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### The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Romantic Comedy

#### THEATRE

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#### OPENED

September 16, 2005

#### CLOSES

October 14, 2005

#### PERFORMANCES

Fri at 8pm

#### RUNNING TIME

1 hour

#### TICKETS

800-838-3006

#### MORE INFO

[Visit the show's official website](#)

#### WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY

Negin Farsad, Alexander Zalben

#### DIRECTOR

Bob Wittfong

#### MUSIC

Gaby Alter

This is from the press release: "*The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Romantic Comedy* tracks the notorious Mideast conflict back to a botched one-night stand at the Geneva Convention. The newly formed country and the aspiring territory had sex, then Israel didn't call, then Palestine was pissed, then Israel totally had some beef with Palestine's friends, and then some land was occupied... But somewhere in the middle of all the chaos, in the middle of all the wars and embarrassing run-ins, rebound relationships, and pint after pint of ice cream therapy, Palestine and Israel may just have found love." This sketch-based show is the creation of writer/performers Alexander Zalben and Negin Farsad, who are also the comedy duo Madame Funnypants.



#### nytheatre.com review

Martin Denton · September 23, 2005

It takes a certain kind of chutzpah to put up a comedy show called *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, but Negin Farsad and Alexander Zalben, who usually go by "Madame Funnypants" when they perform together, run with a gutsy idea and mostly make it work. It helps, of course, that they're both naturally funny people: Zalben's stage presence is easy, dry, and vaguely intellectual, while Farsad is fearless and hilarious, bursting into song or taking on outlandish new characters with brio, and almost always hitting a bull's-eye.

It helps, too, that as writers, Farsad and Zalben are pretty smart. The central conceit of *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* is that the decades-old cycle of war and retribution in the Middle East is the result of a romance gone awry: Farsad and Zalben anthropomorphize (if that's the right word) the nations of Israel and Palestine (I'm using "nation" here in the conceptual sense of a group of people sharing common heritage and political objectives), having them meet cute during the Geneva Convention of 1948 (they seem to be assigned the same seat), go out on a date, fall in love, and then break up; basically, Israel doesn't call Palestine, and Palestine, feeling spurned, starts to hang out with the Arab states. Tension mounts and things get ugly, as they do among former lovers. Farsad and Zalben postulate a reunion, set in the future, with teary apologies and promises never to do anything bad again to each other; well, one can hope.

The idea of making Israel into a cute but nerdy guy and Palestine into a loving but needy girl works far better than I expected it to, and indeed *Conflict* is at its best when it finds unexpected comic parallels for the dry constructs of international affairs in teen flicks and/or pop culture. The Geneva Convention, for example, is depicted here as a Very Big high school prom, with Charles DeGaulle hosting an awards evening where countries win trophies in categories like "Most Cowardly Country" and "Best Second-Rate Axis Power" (I'm paraphrasing, but you get the idea). A slide montage showing the young and newly-in-love Israel and Palestine hitting Geneva's romantic spots (such as the "Geneva State Building" and "Geneva Square Garden") is particularly effective.

Later on, Farsad and Zalben treat us to faux *Entertainment Tonight*-style newscasts, a rap battle of the stars between ex-lovers Israel and Palestine, and a very funny vignette during which Iran is brought to the principal's office, like a high schooler caught smoking in the bathroom, for starting up its nuclear weapons program. (Iran protests that she saw India and Pakistan making nuclear bombs under the bleachers, but they didn't get into trouble.)

The sublime surrealism of it all gets interrupted a few times by some more direct political commentary, generally criticisms of Israel's handling of its Palestinian population in real life; this is jarring in the context of this show, which rises about specifics to make the very valid point that all of Middle Eastern politics is utterly absurd.

Much of the time, though, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* maintains its loose, free-wheeling bearings, and is a clever, entertaining ride through the insane world of international relations.

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Last Updated: September 30, 2005

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