

PRESS RELEASE
SULAYMAM AL-BASSAM THEATRE
KALILA WA DIMNA (THE MIRROR FOR PRINCES)

A new play by one of the leading young dramatists in the Arab World. The award-winning Arab writer / director Sulayman Al-Bassam (last seen in the UK in 2004 with the political bombshell *The Al-Hamlet Summit*) presents a powerful and poetically charged new drama exploring religion and politics in today's Middle East. Part political fable, part historical epic, the play unfolds in Iraq circa 750 AD when expanding Empire, pre-emptive strikes and the savage threat of civil war made it an age with all too many parallels to our own.

In the midst of this turmoil a court scribe, wit and radical reformer, Abdullah Ibn Al-Muqaffa, wrote one of the most enduring pieces of literature in the world. The animal fables of "Kalila wa Dimna" were originally intended as counsel for Rulers and retain to this day immense significance across the Arab, Indian and Persian worlds. The drama focuses on the tragic events that unfold around the writer of the tales as he battles for both love and reform in the midst of fervent revolutionaries, heretic poets, religious propagandists, and a ruler who names himself none other than 'God's shadow on earth'.

"the resonances emerge powerfully.....its eloquence is visceral and visual".

The Times

"the show finds its voice in swirling images, a brilliant mix of video and eerie soundscape, and a use of the space that makes it feel as if the whole production is bleeding at the edges". *The Guardian*

Written and directed by Sulayman Al-Bassam, designed by Julia Bardsley and performed in English with live musical accompaniment composed by Lewis Gibson, the play is both a timely investigation into the mechanisms of Empire and a passionate argument for cultural and religious tolerance in the modern Arab and Western worlds.

Sulayman Al-Bassam is based in Kuwait and his plays have been performed throughout the UK as well as at international festivals across Europe, South East Asia and the Arab World. *Kalila Wa Dimna* comes to Oxford after a successful London run at the Barbican. The play premiered in March 2006 at the Tokyo International Arts Festival.