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## **A *CurtainUp* Report**

### **2002 New York International Fringe Festival**

by Les Gutman, David Lipfert, Jerry Weinstein and Brad Bradley

**Update: August 26, 2002**

A made-to-order post-9/11 docudrama *Sajjil* (Recording) adds voice to the Arab-American community. Clearly the members of Nibras company have done their homework. They did extensive interviews with individuals ranging from resident intellectual Edward Saïd to a pair of rednecks in Palestine, Arkansas. Playing these varied people are six actors: James Asher, Kathryn Leila Buck, Omar Koury, Omar Metwally, Najla Saïd, and Afaf Shawwa. (Maha Chehlaoui is ensemble head for this self-directed show.) Lively Shawwa shows how long-term immigrants like Samia Halaby or Auntie Jaquie are essentially bystanders to the drama of Middle-east politics and their reflections in America. Koury is the most effective in suggesting highs and lows of the Arab experience in America. Metwally's Edward Saïd misses the academic's dour quality with a hint of condescension, but he more than makes up with archetypical overly earnest director of an Islamic Center (mosque) Ayman. Although *Sajjil* does include prejudice and anti-Arab politics, it is too feel-good to challenge preconceptions. There is a level of ignorance on the part of most Americans that I doubt a show like this can overcome. Luckily just as the script's words of wisdom turned preachy, the show ended. Docudrama is by now an overused format that, despite its name, lacks drama. It places a high premium on the actors' stage personalities and techniques. In the first category Nibras looks very good, but they have difficulty in suggesting the range of ages for the people they represented. At Cino Theater at Theater For the New City, 155 First Avenue (9/10 Streets). 1 hour 45 minutes. [Lipfert]

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