

Bleak vision of everyday life in Palestine

Peter BurdonThe Advertiser



Helana Sawires in *Tales of a City by the Sea*, Bakehouse Theatre, 2016. Supplied.

SAMAH Sabawi's play *Tales of a City by the Sea* is a brave work, based as it is in Gaza at the height of the 2008-09 Gaza War.

Sabawi is uniquely placed, as author and playwright, being Palestine-born and Australian-based, having emigrated with her family in the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, and with friends and family still in the region.

She seeks to tell a love story, between Rami, a Palestinian-American doctor who has entered Palestine illegally to work in the desperately understaffed hospitals, and Jomana, a journalist trying desperately to get the word out about the incredible suffering of the community.

The drama is played out well, and in the lead roles Osamah Sami (Rami) and Helana Sawires (Jomana) are both convincing as characters, and personally appealing. They are clearly deeply invested in the work, and a particular scene where Jomana addresses the audience directly with eyes glistening, on the point of tears, is searing stuff.

Sabawi's claim that the play avoids politics, ideological agendas and clichés is a stretch, and wears thin towards the end, for at times it does nothing of the sort, and could do with a trim. But that's not to say that it isn't a valuable work, not only reflecting but also possibly affecting our view of this seemingly intractable conflict.

Tales of a City by the Sea