

The

# EXPERIMENTAL



2009

The English-language daily of the twenty-first Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre No.6 - Thursday October 15, 2009

## The Genius of the Place

**Iman Ezzeldin** enjoys a night of mystic trance in Egypt's official entry *Al-Malaweyya*

Inspired by the ancient Egyptian texts and rituals, director and scenographer Intessar Abdelfattah presents the second part of his trilogy: *Exodus to the Daylight* under the title *Al-Mawlaweyya*

The *Mawlawi* confraternity was founded in the 13th century in Konya, Turkey, based on the philosophy and teaching of the Persian Sufi poet Jalal Al-Din Al-Rumi, whose popular title *Mawlana*, or "our master", gave the order its name. The *Mawlawi* gained a special vitality along with the Ottoman expansion, spreading all over the Islamic world, with many centers connected with the mother establishment in Konya. In 1925 the *Mawlawi* order moved to Aleppo in Syria, then to Damascus, and in 1929 the order came to Cairo and settled in the area at the foot of the Citadel. The word *samaa* denotes the Sufi practice of listening to music and chanting to draw closer to God. The *Mawlawi* dervishes combined *samaa* with dancing.

The scenographer/director should be congratulated for his brilliant choice of location. The show was presented at Al-Ghuri Palace, which dates back to more than five centuries. The place in itself is a magnificent architectural building that gives the performance a special taste.

The show starts from the outside yard and the viewers ascend to the upper court after they watch a ritual performed by a number of participants (from the cast) including the *Mawlawi* dervishes themselves.

This ritual scene prepares the



Al-Malaweyya

audiences to the atmosphere it will create afterwards.

The text is taken from *Book of the Dead* and a number of mystic writings by Ibn Arabi and others. The text thus creates a spiritual atmosphere which gives the performance its distinctive appeal and allows audiences to get into the experience. This is also thanks to the dialogue written by Rasha Abdelmoniem.

The director also uses symbols from the ancient Egyptian civilization like: Plum of Maat, The Eye of Horus and the Priestess.

The actors' performance depends here on the deep, spiritual voice to transmit the spiritual state to the audiences. So the voices of Samira Abdelazia (Mistress of the other world), Ahmad Fouad Selim (The Grand *Mawlawi*) are fundamental elements perfected by the ritual body language of the priestess (Ann Thomas) and the young man (Muhammad Samih).

This effect reaches its full realisation thanks to the use of different colours and and races, as if representing the diversity and heterogeneous nature of the Egyptian people across different eras.

The music and the dance of the *Mawlawi* dervishes play an extremely important role, which I consider the other pillar of the work beside the place, through its ascending harmony and interaction. The show features Mystic *Samaa* Chanti ng, Coptic and Ecclesiastical Hymns as well as contributions by the Indonesian Chanting Choir. All these vocal and musical elements helped the show to become an impeccable harmony of colours and sounds, guiding the *Mawlawi* through his ultimate journey towards the greater Knowledge and Elevation.

**A l'intérieur des  
pages en Français**

[iei7@hotmail.com](mailto:iei7@hotmail.com)

Festival President  
**Prof. Fawzi Fahmy**

Press Committee Chair  
**Mohamed Abou-Se'ada**

Editor-in-Chief  
**Abdel-Razeq Hussein**

*The English Supplement*

Editor  
**Hazem Azmy**  
*Univ. of Warwick, UK*

Editorial Assistants  
**Shady Badran**  
**Amira Shawky**

Contributors

**Dr. Bahaa Abdel-Megid**  
*Ain Shams Univ., Egypt*

**Dr. Iman Ezzeldin**  
*Ain Shams Univ., Egypt*

**Dr. Areeg Ibrahim**  
*Helwan Univ., Egypt*

**Dr. Salwa Rashad**  
*Ain Shams Univ., Egypt*

Head of Publications  
Committee  
**Amal Safwat**

Printed in  
the Supreme Council of  
Antiquities Press  
(Ministry of Culture, Egypt)

On Oct. 14. world-renowned founder of performance studies and CIFET 2009's honouree Richard Schechner gave a PowerPoint presentation at the Supreme Council for Culture (Opera House Grounds). The session was moderated and translated by the prominent Egyptian critic Nehad Selaiha. **Salwa Rashad** took down notes.

## Thus Spake Schechner

Schechner started by emphasizing the interactive role of the theatre. For him, theatre is not just a picture on the wall, or a text. He approaches plays as a composite of music, playing, and feelings. Although he describes himself as far from being religious, he enjoys religion which is . As an anthropologist, Schechner reads about religion and writes on rituals. As such, he regards religion as essential to the mind as food is to the stomach. Religion is to be rejected only when it becomes an occasion for prejudice, strife, and conflict. All sacred books advocate love and peace, but people could not act more differently.

It is the role of theatre to help us deal with these complications. For Schechner, theatre gives us something to play with, something that is not always available in ordinary life. To play in real life is dangerous; whereas in theatre this is not possible as we play without hurting each other. Violence, in theatre, could be used to play with, let go of, and not to harm.

