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EASTER: THE BREATH OF SPRING

The Babylon Troop

Born in Alexandria!

By **Omneya Okasha**



Riham Isaac.



Hana Kovacova



Ilona Roth.



Benoît Lepage

Recently, our beloved city has given birth not just to individual artists but to an international independent theatre group! The aspiring members established the group in Alexandria and are starting to spread their wings to the world:

Riham Isaac, B.A. in Physiotherapy. Her passion for theater and arts however, has changed her career and led to the discovery of her potentials in being a creative active artist in Palestine.

Hana Kovacova, 22, studied stage directing and dramaturgy for 3 years in Slovakia, in the capital city -Bratislava. Her mother is an opera singer and since an early age inspired and mentored her education in arts. So, she adopted various artistic activities like painting and dancing, later on she attended courses on drama art.

Ilona Roth, 27, was born in Kazakhstan and lived in Germany. At the age of 7, her mother took her to a ballet school. When she finished her secondary education, she enrolled in a musical theatre school and then to a university to study contemporary dance. This opened a whole new field of theatrical expression. She

started to get more interested in mixing dance with theatre.

Benoît Lepage from France. An eclectic freelance performer (working in theater/video workshops, workshops for teenagers, with kids and handicapped children, and independent music creation). He started theater at 11 years old, and until this day he never once stopped being passionate about it and this lead him to enroll at a university to study theater, cinema, photo, literature and anthropology. Other members of the troupe include **shereen zomout** from Jordan, **Cat Soetens**, and **Alper Saldiran** from Turkey

How did you become friends and form the troop?

The first meeting with the people from Babylon Troop was in the first International classroom organized by I-Act in 2007. After 10 days, the synergy was really deep and positive. Frustrated not to have built an artistic project for stage, we decided to ask I-Act for a comeback. They allowed us to come in 2008 for a 10-day creation, lead by Simon Sharkey and Catrin Evans from the National Theater of Scotland. Dr. Mahmoud Abou Doma enjoyed the creation and encouraged us to create a troop (it was such

an amazing moment) and proposed that we come back in 2009 to work on the walls and borders' project.

Whose idea was it, and how did it begin?

It was all our idea, with great support from Simon Sharkey, Mahmoud Abou Doma and the I- Act team.

As for you Riham, Was it difficult for you to work in théâtre whether locally in Palestine or internationally with the troop?

There have been two main obstacles. First, theater is a new movement in Palestine and is still finding its path towards being an active tool in cultural development. Second, being a female actress is somehow a new phenomenon for Palestinians, and that's why it was important for me to participate in international projects.

Was your first project challenging?

Yes and no. It was challenging at the beginning because we did not know what would be expected from us. But with time, we started to actually have fun and enjoy working together.

This year's performance?



This year's project was "Walls and Borders". Catrin Evans our director sent us tasks to prepare before we met last January.

Riham could not join the troupe this year because of the political situation in Gaza.

You live in different countries, what motivated you to keep the troop going and plan for future projects together?

The opportunity to share work among different people from different places in the world is a good way for improvement for the performers and results in special productions. The distance could be tough at times, but we think that borders are not so far between people around the world. The reaction of the

people after our shows is also a great motivation.

What does it mean to you to gather in Alexandria every year to perform as an international troop?

Alexandria is the place we met at first. For us, it's a magical place because we've grown as a family here. It's really important that we keep up this Creative Forum For Independent Theater Groups. We were born as a group here and it's like going "home" to meet in Alexandria.

What are your future plans?

We look forward to having a longer residency, so we can really rehearse our material and show it at higher standards and in different festivals. Therefore, we are currently looking for further funding.

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