

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Go to Gaza, Drink the Sea

Justin Butcher & Ahmed Masoud

Passion Pit theatre & Zeitgeist Theatre

Theatro Technis

(2009)

This is a theatre piece that has been created in the last three weeks in reaction to what has been happening in besieged Gaza since Christmas with first air attacks and then a ground assault by the Israeli army which they called 'Operation Cast Lead.' It is essentially a piece of verbatim theatre, constructed from the interviews and statements from people in Gaza, video footage taken there, an Israeli government spokesman seen on television news and some scripted material which is itself based on actual people and events, and some beautiful songs sung by Nizar Al-Issa accompanying himself on the Oud.

It opens by welcoming us to Gaza (*Retzu'at 'Azza* in Hebrew) Azza being a sort of devil and therefore also welcome to hell where a white faced figure emerging from one of the tunnels constructed beneath the closed borders to bring some food, fuel, medicines - and arms - to those beleaguered there. He is both a real merchant and a sort of Virgil figure to lead us through the various levels of this Inferno but the personal stories that we encounter are entirely real. A mother waiting for her son to return, the choreographer daughter who tries to lift her own spirits with dance, the paramedic shot in helping, the father whose little daughter will never walk again, the extended family of 49 all dying together while sheltering in one member's house when the rest been destroyed, the UNWRA local head and the BBC correspondent who had informed the Israelis of exact locations of places used as shelters and with no military connection that were then bombed or shelled, the young man whose experience is driving him to take up arms.

Except for Israeli government-speak and one voice from Israel - a Jewish peace protestor talking telling us of her terror when the army she had once wanted to join now turned its guns on her - this is a view from Gaza. It is an emotive piece, a cry of pain made bearable by some beautiful and poignant songs. This is not a piece of political argument but a simple presentation of what life as it is now being lived. The writers, who are also co-directors, and co-deviser and designer Jane Frere have appropriated the image of shoes now closely associated with the Holocaust and the extermination camps in which so many Jews and others died and used it here with potent force. They have put together a powerful blend of theatrical elements that touch the heart.

However it is not just a plea for compassion and human rights ignored for it shows the reaction of joining the Hamas military. It does this through a piece of clever choreography, extremely effectively, but at the risk of romanticising the brutal facts and which turns waste of life into patriotic martyrdom rather than the tragedy for all of us that this play represents. It is played with great sincerity by Fisun Burgess, Rupert Mason, Amir Boutrous, Ali Alzougbi and George Couyas and it is almost unbelievable that something so effective could have been created in such a short time. At the first preview, which is when I saw it, a couple of voices were not yet quite matched to the

playing space but that is something that should be easily corrected by the time my colleagues go to see it.

*Until 14th March 2009*

**Reviewer:** [Howard Loxton](#)