Aware of all this and the enormous cultural differences, Schechner resorts to cracked human bodies in his works. He does not mean to be offensive or shocking but this is part of his work and vision. Rejected and opposed by traditional and repressive structures in his country, he is adamant in his adoption of what he calls "Environmental Theatre." The American director points to some basic axes as operating principles to his theatre. Most important for him is that all spaces are used in performance. The text is not always the starting point for production. The director could begin with people, exercises, or themes, where the text becomes only a possibility out of many. In performance, space could be found or constructed, rejecting the traditional theatre spaces as in the case of Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* performed in 1985. Schechner also praised the Egyptian performance *The Mawlaweyya*, a contemporary artistic vision of the Sufi tradition, for its successful manipulation of space, thereby granting it meaning and texture.



Schechner believes that each production element should speak its own language. For instance, light could find its own track apart from, and not in combination with, other elements. In this experience, the audience is included and not excluded. There is no special place recommended for the audience members who are scattered everywhere. Unlike Italian stages, there is no best picture or best viewing position.

As the session drew to an end, Schechner showed parts of three DVDs for three productions which he directed: *Dionysus* (1969), Sam Shepard's *Tooth of Crime* (1972), and most recently *Vokastas Redux* (2007). In the controversial performance of *Dionysus* about birth giving rituals, the audience participate for the first time in American theatre. "I do not oblige any people to do it, but only invite them through theatre" Schechner confirms.

Shocking scenes of violence and bloodshed, cross-gender role-playing,

role-splitting, the use of doubling, masks, live music, dancing, rituals, games, various vocal deliveries and resonances, the physical acting style, as well as the interference of audience and performer spaces are only some of the most salient features that characterize Schechner's rich theatrical experience.

Asked if he would dispense with nudity that sometimes pervade his works, Schechner was emphatic: "nakedness is not to achieve eroticism. It is not serving anything in specific but it is part of my vision.

"If I feel the audience are coming to see naked bodies, I'll ask them (the performers) to wear their clothes," he said.

Schechner ended by denying that he is a dictator. He does not care if people adopt his methods. "I'm not interested in having clones. I like more to stimulate organic development," the guru director maintained, arguing, after Antonin Artaud, that the actor is "an athlete of feelings."

He also admires Jerzy Grotowski in his ability to control the actors and their performances. However, he might also give the actors the chance to have their input, and then select from what they offer.

srashad2005@hotmail.com



## Life (Yemen)

The performance tackles the theme of terrorism. It also sheds the light on the manifestations of violence and oppression. This is realized through expressive movements and acting.

The 45-minute performance will be presented for the second and last time today (7 p.m.) at the downtown Metropol Theatre.

## Tomorrow's Schedule

PLACE OF PERFORMANCE	مكان العرض Arabic Address	TIME	COUNTRY	TITLE OF PERFORMANCE	NAME OF COMPANY	DURATION OF PERFORMANCE	
Al-Aim (The Main)	المسرح لعالم الكبير	المثيل كورنيش النيل بجوار كوبري الجامعة	9:00	Tunisia	Hes Al Keta	Troupe Municipale de Theatre Douz	80 min
As-Salam (Main Hall)	مسرح السلام القاعة الرئيسية	شارع لناصر لعيني	10:00	Saudi Arabia	Playing on Death Threads	Society of Culture and Arts- Negrans	60 min
Al-Talyaa (Zake Tolyamat)	مسرح الطليعة زكي طليمات	ميدان العنتبة بجوار المسرح القومي	9:00	Russia	Pannochka (Panic)	"U Mosta Theatre"	130 min
Al-Talyaa (Salah Abdel Sabour)	مسرح الطليعة صلاح عبد الصبور	ميدان العنتبة بجوار المسرح القومي	7:00	Austria	Scipio (A Concert-performance)	Konnex	30 min
Al-Araxes	مسرح الاراض	ميدان العنتبة بجوار المسرح القومي	8:00	Sri Lanka	Hari Apuru Dawasak (A Wonderful Day)	Audio Visual Creativity and Experimental Forum	90 min
Metropol Theatre	مسرح متروپل	شارع عماد الدين وسط البلد	7:00	The Sudan	The Arrogant White Cat	The Sudanese Experimental Group	30 min
Miami Theatre	مسرح ميامي	شارع طلعت حرب بجوار سينما ميامي	9:00	Romania	The Dream	Theatre 7	70 min
Al-Ghad	مسرح الغد	العجوزة بجوار مسرح اليونان	7:00	Greece	ODC	ODC Ensemble	60 min
Cairo Opera House (Small Hall)	المسرح الصغير الاورا	دار الاوبرا المصرية	8:30	Iraq	The Shadows	The Workshop of The On-going Rehearsal	58 min
Cairo Opera House (Open Air)	المسرح المفتوح الاورا	دار الاوبرا المصرية	10:00	Singapore	Ktenang	Ekamatra Theatre	60 min
Al-Gomhoureya	مسرح الجمهورية	شارع الجمهورية	9:00	Armenia	The Colors	Mihr Theatre	30 min
Artistic Creativity Centre	مركز الابداع	دار الاوبرا المصرية	9:00	Brazil	I Choose	The Research Group	55 min
Al-Ghoury (Cultural Development Fund)	مركز الغوري	الحسين	8:00	Egypt	The Mawlaweyya	Al-Ghad Theatre Group	

The Experimental takes no responsibility for changes introduced to the above schedule without a 24-hour advance notice

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)

### Contact

The Experimental  
experimentalcifat@gmail.com

# 3