

# Et'teffeh/Apples

*By*

Abdelkader Alloula

*Directed by*

Jamil Benhamamouch

*Performed by*

Rihab Alloula

Moussa Boukra

Mustapha Lakhdari

*Stage Manager*

Djalel Hadjel

*Producer*

Istijmam Culturelle

Lila Tahar Amar, Administrator

Running time: 60 minutes  
Post-Performance Discussion Follows

This 2016 presentation of *Istijmam* was part of Center Stage, a public diplomacy initiative of the **U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs**, administered by the **New England Foundation for the Arts** in cooperation with the U.S. Regional Arts Organizations, with support from the **Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art**. General management provided by **Lisa Booth Management**.

## Characters and Players (in order of appearance)

*Restroom attendant* ..... MUSTAPHA LAKHDARI  
*Customer*..... RIHAB ALLOULA  
*Actor*..... MOUSSA BOUKRA

Translation of *Et'teffeh/Apples* by Malik Bourbia and Nabil Taibi, with Jane Goodman.

## PRODUCTION NOTE

A man has just engaged in an agonizing search for apples to satisfy his pregnant wife's cravings. Apples are an imported luxury product in Algeria, expensive and hard to find. In this case, a local vendor had managed to obtain a basket of choice aromatic apples but refused to sell, contending that their value was higher as a display item because they brought prestige to the neighborhood. The inability to purchase an apple that 'The Customer' could see and smell right in front of him is only one of a number of frustrating situations that he has recently encountered. The factory where he worked for years has vanished overnight without warning. When he went to the authorities to find out what happened, he joined throngs of others who had long been seeking justice that never comes. At wits' end, the man stumbles into a public restroom, asking the proprietor, 'The Attendant,' for permission to let everything out. He wants to scream, jump around, and literally release his frustration and his rage at the System, which makes daily life all but impossible. Meanwhile, a third character – 'The Actor'– happens into the same public restroom. Marginalized by the state-run theatrical institution he was working for, he seeks a space to rehearse and realizes that the restroom fits the bill: clean, calm, and with great acoustics. The actor "takes the stage" as he recites passages from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. In the end, the quest for freedom and democracy, catalyzed by apples, brings the characters together.

Playwright Abdelkader Alloula wrote *Et'tefeh* in 1992, in the aftermath of Algeria's 1988 uprising, which toppled 30 years of single-party dictatorship but led to a decade of civil war that pitted Islamist insurgents against a military-backed regime. A secular democratic intellectual committed to political pluralism, Alloula was assassinated outside his home in Oran by Islamist terrorists in 1994. Alloula had previously served as director of both the Algerian National Theater and the Regional Theater of Oran. Alloula was the father of Rihab Alloula, one of the Istijmam actors, and an uncle to director Jamil Benhamamouch.

*Jane E. Goodman*  
*Associate Professor of Anthropology, Indiana University*

## ABOUT THE COMPANY

Based in Oran, Algeria, ISTIJMAM is an experimental theater collective founded in 2007 as a theatrical lab – to bring contemporary theatrical perspectives to bear on indigenous Algerian theatrical traditions. They are inspired by the pioneering work of Abdelkader Alloula, who creatively resurrected the popular *halqa* (circle) form of populist street theater as well as the tradition of the *goual* (a storyteller engaged in barbed social commentary).

"Theater in Algeria is *in* society, and society is *in* the theater," says actress Rihab Alloula. This is no abstract statement for Istijmam, which stages its works in cinemas and courtyards, playgrounds and theaters. The aim: to renew traditions of improvisation and interaction after two

decades of sectarian violence and authoritarian rule emptied and silenced them. Istijmam's approach deeply considers Algeria's indigenous theatrical roots, and the literary and cultural impacts of France's 132-year colonial control of Algeria, the longest in North Africa's Maghreb. "Theater in Algeria doesn't have a lot of theory to support its traditions. We started working on classic texts by Grotowski, Stanislavski, Artaud, and Brook. We discovered alliances," says director Jamil Benhamamouch.

"Traditionally, Algerian theater is interactive," continues Benhamamouch. "It depends on the skill of the *goual* -- a storyteller, a narrator who shifts from role to role but doesn't intend to 'be' a particular character." In this way there are similarities to Brecht's distancing. "He can tell a full story without a set or costumes. He makes a personal connection, works on the imagination, without props. His goal is for the spectators to imagine the story, not watch it. Abdelkader Alloula said: 'I give the ear to see and the eyes to hear.' That's our theater."

