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ART & DESIGN | ARCHITECTURE | FASHION | INTERVIEWS | COMMENTARY | FILM | MUSIC | PERFORMANCE | PHOTOGRAPHY | FEATURES | REVIEWS



EDITOR'S NOTE



'Banana Plant in the Kitchen', 12x12 inches Original Oil Painting on Canvas by Cornish Artist Joanne Short

And just like that, half the year is already behind us. On a global scale, we continue to witness tragedies unfold from all corners of the world. As we pray for peace and stillness, we turn inwards, seeking solace and meaning through the arts. We scribble poetry, listen to music, attend Broadway shows, and reflect on the difference between content born of human passion and that generated by algorithms and AI.

This month, we bring you a collection of reviews from the shows we've watched over the summer. Yes, we've been spoilt for choice — indulging in musicals that moved us and performances that lingered long after the curtain call. As the UAE gets hotter and more humid, we hope the arts give us a reason to brave the sun, sunscreen in hand, and step out to explore.

We're planning gallery hops, revisiting long-forgotten hobbies (rusty guitars, dried-up watercolours, and maybe even jewellery design), and diving into the autobiographies of artists we admire. We're also hopeful that regional art exhibitions will see more curators, collectors, investors, and true enthusiasts, not just supportive friends and family.

Here's to watching the space grow, evolve, and flourish. We'll be here, applauding every step of the way.

P.S: In an era of ChatGPT and Paywalls, we're daring to create original content and offer it to our readers without a fee. Your support would go a long way. Subscribe to the portal and meet us on social media as well.



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SHREK THE MUSICAL – ONCE UPON A STAGE IN ABU DHABI

A fairy tale with a local touch, laugh-out-loud moments, and plenty of heart—Shrek in Abu Dhabi proved that magic, misfits, and musicals are a match made in swampy heaven.



How about a fairy-tale musical that pauses your buzzing brain, silences your to-do list, and freezes your heart in a childlike wonder? One where your legs begin to tap, your arms sway to the rhythm, and even your adulting soul giggles? We found just that—or came deliciously close—on a June afternoon in Abu Dhabi.

The venue: Red Theatre, NYUAD, The Arts Centre.

The show: Shrek the Musical, matinee.

Presented by: Abu Dhabi's community theatre company, the spirited Abu Dhabi Choral Group.

Based on the beloved DreamWorks Animation film and the book by William Steig, this stage adaptation featured music by Jeanine Tesori and book and lyrics by David Lindsay-Abaire. The live orchestra was nothing short of phenomenal.

From the moment the curtain lifted, we were transported into a pop-up storybook world. The clever use of pages as a backdrop—complete with “Once Upon A Time” lettering—was a gentle reminder that all great things begin with a story. Castles, forests, sunflowers, swamps—each digital backdrop felt hand-touched, charmingly human, and refreshingly non-AI.

The juxtaposition of baby Shrek and Fiona with their grown-up selves at the start was thoughtful. A round of applause for the little Fiona and a tiny plea to not hide baby Shrek's adorable face—his back may be ogre-strong, but we wanted to see that talent up front.

One of the pure joys of the show? Spotting all our childhood (and adulthood) fairy tale favorites. As Lord Farquaad exiled them to the swamp, we played the best live-action guessing game: “Oh! The three blind mice!” “Is that Sleeping Beauty?!” (She kept dozing off mid-scene—brilliantly funny.) Pinocchio was dramatic. Puss in Boots sassed in style. The Three Bears, Wicked Witch, Big Bad Wolf—each had their moment in the spotlight, no matter how fleeting, and owned it—which spoke of great direction!

Now, about the “local flavour” sprinkled throughout—Burj Khalifa signage next to Duloc? AED 10 honey jars in the forest? The occasional “Yalla Habibi!” and “Khalas!”?





Not purist, perhaps—but absolutely crowd-pleasing.

