

Great Art and Brave Hearts (1997)

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By Nehad Selaiha

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Out of Joint plays Caryl Churchill's *Heart's Desire* and *Blue Kettle* at the National Theatre (1997). The brutal Luxor massacre had cast a pall on the whole country; the general mood was one of horror, anger, disgust and deep revulsion. The reception held on Tuesday, November 18th, by the British Council to welcome the Out of Joint Group was somber and subdued; the British government had already issued its official warning for Britons to stay away from Egypt and, despite the presence of Max Stafford-Clark (the founder and artistic director of Out of Joint and director of the guest production), his determination that the visit should take place as planned, and the frantic contacts and consultations between Cairo and London, no one really believed the actors would turn up. The first performance had already been canceled, and a generous supply of good wine was provided to help us swallow our disappointment. But the following day, just as we were getting resigned to the dismal prospect of a dull, gloomy weekend, they arrived. It was a wonderful gesture of friendship and support. I do hope they realize how much it has meant to all of us Egyptians, not just to theatre artists and lovers, and how deeply it has touched us.

On the morning of Thursday, November 20th, Max did his workshop as planned. Although it lasted only three and a half hours (he had to rehearse his actors for their first performance that evening), it was invaluable in terms of the inspiring insights it gave us into his understanding of theatre and method of work. Cultivating the power of intuition, grasping the effect of the cultural context on any process of theatrical signification, understanding the influence of the hierarchies of power on feeling, behavior and social and personal relationships, and ensemble acting were the focal points. The participants included ten Egyptians, mostly young performers and directors, two British actresses, and a brilliant AUC team made up of playwright Tom Coash, director Tori Haring-Smith, actress/director Krista Scott, and director Eric Grischkat. This made it possible to view modes of expression from different cultural angles and compare notes about different responses to familiar situations. By the end of the workshop Max had won a permanent place in everybody's affection and we had gained a deeper appreciation not just of his great talent and commitment, but also of the breadth and richness of his humanity.

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