

SAAD AL GHEFARI سعد الغفري

Saad Al Ghefari, born in Damascus 1981, is an actor and stand-up comedian based in Vienna. Growing up in a family of female artists, he was raised up in between emancipatory discussions about religion, politics, art and women's rights, significantly influenced by his grandmother and his mother, who, as prominent figures in the Syrian cultural scene, have always been committed to socio-political issues. He completed his studies at the renowned Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus, where he was inspired by various artists and theatrical traditions. After numerous cinema, theater and television productions, in which he embodied a wide range of roles and characters, comedy as an art and communication form became a subject in which Al Ghefari began to take an increasing interest. During the war, he began to explore the different forms and languages of comedy. He performed as a stand-up comedian in Damascus for the first time in 2014, establishing a genre that had not previously existed in Syria. After his flight from the ongoing war in Syria, he continued his work as a stand-up comedian in Austria, trying to develop a language that is both idiosyncratic and global, preserving the polemics and poetics of the Arabic language in English with all its deviations and absurdities. Along with his passion for cross-cultural conceptions of history, mythology and etymology, he is keen to display these traditions through new media such as the Tiktok platform, following their potential to engage youth as a movement for a global understanding to come.

Selected works

Theater:

2018

The Factory

Director: Omar Abusaada, Script: Mohammad Al Attar

Ruhrtriennale 2018 – PACT Zollverein, Essen

Coproduction of Volksbühne Berlin with Ruhrtriennale

2017

Flüchtling im Wunderland

Director: Oula AL Khatib, Script: Khalil Mohammad

Venues: Dschungel Wien, Theater Akzent Wien, Kultur.Park.Traun,
Forum Stadtpark / Theater am Lend Graz, Brunnenpassage Wien

2011

One Thousand and One Night

Adaption: Hanan al-shaykh, Director: Tim Supple

Venues: Toronto – Canadian Opera Company, Royal Lyceum Theatre
Edinburgh / Schottland – Edinburgh International Festival

Commissioned by Luminato, Toronto Festival of Arts and Creativity

Stand-Up Comedy:

2024 *Modern Parenting for Arabs*
Comedy Thursday im Votivkino Cafe, The Church – International Bar,
Comedy Pub Wien

2022 *Muslim in the Church*
The Church – International Bar, Spektakel

Film / Video:

2018 *The Story of the Polar Bear that wanted to go to Africa*
Regie: Mo Harawe, Kurzfilm, AT 2018

The Sparrow
Regie: Nasri Hajjaj, Kurzfilm, AT 2018

2007 *Seven Kilometers from Jerusalem*
Regie: Claudio Malaponti, IT 2007

TV shows:

2009 *Lawrence Of Arabia*
Regie: Saer Mussa, SY 2009

Lectures:

2017 *Syrien zwischen Mythos und Realität*
Curating the event of SPERANZA »über ein Land jenseits
von Blut und Tränen«, Transform! europe 1040 Wien

2023 *The Gaza Mono-Logues*
Lecture, together with N. Tamar Adler-Oppenheim in the frame of
Hier & Jetzt Vienna 2023, Kunsttankstelle Ottakring

Saad Al Ghefari on Comedy

My first encounter with comedy was through jokes, almost daily my grandmother started telling jokes from a book where she wrote all the funny jokes. She started leafing through it when friends came by. In this moments I think I realized how much laughter brings people together and I wanted to be a part of those joy-giving moments..

During the war, I started watching a lot of comedy shows and re-watching some of them, like Seinfeld, which I had already seen twice since I was a kid, but I never knew what he was doing, why he was standing there talking to strangers about things he deals with on a daily basis, and I was aware that stand-up comedy is an art and a form of expression, and I was shocked when I learned in 2014 that it was an art called stand-up comedy.

So I gave my first show in 2014 in Damascus. It was an old monologue that I told to my family and made them laugh. I used old material that was in one of the shelves of my brain and I found the perfect place for it and then when I came to Vienna in 2015, I started adapting my jokes in English and that was the beginning of my two-language comedy journey.

Through my gesture, I release the pain from its absurd, meaningless, and "natural" context and, by inscribing it in a cultural context, give it symbolic meaning.

Vilém Flusser, *Gestures*