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ASSTAR THEATRE

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

Executive Summary

A vibrant and productive year that marks the Silver Jubilie of ASHTAR for Theatre Productions and Training organization.

ASHTAR Theatre celebrated 25 years of its foundation, at the opening of its third edition of the International Youth Festival in July 2016, at the Ottoman Court in Ramallah. The Festival ran between 11 and 19 of July, and hosted 50 theatre students from Germany, Belgium, Greece and the local Palestinian theatres alongside ASHTAR students from Ramallah and Gaza. At the closing ceremony, Palestinian Minister of Culture graduated ASHTAR students thirteenth class.

Drama Training of four youth groups was implemented, 37 youngsters trained for the whole year, produced and performed publically 3 plays; "The Garden", "The Clown", and "The Gaza Mono-logues".

A new Forum play "Machine and a Hammer", was produced and tackled the problems of workers in Palestine and the lack of knkowledge in their rights.

In Gaza, ASHTAR team produced the play "Romeo and Juliet in Gaza" in partnership with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung in Palestine, to depict the political split between the two major parties; Fatah and Hamas.

Within ASHTAR Theatre's international productions and touring, two plays were performed in Jordan and Germany, "The Gaza Monologues" and "The Syrian Monologues". in addition "48 minutes for Palestine" was performed in New Mexico and Germany. From Dublin, Outlandish Theatre Company, invited ASHTAR to participate in the play "Megalomaniac" about a Palestinian Syrian Refugee. Furthermore, ASHTAR Theatre participated in the co-production of the two plays "This Flesh is Mine" and "When Nobody Returns" in London.

ASHTAR Theatre Activities in 2016

FIRST: Theatre of The Oppressed Program

A) PRODUCTIONS:

"Machine and Hammer"

"Machine and Hammer" a Froum Play, produced by ASHTAR in partnership with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung in Palestine.

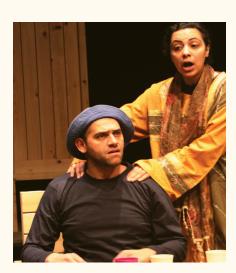
The play was directed by Edward Muallem. It tackles a number of issues about the situation of workers in Palestine and raises questions about their rights. The play encourages the audience to take the role of the oppressed characters and suggest solutions to the isnjustice actions imposed on them.

"Machine and Hammer" presented through the stories of 3 workers; Abu Safi - a carpenter who works at a Palestinian carpentry for seven years; one day he finds himself jobless and his minimum rights were not delivered to him; leaving him and his family in a bad economic situation.

The second story is about Sameer, a young man working with his uncle in a construction site, during his work, Sameer, gets an accident that leaves him suffering from a lifelong debilitating disability.

The third story is about Abu Fuad, the owner of a tailoring workshop and his mistreatment of his employees, who are not aware of their rights, constituted by the Palestinian Law of Labor?

"Machine and Hammer" was performed eight times during the year 2016, and will continue touring at Palestinian univirsites and colleges in 2017.



b) INTERNATIONAL THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED (TO) WORKSHOPS:

1. Albuquerque - New Mexico:

In January 2016, during the 'Revolution Festival' in Albuquerque - New Mexico, Edward Muallem, ASHTAR General Director, led a workshop in "Theatre of the Oppressed" techniques with 26 theatre students and actors from Albuquerque. The workshop ended with a short Forum presntation by the participants.



2. Tunisia:

In partnership with the Culture Resource "Al Mawrid", and upon the invitation of the Live Art Association in Tunisia and the Higher Institute of Dramatic Art; Edward Muallem, trained from March 1 - 14, two groups on 'TO' techniques, at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Art and in the village of Bani Mteir. The workshop at the Higher Institute was attended by 14 students from the second year who trained for 11 days.



As a result two Forum scenes were produced based on the students' personal stories and lasted for 20 minutes each. "Mom's Birthday", that talked about the relationships between parents and children and that between the siblings.



