

Our exciting journey together

Thomas Høegh

As I came through the checkpoint from Jerusalem to Ramallah a few days after the great poet's death what struck me was the banners and posters with the inscription of his name and "farewell". In my mind, I had just said "Hello" a short year before and only begun our exciting journey together. For most readers, you have many chapters in your book of memories of him and his words. For me it has only one chapter, but probably more intense chapter than anyone can dream of. It started with an introduction to

his poems by my wife Dr Julie Hoegh who scanned poetry collections from around the world to find a compliment to Henrik Ibsen's "Terje Vigen" as the core of our five outdoor screen cinematic performance Identity of the Soul. After reading "A Soldier Dreams of White Lilies" I knew that I had found what I was looking for and also discovered a whole world of powerful poetry that I had previously not been exposed enough to. It was clear I had to go meet this man and ask his permission to include his words next to Ibsen's in our perform-



Norwegian film director Thomas Høegh and Mahmoud Darwish in Ramallah

ances all over the world. It took a few trips and attempts to meet him in Ramallah with my Producer Martine Rod and Khaled Hourani, who acted as a door opener and champion of our project.

The great man was reserved, asked hard questions and did not come across as particularly convinced to start off with. He did not like being filmed, having had bad experiences with TV and film crews before, and had a very full schedule. However, as we got into the artistic discussion and the conversation moved into the meat of the project he started to realize that this was not a film about him, nor another TV documentary about the PLO with a twist. As he later described it “A new way of presenting poetry that could pick a fight with the music video”. He started to lean forward and look at the Ibsen poem, wanted to see the filmed material and suddenly burst out: “Not only do you

have my permission, but may I read my own poem in your film?” We could not believe our ears, but knew that the sun had just entered the room. Ten minutes later after reading the first few verses of “Terje Vigen” in Fadhil Al-Azzawi’s excellent translation, he said: “This is very powerful, beautiful, may I read this one too?” The rest is history.

We started to prepare the filming and spent some incredibly inspiring days together working with the text and filming at Ashter Theatre. Now we couldn’t wait to bring Mahmoud’s words and voice to eight towns in Palestine in October 2008 and then out to Arabic-speaking communities around the world in 2009 and beyond. His body of work will live on through his many books. With him as a narrator we are proud to make a small contribution to his legacy. May he rest in peace, but his words continue to penetrate soul after soul.



Shooting Identity of the Soul in Ramallah with Mahmoud Darwish

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