



Nina Haft & Co. dancers are performing in the Middle East.

Theatre/dance professor, alumni take art to Middle East

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Nina Haft, assistant professor of theatre and dance, and her namesake Oakland-based dance company – including three CSUEB alumni – are touring Jordan, Palestine and Israel to perform, teach and meet with other dance artists. Over a two-week period they will perform at the Amman Contemporary Dance Festival, the Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival, the Ibdaa Cultural Center in the Dheisheh refugee camp near Bethlehem, and also in Jerusalem.

The three East Bay alumni are Edmer Lazaro, Frances Sedayao and Josie Alvite.

As a choreographer with a substantial body of work in new Jewish performance, Haft's goal is to cultivate relationships with Jewish and Arab artists, to exchange ideas and artistic traditions, and to lay the groundwork for collaborative projects between Jewish and Arab choreographers in the Middle East and the United States.

While on tour, she is posting blogs, video and photos of the travels at

<http://ninahaftandcompany.wordpress.com/about-nhco-s-middle-east-tour/>^[6]

Upon returning, the members will begin creating new work inspired by this cultural exchange, which will premiere in 2011 as part of the Middle East Moving program in the San Francisco International Arts Festival, where they will share the stage with Leyya Tawil's Dance Elixir, and with companies from the Middle East.

During her 2007 study tour in Israel and Palestine, Haft was struck by how many of the Israeli choreographers she met knew little or nothing about Palestinian dance, while the Palestinian dancers and choreographers she met in Ramallah and Bethlehem were uninterested in learning more about Israeli culture.

This cultural divide is an unusual one among dancers, who normally exchange with one another quite freely as artists and educators. As a visiting American Jewish artist, however, Haft enjoyed free access to both Israeli and Palestinian dance and was invited to exchange with dancers on both sides of the border. She returned to the U.S. feeling compelled to give witness to what she experienced and to find ways to bridge such divides between Jews and Arabs in her own community.

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