A standing ovation (if our knees weren't still recovering from laughing) for Lord Farquaad. Portraying a villainous dwarf while on your knees the entire show? That's dedication. Add silky hair flips, exaggerated haughtiness, and comic timing: you've got a crowd favorite. The "faux legs" were used brilliantly—from stretches to dance routines, every movement was hilarious and brilliant. And yes, the puns—"small talk," "lower expectations"—were greatly appreciated.

The three Fionas—singing across time with finesse, harmony, and stage presence. Casting for them (and for adult Fiona and Shrek) was spot-on. Shrek had us wrapped in his green charm—his emotional vulnerability, quiet strength, and perfect comic pauses made him a joy to watch. Fiona was magnetic—she danced, sang, over-acted in just the right way, and totally owned her moments of melodrama.

The dragon deserves her standing ovation. Not just for her gorgeous appearance but for the craftsmanship behind every muscle and every tooth. We were in awe of how the characters ensured even the teeth moved. The entire dragon sequence was pure theatre magic—more carnival than creature—and the singing spellbound us.

Donkey, oh, Donkey. You made us love you even more. From the facial expressions to the physical comedy, the warmth and chemistry you shared with Shrek made us long for a friend like you. Your presence filled the stage—and our hearts.

One standout scene was the Pied Piper bit—where the mice wouldn't follow until Fiona suggested a change of tune. A delightful burst of choreography followed, with mouse-faced feet peeking out from beneath the curtains. Genius. The varied choreography throughout the show had us dancing in our seats.

A tiny request: a printed cast list or an on-screen credit post-curtain call would've helped us applaud each talent by name. Yes, we did the scan QR code. Some performers did emerge to the lobby afterward, charming little fans (and their grown-up counterparts), reminding us it was time to return to reality... and to the long drive back to Dubai. But not before singing:

"And then I saw her face... Now I'm a believer!"

The sets and props? Handcrafted delights. The unicorn used by the Lord. The dragon's teeth. The DIY cookies, the milk carton! It didn't feel like a movie set. It felt better—intimate, imaginative, and made with love. The live orchestra was nothing





short of phenomenal. From the very first note, the orchestra brought the fairytale world to life with a vibrant, cinematic sweep that elevated every scene. Each musical cue was perfectly timed, adding drama, humor, and heart to the onstage action. The energy of the musicians was infectious, making the performance feel immersive and grand. Clearly, the orchestra wasn't just accompanying the show—they were an integral part of the storytelling magic.

One element that did take away, rather than add, to the magical illusion was the use of artificial fog and smoke. While it did amp up the drama and fairytale mystery of certain scenes, it wasn't the most practical choice—especially for an indoor theatre packed with an enthusiastic audience. Several viewers, including us, found themselves coughing through the haze. Given that this was the fifth and final show of the run, we were surprised this hadn't come up in earlier feedback. Dramatic? Yes. But practical or comfortable? Not quite.

And the jokes? Sharp and well-placed. "Let me spell it for you..." got the usual laughs. "What goes well with donuts?" "Well, diabetes..." Ouch—but we laughed.

Shrek's emotional range was powerful—we cried when he felt lonely, rooted for him when he broke emotional walls, and chuckled when he remained stubbornly ogre-ish. He reminded us all that we, like ogres (and onions), have layers.

In the end, this musical reminded us that fairy tales deserve a refresh.

This one celebrated individuality, imperfection, and joy in all its green, swampy glory. The multicultural cast and diverse audience only added to the magic. As the cast sang, "What makes us special, makes us strong," it rang true in every accent, every

laugh, every layer.

For the love of fairy tales is such, and sang the performers: "We will write them, you will hear them, and even smell them..." Yes, the fart and burp jokes landed—quite literally—with a whoosh of hand waves and loud guffaws. Because who said fairy tales had to be proper?

More on Shrek:

Once upon a time, an ogre named Shrek lived in a faraway swamp whose precious solitude was suddenly shattered by an invasion of annoying fairytale characters. They were all banished from their kingdom by the evil Lord Farquaad. Determined to save their home—not to mention his—Shrek cuts a deal with Farquaad and sets out to rescue Princess Fiona to be Farquaad's bride. Rescuing the princess may be a small task compared to uncovering her deep, dark secret.