"Certificate of Experience" was the other scene, and talked about the problems that the new university graduates face, when they look for work, but get rejected due to their lack of experience. The two scenes were presented to their peers at the Institute. One of the female students who was trained during the workshop to facilitate the show, led the discussion between the audience and the actors on stage.



Requested by Mr. Hisham bin Issa, a teacher at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Art, Mr. Muallem, gave a master class entitled "Theatre and Social Integration". During that class he talked about the experience of ASHTAR, in the field of TO and interactive community theater, and presented briefly to the students some of the 'TO' Techniques developed by the Brazilian Director Augusto Boal.



3. First tour in Germany:

Ivited by Teater/Masrah in April, ASHTAR team, Edward Muallem and Iman Aoun led a workshop in 'TO' with 16 theatre students at Osnabruck University in Lingen.

On the same tour, the team conducted two more workshops in Hanover at Theaterwerkstatt with 22 refugees from differnt backgrounds and young Germans, and with community and social workers in the other workshop.

In Berlin, Ms Aoun led a one day 'TO' workshop with 8 actors and theatre directors at Metropolis Theatre.



4. Second tour in Germany:

As part of Frankfurt Festival that was organized in October 2016 by the Municipal Theatre under the theme 'Immigration', Edward Muallem led a 'TO' workshop for two days with forty participants: Germans, Syrian and African immigrants.

5. Third tour in Germany:

In November 2016, ASHTAR Theatre was invited to the "War & Peace Festival" in Greifswald-Germany. During the festival, ASHTAR team trained a group of German and Syrian youth and produced three forum scenes with them. The scenes tackled issues of cultural differences between the two groups and problems of integration for the refugees. The three scenes were performed in Greifswald and Anklam and were followed by the audience interactions and discussions.





SECOND: Professional Productions

a) "Romeo and Juliet in Gaza"

"Romeo and Juliet in Gaza", which was directed by Ali Yassin, was produced in partnership with Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, to depict the political split between the two major political parties; Fatah and Hamas, and its consequences on the Gazans.

Love, like everything else that is beautiful dies in the fire of conflict. Therefore, the play is a search for the secret of life in the shadow of disagreement, conflict and fragmentation.

The play reflects the reality of Gaza Strip, through a love story between a young man and a young woman, which ends due to the heated and unjustified conflict between their families. This reflects the state of the Palestinian division, and leaves its bloody effects on the daily lives of Palestinians.

The struggle of the families is not only a frail struggle and interacts more with the emergence of the love story, but reveals its pathetic logic, brutality and weakness with no relation whatsoever with the interests and aspirations of the neighbourhood nor its inhabitants, who have to pay its bitter bill.







THIRD: Drama Training Program

a) Drama Clubs:

During 2016, 4 groups of drama clubs were trained with a total of 37 students (21 females and 16 males).

The first year students were trained by ASHTAR's graduate, Rana Burqan over a period of 8 months, once a week for 3 hours per session. These students were 8 (4 males and 4 females). The group produced "The Garden", and performed it to their families and friends an audience of 80 people.

The second year students were 6 females, who were also trained by Rana Burqan over a period of 8 months, once a week for 3 hours per session. They performed one of Juha's fables to their families and friends.

The third year students were trained by Mohammad Eid over a period of 9 months, once a week for 3 hours. The 11 students (8 females and 3 males) worked on "The Clown" a play by Mohammad Al Maghout, and



performed it at the opening of ASHTAR International Youth Festival ATiYF in Jully, reaching 150 audience members.

The fourth year students were trained by Iman Aoun over a period of 9 months. These 12 (9 females and 3 males) students were responsible of organizing ASHTAR Theatre International Youth Festival and also worked on their version of the "The Gaza Mono-logues" in adition to their monologues. they presented these monologues at "Nwar Nissan" a festival organized by Ramallah Municipality and



during ATiYF together with 4 of their peer from ASHTAR Gaza. Their performances reaching 200 people.

It was a major year for this group, for their graduation project was to design, implement and follow the ATiYF Camp-Fest. They were in charge of preparing the invitation, selecting the participants, designing and producing the festival's posture and brochure (attached), coordinating all the logistics and following up all the issues that arise during the implementation of the Festival.

