

"Shi Fashil" blows audiences away

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A scene from Ziad Rahbani's "Shi Fashil"

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An adaptation of the renowned Ziad Rahbani play "Shi Fashil," organized by the Awareness Club and the Ihaa Theater Troupe, dazzled audiences for three weeks in a row. Spectators were so eager to watch the play that each night was sold-out, leaving West Hall's Bathish Auditorium packed to the brim. The play comes two years after the last Rahbani adaptation was acted out in AUB, "Bi nissbi la bukra shu."

Solid performances, magnificent direction (Iyad Wehbe) as well as the wittiness of Rahbani's discourse, combined to create a thoroughly enjoyable theatrical experience. Though the play might not have done justice to Rahbani's original— at least according to die-hard fans— audiences were stunned at the successful attempt to depict it in as accurate a manner as

possible. Fadi, one engineering senior, commented that he had an image of the play "which at certain parts coincided with the adaptation, but at others was disappointing. However, all in all, it provided a more vivid picture of what a Ziad play might have been in real life."

The three hour play (with a fifteen minute break in between two acts) was acted nine times over a period of three weeks, and just like the bulk of Rahbani's work, was an in-depth yet incredibly witty and intelligent critique of Lebanese society.

Set during the civil war, in 1983, Nur (played exceptionally by economics master's student Ziad Matraji) is a cynical director attempting to put together a play despite numerous hurdles. The preparation for the play, held in pre-

dominantly Muslim West Beirut, is hindered by a cast divided according to religion, the on-going tension of armed clashes, technical problems, as well as the lingering pressure to bring everything together before the opening night. The hysteric and subservient Stage Manager, played by a focused and energetic Johnny El-Hage, contradicts yet complements Nur, adding flavor throughout his performance.

The preparation for the play within this environment, as intended by the director, involves the Lebanese idiosyncrasies and ironies that Nur (and in parallel, Ziad Rahbani) is so passionately frustrated with. The ingenuity lies in the fact that the actors of the play are in a sense replicas of the characters they play, and in turn of the typical Lebanese citizen. Ultimately, it portrays the inability of Lebanese to look at themselves even if their surroundings so obviously prompt them to do so.

The play within the play (and hence the play itself) is also rife with political undertones: despite the fact that the "clear" enemy is Israel, Lebanese citizens will tend to doubt each none-the-less. Either way, the journalist is depicted as the temporary savior: the potential messenger of one of the many truths Lebanese citizens believe in.

In general, the play came at an incredibly relevant time, given the circumstances Lebanese are facing during the country's ongoing political struggles. Above all, "Shi Fashil" is an excellent portrayal of Rahbani's genius.