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DIRIYAH ART FUTURES ANNOUNCES AN OPEN CALL FOR THE SECOND EMERGING NEW MEDIA ARTISTS PROGRAM

EMERGING NEW MEDIA ARTISTS PROGRAMME 2025-2026

OPEN CALL

Diriyah Art Futures (DAF), the MENA region's first New Media Arts hub, has announced a call for applications for the second cycle of its Emerging New Media Artists program, set to launch in October 2025. Developed in partnership with Le Fresnoy – Studio National des Arts Contemporains in France, the one-year program offers access to cutting-edge professional equipment and facilities, a production budget, and personal mentorship from prominent international digital and new media artists.

The funded program launched last November, alongside the highly anticipated opening of DAF in Diriyah, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The inaugural cohort featured 12 up-and-coming new media and digital artists from 11 countries, with strong representation from Saudi Arabia and the MENA region.

The program begins with three months of thematic and conceptual explorations of cutting-edge topics presented by artists and theorists through seminars, lectures, screenings, and workshops. Following this, participants will work under the mentorship of leading

artists and scholars to produce new artworks using DAF's world-class facilities, including advanced audio-visual techniques, immersive reality, coding, sensing, machine learning, and spatial audio-visual environments. The final works will be exhibited at DAF as the program's final curated and juried outcome.

DAF is now taking applications for the 2025 / 2026 Emerging New Media Artists program. Applicants should be 35 years or younger, at the graduate or postgraduate completion stage, and have experience developing and creating New Media and Digital Art.

Diriyah Art Futures (DAF) is an art, research, and education hub driven by a belief in the power of interdisciplinary creative practice at the intersection of art, science, and technology. Developed by the Ministry of Culture of Saudi Arabia, DAF is the region's first institution dedicated to New Media and Digital Arts. It is a space for collaboration, speculation, and production by creative practitioners from across the globe, focused on research, documentation, and producing new work. Find out more about DAF and on social media: X and Instagram: @DAFmoc.



ONCE UPON A TIME IN DUBAI

The global musical Once Upon a Time in Dubai releases its new single, 'Habibi,' as the full cast is revealed.

The excitement around Once Upon a Time in Dubai, the region's global musical, has reached new heights with the official release of its upbeat anthem, Habibi, performed by rising Lebanese star Amanda Maalouf. Known for her powerful vocal range and stage charisma, the Dubai resident takes center stage in this track as Zeina, one of the lead characters in the show.

Composed by the internationally acclaimed Nazim Khaled and released under Universal Music MENA, this uplifting anthem blends international pop with Arabic rhythms. It celebrates the very 'multicultural heartbeat of Dubai', according to Stéphane Boukris, the French entrepreneur and creator behind the musical he describes as a 'genre-bending spectacle' – all set to bring together Broadway and West End flair, cinematic visuals, and a diverse international cast to Dubai for the very first time.

"It is a vibrant, feel-good tribute to the spirit of Dubai," said Boukris, who previously produced the hit musical Robin Hood, which sold over one million tickets across Europe. "The song captures the warmth, ambition, and energy that define this city. We wanted a track that resonates with both residents and the world."

Released in May 2025 on all major streaming platforms, Habibi marks a milestone for the musical set to premiere in December 2025. The single is accompanied by a stunning video teaser, shot against Dubai's iconic skyline and desert dunes, reflecting the show's larger-than-life scale. The song offers a sneak peek into the show's soundscape and blends Eastern melodies and Western arrangements – a signature musical style.

"Creating Habibi was about capturing the sound of a new Dubai – bold, inclusive, and full of rhythm. It's a song that blends east and west, tradition and innovation, much like the city itself," said Khaled, the composer who's worked with artists like Kendji Girac in the past and whose compositions have garnered billions of views globally.