The Drama Training Program was implemented in partnership with Sida (Swedish International Development Agency.

b) ASHTAR Theatre Silver Jubilee and the students graduation during the International Youth Theatre Festival

ASHTAR Theatre celebrated 25 years of its foundation at the opening of it's International Youth Festival in July at the Ottoman Court in Ramallah. ASHTAR Theatre International Youth Festival in its 3rd edition was implemented between 11th - 19th of July 2016.

ATIYF is the graduation project of ASHTAR Theatre's Drama Training students in their fourth year, the students are responsible for organizing all the details of the Festival with the help and guidance from the Artistic Director and the Coordinator of ASHTAR. The Festival invited local and international theatre students aged between 18 and 24, to participate in the Camp-Fest which included performing plays, in three cities in the West Bank, participating in workshops led by local and international trainers, and work on a collective final presentation for the closing ceremony.

The preparation for the Festival started in October 2015, where the 4th year students met with the Artistic Director and the Coordinator to decide on the theme of the Festival, after several meetings the students decided on the tittle "Through A Different Lens" which became the theme of that edition. They wanted the youth to try and change their societies' perspective towards their issues and aspirations, and to help themselves understand, explore and accept their society, and that of the other cultures.

The Festival had 50 participant, included students from local theatres: YES Theatre from Hebron, Al-Harah Theatre from Beit Jala, The Drama Academy from Ramallah, in addition to ASHTAR Theatre's 4th year students from Ramallah, and for the first time, four of ASHTAR graduates from Gaza were able to join. International theatre groups

were: the Alternative Theatre from Belgium, Theatre of The Oppressed Activist Group from Greece, and Osnabruck University of Applied Sciences from Germany.

Each of the participants took part in one of the four theatre workshops of: in Commedia Dell' Arte, Physical theatre, Greek Chorus and Improvisational Theatre, that were led



by directors from Sweden, Turkey, Germany and France. All of the participants were highly motivated and involved in the workshops, and worked very hard to present the final performance.

The young participants expressed the high benefit from the training recieved, and the joy of recieving it with other students from different countries.

During the festival a total of 7 plays were presented in 3 cities in the West Bank, Ramallah, Beit Jala and Jenin. The opening performance on July 11, 2016 was by ASHTAR's 3rd year students, who presented "The Clown," directed by Mohammad Eid, at the Ottoman court in Ramallah, and attended by 200 audience members from students' parents, friends, donors, partners and general audience.

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The second performance was at The Freedom Theatre in Jenin Refugee Camp, the TO Activist Group from Greece presented their play "Running Time", that talked about the difficulties and pressure Greek students face in schools, as a result of a highly demanding school system. The play was a Forum performance, followed by an interactive discusion with the audience who suggested solutions to the presented problem, that is quite similar worldwide. The play was attended by 80 audience members.



The third performance was "The Gaza Monologues" by ASHTAR 4th year students from Ramallah and graduates from Gaza who actually participated in the writing of The Gaza Monologues, they all worked with Iman Aoun to present a joint performance. The performance was attended by

more than 90 audience members, and was held at ASHTAR in Ramallah.

This was the first performance where ASHTAR students from Gaza meet and work

together with their peers from the West Bank. Noting that their first meeting was on the first day of the Festival. The performance received great feedback from the audience and wide media coverage, a lot of the audience members commented on how interesting it was to watch how the graduates from Gaza presented their own stories, and on the other hand how the students from Ramallah presented them.



The 4th and 5th performances, "Looting of Paradise" in cooperation with ASHTAR Theatre, and "The Guaranteed Way to Remove Stains", were of Al-Harah Theatre PARC

students' graduation projects. They were presented at Al-Harah Studio in Beit-Jala, and attended by the Festival's participants and other youth from Al-Harah. The most interesting fact about these two performances, were that they were totally produced, directed, designed and managed by youth.

The festival gave the international participants a chance to see real youth theatre

work in Palestine, and were impressed by the performances.

