

"THE AL-HAMLET SUMMIT" AWARDS :

- 08.02 Scotsman Fringe First Award, Edinburgh Festival, 2002.
- 09.02 Best Performance Award at the 14th Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre (C.I.F.E.T)
- 09.02 Best Director Award at the 14th Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre (C.I.F.E.T)

UK and other Press Reviews :

Joyce McMillan, The Scotsman, Thursday, 8th August, 2002

A PLAY FOR OUR TIMES THE AL-HAMLET SUMMIT

THE room is set up like a conference hall somewhere in the Arab world, or perhaps like the legislative assembly of a small modern state. There are desks with push-button microphones and headsets. Behind, there is a screen, as if someone planned to give a Powerpoint presentation. But the names on the desks are the familiar characters from Hamlet. The setting of **Sulayman Al Bassam's powerful, disturbing version** of the Hamlet story is a modern Middle-Eastern state whose old king has just died, to be replaced by his brother, a ruthless, westernised dictator who has married the old king's wife to legitimise his rule, and calls his regime a "new democracy".

The Al-Hamlet Summit is presented by Al Bassam's London-based Zaoum Theatre Company with an English and international cast; and there are times when it seems a little glossily distant from the region it strives so passionately to represent.

But this show has three striking features. First, there is **Al Bassam's astonishing text**, which rarely echoes Shakespeare's words, but takes the story of Hamlet and reworks it in **a rich new poetic version**, full of what sounds like Koranic and classical Arab imagery. **Some of the results are electrifying.**

Second, the show uses video and projected images in a seriously effective and disturbing way, the glare of burning oilfields haunting the action, characters observed by hidden cameras as they talk.

And finally, its story of Hamlet's progression from dumb Oedipal rage to cold-eyed religious fundamentalism is chilling and utterly credible. It is as important for our understanding of the conflict looming over the world this month as the images of a transformed America in Eastcheap Rep's Jumpers at the Underbelly.

This is not a perfect show; sometimes its intense poetic approach spills over into pretentiousness, sometimes its solemnity is wearing. But the acting is generally strong, the live music magnificent. **And I doubt whether this year's Festival will produce another show so directly relevant to the nightmare that is brewing in the Middle East, or so vivid and eloquent in the theatrical means it uses to confront it.**

Tim Abrahams, The Sunday Herald :

“THE BARD TAKES A FLYER”

... That production seems even more trivial when compared with the **urgent, vital adaptation** by Zaoum Theatre called The Al-Hamlet Summit. Here the writer Sulayman Al-Bassam has not merely altered the plot but rewritten the entire play in his own words, and he has the most urgent and vital of reasons. Set in a unspecified modern Arab state, **Al-Hamlet is a superbly constructed dramatisation of a society's descent into fundamentalism and chaos.** To have created such an impressive piece of writing himself, Sulayman has clearly mastered Hamlet and its politics, sexual and otherwise. **Ingeniously staged and almost impeccably acted, its elegiac finale pushes it into the realm of the sublime.**

Ian Shuttleworth, The Financial Times, 16th August 2002

The Al-Hamlet Summit (Pleasance Dome, venue 23) is **a fascinating piece by London and Kuwait-based writer/director Sulayman Al Bassam.** Shakespeare's story is updated into contemporary Middle Eastern political rhetoric, set in an unnamed Arab state and staged as if in a negotiation chamber, complete with name plates, microphones and mini-video cameras on the desks of the six main characters. It works remarkably well until Hamlet's return from exile in England.

At this point, the analogies break down, and too many plot strands - generational conflict, westernised secularism and venality versus Islamic fundamentalism, commercial and political manipulation by external forces, the Israeli dimension - crowd in to be tied up satisfactorily. **But it remains one of the most intriguing and intelligent shows I have seen this year.** It will shortly visit Cairo.

August 12, 2002

Agitprop prince

BY DAVID STENHOUSE

Hamlet takes on Arafat and Sharon in one of the festival's many political plays

Despite complaints that the fringe has lost its edge and turned into a bloated money-making machine, it is arguably the biggest festival of political theatre in Britain. It may be the looming recession, it may be the threat of military conflict, but there are more political plays on here than at any time since the Falklands conflict or the miners' strike.

Donkey-jacketed students with “Coal not Dole” badges are in short supply, but for radical theatre about September 11, the Israeli-Arab conflict and the effects of globalism, Edinburgh is the place to be.

