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Zoukak Sidewalks to tackle identity



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Sarrieddeen says this



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Organized by Zoukak Theater Company, Sidewalks began life in 2008 as a series of international arts performances staged throughout the year. In 2015 Zoukak created another platform called Focus Liban, aiming to showcase local talent. In 2016 these two components were fused to form this festival.

“The festival aims to open a space for thinking about the performing

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year's edition is bigger and better with a longer run than previous years.

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arts its role in society and politics,” co-founder Junaid Sarrieddeen told The Daily Star. “It highlights the arts as an essential element in society, as a chance to question and debate personal happiness and happiness as a society, which are important questions.

“This year the festival is focusing on topics of identity and justice,” he added. “Within those two subjects, we can explore things like violence and the divide between people pertaining to their identities, whether it’s through ID cards or gender etc. and how this affects our understanding and relationship to justice.”

Sarrieddeen says this year’s edition is bigger and better with a longer run than previous years. Twenty international events will be staged.

“We’re offering up the knowledge and experience of these visiting artists to the public and to the other artists around us,” he said. “There is great variety and most of the artists are also ... opening up the festival to students by holding master classes.

“The highlights of this year are ... the Swiss-German director Milo Rao, who will give a master class, talks and show two of his films,” he added. “We also have a visit from the Sundance Institute with two shows from America, alongside a master class and panel discussion from their theater program artistic director Philip Himberg and production director Christopher Hibma in Zoukak Studios.”

It’s a lot easier to get productions from Europe, Sarrieddeen explained, due to abundant funding from European institutions. Zoukak is trying to reach out further east and south to bring a more varied program.

“We’re able to program a performance by Moroccan dance choreographer Taoufiq Izzediou called ‘Et Pourtant Elle Tourne,’” he said, “and a show from India by Sankar Venkateswaran called ‘Criminal Tribes Act.’”

The Focus Liban section will this year have over 20 productions ranging from complete works to 30-minute pitch sessions for professional feedback and, possibly, production assistance.

“We’re inviting managers of theaters and festivals from around the world to see both complete works and works in progress, giving the artists the chance to be able to show their works around Lebanon or abroad,” Sarrieddeen said. “We have Carlos Chahine’s new play ‘Illusions’ and ... Abdullah al-Kafri’s play ‘The Confession,’ which opened earlier this year.

“Zoukak is putting forward our [Shakespeare-inspired] ‘Two Heads and a Hand,’” he continued, “and we will close the festival with an untitled, in-progress production with the Association of Lebanese Political Detainees in Syria, which [recounts] the daily experiences and personal stories of the detainees.”

Zoukak Sidewalks The Festival runs through Nov. 11 in several venues around Beirut. For more details, see Zoukak.org.





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A version of this article appeared in the print edition of The Daily Star on November 02, 2018, on page 12.

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