"A Walk Through Our Existence" was the Belgian Performance, the play was performed at ASHTAR Theatre, and was attended by 80 audience members. The play presented the different age stages of human lives, and how the events that we live affect us. The presence of a baby on stage to represent the first stage of a human life was very interesting and eye catching to the audience, especially that it was integrated in a smart way which added a lot to the performance.

The final show, was a collage made by the results of the different workshops that were implemented during the Camp-Fest. It included four scetches under the title "Through A Different Lens". The final piece of the 4 scetches gathered all of the participants on stage representing solidarity and unity between youth of different cultures, and highlighted the similarities these youth share.

Under the auspecies of the Minister of Culture, the closure was a ceremony, celebrating ASHTAR 4th year students' graduation. Dr. Ihab Bseiso, Minister of Culture, delivered a speech on the importance of such youth activities and cultural exchange, and handed the certificates to the graduates.

The closing ceremony was held at the Ottoman Court in the old city of Ramallah, and was attended by 200 people of the students' parents, friends, donors and partners of the festival, and the general audiences.

ATiYF Camp-Fest was implemented in partnership with Sida (Swedish International Development Agency)









FOURTH: International Tourings & Co-prodctions

"48 minutes for Palestine" in USA and Germany

a. As part of the 'Revolution Festival' which took place in Albuquerque in January 2016, ASHTAR Theatre performed the play "48 Minutes for Palestine" twice, with more than 350 people attending the performances.



b. In Lingen, at Osnebruck University - Germany, ASHTAR Theatre performed "48 Minutes for Palestine" and was highly appreciated by the audience.

C. In Hanover one performance of "48 Minutes for Palestine" was staged at Theaterwerkstatt during the Middle Eastern Festival.

"The Syrian Monologues" - Project

In response to the Syrian Refugee Crises, ASHTAR Theatre launched a call for artists around the world to work with Syrian Refugees in their countries and gather their stories to be documented and performed publicly on the 21st of June, The International Day of Refugees. Ten countries responded to the call; The United Kingdom, Siri Lanka, Rwanda, Portugal, The United States of America, Belgium, France, Germany, Jordan, and Palestine. They all performed The Syrian Monologues on that day.



a. "The Syrian Monologues" and "The New Gaza Monologues" in Jordan: Within its joint project with The Freedom Theatre, funded by The Euro-Med, ASHTAR, performed during May "The New Gaza Monologues" and "The Syrian Monologues", at the National Center of Performing Arts in Amman and in Hettin and Al Wehdat Palestinian Refugee Camps. The performances were well received by the audience and the actors where enthusiastically applauded.

b. "The Syrian Monologues" in Frankfurt, Hanover and Berlin:

In April 2016, ASHTAR Theatre was invited to perform "The Syrian Monologues" twice as part of the Frankfurt Festival which was organized by The Municipal Theatre and focused on the topic of Immigration. In Hanover, one performance of "The Syrian Monologues" was staged at Theaterwerkstatt, during the Middle Eastern Festival, and another at the Metropolis theatre.



c. "The Gaza Monologues" and "The Syrian Monologues" at the "War and Peace Festival" in Greitzwald:

In October 2016, ASHTAR theatre was invited to "War and Peace festival" in Greitswald-Germany. During the Festival, ASHTAR performed "The New Gaza Monologues" directed by Mohammad Eid, and acted by Yasmin Shalaldeh, Khalil Al Batran, Majdi Nazal and Saji Dimeiri. As well "The Syrian Monologues" directed by Mohammad Eid acted by Edward Muallem



and Iman Aoun was performed in Greifswald, Anklam and Nuremburg during the same festival.

International Co-productions

d. The play "Megalomaniac"

Outlandish Theatre from Dublin invited Iman Aoun to participate in the play Megalomaniac as a main actress along side Bernadette O'Reilly and Luca Pierucci and four young people written and directed by Maud Hendricks. The story follows Noor, a Palestinian woman from Yarmook Camp who immigrated to Ireland before the Syrian war and the psychological impact it brought upon her. The play was well received



by the audience and the media and was presented during the Dublin Fringe Festival in September.

e. "This Flesh Is Mine" & "When Nobody Returns"

Invited by Border Crossings, ASHTAR Theatre in partnership with British Council participated in the co-production of the two plays that were written by Brian Woolland and directed by Michael Walling. Iman Aoun and Bayan Shbib, participated in both plays alongside a group of renowned actors from London; Andrew French, Gerard Mc Arthur, David Broughton Davis and Tareq Jordan.

