

New York International Fringe Festival Reviews

SAJJIL (RECORD)

reviewed by Antonio Sacre

You know how, when you're flipping through the FringeNYC program guide, you think you ought to see something uplifting, but you really want to see one of the five shows with "spanking" in the title instead? Well, put your fears to rest brothers and sisters, because I've got good news. *Sajjil (Record)*, conceived, written, performed, and directed by members of Nibras, is serious *and* entertaining. It's well worth postponing those other guilty pleasures, at least for a night or two.

Described as a "theatrical testimonial," *Sajjil* asks the question "What comes to your mind when you hear the word Arab?" The members of Nibras have spent the last year recording interviews with a wide cross section of Americans, trying to get at the core of what it is to be Arab in America. It appears that every member went out into their lives with a tape recorder, taping their families, friends, teachers, as well as strangers, and brought what they uncovered back to the group. Then, in the manner of Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues*, they culled the most theatrical, revealing, and humorous moments and loosely threaded them together. The result is an educational and entertaining show about the incredible variety, beauty, and struggle of what it is to be Arab and Arab American.

The writer/performers are committed, charismatic, and talented, expertly conveying more than thirty characters with passion, dignity, and much humor. I felt that the ensemble would have benefited from the voices of some older actors; *Sajjil* feels too much like the reflections of the younger generation. But the subject matter is crucially current: we are an ignorant people. Until 9/11, much of America knew nothing at all about Islam or what it means to be Arab in America. Many theatergoers want to be enlightened, want to be educated, want to know what we can do to make things better not just for ourselves, but for others as well. The questions are raised by Nibras, but never answered. Near the end of the show, they ask, "What should I do?" That's a question well worth exploring.

http://www.nytheatre.com/nytheatre/fringe2002_r08.htm