


# The EXPERIMENTAL



2009

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en Français



**CIFET 2010?**

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## **Best Actress Award** **(Echo - Iraq)**

**The Experimental** engages in a foyer talk with audience members after the Iraqi performance *Echo*. Reprinted from Issue 5 (Oct. 14, 2009)

In the Iraqi entry *Echo*, which received a standing ovation at the Opera House's Small Hall Theatre, we see an Iraqi mother whose son has abandoned for many years, only to come back to tell her about how he murdered his eight brothers before he left.

Few could fail to miss the references to contemporary, war-devastated Iraq.

Polish director and CIFET participant Krysztof Prusa describes the Iraqi entry as "fantastic". Although he does understand Arabic, he is deeply by the performance, particularly by the excellent acting which, he adds, shows the work of a master director. Prusa is particularly impressed with the Iraqi director's use of light and shades in addition to his employment of music.

Iraqi actor Falah Ibrahim, who takes part in the other Iraqi show *Shades*, calls the play another important reflection of the realities of Post-occupation Iraq. The changing realities have imposed themselves strongly on the consciousness of the contemporary Iraqi artist.

Ibrahim's colleague Mohamed El Rabeay agrees with him, but thinks that, whatever their tragic consequences, these surrounding realities have posed art with a number of creative challenges. He believes that these challenges are precisely what leads Iraqi artist to be keen on taking part in CIFET: to use it as an innovative platform to explore the seemingly



Boshra Ismail in *Echo*

incomprehensible changes in their society.

The idea that art thrives under challenging conditions is also expressed by Estonian long-time expatriate Helen Kress, who works as a teacher at an Egyptian private school, who was no less touched by the show's expression of these Iraqi realities.

Although unable to understand Arabic, Kress was particularly moved by the passionate scene towards the end of the performance, when the mother calls her son a thief and screams for help.

## **Acknowledgement**

As CIFET 2009 comes to its conclusion, the English section of *The Experimental* wishes to thank a number of individuals, without whose help this publication would have been impossible.

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We are extremely indebted to **Mr. Mohamed Abou-Se'ada**, head of the Cultural Development Fund as well as of the festival's Press Committee. Over the years, the support we received from his staff *The Experimental* to grow from a patchy collection of translation from the Arabic section to an autonomous, if still space-deprived, supplement that attempts to serve the festival's English-speaking guests and enthusiasts.

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**Ms. Amal Safwat**

**Cover : Orpheus (Bulgaria)**

**Photo: Sayed Helmy**

# Competition Awards

The CIFET 2009 Jury's Awards

Award	Winner	Nominee (s)
Best Performance	<i>Macbeth</i> Jaranda Project (South Korea)	<i>Echo</i> National Acting Group (Iraq)
Best Ensemble Work	<i>The House of Bernarda Alba</i> Comania de Teatro del Espacio Cultural Metropolitano (Mexico)	Ascent and Ruin of the City of Mahagonny (Italy)
Best Director	Osama Halal Koon Theater Group ( <i>Don Quixote</i> , Syria)	Duda Paiva Bialostocki Teatr Lalek ( <i>Facade</i> , Poland)
Best Actress	Boshra Ismail National Acting Group ( <i>Echo</i> , Iraq)	Juliette FB. Bangouva Arenk Theatre de Guine ( <i>Targuiya</i> , <i>Guine-Conakry</i> )
Best Actor	Mohamed Fahim Artistic Creativity Centre - Cultural Development Fund ( <i>I am Hamlet!</i> , Egypt)	Dr. Maamoun El Khaldi The Workshop of The On-going Rehearsal ( <i>Shadows</i> , Iraq)
Best Scenography	<i>Facade</i> Bialostocki Teatr lalek (Poland)	<i>The House of Bernarda Alba</i> Compania de Teatro del Espacio Cultural Metropolitano (Mexico)



**Best Performance *Macbeth***  
(South Korea)

It follows the storyline of the original text by Shakespeare except for some changes of some characters. However, in terms of expression, the performance is liberated from the confinement of the space as the performers use their bodies as musical instruments. In addition, desks and chairs are transformed into a variety of human emotions.



**Best Director**  
**Osama Halal**

## **Don Quixote (Syria)**

For us as well as for him (Don Quixote), the idea this time was to dominate the stage as we found what we wanted from each other. He decided to stay with us in our imagination. He became everything We asked him because we had no answers

"I was always in the shadow, far away from words, images, platforms and any official ceremonies. He was as remote as the distance between the dream and its fulfillment.

## **Best Ensemble Work** **The House of Bernada Alba** (Mexico)

The play centers on the events of an Andalusian house during a period of mourning, in which the title character Bernarda - An elderly widow who exerts excessive will over her five daughters. She is preoccupied with ideas of honor and tradition, in particular relating to the role of women in society. The deliberate exclusion of any male character from the action helps to build up the high level of sexual tension that is present throughout the play. The play explores themes of repression, passion, and inspects the effects of men upon women. Bernarda's cruel tyranny over her daughters foreshadows the stifling nature of Franco's fascist regime, which was to arrive just a few weeks after Lorca finished writing his play.



The Experimental's English editor **Hazem Azmy** talks with CIFET pre-selection committee member **Brian Singleton** and finds the Irish scholar full of good stories to tell about rising trends in CIFET

# The Return of the Story

**B**rian Singleton is no stranger to CIFET. In 2003, the Head of Drama in Trinity College, Dublin served as the President of CIFET's International Jury. Six years later, he was back to the festival as a member of the international Pre-Selection committee entrusted with sifting through the performances to select those qualified to enter the competition.

As a member of the Jury in 2003, Singleton only saw the performances selected for the competition. This year he could see whatever was submitted by the participating companies, warts and all.