Once Upon a Time in Dubai tells the story of Will, a young artist who moves from London to Dubai to reunite with his partner, Sophia, and pursue his dream of producing a musical extravaganza. Themes of love, ambition, and Dubai's vibrant culture are woven into the narrative.

The creators of the show include director Johan Nus, known in the region for his work on Arabs Got Talent and The Masked Singer, and Gilles Papain as the

executive producer with experience on major productions like Celine in Las Vegas and Disney World of Colors in California, also announced the full international cast, one that brings together a remarkable ensemble of global talents, each with a unique artistic journey.

Lebanese singer Amanda Maalouf stars as Zeina, a powerful voice navigating the tension between tradition and ambition. British talent Melissa Jeffrey, a tenacious dancer and singer who began full-time training at just 11 and later earned scholarships at London's elite Urdang Academy, takes on the female lead role of Sophia. Joe Woolford, also from the UK and a charismatic rapper whose rise to fame began on The Voice UK and culminated with his Eurovision appearance, plays the male lead Will.

Dubai-based performer Isiako (Khalid) infuses the stage with Mediterranean flair and a mix of reggaeton, soul, and pop as Portuguese vocalist Jessica Alves brings poise and energy to the role of Kim, drawing from her rich experience in Dubai's live music scene. Dutch musical theatre star Shay Lachman takes on Gautam, adding depth with his classical training and international stage experience from European and Asian productions.

Canadian-Lebanese singer Enzo S, who plays Elias, the heart of the group, adds a soulful layer to the production. A semi-finalist from The Voice France Season 9, Enzo's performance is shaped by more than 15 years of global stage experience and a strong academic foundation in jazz and gospel from Montreal's Concordia University.

Speaking about the diverse ensemble, director Nus said, "We have gathered talent from across continents with each performer bringing their authentic voice and a bit of their culture to the stage. This show could only happen in Dubai."

The musical is set to debut in December 2025 with a full-scale theatrical production that promises a rich blend of music, dance, and storytelling. "Each of these performers brings a unique voice, story, and spirit to the production," added Boukris. "This is not just a show – it's a love letter to Dubai through the eyes and voices of the world."



CARMINA BURANA REIMAGINED: A BALLET THAT STRIPS EMOTION BARE AT DUBAI OPERA

What happens when a centuries-old cantata is stripped of its traditional grandeur and rebuilt through modern choreography? At Dubai Opera, Edward Clug's *Carmina Burana* answered with stark minimalism, unsettling repetition, and jarring emotional depth. Performed by the Ballet of the Slovene National Theatre Maribor, the production defied easy interpretation—and left no viewer untouched.

Image Credit: Tiberiu Marta



There's something surreal about encountering emotions up close—especially when you've only ever watched them unfold from a distance. That was the essence of a recent weekend at Dubai Opera, where we sat face-to-face with a storm of human expression: raw, visceral, and almost unreal in its intensity.

What unfolded was a bold reinterpretation of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, choreographed by Edward Clug and performed by the Ballet of the Slovene National Theatre Maribor. This contemporary ballet, staged in May 2025, transformed the grand opera house into a pulsating emotional arena—where music, movement, and meaning collided in a hauntingly beautiful spectacle.

Dubai Opera's vast stage felt suddenly intimate under the emotional weight of the performance. Clug's choreography didn't just echo Orff's iconic themes—it reawakened them. The dancers moved like fragile structures—matchsticks in a gale, popsicle sticks shaping dollhouses—always on the verge of collapse yet miraculously holding strong. They swayed like the branches of a deeply rooted tree, bound by an invisible force, their limbs responding to musical crescendos as though strung directly to the score.

At times, the performance plunged into stark vulnerability. The shedding of clothing onstage became more than symbolic—it was a stripping of ego, a surrender to truth and transformation. As the music shifted and layers fell away, the atmosphere thickened: the scent of sweat, the echo of breath, and the dim, urgent lighting—all conjured an immersive intensity that verged on panic. The dancers moved like pendulums in an ancient clock, their momentum in sync with the audience's heartbeat. When a large metallic ring appeared—cold, looming—dancers moved around and even perched atop it. Their fragile humanity, cast against its hard geometry, struck a visceral chord.

