

TOTALTHEATRE



Enkidu Khaled: Working Method - Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2017
by Sarah Davies

This interactive solo piece from Iraqi-Belgian theatre maker Enkidu Khaled is part lecture, part workshop, part direct audience address, but always complex and often fascinating. At its core, it seeks to address the universal age-old question 'can art save the world?' This is lent extra weight by the production's context, for as the show progresses we gradually learn about Khaled's own story and experiences as a practitioner in war-torn Iraq; understandably the atrocities witnessed have directly influenced his practice. The vast topic is rendered manageable through application of a specific 'method' to skilfully deconstruct its components. This method is therefore a tool to enable Khaled to use personal narratives as potential stimuli for scenic construction. Passionately explained, the four-step process is explored via some audience participation, with some of our own experiences brought to life on stage in a collaborative 'brain storming' style process. Firstly translated in to images, the ideas then become words, sentiments, phrases and ultimately usable stage pictures, or as Khaledi prefers 'environments'; evolving and flexible constructs for devised theatre pieces. The strength of the work for me lies in its highly experimental nature. Like all experiments it is of course at times messy, disjointed and at the mercy of human failure (when

participants misunderstand instructions that need to be followed quite exactly, for example). Even more strongly, there is a really urgent and compelling nature to Khaled's questioning, lending a gravity to the framing of the piece, and in the best traditions of Boal, Brecht et al, emphasising the possibility of theatre as being a concrete agent for change, despite the many potential hurdles. Like most political theatre, the production certainly contains some challenging subject matter and imagery, though handled very sensitively. Interestingly, post-show, a few audience members accompanied by children questioned the suitability of some of the content, for when the stories of Isis and the inevitable torture come, as well delivered as they are, they are highly visceral too. The obvious flip side of this is the argument that children in other countries are not only hearing about this, but experiencing it directly, which itself raises huge questions with no easy answers and leaves the audience thinking deeply. Some development of technique would also aid the piece even further; in the large venue both sight lines and audibility (particularly for audience contributions) were at times challenging, which obviously becomes incredibly important when the message is so pertinent.

The pace of the performance was extremely well justified by Khaled, who spoke with heart about the need to take our time with his method, highlighting the deeply affecting (and to him, frustrating) fact that 'art is so very slow, violence is so fast'. Even so, the teacher in me struggled at times with the slow pace of the audience-related exercises, which broke my engagement momentarily, but I acknowledge that this is entirely subjective and maybe comes from my own familiarity in working in a culturally different way. In all, the performance is something hard to pin down, which is some ways, is a part of the delight of it – at once vastly complicated whilst also being accessible, its pieces seem to make sense as a whole. Just like the opening slide show which had questions layered over it, the production's images read differently when integrated with each other, resulting in a creation which has real feeling and power.

Enkidu Khaled: Working Method was presented as part of the Big in Belgium programme at Summerhall, by Richard Jordan Productions and Theatre Royal Plymouth in Association with RBC/Upper Church).



Sarah Davies is a Drama Lecturer based in Kent, specialising in Playwriting, Directing and Contemporary Theatre. She has a Masters degree in Drama and is a graduate of the Royal Court Theatre's Young Writers Programme. Sarah also works as a writer and director and is New Writing South's Squad Associate. Recent published work includes short stories (including in Through the Line Anthology and Transmission Literary Journal), reviews (Total Theatre), and articles (The Tall Person's Magazine). Her plays include Nigel the Dark Destroyer, Bingo-ing Crazy and Humpty Smith.