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Immersive and interactive Foreign Radical comes to the Prismatic Arts Festival

Theatre Conspiracy's Foreign Radical plays as part of the 2024 Prismatic Arts Festival at the Alderney Landing Theatre from October 3-6, 2024.


 By **Mark Robins** September 25, 2024

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An immersive and interactive show from Vancouver's Theatre Conspiracy, *Foreign Radical* has toured extensively and received wide acclaim, including making this writer's top Vancouver theatre picks in [2015](#) and [2017](#). Not performed in English since 2018, it gets a remount in Halifax as part of this year's Prismatic Arts Festival.

"It's an immersive and interactive theatre performance that revolves around questions of cyber surveillance, security, and our own internal biases," says Theatre Conspiracy's co-artistic director David Mesiha.

More of an 'experience' than a traditional play, the audience is divided into groups, each moving through four quadrants, witnessing different perspectives, and interacting. "It's a way to explore how people can be divided and brought together by shared experiences," says Mesiha.

Foreign Radical's development began in 2011, during a period rife with revelations about government surveillance and data leaks. Tim Carlson, co-founder of Theatre Conspiracy and a former journalist, drew heavily from these global events. "Tim had been reading all this information from the Wikileaks dumps at that time, and simultaneously some of Snowden's revelations were coming out," says Mesiha.

A document that caught Carlson's attention was the U.S. government's "Watchlist

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“ *It's transformative and transportive, and it opens up dialogue in ways that we are not often able to have in a traditional theatre setting. Plus, it's a lot of fun.* ”

– David Mesiha

Guidance,” which provided controversial instructions for determining whether individuals should be placed on a terrorism watch list. “This document was less about real intelligence and more about racial profiling and arbitrary assessments,” says Mesiha.

At the same time, the Arab Spring had just kicked off. “In the beginning, we thought the show was going to be about the Arab Spring and revolutions. We did the first workshop with that theme in mind,” says Mesiha. However, as they worked through the material, cyber surveillance and profiling themes emerged more strongly. “The more we explored, the clearer it became that these themes were interconnected with what was happening globally.”



Foreign Radical was originally co-created by Tim Carlson, Jeremy Waller, David Mesiha (photo above), Kathleen Flaherty, Milton Lim, Aryo Khakpour, Florence Barrett and Cande Andrade.

According to Mesiha, *Foreign Radical* has evolved somewhat since its first public performances in 2015 but remains essentially the same.

“We do switch and adjust some things as needed to make the information more current,” he says. “However, the unfortunate reality is that many of the themes and issues addressed by the show remain the same as when we premiered it. The questions we raised in 2015 are still relevant, and in some ways, even more pressing today.”

When it comes to audience reactions, Mesiha notes that they can vary significantly depending on the location. “It

can be quite different,” he says. “Some audiences are more reserved, while others are very permissive and open to engaging with the material.”

The show’s interactive nature fosters a deep connection among participants. “We wanted to create a space where audiences could feel safe and encouraged to participate,” Mesiha said. “It’s quite astonishing how a group of strangers can occupy an intimate space and be open with each other.”




Mesiha also assures no one is forced to participate beyond their comfort level. “You become a team with your other audience members. It’s not the case that you’re put on a stage and picked on individually,” he says.

As for the upcoming Halifax performance, Mesiha is excited about bringing *Foreign Radical* to the Prismatic Arts Festival. After a French-language tour just before the pandemic, the English version of the show has not been performed since 2018. “We didn’t think the show was going to go up again, but Prismatic reached out, and we were thrilled by the opportunity,” he says.



Foreign Radical is an interactive multimedia experience with multilingual elements in English, Farsi and Arabic. Each performance is unique in that the audience dynamic influences the outcome.

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Dealing with “real, contemporary and important subject matter”, Mesiha says *Foreign Radical* is an experience, unlike anything you have likely encountered. “It’s transformative and transportive, and it opens up dialogue in ways that we are not often able to have in a traditional theatre setting,” he says. “Plus, it’s a lot of fun.”

Theatre Conspiracy’s *Foreign Radical* plays as part of the 2024 Prismatic Arts Festival, presented by Eastern Front Theatre at the Alderney Landing Theatre from October 3-6, 2024. Visit prismaticfestival.com for tickets and information.

The 2024 Prismatic Arts Festival, celebrating the work of Indigenous artists and artists of colour from across the country, returns to Kjiptuk/Halifax from September 26 through October 9. Visit prismaticfestival.com for the complete lineup.

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