

TAHA

(English Version)

Written and performed by AMER HLEHEL

Translated and Directed by AMIR NIZAR ZUABI



TAHA is based on the story of the celebrated Palestinian poet Taha Muhammad Ali. His poetry tells of the experience of Palestinian refugees; his story parallels the story of a million and a half Palestinians who remained in their homeland after 1948.

This is not a play about the tragedy of a poet, but rather about the triumph of his life. What makes the story of Taha Muhammad Ali so unique and special is that it is the tale of a poet that did not for one moment stop loving.

*“When our loved ones leave
Amira,
as you left,
an endless migration in us begins
and a certain sense takes hold in us
that all of what is finest
in and around us,
except for the sadness,
is going away.”*

----- Taha Muhammad Ali

About TAHA

Taha Muhammad Ali is the beautiful optimistic picture of the Palestinian people – of all of us. In his beloved verses, Taha documents hopeful survival after 50 years of loss - loss of his home, his lover, his friends and his shop in Saffureh in Galilee.

Adapted from Adina Hoffman's book "My Happiness Bears No Relation to Happiness" and based on the poet's life and works, writer-performer Amer Hlehel has created a tour-de-force solo performance interweaving Taha's singular and exquisite poetry with his compelling life's journey.

Performed by Hlehel in both Arabic and English versions, TAHA powerfully communicates the sorrow, humor, resilience and tender humanity of this extraordinary man and artist.

The Arabic-language version of the play was presented at the Al- Mindan and the Khashabi Theatres in Haifa; at The National Theatre in Jerusalem,; and at the Al-Sarraya Theatre in Jaffa. The play is touring throughout the Arab world, in Amman, Jordan; Algiers, Algeria; Doha, Qatar.

The world premiere of the English-language version of the play was at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC in the USA. Then it was followed by a worldwide tour included: Luxembourg, Manchester, London, Edinburgh (UK), Adelaide, Wollongong, Parramatta, Melbourne (Australia), Singapore, Toronto (Canada), Brussels (Belgium), Gothenburg and Stockholm (Sweden).

In 2019, Taha's tour will include:

- Porsgrunn International Theatre Festival, Norway.
- The International Theatre Festival Sirenos in Vilnius, Lithuania.
- D-caf Festival, Cairo, Egypt.

The English version was developed in the July 2015 Sundance Institute Theatre Lab in Utah. The English version was supported by A.M. Qattan foundation.

Video Link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1q7b7bV-miVHcQJSScunZctBT7Y4qdfQQ/view?usp=drive_link

Reviews

“Amer Hlehel's TAHA is a dramatic & lyrical tour de force. Hlehel's epic account of Taha Mohammed Ali's coming of age and coming to poetry against all odds is a delight for the mind and nourishment for the heart.” *2013 Pulitzer Prize winner AYAD AKHTAR.*

Anchored by his own excellent text, Amer Hlehel is splendid as Taha. He is funny, earnest, perceptive and irrepressible. *The dailyreview, Australia.*
<https://dailyreview.com.au/palestinian-voices-adelaide-festival-azza-haha-theatre-reviews/72736/>

It's a rich, vivid monologue about a family's struggle to survive the Nakba, or Catastrophe, of the 1948 Palestine War. Simply beautiful. *The Times, London.*
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/theatre-review-taha-at-the-young-vic-se1-6vnvwj6vs>

Delicate, deeply affecting piece. It's a tale of loss, borne with resilience, hope and humour. warmly recommended. *The Independent, London.*
<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/taha-young-vic-london-review-the-evolution-of-a-palestinian-poet-a7833026.html>

Amer Hlehel, gentle and appealing in Amir Nizar Zuabi's calmly focused production, performs his own rich script. *The Evening Standard, London.*
<https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/theatre/taha-theatre-review-pure-poetry-blossoms-in-deceptively-simple-show-a3681756.html>

All in all, TAHA is a memorable and moving celebration of a powerful voice in the ongoing struggle for sovereignty, dignity and freedom in Palestine. ***The Skinny, Edenborough***
<http://www.theskinny.co.uk/festivals/edinburgh-fringe/theatre/taha-summerhall>



Cast:

Amer Hlehel

Crew:

Director– Amir Nizar Zuabi

Technical director – Muaz al Jubeh

Production Manager – Khawla Ebraheem

Production length: 70 minutes.

