

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Romantic Comedy

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John Devore · August 12, 2006

Written by:

Negin Farsad & Alex
Zalben/Music by Gaby Alter

Presented by:

Madame Funnypants at the
New York International
Fringe Festival

Modern day political theatre is normally just flamboyant agitprop; relentlessly didactic, moralizing, and so steeped in agenda that it's usually one wobbly rung above propaganda. So don't be deceived by the provocatively titled *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Romantic Comedy*—this two-person cabaret tackles the hottest of hot-button issues with humor, heart, and a dispassionate wit that lovingly ribs both sides of this otherwise tragic situation.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Romantic Comedy imagines two seemingly eternal enemies—the Israelis and the Palestinians—as lovers who met during the Geneva Convention where the great post-war powers decided to carve out a slice of land for displaced Jews at the expense of the Palestinians. All the usual trappings of romantic convention ensue, and a full-fledged fling follows. But, of course, boy loses girl, and over the decades war, greed, and nationalistic groupthink keep the pair from any reconciliation. But the promise of a final kiss powers the sketches, songs, and clever history lessons that unfold at a brisk, yawn-battling pace.

As this is the Fringe, the piece itself can't help but be judged as a workshop—the production schedule and general ethic of the festival means that resources are scarce, and that all venues are technically inconsistent. These aspects conspire to make liking this production an uphill battle, but to judge what it could be by what it is is to grudgingly love it. And it is, simply, a well-written, bordering-on-hip showcase for a pair of top-notch comic actors. As Palestine, Negin Farsad recalls a Tracy Ullman of Middle Eastern descent, and that John Flynn is able to keep up with her manic and strangely genuine energy, is high praise. Farsad has a touch of madness about her, and that's always worth the price of a ticket.

The piece is written by Farsad and Alex Zalben, a mainstay of New York's improv comedy scene, and it is extremely sharp and utterly commercial. The trick they pull with their skits (which are complimented by hilarious music by Gaby Alter) is to remove nationalism and geopolitics from their comedic discourse, and then try to find the human heart central to the dilemma by using equal opportunity humor instead of treacle. By refusing to hold either side's historical grievances sacred, they are able to mock both the Israelis and the Palestinians, two peoples desperately in need of humor and hope. Both of which are supplied during the course of this hour-plus show.