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# Gardzienice



منتدى شارك الشبابي  
SHAREK YOUTH FORUM







March 2018 saw an unlikely encounter of two traditions that hadn't had a chance to come together before. The cultures of Palestine and Poland met, bore witness to one another, and then merged into a unified, singular experience -- all this on the fecund ground of theatre. This encounter formed a part of a broader cultural project, entitled 'the Seeds of Expression', implemented by Sharek Youth Forum and funded by the European Union. The purpose of the project is to bring closer artists from Palestine and from Europe, to initiate the professional network between them, as well as to propagate art as an channel to express one's narratives among various vulnerable communities.





## The Polish Guest Artists

It started on February 26th with the arrival of eight artists from "Gardzienice" - a world-famous Polish theatre group - to Palestine. The group, which temporarily functions under the name of the European Centre for Theatre Practices "Gardzienice", has a long and bountiful story behind them. It was founded in 1977 by a young actor and director, Włodzimierz Staniewski, on the eastern side of Poland, in a secluded village barely touched by civilisation. There, away from mainstream trends, Staniewski was free to seek inspiration in traditional Eastern European music and rituals, and married them with the heritage of Ancient Greek drama, thus, creating a unique language of music, dance, and performative intensity. The theatre he established in Gardzienice soon became famed throughout the world thanks to its uncompromising performances and rigorous theatrical practices. Today, 40 years on, it is agreed that the phenomenon of "Gardzienice" was one of the vanguard of changes that have taken place on the theatrical landscapes of Europe in the last quarter of the 20th century.

Over the past 40 years, Gardzienice welcomed and fostered hundreds of artists, scholars, and cultural animators from all over the world, and the traces of their creative presence are permanently interwoven into the Theatre's dynamic nature.

This year, eight "Gardzienice" artists, including its artistic director and creator, Włodzimierz Staniewski, agreed to accept the invitation of Sharek Youth Forum and came to Palestine to present young Palestinian theatre artists with their techniques, as well as with the Eastern European spirit that underlies them.





## The Palestinian Artists and the Training

The pivotal part of their stay in Palestine was the two-week workshop given to young actors, acting students, and cultural animators from all over Palestine. The training started on February 28th, and consisted of 2 stages: 8 days in Sharek's Youth Village in Kurf Nemah and 3 days in the premises of the Palestinian Circus School in Birzeit. The training consisted of music (singing in harmonies, singing in multiple languages, non-conventional metres, such as 5/4 or 9/8, and 'white voice' technique), movement (the 'cheironomy' technique, joining ritualised gestures with spoken word, team exercises to enhance the participants' coordination on stage), working on the participants' individual presence on stage, based on the ancient theatre opposition of the Choir and the Protagonist.

The intensity of the training accelerated the deep cultural exchange. The teachers too became eager students, willing to know more about Palestinian musical stylistics, traditions, dances. They weaved the sound of oud into all musical pieces, introduced the traditional dabkeh dance into their own dancing sequence, and incorporated Palestinian songs into their repertoire. This mutual fascination, as well as the turbulent force intertwined within the music of both nations, gave birth to fervent, heated images and visions that, eventually, found their way onto the theatre stage.





## The Performances

The training concluded with four performances that drew on various aspects of the techniques the Gardzienice artists taught to their Palestinian students and presented the reverberating sum of the Palestinian and Polish experiences. Loosely woven around the texts taken from an early 20th century Polish drama written by Stanisław Wyspiański, the performances took the theme of a wedding as the starting point, so as to readily depart from it and lift the audience to the spheres of pure image and unrestrained expression. The sequences of movement, dance, and strong, dense singing poured down onto the auditory and filled all the space with ritual focus: something that "Gardzienice" inherited from the Ancient Greeks, one of their fundamental inspirations. The performances were shown in Birzeit, Nablus, Jenin, and Abu Dis, the grandest of which was the first show, hosted under the tent of the Palestinian Circus School. With 23 artists constantly on stage, the performance was a fervour of heated expression, for which "Gardzienice" are known around the globe.



Asked about how they find themselves in such a rigorous system of training and performing, the Palestinian participants were unanimous: it was something they had not had the chance to encounter before. The techniques, the intensity, the sanctity surrounding the work -- all this was not only new, but deeply fascinating to them, too. No less amazed were the Polish artists: the eagerness with which the students devoured any piece of new knowledge proposed to them seemed remarkable. The artistic outcomes of the trans-traditional fusion were also more profound than anything they could ever expect. This led Staniewski to open an enthusiastic invitation for the young artists to bring the show to Poland, so as to display the closeness of the two cultures also in front of European audiences.





