

Jordanian-Armenian Author Margo Malatjalian Honored by the Arab Theater Institute with Lifetime Achievement Award - Exclusive

By Katia M. Peltekian
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Ms Margo Malatjalian and the Award

At its Fourth Convention in Tangier, Morocco during the first week of November 2017, the **Arab Theater Institute** honored **Ms. Margo Malatjalian** with a lifetime achievement award for her pioneering work in Children’s Theater and Puppet & Folklore Theater. The Convention was organized by the Arab Theater institute in collaboration with “Tangier, Gate to Africa” association as well as the Moroccan Ministry of Culture.

During the convention, Ms. Malatjalian also presented a paper on her experience in developing children’s art and culture in Jordan through not only theater but also through books.

The award comes to honor Ms. Malatjalian for her role as a founding member of the Jordanian theater in the early 1960s and as a pioneer in Children’s Theater. From the early 1960s to the early 1980s, Ms. Malatjalian wrote, directed and produced a large number of plays and puppet shows for children, most of which were inspired by the every-day lives of children in a part of the world where life has not been easy for many decades.

Margo Malatjalian was born in Jerusalem to Armenian parents, both survivors of the Armenian Genocide. Her family later moved to Jordan where she lives to date. She studied business at the American University of Beirut in the early 1960s and upon her return to Jordan, she co-founded the Jordanian Theater Group and became the first woman to appear on stage as a professional

actress. She later studied play directing in the USA and Britain and returned to Jordan to establish the Children's Theater, henceforth dedicating her life to developing the art and culture of children in Jordan. As she continued to write, direct and produce plays for children, she also trained in Puppetry in Prague, Czech Republic. This led her to yet another path in enhancing children's culture. Because of her work with children, she became the head of the Department of Children's Program at the state-owned Jordanian Television, where she produced and directed several programs for children. She has also participated in several festivals and won the admiration of the Arab public for her very professional approach to this form of art.

She currently focuses on developing literacy in the Arab world and has published over 28 story and picture books for early childhood years. Ms. Malatjalian is a well-known educator in the Middle East as she conducts teacher-training workshops for teachers of Arabic in several Arab countries including the United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of Bahrain, Lebanon and Jordan. Some of her books have won both international and Arab awards for best penmanship.



Margo Malatjalian receiving her Award from Mr. Ismail Abdallah, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Secretary General of the Arab Theater Institute, which was founded by Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammad Al-Qasimi, the Emir of Sharjah, UAE.

On November 4, 2017 in Tangier, Morocco, Ms. Malatjalian was honored by the Arab Theater Institute with a lifetime achievement award. Mr. Ghannam Ghannam, a committee member of the Institute, introduced Ms. Malatjalian's achievements. He began his speech by taking the audience through the three major stages of Margo's contributions to theater and folklore. He said that anyone interested in children's art and culture in Jordan must pass through Margo, who devoted her life to the arts and culture of Jordanian children. Ghannam asserted that he spoke as someone who also went through "Margo" when he worked with her.

“Margo became the first female professional artist in Jordanian theater,” he added, when she joined Mr. Hani Snobar in founding the Jordanian Theater Troop in 1964. The first play they presented to the public was *The Trap* by Robert Thomas. She thus became the first woman to go on stage as a professional actress at a time when men usually played the female roles. This was Margo’s first contribution.

“Margo’s second lead came when she established the Children’s Theater in 1971 and began directing and producing plays, some of which were adapted from world famous children’s stories; what distinguished Margo was that her plays were produced very professionally with specific goals in mind,” Ghannam said, without all the hustle bustle that most children’s plays use. “Only Margo’s heart and spirit could produce one play after another for children, not demanding fame for herself,” Ghannam added. Some of the plays and stories she adapted for children in the Arab world include works by Molière, Robert Browning, and the Grimm brothers. She also wrote a large number of original plays such as *Anbara and the Witch* (1971), *The Slave and the Lion* (1973), *The Magical Journey* (1978), *Mazloun and the Lion* (1980), *The Flute Player* (1982); *Nuss En-Nseiss*, inspired by the Palestinian children’s resistance with stones, was the last of the plays she produced and directed for the Jerash International Festival in Jordan two decades ago.

“Margo became the challenge to those who wanted to work with and produce children’s plays too. Margo’s standards in producing and directing these plays were set very high; she ran her theater as she would run her house which was as busy as a bee hive,” said Ghannam. He described the “hive” where some would be rehearsing a song in one corner, others would be reciting their lines in another, while Margo’s mother would be sewing the costumes or making the puppets in yet another. “What I describe are not figments of my imagination,” said Ghannam, “I myself crossed the compulsory path called Margo Malatjalian.”

“Margo knows that working with children does not make her a celebrity,” added Ghannam, and that is why she has devoted her life “very humbly” to face another challenge in the Arab world: illiteracy among the children, especially in standard written language. For over quarter of a century, she has devoted her life not only to writing books but also to introducing these books as an “excellent story-teller.”



Ghannam concluded saying, “And after all the plays, puppet shows, books, curricula, and studies, here she sits among us with humility, kindness and love. Margo Malatjalian, how beautiful, great and noble are all that you have given to us so that our lives and our children’s lives and future would become better. Here, I would like to add my personal love and gratitude to Margo: Thank you for all that you have given to the Palestinian cause from a humane approach and perspective in order to help raise children with principles in spirit and discipline without exaggeration or empty fanfare. And why not, when you yourself carry the memories of the human suffering and calamity of the Armenian people which was then complemented by the Palestinian suffering. But you turned all that agony to positive and creative energy. Margo Malatjalian, throughout this speech I talked to you without using titles; do you know why? It’s because all titles fade before your name, Margo.”

Other speeches and a reception followed the award ceremony.



Ms. Margo Malatjalian with Katia Peltekian in Tangier, Morocco, after the award ceremony.

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