

their musical talent to the fullest. Our stage performances were no longer limited to short artistic sketches, but told a complete story, using the *taba*, a special kind of song, really a narrative which draws its content from concrete things that people can relate to, including expressions of the national struggle. Such performances are not limited to mere entertainment.

"*Wadi Tuffah (Valley of Apples)* is one such work which we began performing. *Wadi Tuffah* is located near Nablus, and many of the fierce battles took place there, from 1936 when Palestine was still under British Mandate. This piece traces the different stages of Palestinian history from 1917 until the time of occupation. In addition to arranging the dances, *dubka* (folkdance), and the lyrics, we began to use lighting to show the passage from one historical period to another.

"The introduction of the chorus also represented a change. Before we had used solo singers, but in the more advanced stages of our work we introduced the element of a chorus.

"In the third stage, we began to work more independently. Previously, we had used only the traditional lyrics and tunes. Then our own members began composing new lyrics in the folkloric spirit; now our musicians are composing new melodies for these lyrics. We used to take a song from a village and perform it exactly as it was. Now we give them a different touch - different lyrics, music and arrangement, but all in the essence of Palestinian folklore. We want to add our own ideas; that is how progress takes place. We think that in the future this will be regarded as Palestinian folklore, because we are not adding foreign elements; it is derived from the folklore of this country.

"This is the stage we are now in. Most of the songs in our new show are words that people have not heard before and new tunes and musical arrangements. We are introducing some new instruments not usually used in folklore. We are also creating new dance steps to go with the new music. It is still Palestinian, but a new type of dance.

"The people have been responding to our work very enthusiastically. We don't want people to say that we are trying to change Palestinian folklore. We think that folklore reflects the situation people are living in. Folklore is not something old, collecting dust, that no one sees or feels. When you give people something born out of their situation, that's folklore, and eventually it will become traditional. We are attempting to give the people what we feel as Palestinians. If we are living in a revolutionary period, our dances must reflect this, as with the uprising.

*My dignity is dearer than my life,
Than the blood I have lost.
The voice of the intifada is louder
than the occupation...
It will not be silenced.*

"We want to stay close to the people. We don't want to be so advanced that they say: It is a very good group, but we don't understand what they are doing. Other groups have attempted to do the same, but failed because they modernized the folklore

too much, to the extent that no one could relate to it. It became sort of Western, too far removed from the people. When people come to our shows, they often come up and say: We feel like we are the ones dancing up there, we are the ones singing these songs; they reflect exactly what we feel. We are trying to connect the past to the present. We don't want people to live in the past or the future. The past and the present should melt together into what we are experiencing now.

"In their attempt to liquidate the Palestinian identity, the Zionists have put many obstacles in our way. Every group is required to have a permit. We don't have one. The use of national songs and patriotic lyrics is forbidden. Normally, the script of every performance must be submitted. We don't do this. We are against this and they wouldn't approve it anyway. Many times they have forbidden us to perform in the territories occupied in 1948. Here in the West Bank and in Gaza, they have closed the theaters we were scheduled to perform in; they have also raided the places we performed. They have arrested our members the night before a performance to prevent us from appearing. At the moment, the person who writes our songs is in prison, as is our music composer and many of our dancers. Some were just released; others were just thrown in. Some have been in prison since the beginning of the uprising, but this did not start with the uprising. We have been arrested many times in the past. Five of us were arrested upon returning from a tour in the US, charged with membership in *Firgat Al Fanoun Al Shabiya*. We have been invited to other places, but we are not issued travel permits.

"Nonetheless, we do perform in the 1948 occupied territories quite often. We were in Nur Al Shams, Sakhnin, Akka, Haifa and Taibeh. We even performed for Palestinian students at the Hebrew University in Tel Aviv. The audience's response was incredible, as if they were thirsty for their traditions. When we started a song, they would sing along. They have memorized our songs. Whenever we perform in the North, for example in Um Al Fahm, people request songs; they come on stage and dance with us. These are clear signs that there has been a renaissance of Palestinian culture.

"Traditional folklore constitutes one part of the civilization of a people. One says, if you want to find the roots of a people, look at their dances, their folklore, because every dance represents a way of living, a way of thinking and the aspirations of a people. As do all other nations, we also have our traditions, culture and history. We are very interested in reaching people everywhere, including the Palestinian people in the diaspora, in communicating every aspect of our situation and our life."

*There is no room for patience.
There is no longer room for patience here.
Either a human life or death.*

Firgat Al Fanoun Al Shabiya has intensified its work during the uprising. In 1987, they produced an underground recording of intifada songs which describe how the suffering of the people has been transformed into the immense power of the upri-