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**ALISSAR CARACALLA, Choreographer, Lebanon**

*Come now, what masks, what dances shall we have?*

Caracalla is a family, a dance company that unites in a country that has seen too much conflict and pain.

My father who founded Caracalla almost 50 years always believed that Shakespeare spent his so-called missing years in the Middle East. We really recognise his voice in Lebanon.

In 1990 during the final months of the civil war fighting forced the company from our homes. As a family, we retreated from Beirut and travelled up into the Chouf Mountains.

So it was here in the mountain palace of Beiteddine, with explosions and gunfire just a short drive away that we devised our legendary dance production of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Confined by war the palace provided a haven for Caracalla; while the Barouk Forest, a place of inspiration.

*Out of this wood do not desire to go. Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no.*

Here in the forest we could forget about conflict. What better place to recreate our *Midsummer Night's Dream*. To transform Shakespeare's tale of love and magic and to dance, we found the thread of the story. Inspired by these trees, words became movements.

In our production Barouk is our mystical forest and the fairies are enchanted djinnies. Their mischief causes chaos.

*Lord, what fools these mortals be!*

In Lebanon today for meddling fairies read political leaders. We're merely their playthings. When the company finally performed *Midsummer Night's Dream* in the summer of 1990, it heralded a time of peace. Like the works of Shakespeare, dance is a magical language, and it's how we can change our reality.

*Are you sure that we are awake? It seems to me that yet we sleep, we dream.*

END OF RECORDING