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## ***Overcoming the Fear***

***With Ahmed El Attar's play "Othello or Who's Afraid of William Shakespeare" –performed on Saturday and yesterday (Sunday) and hardly lasting an hour- the Chur Autumn theater plays have taken us to the Middle East.***

**Their love is not meant to be: the Arab Othello (Ramsi Lehner) and the European Desdemona (Crystal Shepherd-Cross)** (Picture by: Jusha Casault)

By Ladina Heimgartner

Shakespeare's Adaptations are like sand in the sea. This obviously speaks for the timelessness of the English poet and dramatist. On the other hand it is becoming more and more difficult for theatre creators to be innovative on stage. An unusual and opinionated adaptation –especially for our western understanding of theater- was presented to the audience in the Chur Theater on the weekend by the Egyptian theater creator Ahmed El Attar.

### **Gigantic Stage Setting**

The audience's aspiration to become familiar with the characters, does not actually prove –for the time being- to be of help with El Attar's theater project "About Othello or Who's Afraid of William Shakespeare". Not at all. The gigantic stage setting with frames and scaffolds, several levels and different video installation, the film-like rapid change of scenes and the Arabic romantic love scenes hardly, they all hardly leave enough time to register the events as a whole. Fortunately the short scenes of the theatrical project -that according to the actors are in constant changing- are bundled into "acts" and constantly repeated. The only thing that changes is the relative emotional potential. Especially entertaining in this regard is the strongly pleasurable Arabic swearing words tirade, that gradually covers Hamlets monolog "To be or not to be". Beside the "Hamlet" quotes, there are great text collage such as from "Othello", "Romeo and Juliet", "A Winter's Tale" as well as "The Merchant of Venice". The distilled main figures are those of the tragic love couple Othello and Desdemona. That El Attar's boldly produced play about the European Desdemona and the Arab Popstar Othello had to be performed in a censored form in Cairo, is no surprise considering the practiced liberality. Moreover,

knowledge of this fact allows a further insight into a totally different theater culture.

### **Excellent theater group**

Desdemona (Crystal Shepherd-Cross) and Othello (Ramsi Lehner) are their fathers' children. They seek to avoid living together as lovers. Yet Othello and Desdemona are also offsprings of their cultural roots. A harmonic union is impossible in spite of repeated and unwearied approaches, and thus the play ends dramatically – with the death of Desdemona.

“About Othello or Who's Afraid of William Shakespeare” leaves many a spectator with inquiring gazes. El Attar's excellent troupe of international performers has made it its aim to overcome fearing Shakespeare –the father of the western theatre- so as to tell its own story. Perhaps this applies on the other hand to the audience, making them overcome the fear of awkward questions, in order to simply take the offered story as it is.