

MUSIC AND DANCE

Shortly after its reestablishment, the group was divided into two subgroups for the purpose of specializing in music and dance, respectively. The dance group, trained and led by Fuad Nahar and Tarek Samallouti, concentrated on *debka*, the traditional Palestinian folkdance which has many variations. The music and choral group was led by Abu Imad. The subgroups rehearse separately in order to perfect their specialty, and jointly to prepare for performances combining both elements.

The musicians play all the basic Arabic instruments. One of these is the *qanoun*, a stringed instrument resembling the zither with a shallow trapezoidal sound box set horizontally before the musician. Another is the *aoud*, a form of lute. Yet others are the Arabic-style flute made of bamboo, without a mouthpiece, and the drums. In addition to these, the main instruments of the group are ancient Palestinian instruments such as the *rababa*, a stringed instrument resembling the fiddle; the *shabbaba*, a reed flute;

flute; and the famous *urghoul*, a wind instrument related to the clarinet, consisting of two pipes of unequal lengths.

THE PALESTINIAN EXPERIENCE AS OPERETTA

During the past three years, *Al Ard* has developed the art of presenting stories through song and dance in a form of operetta. These operettas aim at portraying the experience and agony of the Palestinian people not for the purpose of eliciting sympathy, but for mass education and mobilization. The first such musical was entitled «Sabra and Shatila». Its intent was to show that living in camps is not the natural state of the Palestinian people, but something that was forced on them, and which they reject, all the more so because it exposes them to attacks and humiliation. In this musical, *Al Ard* introduced a song which brought them fame. The opening verse is as follows:

*Who forces us to stay in camps
to endure calamities and stand
to receive the blows*

waiting for a new massacre?

The concluding line of the song is: *We shall return*, emphasizing that the alternative to camp life is repatriation in Palestine.

In 1984, *Al Ard* performed in an international anti-racist rally in London, having been invited by the city's mayor. They performed the «Sabra and Shatila» musical in Queen Elizabeth Theater; a large number of pro-Zionists were present in the audience. Although the musical does not explicitly pinpoint the Israeli role in the massacre, these pro-Zionists caused disorder while the performance was in progress. For days, news about *Al Ard* reverberated in the London press, with right-wing forces labelling not only the group but the mayor of London as 'terrorist' for having invited them. Soon afterwards, this mayor was forced to resign. While a number of factors were involved, Abu Imad remains convinced that the Zionist reaction to the performance had much to do with his resignation.

Al Ard has distinguished itself with these operettas. Its second, entitled