My presence in this training is a golden opportunity. I was able to understand aspects of my theatre practice that I wasn't aware of before, and the cultural exchange that we experienced during the workshop was very special and brand new in Palestine. I was very happy indeed to have been part of this training.

Yasmin Shlaldeh, Jerusalem, freelance actress



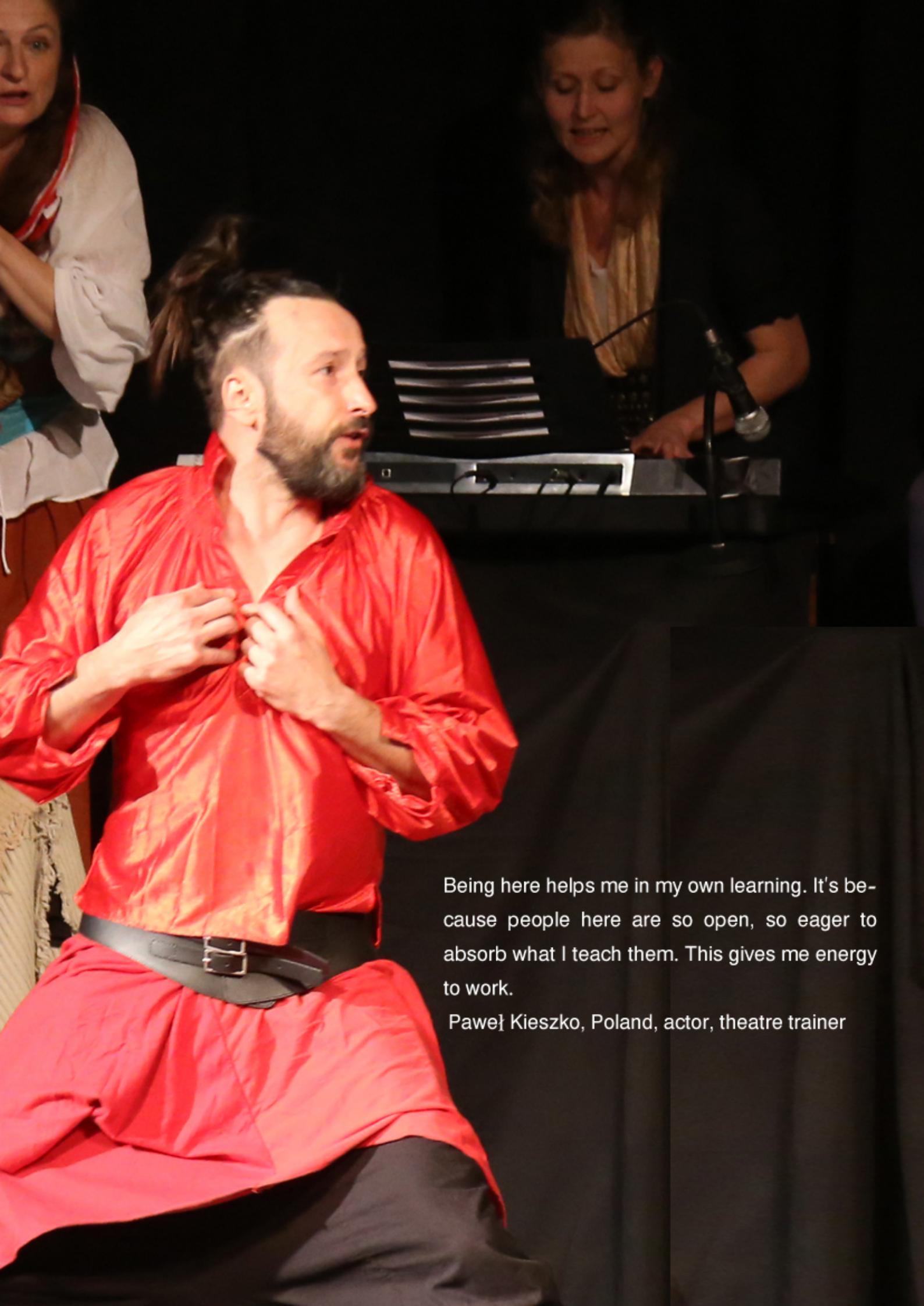


The workshop was of great importance to my career, and I felt truly happy to be in this training. It opened up new musical horizons in front of my eyes and helped me to find a bridge between reduce the European and Palestinian musical traditions.

Ahmad Sharbati, Hebron, instrumentalist, composer, one of the founders of the Mem Group







Being here helps me in my own learning. It's because people here are so open, so eager to absorb what I teach them. This gives me energy to work.

Paweł Kieszko, Poland, actor, theatre trainer





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