

The kingdom of fire and clay - seen 7 march 2015 - a review of ailie conor



The Kingdom of Fire and Clay; A Storytelling performance

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By Ailie Conor

Backgammon is a staple part of most Middle Eastern cultures. It is played in the streets, in cafes and in homes by friends, family and strangers alike. It is around this age-old board game that the story-telling of A Kingdom of Fire and Clay unfolds. Iranian and Israeli storytellers Sahand Sahebdivani and Raphael Rodan market the performance as storytelling showing the similarities and conflicts and bonds between friends and cultures. From the get go however they really do feel like friends you know, and it feels less like a performance and more like a drawn out conversation, set to music.

The music throughout the performance was excellently timed and added so much to the stories and anecdotes, which were woven throughout performance. While it had the potential to be distracting or a little too much, it fit perfectly adding intensity, nostalgia and humour when needed. The characterisation of each performer from the start of the play really helped the audience identify with them, so we felt in on every joke and comment. Whether you identified with or were somewhat put off by either the straight forward, and at times brash Israeli manner, or the Iranian politeness and verbosity, and whether their politics resounded or rankled with your own this all contributed to the atmosphere of both conflict and camaraderie. The friendship, like the game of backgammon sitting centre stage, was played out, joked about, argued over, slammed shut, then opened again and reset, just as with friendships and conflicts in real life.

The theatre itself also contributed to the atmosphere of the performance. Small and intimate the space amplified the feeling of being in a café or salon rather than a theatre and the proximity to the performers made interactions with them feel more candid.

It is not often you leave a performance with so little to criticise, or with the euphoric feeling of having been part of the experience. Both funny and emotionally intense, A Kingdom of Fire and Clay is the kind of performance that really makes you think without you realising, makes you feel at times uncomfortable, while also right at home. The most outstanding part of the performance however was how genuine it felt and it was this that really stuck with those of us who attended. A Kingdom of Fire and Clay - Iran Vs. Israel highlighted differences and conflicts between these cultures, as well as similarities in everything from grandmas' anecdotes and cooking to national trauma and collective memory, which combined with the vivid storytelling overall made for a realistic, relatable and moving performance of friendship.

Keep your eye out for their tour dates in the Netherlands, and head to the artists' websites for information about other projects.

<http://mezrab.nl/>

<http://www.raphaelrodan.com/>

<http://www.theenglishtheatre.nl/>

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