Istijmam follows in the *goual*'s footsteps by keeping external trappings to a minimum. Instead, they sing, play instruments, and use dynamic gesture and movement to animate the text. This very physical and energetic approach elicits equal energy from their audiences, who often get directly involved in the performance. "The spectator participates in the story. He doesn't watch it, he helps make it," says Benhamamouch.

"It isn't a final product," explains Rihab Alloula. "When we come into contact with our audiences the production is different each time." This lively back-and-forth shapes Istijmam's work. "We are not unique," she says. "But making theater is a choice. We have made this choice to work on our collective cultural heritage, our popular tradition. We are very inspired by this, and this is very intimate and personal, for all our members."

The personal ties to the method and material bind **Et'teffeh** to Algeria's struggle for independence and self-determination, the heavy price borne by its citizens, and the legacy that informs Algeria's destiny today.

Alongside their theatrical productions, Istijmam hosts workshops on theatrical improvisation at home and abroad. They recently collaborated with the Office Franco-Allemand pour la Jeunesse (OFAJ) to produce *YADRA*, a play in French, German and Arabic. They also sponsor the biannual Rencontres Artistiques d'Abdelkader Alloula, bringing Algerian theater troupes together to workshop and produce Alloula's plays.

## WHO'S WHO

Playwright **Abdelkader ALLOULA (1939–1994)** was the author of 10 plays, and an actor in numerous plays and films. He wrote and staged *El Alleg* (The Leeches) 1969, *El Khobza* (Bread) 1970, *Homk Salim* (Craziness of Salim) 1972 (a monologue adapted from N. Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*), *Hammam Rabi* (The God of Hammam) 1975, *El Agoual* (The Sayings) 1980, *El Ajouad* (The Generous) 1985, *El Lithem* (The Veil) 1989, *Qissas Nesin* (The Nesin Stories) 1990, *Et'teffeh* (Apples) 1992, and *Arlequin khadem essayidine* (The Servant of Two Masters) 1993 (adapted from C. Goldoni). Alloula was one of the major theatre makers of his generation. He was assassinated on March 10, 1994 in Oran, Algeria.

**Rihab Alloula** Actress since 2001. She has a M.A. degree in Translation Studies from the University of Oran. She is interested in the adaptation of universal theatrical works in Algerian vernacular languages. She is also singer in Goya, an experimental jazz group. She is the daughter of Abdelkader Alloula.

**Moussa Boukra** Actor since 2004. He has a M.A. degree in Dramatic Arts and Cinema from the University of Oran and has produced documentary films including *Kouchet El Djir* and *Temps de Pose*. He now studies African music, in particular, the *diwan* traditions of North Africa.

**Mustapha Lakhdari** (Performer) Actor since 2009. He has practiced dance and martial arts such as Kung Fu and Capoeira. He also works as a singer-percussionist in various Algerian musical groups.

**Jamil Benhamamouch** Director since 2004. He specializes in the works of his uncle, Abdelkader Alloula. Animator of intercultural exchanges since 2013, he is currently interested in audiovisual techniques and also in sounds of traditional Algerian music.

**Djalel Hadjel** Stage Manager of Istijmam since 2009. Animator of workshops and improvisational theater matches. He is interested in the oral tradition of the Algerian popular storytellers and their impact on contemporary theatrical expression.

**Lila Tahar Amar** Administrator of Istijmam since 2009. She organizes tours for the company and develops national and international artistic partnerships. She has also studied Spanish language and literature.



### About Center Stage

**Center Stage** ([www.centerstageUS.org](http://www.centerstageUS.org)) invites performing artists from select countries overseas to the United States to perform and conduct engagement activities.

In its third edition, five acclaimed contemporary music and theater ensembles from Algeria and Tanzania traveled to the U.S. between July and November, 2016. Each group undertakes independent, month-long tours around the country to perform, interact, begin meaningful dialogues with Americans, and share these experiences with friends and fans at home. Center Stage artists perform and engage with audiences onstage and online providing positive and popular avenues of engagement to build mutual understanding through shared culture and values.

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