For all the seeming exhaustion showing on his face while we sat at the hotel lobby, he does not seem to mind the load of the work. "I was hugely impressed with the quality of performances, particularly ones from the (Arab) region," Singleton says.

Although there were fewer entries from Europe (a fact that he blames in part on the credit crunch), many of the performances, particularly Arab ones, surprised Singleton with their courage in broaching contemporary reality, often in a manner that challenged many taboos of their respective contexts.

"It was not just a formalist experimentation, but one that concerned the very subject matter," he added.

"I was here for the festival shortly after the invasion of Iraq" he recalled, "I remember seeing performances from the region that dealt with this issue passionately and in the heat of the moment." This year, by contrast, the emotional aspect is still very much alive but the performances tend to be far more "reflective"

"Much more sophisticated - theatrically, dramaturgically, and intellectually," the Irish scholar explains enthusiastically.

As the President of the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR/FIRT) Singleton is in a good position to tell. Further promoting a policy initiated by his predecessor, Janelle Reinelt, Singleton oversaw the development of the IFTR's Arabic Theatre Working Group which seeks to focus on the study of the performance traditions and cultures in the Arab World, especially in their expression of their fast-changing contemporary realities.

The work of the pre-selection committee focused on "quality," having agreed on a broad definition of what counts as experimental

"This year, the form is no longer dominating" he announces, "all performances have a good story to tell."

For Singleton, at least, this should be par for the course. "If you do not have a story to tell, no one will watch you or remember you. Why else do theatre if not have a to tell a story?"

"Postmodernism does not give a license to do without a story, only that the story in postmodern performance is told in a different way, says Singleton, who admits that his taste in theatre has been maturing towards that direction since 2003.

I remind Singleton that CIFET is often accused of encouraging performances that are too abstract or formalistic in orientation. He attributes this in part to the word "Experimental" in the festival's name, which attracts to the festival a certain type of Western avant-garde troupes that are supra-cultural in orientation (read: not always with a national base).

The word experimental is sometimes seen as being so avant-garde that it appeals only to a very small demographic. "For me theatre has to have an audience, otherwise it does not exist"



**Brian Singleton**

The challenge in international festivals like CIFET's is to attract audiences with different backgrounds. Singleton cites as a case in point the performance *Karma* by the South Korean troupe *Yohangza*, one which he voted to give the best performance award in CIFET 2003 (see box p. 5)

"It was experimenting with traditional culture, telling a very simple Korean story that anyone from any culture could understand, yet it was still experimental in form."

"I followed that company ever since. In 2003, relatively unknown at the time. They used their award in CIFET to promote their work internationally. In 2009, they are now regarded as one of the most celebrated international companies, even having their work presented in London at the Barbican theatre in London," says Singleton who calls the Korean troupe a CIFET success story to which he himself helped to realise by voting for the performance.

"I think it is a high quality festival. I would be proud if I were curating that festival in any city of the world," Singleton says about CIFET 2009

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**Best Actor  
Award  
Mohamed  
Fahim  
(I am Hamlet -  
Egypt)**



As the tents of CIFET 2009 come down, **Shady Badran** asks average Egyptians whether they would welcome a new CIFET next year.

## Should the Show go on?

Hind Abdel Rahman, a Mass Communication student, believes that the festival has achieved great success. While admitting that she is not a theatre specialist, she says that she enjoys all the five CIFET performances she attended. For Abdel-Rahman, popular appeal is essential to the success of any festival. She was greatly impressed to see the performances playing to full houses, especially for the Brazilian entry I Choose.

Diaa Yusuf, a young Egyptian entrepreneur, agrees with her. Like her, he enjoyed the few shows he attended although he cannot assess the festival as a whole. Yusuf himself is a new CIFET convert: "I did not know anything about the experimental theater, but I attended an Egyptian performance because a friend of mine invited me. He went to watch another performance, the Mexican *The House of Bernard Alba*, because he really liked the first one. Much to his chagrin, he could not afford the time to see more shows but says he will be waiting eagerly for the festival next year.

Tamer Barakat, a student at the Institute of theatrical arts who followed the festivals in the last few years, believes that the plays presented this year are of a lesser quality than previous editions. Although the plays dealt with many important issues, Barakat believes that many of CIFET 2009's offerings lacked good directing.

Ilania Barnaba, an Italian painter living in Egypt disagrees with this view. She believes that plays on offer this year showcased much technical and directorial prowess. She cites as an example the outstanding level of physical expression in the Lebanese *wamóí tasemah!* and the Bulgarian *Orpheus*.

she also enjoyed the excellent play of light and shadows employed in the Polish Opening performance *Don Quixote*.

Some come to CIFET by sheer accident. Jean Francois Brabant is a French tourist who came to Cairo for a one-week visit. When he learned about the festival, he decided to attend some of its plays, only to be surprised at the sight of large crowds filling the theatres, all the more so since the plays on offer were billed as experimental.

He emphasizes the importance of maintaining and promoting this and other similar cultural events, providing that they manage to retain their high quality, since they would represent the best expression of artistic and cultural life in today's Egypt

### A CIFET Success Story



The South Korean Yohangza Theatre Company, winner of CIFET 2003 Best Performance Award for their *Karma*. Building on the award, the troupe went on to become an internationally-respected company. The picture here is from their acclaimed production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which was presented in 2006 at the Barbican Theatre in London.

*The Experimental* is available online daily at 6 p.m. (in PDF format) at the Cultural Development Fund's Web Site: [www.cdf-eg.org/English/exp\\_theater/news.htm](http://www.cdf-eg.org/English/exp_theater/news.htm)

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