

Human Stories of MENA

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First edition is out now!



Bringing *Hamlet* to Yemen

Film and theatre director Amr Gamal tells us how, with British Council support, he brought Shakespeare back to the city of Aden.

Amr has long been 'haunted' by the idea of bringing *Hamlet* to the stage in his home city of Aden, Yemen.

But years of war have forced theatres in the city to close, leaving artists like Amr with limited spaces to perform and restricting access to arts and culture.

Amr reached out to the British Council in Yemen to help make his dream happen. He told us that he wanted to make *Hamlet* a celebration of Aden, a cultural city with a proud theatrical tradition. He hoped to stage the play in the historic Legislative Council building, a former church built in 1871. And he wanted to perform it in Arabic, in the local Adeni dialect.

'Art, for me, is a way to preserve the culture, heritage and history of a place,' Amr explains. 'I wanted to preserve our dialect for the next generation.'

We put Amr in touch with the Volcano Theatre in Wales and Shakespeare's Globe in London. They ran online workshops with Amr and his theatre troupe Khaleej Aden, providing advice on everything from playwriting, set design and costumes to lighting and sound.

The workshops gave Amr the connection to international theatre he had been missing and boosted his confidence as a professional theatre maker.

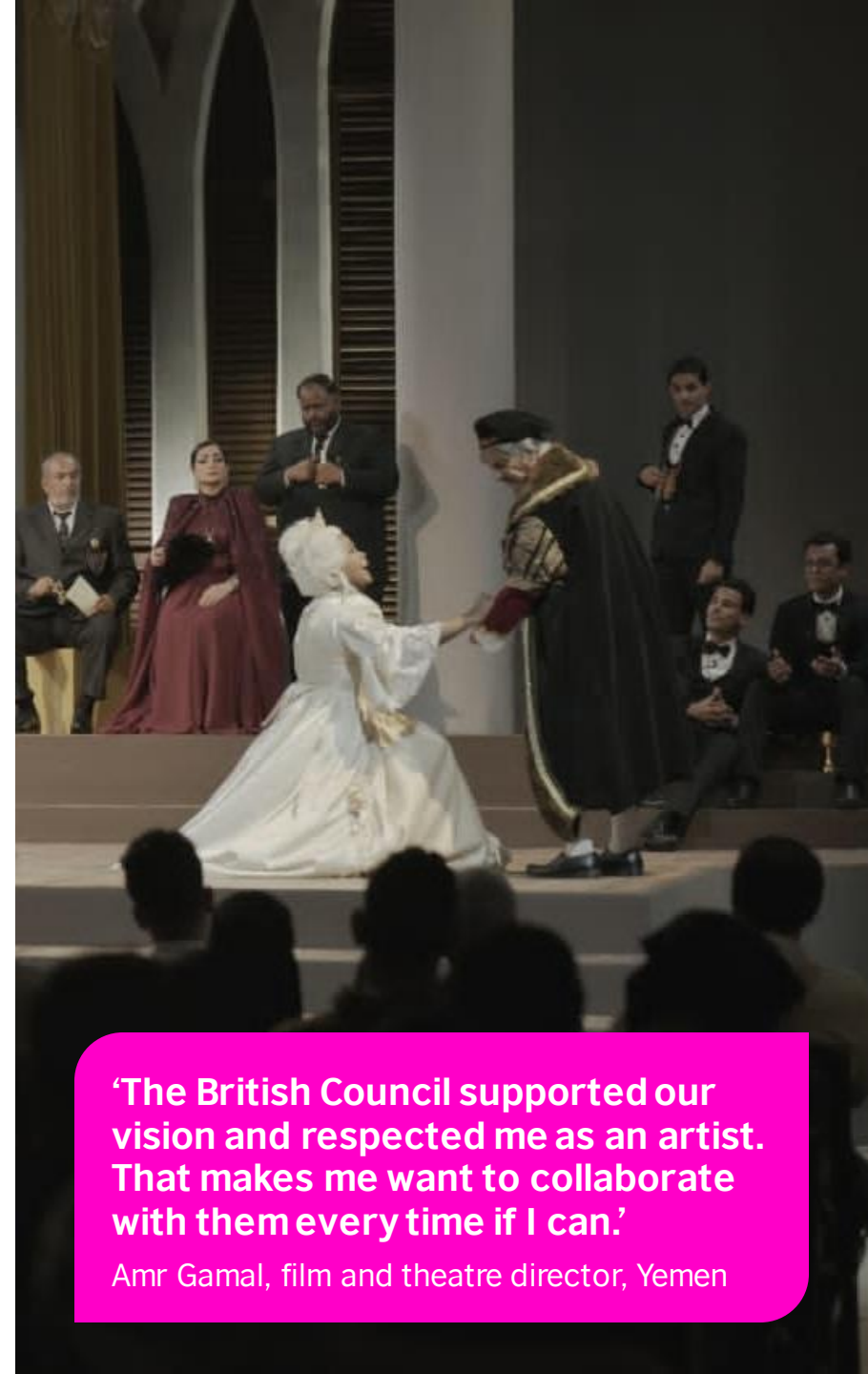
He and Khaleej Aden then began tackling the practical challenges of getting *Hamlet* on stage. Among them, the Legislative Council building was badly damaged and occupied by military forces. But Amr was determined, and with the help of his troupe, the British Council and local authorities, he was able to transform the building into a performance-ready venue, and even persuaded the troops stationed there to leave.