This "Flesh is Mine" that is based on the Iliad was produced in Ramallah two years agao, and "When Nobody Returns" was a





new play based on the Odessey. The two plays were performed 22 times for three weeks at Aklam Market, in October and November, as part of Noor Festival.

FIFTH: Documentary Films and Radio Drama

a) "We are Here" a New Documentary Film

Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, produced a new documentary about seven of ASHTAR's youth in Gaza who participated in the writing of The Gaza Monologues in 2010. The film was directed by Sabrina Ditus and focused on the life of the Gazan youth living under siege for ten years. We are here, is a sensitive film that embodies the dreams of these seven young actors. The film was screened in Ramallah, Gaza and Germany in December 2016.



b) "Voices from the Jordan Valley" - Project

For the third year in a row, ASHTAR Theatre is working in the Jordan Valley. This year with a grant from Qattan Foundation, funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation – SDC, ASHTAR team is focusing on Jiftlik Village. The project follows the needs and hardships of the community that faces continuous harassments of the Israeli occupation, the absence of infrastructure and that of the services that are to be provided by the Palestinian authorities, and ensuing restrictions on social norms. ASHTAR's team met with the inhabitants and collected their stories, organized public meetings between them and the authorities, provided drama training to high school students, screened plays and films that were followed by open discussions around the raised topics. Currently ASHTAR is in the process of preparing a radio drama incorporating the collected stories to draw public attention to the challenges and hardships faced by the residents of the Valley.







c) Radio Drama: 'Light in the Darkness of the Night'

Seven women who lived the harsh experience of detention and the long years of imprisonment inside the Israeli prisons, followed a training of drama and creative writing with Iman Aoun and wrote about their experiences in the detention . These stories were turned into a three radio drama episodes, played by the ex-detainees and accompanied by four actors from ASHTAR Theatre. 'Light in the Darkness of the Night' was the name of the episodes that were presented in the context of 'One Billion Rising for Revolution' at 24 FM in Ramallah in March 2016.





SIXTH: ASHTAR Board and Team

ASHTAR Theatre Board Members in 2016

- 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 2016

ASHTAR Team in Ramallah:

- 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 Burgan Trainer and actor
- 7. Lamis Shalaldeh Administrative Assistant
- 8. Mohammad Ali Technician

• ASHTAR Team in Gaza:

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

Networks

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

SEVENTH: PARTNERS and DONORS

ASHTAR Main Partners in 2016

- 1- Jordan Valley Solidarity
- 2- Freedom Theatre Jenin
- 3- Al Harah Theatre Beit Jala
- 4- Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung in Palestine
- 5- Ramallah Municipality
- 6- Ramallah Universities and Colleges
- 7- PPAN Palestinian Performing Arts Network
- 8- Boarder Crossings Theatre UK
- 9- Outlandish Theatre company Ireland

ASHTAR Main Donors in 2016

- Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung in Palestine
- PPAN -Ramallah
- Pontifical Mission- Jerusalem
- Care Jordan
- A.M. Qattan Foundation.
- Save the Children Ramallah
- Euro Med
- V- day USA

EIGHTH: Artistic Plan For 2017

- A local tour with the Forum play "Machine and a Hammer"
- Producing a new Forum play in Gaza
- Intenational tour with "The Syrian and The Gaza Monologues"
- Reproduction of the play "48 minutes for Palestine"
- Producing of a new experimental play.
- Producing of a new forum play with Charlottenlund School students and ASHTAR students in Trondheim- Norway and touring the play in Palestine.
- Continue the training of ASHTAR students from the 1,2,3 and 4th years
- Co-producing a circus/theatre performance with Ashtar Muallem

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