The Middle East is the kind of arena where some of Shakespeare's bloodiest characters would have had a field day. But it's not butcher Titus Andronicus or malignant Iago that the Zaoum Theatre

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Company has turned to in order to create **the most daring piece of political theatre on the fringe** this week. Instead, the student prince has the chance to solve the challenge of the Middle East, as he takes on Arafat and Sharon.

The Al-Hamlet Summit takes the characters in Shakespeare's play to a Middle East peace conference. Complete with interpreters and live music, **it's a fascinating mix of subtlety and bombast.**

BBC ONLINE

Tuesday, 20 August, 2002, 10:40 GMT 11:40 UK

Hamlet gets Middle Eastern makeover



The family feud take place in a Middle Eastern summit

Shakespeare meets the Middle East in an imaginative and topical remake of Hamlet by the Anglo-Kuwaiti director Sulayman Al-Bassam.

The Al-Hamlet Summit, set in a Middle Eastern country riven with war and corruption, deservedly won a Fringe First Award last week.

Although the names are familiar from the Shakespearean version, the setting is decidedly 21st Century.

Hamlet, the aggrieved son of the deceased king who has just been succeeded by his westernised despot of a brother, Claudius, descends to bitterness and religious extremism in his attempt to gain the crown.

Unnerving

The family feud is played out against the backdrop of a country wracked by a devastating war as well as domestic insurrection.

Al-Bassam's play is a brave attempt to bring one of Shakespeare's darkest and most unnerving plays into a modern context.

Extracts of Shakespearean verse are interspersed with chilling background images of burning oil fields, and whether by accident or design, its Middle Eastern setting makes it one of the most topical plays on this year's Fringe circuit.

Internet address of this article: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/reviews/2193375.stm>

From Al-Jazeera web site : (Title: Anglo-Kuwaiti Play Receives overwhelming reaction in Cairo)

المكرمة، 15:35 (غرينيتش)

مسرحية بريطانية كويتية تحظى بإقبال شديد بالقاهرة



شهدت مسرحية (مؤتمر هاملت) للمخرج الكويتي سليمان البسام التي تعرض حاليا في العاصمة المصرية ضمن فعاليات الدورة الـ 14 لمهرجان القاهرة الدولي للمسرح التجريبي إقبالا شديدا من المشاهدين، مما اضطر فرقة زوم البريطانية التي تقدمها على عرضها مرتين متتاليتين في الليلة الأولى. وقام رجال الأمن في مركز الإبداع بوقف تدفق المشاهدين في اليوم الثاني والأخير.

وقال مدير صندوق التنمية الثقافية صلاح شقوير، أحد الجهات المنظمة، إن هذه المرة الأولى خلال الدورة الحالية للمهرجان يتم اتخاذ مثل هذا الإجراء بمنع المشاهدين من الدخول نتيجة اكتظاظ القاعة.

وتابع "لقد اضطرت الفرقة أن تعيد العرض مساء الأربعاء مرة ثانية ولا أعتقد أنهم سيقومون بعرضه ثانية هذه الليلة فالفرقة منهكة ومتعبة".

وقال أحد الذين حضروا لمشاهدة العرض ولم يستطيعوا الدخول "لقد سمعت الكثير عن العرض بعد اليوم الأول لعرضه خصوصا وأن عددا كبيرا من نقاد المسرح الذين شاهدوه في الكويت العام الماضي قد أشادوا به".

وتابع "وشدني حب الاستطلاع لأرى كيف استطاع المخرج الكويتي مع فرقته البريطانية التعرض للواقع العالمي الجديد وحرب الخليج من خلال قراءة جديدة لرأية شكسبير هاملت".

وكان المخرج الكويتي سليمان البسام قد قام بإعداد معالجة خاصة للمسرحية طرح من خلالها لقاء لعدد من الوفود في اجتماع قمة تصور محاولتهم علاج ما خلفته الحرب من دمار ومحاوله كل طرف من المشاركين الحفاظ على حظوظه في البقاء واستمرارية الحياة.

خلال ذلك يتم عرض فيديو لحرب الخليج ومشاهد من شوارع لندن ويجعل من المجتمعين جوقة مديح لتاجر الأسلحة الذي يدخل الاجتماع في إشارة إلى مستقبل العالم في القرن الجديد، في الوقت الذي تنهار فيه الدولة وتفقد قدرتها على اتخاذ القرار.

وكانت الفرقة قد عرضت المسرحية عام 2001 في الكويت العاصمة الثقافية للعرب في ذلك الوقت وتبعتها عروض أخرى في تونس عدا عن بريطانيا.

المصدر: الفرنسية