When the play at last premiered, it was met with a standing ovation and huge enthusiasm on social media. Despite Amr's fears about how the audience would respond to this 'very long, very European play', every single one of the ten performances sold out.

'It was amazing. It made me realise that you can dig deep, you can challenge your audience. It's given me the bravery to break more walls in future productions.'

Amr now hopes to stage *Hamlet* in a bigger venue. Making it happen will be challenging, but the success of the play has left Amr more determined than ever to keep arts and culture alive in Aden.

'We have experienced many struggles, but what has always pushed us is the love of our art. We cannot stay in our homes and just do nothing, because without art, you don't have a life and soul.'



'The British Council supported our vision and respected me as an artist. That makes me want to collaborate with them every time if I can.'

Amr Gamal, film and theatre director, Yemen



‘Winning the Study UK Alumni Award continues the dream I had when I began studying in the UK.’

Noor Abu Jbara, founder, SHEE hub

Empowered for success

Noor Abu Jbara tells us how winning a Study UK Alumni Award is opening the door to even more opportunities.

Noor Abu Jbara is an Industrial Engineer. She holds an MSc in Innovation and Entrepreneurship from the University of Warwick, UK.

Noor is passionate about women’s economic empowerment and social entrepreneurship. Studying in the UK supported her to build the knowledge and skills to turn this passion into a career.

It also helped her to raise her academic and research profile. Encouraged by the University of Warwick, Noor published two conference papers – one on measuring women’s empowerment and another on social enterprise business models.

In 2022 Noor won the Business and Innovation Award, part of the Study UK Alumni Awards. This inspired her to turn an idea from her dissertation into a real platform supporting women in Jordan.

SHEE is a social, human and economic empowerment hub. It helps women to achieve economic independence by developing their entrepreneurial skills.

The Business and Innovation Award has given Noor the recognition and professional networks she needs to grow SHEE.

She now hopes to expand its services in education, travel, mentorship and project funding.

‘Winning the Study UK Alumni Award continues the dream I had when I began studying in the UK,’ Noor says.

Championing a greener future

Our Climate Connection Champions programme in Bahrain supported Areej Salah Ali Abdulrahman to build her social leadership skills and environmental knowhow.

Marketing student Areej was keen to play her part in tackling the climate crisis, but wasn't sure she had the knowledge and understanding to make a difference.

Eager to learn, she seized the chance to take part in Climate Connection Champions. Our global programme supports young people like Areej to take action against climate change and lead positive change in their communities.

Led by UK trainers and Bahraini facilitators, the programme brought together 48 local students who worked in teams to develop sustainable solutions to environmental challenges.

Areej's team took aim at water wastage from widely used air conditioning systems. Their solution connects the systems to storage tanks, allowing water to be collected and reused in gardening, fire safety and other areas.

