

François Abou Salem

Raised in East Jerusalem, Abou Salem attended High School in Beirut in the mid sixties, before he was engaged as an actor in Ariane Mnouchkine's *Théâtre du Soleil* in Paris in 1968. In 1970, Abou Salem returned to East Jerusalem where he worked as an author, director and actor with the *Balaleen*, *Bila-leen* and *Sandug el 'Ajab* companies which he founded, until he established the world famous el-Hakawati Theatre Company in 1977. Born in a land with no theatrical tradition, the group performed mainly outdoors, in refugee camps and schoolyards and developed an ethic of "Poor Theatre". First international tour in 1978.

In 1983, he transformed the burnt down Nuzha Cinema in East Jerusalem into a theatre - the first Palestinian theatre, today the Palestinian National Theatre - where he became the Artistic Director, co-wrote and directed 8 original plays in Arabic that all toured Europe and brought the company to such theatres as the Almeida in London and the Théâtre de la Colline and the Théâtre du Soleil in Paris, such as *Mahjoob Mahjoob* and *The Story of the Eye and the Tooth*. He also adapted and directed written plays such as Dario Fo's *Mistero Buffo*, Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule* and Tchekhov's One Act Plays. In 1987, he directed in Hebrew Doron Tavori's *The White Sect* at the Haifa Municipal Theatre (Israel). A year later, he co-wrote and directed the master play of the company, *The Story of Kufur Shamma*, which toured Europe, the USA, the Arab world and Latin America during the three year period of the first *Intifada*.

Starting 1991, the year of the Gulf war, and with productions such as *In Search of Omar Khayyam is Passing by the Crusades*, he started devoting himself to productions questioning the notion of civilisations' encounter, aiming to contribute to dialogue between Europe and the Arab World involving Arab-European artists.

In opera, he directed Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, a hit of the Salzburg Festival, in 1997 and 1998, Bizet's *Carmen*, Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* and François Ribac's rock opera *Qui est fou?* President Arafat honoured him with the Palestine Prize in the same year. During his stay in France he studied neuro-psychology and is actually writing a play about the functioning of the human brain. He has re-established himself in Palestine since 2006 and has created plays in which he also acts, such as *Gilgamesh 3*, and *A memory for Forgetfulness* based on Mahmoud Darwish's chronicle about Beirut 1982 and *Abu Ubu in the Meat Market* inspired from Alfred Jarry's classic and his newly acquired knowledge in neuro-psychology.