Ramallah Universities and Collages
7. Ministry of Education
8. Palestinian National Theatre
9. Yabous Cultural Centre- Jerusalem
10. PPAN - Palestinian Performing Arts Network
11. Palestine TV
12. Ma'an TV
13. Radio Nissa FM
14. Ramallah Private schools
15. CARE International- Jordan
16. Russian Cultural centre - Beithlehem

ASHTAR Main Donors in 2015

- Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung
- Sida - Swedish International Development Agency
- EU - Jerusalem
- The Pontifical Mission- Jerusalem
- UNICEF
- Care International.
- Minority Rights Group.
- Prince Claus Fund.
- A. M. Qattan Foundation.
- Ministry of Culture.
- British Council and General Consulate
- Omid Stiftung - Germany
- Dr.-Eitel-Stiftung
- V-Day - USA

SIXTH: Artistic Plan For 2016

Ashtar's artistic plan for 2015 includes the following programs and activities, pending the availability of funding for them:

- * Touring with the play "48 Minutes for Palestine" in the USA and Germany.
- * Organizing the 3rd Edition of ASHTAR Theatre International Youth Festival (ATiYF) in July.
- * Drama Training for youth in Ramallah.
- * Producing a professional play in Gaza.
- * Producing and performing a new forum theatre play.
- * The presentation of the produced plays under the Drama Training Program for youth.
- * Touring with "The Gaza Mono-logues" in Germany and Belgium.
- * Producing and touring a professional play about the crisis of death boats.
- * Drama Teacher's Training Program in cooperation with Ministry of Education.
- * Organizing theatre summer camps in Ramallah and Gaza.
- * Producing a radio drama series on women's issues.

Contact Us

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