Putting the plan into practice allowed Areej to build her project management skills. She gained practical experience in product sourcing and supply chain co-ordination, and also had the opportunity to consult potential customers, including businesses and universities.

Areej was encouraged by the warm responses she received from her local community, which she felt suggested they were open to new approaches to the climate crisis. This reaffirmed her belief in what she was doing.

'My confidence in making people aware about the challenges that my community is facing from climate change has increased as a result of the programme,' Areej says.

'I believe that working in a team to address these challenges offers a high potential for impact.'

Areej especially valued the opportunity to collaborate with other students and enjoyed the energy the facilitators brought to the programme.

Her experience has encouraged her to think more about the role she could play in addressing climate change and motivated her to do more in the future.

'These sessions helped me to think about how I can get into this and made me want to know more about climate change.'



'I joined because I wanted to make a change and make a better world.'

Areej Salah Ali Abdulrahman, student, Bahrain

Young minds shaping the future

Reem Abbas, Al-Wadi International School | Jeddah, KSA

Shaping young minds to ask, be intrigued and want to dive headfirst into learning is at the core of British Council Partner Schools' methods

Reem Abbas, an alumnus of Al-Wadi International School in Jeddah, KSA, is an exemplary real-life exhibit of being so immersed in interdisciplinary learning. Graduating with the class of 2014, her education at Al-Wadi helped build a strong foundation of being keen to learn. After acing her IGCSEs and A-levels, Reem pursued an English Language and Literature degree at Bilkent University in Turkey and graduating Summa Cum Laude.

Shortly after attaining her Bachelor's, Reem obtained a Master's degree in philosophy in Modern and Contemporary Anglophone Literatures at the University of Cambridge. Currently, she is in the process of accomplishing her doctoral studies on the literary and artistic cross-linguistic and

cross-cultural Persian influences on poetry.

'I am genuinely grateful for my time at Al Wadi, without which I would not have been able to achieve all that I did,' said Reem. 'My deepest gratitude goes to the teachers who taught me and were patient with me when I asked for extra help. In hindsight, I now realize it was their training that had equipped them with the right tools to teach, and in turn, affect us students for the better.'

Her pursuit of learning has culminated in winning the Review of English Studies' global essay competition, teaching at the very university she was studying in, and being a published poet in reputable platforms such as the Poetry National Review, Poetry Birmingham, ArabLit Quarterly, among several others.



'My achievements at Al-Wadi, and beyond, only became a reality thanks to the teachers who would often sacrifice their own lunch breaks to clarify any questions or doubts I had. My academic success is the fruit of their patience and dedication to their work.'

Reem Abbas, Al-Wadi International School | Jeddah, KSA

Disability art transcends exclusion

Aheda Abu Musleh tells us how the British Council supported her to realise her artistic ambition and opened up new opportunities for her as a D/deaf storyteller and performer.

Aheda has always had a talent for storytelling and believes sign language is an under-appreciated form of artistic expression. However, opportunities for a D/deaf female storyteller in Jordan are rare.

A feeling of nervous excitement took over Aheda when she was invited to take part in a disability art showcase run by our partner Sanad Abu Assaf. The Arts for All Week aimed to highlight art as an essential right for persons with disabilities, whether as artists or members of the audience.

Aheda worked closely with Sanad and other members of the D/deaf community to create a performance that for the first time would feature D/deaf storytellers and non-Deaf dancers on stage. The show was presented to audiences in Irbid and the capital Amman.

For the first time Aheda was able to break the silos she has been contained within and work closely with contemporary dancers to create an artistic showcase that shows the talent of artists with disabilities and has appeal for audiences across Jordan.

The showcase premiered at the Haya Cultural Center to rapturous applause from the audience. The response to the show has motivated the project team to schedule a tour to take the performance to audiences across Jordan.

This single opportunity has led to further discussions about how artists with disabilities can collaborate with the arts and culture sector in Jordan, potentially opening up opportunities for many more artists.

'This visually mesmerising "dancing" sign language show was thought-provoking and emotional. For me to experience the feeling of not being able to follow all that was presented on stage makes one think of the many times the audiences with disabilities experienced the same attending our mostly inaccessible performances.'

Mohammad Abd Al Aal, audience member, Jordan





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