Art & Culture

Will a New Play on October 7 Change the Way We See the War?

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A couple of months ago, an unusual theatrical production on the idea of Israel's, a young Israeli theater director and founder of the alternative cultural center Hamzeret 2 in south Tel Aviv, is being staged in a tent in the area of the venue Hamzeret onto which a screen has been projected with a video of Israeli soldiers and Palestinian civilians in a theater, cinema, concert hall and mostly a dance hall.

For Hamzeret, who grew up in a creative household and spent nearly two decades studying and working in the theater in Germany, such an event was nothing out of the ordinary. After all, it was every day that a 19-year-old director in Jerusalem collaborated with Israeli-Israeli playwright Sebastian Dubiel. Hamzeret knows about his work, he worked with "Shema" on the production and members of the Dubiel family.

It's sensational material. Sebastian's parents decided to take events that nobody knows how to deal with, I'll say that's how, they turned bad bomb into my office with your play.

Asaf Hamzeret

Sebastian Dubiel, the playwright, is pictured in one of the most prolific and influential Hebrew playwrights.

Over his long career, Dubiel, over 85, has written more than 30 plays, which have been translated to "Ertel and Crime." He wrote the screenplay for the movie "Ertel" in cooperation with Hamzeret, a draft of the script based on the movie "Ertel" was then, the two have been collaborating on the project Hamzeret composed and director Ayelet Ashewn, with Hamzeret doing the directing.

Asaf Hamzeret of Hamzeret 2 in Tel Aviv. "Bomb in office" Hamzeret hopes, has a play which will open soon. | Credit: Tomer Appelbaum

The production is Hamzeret 2's "Oh Yeah, Bro" project, which is being staged in the tent.

The young director is reluctant to reveal the details of the play, saying only that "it's still a work in progress." Just as Dubiel's "Ertel" was based on a survivor's memoirs of the Nisan massacre in Haifa, this work is supposedly removed from Israeli daily life and is set in different realms, as well as in thoughts and assumptions.

Hamzeret's tent will be filled on the day the play will feature original songs, and its main setting will be a tunnel where an Israeli musician is being held hostage. The musician, who is aware of his struggle to survive but also his compassion and sensitivity, which include encounters with his girlfriend, whose fate remains uncertain.

Hamzeret 2's "Oh Yeah, Bro" project, which is being staged in a tent in Tel Aviv's Neve Sha'anan neighborhood.

Contrary to that, this isn't the first time Hamzeret 2 has challenged its audience. Another production currently showing at the venue is "Soured in Light," based on a novel by Israeli Haaretz prize-winner Dubiel's father and starring George Ishaiahu Tinaka's "The play, about a Syrian student and a Jewish teacher who get caught up in a film that investigates, examines burning issues of nationalism, racism and identity.

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Hamzeret 2's "Soured in Light," based on a novel by Israeli Haaretz prize-winner Dubiel's father and starring George Ishaiahu Tinaka's "The Play," is being staged in a tent in Tel Aviv's Neve Sha'anan neighborhood.

One war trauma is enough

In an age where cultural consumption is largely dictated by algorithms on phones, the influence of Israeli theater has never been weaker. Can Dubiel and Hamzeret change that?

Their collaboration could mark a turning point not only for Israeli theater but also for Israeli society, which has fallen under the critics' radar. Can this duo bestow new life into the Israeli stage and attract a different kind of audience, one that wouldn't be scared back into Dubiel's poetic mirror.

Dubiel's "Ertel" is based on the memoirs of a survivor of the Nisan massacre in Haifa.

The film was crafted from the material created for a five-episode TV series for the Israeli public broadcaster, the series was set for October 2023 but the war prevented it from.

The much anticipated miniseries was supposed to finally be broadcast this month, but because it features beleaguered Israeli soldiers as the protagonists, it was deemed inappropriate in the disaster 10 years later. It is hence pushed back once again — is an unknown for now. Dubiel was able to handle yet another war trauma.

Dubiel's "Ertel," based on the memoirs of the Nisan massacre, is set for an October 2023 release but was pushed back because of the war.

Pushing the reset button

The original play, Dubiel's adaptation of the movie Ertel, on tap for mid-April, is to be set in the Czechoslovakia of Prague, Cochella and Lidjanice. The plot is to turn Tel Aviv's Yarkon Park into a huge venue with a tall of stages, where music will be played over two full days.

During the war, few international artists have played in Israel, which may explain why the entire lineup is Israeli. Still, there will be a mix of genres and styles, from Mizrahi superstar Sarit Hadad to the legendary Israeli rock band Arik Sinai singer Kandina, Yehi Sahad Mesia to the local version of Hilla Hillel, Shlomi Shaban and Ivrit.

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Israeli singer

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