

REVIEW

Ihaa theater troupe finishes seven-night run of 'Shi Fashel'

Amira Akar

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BEIRUT: Founded in 1999, the Ihaa theater troupe is finishing the seven-night run of Ziad Rahbani's "Shi Fashel," tonight.

Night after night, this two-and-a-half hour comedy tinged with a bit of meta theater has packed the American University of Beirut's Bathish Auditorium, with all 250 filled.

"Shi Fashel" is a play within a play filled with physical humor, 30 exceptional actors and actresses (11 of them dancers) and a comical script reflecting Lebanese society and folklore.

The story takes place in West Beirut circa 1983 (also the year the play was first performed). A director is arduously trying to put a theater production together about villagers in Lebanon and a stolen clay jar. But he keeps getting bombarded with difficulties including conflicts with and between the actors, amid the technicians and stage manager, and with finances.

Audience members who understand colloquial Lebanese will find ample humor in the script and the competent actors, and those familiar with the various facets of Lebanese culture will undoubtedly identify with – and maybe even relate to – the distinctive characters.

From Jamal Malaeb's hilarious body and facial expressions in his portrayal of "The Stranger" to Johnny al-Hage's amusing, air-headed obedience, the actors almost flawlessly engross the audience. Ziad Matraji, one of the main actors playing the cynical, stern director named Nour, sustains his energy throughout the play.

Despite the high entertainment factor, however, "Shi Fashel" may be a bit too long and can get a bit too loud and exaggerated at points.

When director Eyad Wehbe was asked why he has chosen to revive this particular play at this particular time, he replied: "We're living it. Some people haven't understood yet. They want to fix a new Lebanon, yet they can't stand each other."