Credits:

Written and Performed by: **Amer Hlehel**, Translation and Direction: **Amir Nizar Zuabi**, Design: **Ashraf Hanna**, Music: **Habib Shehadeh Hanna**, Lighting: **Muaz Al Jubeh**.

Credits of the original Arabic Production:

Written and Performed by: **Amer Hlehel**, Director: **Yussuf Abu Warda**, Dramaturge: **Ala Hlehel**, Scenography: **Ashraf Hanna**, Music: **Habib Shehadeh Hanna**, Lighting: **Firas Tarabshi**.

Production: **Qadita Productions**. Supported by: **A.M. Qattan Foundation**

The play also is based on **Adina Hoffman's** book "**My Happiness Bears No Relation to Happiness**".

"Taha was **developed**, in part, at the **2015 Sundance Institute Theatre Lab** at the Sundance Resort".

Translated poems are from **So What: New and Selected Poems, 1971-2005**, translated by **Peter Cole, Yahya Hijazi, and Gabriel Levin** (Copper Canyon Press, 2006) and used by permission of the translators.

About AMER HLEHEL



Palestinian Actor, director and playwright AMER HLEHEL is based in Haifa. He has written several plays, including "Taha" (Best Production- Asian arts award- Edinburgh 2017), "Lanterns of The King of Galilee" (An adaptation from a novel written by Ibrahim Nasrallah), "Juha and Bahlol" (children's play), "What the Story is All About", and "Almushakhesati – the Player" (with Firas Khateeb and Ala Hlehel). He has appeared in numerous productions, including as Caliban in Shakespeare's "The Tempest" in David Farr's production at the Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-on-Avon; as Abu Altayib in "Goats" at The Royal Court Theatre, London; as Truffaldino in "A Servant of Two Masters"; as Dr. Roberto Miranda in "Death and the Maiden"; as Yusuf in "I am Yusuf and This is My Brother" by Amir Nizar Zuabi; and as The Soldier in Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" at the Young Vic (London), directed by Amir Nizar Zuabi, He has also performed as Diab in "Diab" (Award for Best Actor and Best Solo Performance at the Masraheed Festival, 2005, Acco) and as Enkido in "Gilgamesh Didn't Die". Hlehel's film work includes Palestinian films: "Tel Aviv On Fire", "Personal Affairs", "The Idol", "The Time that Remains", "Amreeka", "Man Without a Cell Phone" and the Golden Globe award-winning "Paradise Now". His work as a stage and film director includes "What the Story is All About", "Breaking News", "Finding the Dream", "Thanks", "Prayer" (on video) and most recently "Altagreeba". Hlehel is a Sundance Institute Theatre Program alumnus.

Reviews as an Actor:

As Caliban in "The Tempest" by William Shakespeare, RSC, London/ Stratford upon Avon:

"The big, crude Caliban is the Palestinian Amer Hlehel, who respects and speaks the savage's poetic lines with rare beauty"

The Times, London.

"Amer Hlehel's Caliban is disconcertingly monstrous in his all-too-human viciousness, with heart-wrenching intimations of spirituality."

The Guardian, London.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2012/apr/29/twelfth-night-tempest-rsc-review?newsfeed=true>

As Yusuf in “I am Yusuf and this is my brother”, Young Vic theatre, London:

“The cast are excellent, in particular Amer Hlehel, who is superbly moving as Yusuf, perfectly capturing the character’s simplicity and vulnerability.”

Music OMH, London

<http://www.musicomh.com/extra/theatre/i-am-yusuf-and-this-is-my-brother-young-vic-london#jI9xHDXZiywekvLa.99>

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