

[Badke\(remix\)](#)

Amir Sabra & Ata Khatab
laGeste | Stereo48

Interview with Amir Sabra and Ata Khatab – June 2026

- **The original *Badke* emerged in 2013 through an encounter between traditional dabke and contemporary movement languages. With *Badke(remix)*, what did you want to preserve from that first version, and what did you feel needed to be reimagined or challenged?**

ATA: The original *Badke* was already a radical gesture. It challenged the idea of dabke as a fixed folkloric form and treated it as a living practice capable of transformation. In *Badke(remix)*, we wanted to preserve that spirit of questioning and experimentation. What changed was the historical moment. The world has changed, Palestine has changed, and we have changed. Rather than recreating the original work, we wanted to place it in dialogue with the present and ask what dabke means today, after more than a decade of political upheaval, social transformation and personal experience.

AMIR: This encounter between the contemporary and traditions is what we wanted to preserve, looking at Dabke today. When we started working on the remix we also were faced with a very strong structure that defended itself although we intended on changing it, but it was resisting. It started in the Dark, with the sound of the Dabke, and ended with a slow Dabke back to the Dark, with an electricity cut in the middle. This relation between light & dark has been significant in the work. All the dance itself we reimagined. We allowed the new dancers to create their own dance material that expressed how to they see the Palestinian dance today.

- **Ata Khatab, you were part of the original *Badke* as a performer, and now you return to the work as a co-creator. How does it feel to revisit this piece from a different position, after all these years and experiences? What do you see differently today?**

ATA: Returning to *Badke(remix)* from the position of co-creator rather than performer has been a profound experience. As a performer, my focus was primarily on embodying the work. Today, I find myself asking different questions about responsibility, meaning, process and context. I see more clearly how artistic work is not only about creating performances but about creating spaces where people can think, imagine and transform themselves collectively. The piece feels different because I am different, and because the reality surrounding us is different.

- **In *Badke(remix)*, dabke does not appear as a fixed or “museum-like” tradition, but as something alive and constantly evolving. When does tradition become a space of freedom and reinvention, and when can it become restrictive?**

ATA: Tradition becomes a space of freedom when it is approached as a living process rather than a finished product. We are not interested in preserving folklore as a museum object. What interests us is the creative force that produced it in the first place. Every generation inherits traditions, but it also



reshapes them according to its own realities and desires. Tradition becomes restrictive when it is frozen and disconnected from life. For us, respecting tradition means allowing it to continue evolving.

AMIR: For me, tradition becomes a space of freedom when it allows me to recognize myself more deeply through it. I experience this most clearly in traditional dance. There is a profound sense of familiarity that my body finds in dabke, as if it carries memories and ways of being that connect me to others and to a history larger than myself. In that sense, tradition is not a limitation but a starting point from which I can explore who I am.

At the same time, I believe that every individual has something unique to contribute to the tradition they inherit. A living tradition is not simply repeated; it is renewed and expanded through the people who practice it. When tradition welcomes this process, it becomes a space of creativity, participation, and freedom.

Tradition becomes restrictive when individuals are excluded from shaping it, and when identity is treated as something fixed and closed. In such cases, any deviation, reinterpretation, or personal contribution is perceived as a threat rather than as part of the tradition's ongoing life. When tradition is reduced to guarding boundaries instead of creating meaning, it ceases to be a space of freedom and becomes a space of constraint.

- **The performance brings together celebration, weddings, collective joy, but also the sounds of war: sirens, drones, children crying. How did you work with this coexistence of pleasure and violence without allowing one reality to erase the other?**

ATA: For Palestinians, celebration and violence are not separate realities. They often coexist within the same moment. Weddings happen during wars. People continue to sing, dance and fall in love despite loss and uncertainty. We did not have to artificially combine these elements because they already coexist in our daily lives. The challenge was to create a space where neither joy nor violence would cancel the other. Instead, they reveal the complexity and contradictions of living under prolonged occupation and conflict.

AMIR: If we look at the work as a whole, joy occupies the greater span of time. For seventy minutes, we witness a wedding celebration with all its dancing, gathering, and collective energy. Yet scattered throughout are a number of intense moments, almost like cracks or brief ruptures, through which we glimpse another condition, one that could be described as violence or latent tension. Even so, this violence does not overshadow the joy, nor does it define the work as a whole.

I believe that the piece's success to allow these two states to coexist because ordinarily, we might expect the appearance of violence to interrupt or bring joy to an end. However, the work's strength is its commitment to continuity. Violence does not arrive as a complete break from celebration; rather, it emerges from within it and alongside it, while the dancing, the gathering, and the sense of joy continue. In this way, joy persists despite the presence of violence.

- **Palestinian identity is often perceived internationally as something unified and homogeneous. Yet the performance foregrounds internal differences, social tensions, class backgrounds and conflicting desires. Was it important for you to complicate that image and reveal those internal contradictions?**

ATA: It was very important for us to move beyond simplified representations of Palestinian identity.



Palestine is not a single story, a single class, a single political position or a single social experience. Like any society, it contains tensions, contradictions, aspirations and disagreements. We believe that showing these complexities does not weaken identity. On the contrary, it makes it more human, more truthful and ultimately stronger.

AMIR: No. Our intention was to affirm a unifying sense of Palestinian identity. At the same time, the internal contradictions and multiple layers within the work challenge the tendency to reduce Palestinian identity to its relationship with the other, as if it could only be understood through that lens. What interests us is the idea that Palestinian identity stands on its own as an independent and unified identity, one that is nevertheless complex, layered, and rich in its internal diversity.

- **Throughout the piece, dance feels like an act of resistance, though not in a simplistic or slogan-like sense. What does it mean for you to dance under occupation? Can dance become a form of freedom, survival, or reclaiming agency over the body?**

ATA: Dancing under occupation is not simply an act of resistance in the conventional sense. It is also an act of existence. Occupation seeks to control movement, space, time and imagination. Dance reclaims all of these. Through dance, the body becomes a site of agency rather than control. It becomes a place where freedom can be rehearsed, even when freedom is denied politically. In that sense, dance is not only resistance. It is survival, creation and affirmation of life.

- **A phrase that resonates strongly throughout the work is: "We will dance until we drop." In the context of ongoing war and occupation, what does this insistence on dancing, celebration and collective movement mean today?**

ATA: "We will dance until we drop" is not a slogan of optimism. It is an acknowledgment of fragility and persistence at the same time. It means that despite exhaustion, grief and uncertainty, we continue to gather, move and create together. Dance becomes a way of insisting on life. Not because life is easy, but precisely because it is difficult. The act of dancing together becomes a declaration that we remain capable of joy, imagination and collective presence.

- **What is your relationship with Greece and its culture?**

ATA: Greece occupies a special place in the cultural imagination of the Mediterranean. Like Palestine, it carries layers of history, memory, migration and struggle. We feel close to cultures that have maintained strong relationships between community, music, dance and everyday life. Coming to Greece with this work feels less like visiting a distant place and more like entering a broader Mediterranean conversation about identity, belonging, resilience and the role of culture in shaping collective memory.