We sat at the edge of our seats, watching as bodies shivered, almost as if attached to invisible springs. The heart raged against the chest at the sight of it. And that's how, without words, you begin to grasp the world's cruelties and truths in a way you never thought possible.



This was art that demanded interpretation. Was it a reflection of starvation, of death, of rebirth? The performance offered no easy answers—only fragments of meaning for the audience to assemble. And while that freedom can be liberating, it also proved disorienting. Around the 45-minute mark, a few attendees exited the theatre—an unfortunate and distracting moment. But it may reflect more on modern audience expectations than on the piece itself. Still, a simple program note contextualizing the Goliard texts and Clug’s vision might have offered a bridge to deeper understanding.

Those who stayed were rewarded. The stamina, precision, and emotional depth of each dancer were undeniable. Clug’s reinterpretation is a physical essay on torment and resilience, unity and disarray—on the recurring forces that shape the human experience: love, loss, hope, and fate.

Costume designer Leo Kulaš’s palette of black, red, and nude amplified the narrative—from the heat of passion to the exposure of vulnerability. The design never distracted—it only deepened. Set designer Marko Japelj and lighting designer Tomaž Premzl brought stark elegance to the stage, using minimal elements—shadows, silhouettes, and sculpted

light—to create a space where every movement spoke louder.

When the curtain fell, stepping back into the cool Dubai night felt jarring. The myth and music evaporated, replaced by the city’s glass, steel, and silence. The experience was cathartic—perhaps even exhausting. And that, in many ways, is the hallmark of great art. It unsettles, provokes, lingers.

Edward Clug’s *Carmina Burana* is not an easy watch. It’s not meant to be. But it is unforgettable—a visual and emotional awakening that reminds us of what it means to feel, to endure, and to question.



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THE LEGACY OF CARMINA BURANA

Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* is a 20th-century cantata inspired by a 13th-century manuscript of medieval poetry discovered by the composer in 1934. Composed in 1936 and premiered in Frankfurt in 1937, the work is a dramatic commentary on fate, fortune, desire, and the human condition. Its thunderous opening movement, *O Fortuna*, is one of the most iconic in classical music—its relentless rhythm captures the volatile nature of destiny. The original texts, written by wandering clerics known as the Goliards, explored love, nature, and the wheel of fortune with biting satire and spiritual ambivalence. Orff envisioned a large-scale theatrical work combining music, dance, and striking visuals—a vision that Clug honors and reimagines in this stirring new production.





A JEWEL IS NEVER JUST A JEWEL

For someone like me — a curious observer of art, culture, and now, jewelry — this wasn't just a lecture. It was a time-traveling experience that spanned continents and civilizations, revealing how jewelry is far more than mere ornamentation. It's protection, prayer, power, and a whisper of the past clinging to the present.

Stepping into L'ÉCOLE School of Jewellery Arts Dubai is like entering a world where time stands still, and stories are told not through words but through metals, gems, and age-old symbols. With its curated lighting, statement chandeliers, and sunlit classrooms, the space doesn't just shine — it sparkles with intellect and history. It was here, in June 2025, that I found myself immersed in the course “The Power of Jewellery: Amulets, Talismans, and Lucky Charms,” led by art historian and curator Dr. David Usieto Cabrera and heritage specialist Ms. May El Hage.

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Jewellery Beyond Beauty

As Dr. Cabrera and Ms. El Hage guided us through the session, one truth emerged clearly: a jewel is never just a jewel. It carries with it the energy of stones, a profound connection to belief systems, the secrets of ancient craftsmanship, and sometimes even the spirit of the cosmos.

Our journey began in the Paleolithic era and moved through Megalithic cultures, ancient Egypt, Catholic Europe, Islamic

traditions, and across China, India, and North America. In each culture, we found jewelry infused with sacred intent — sometimes protective, sometimes aspirational.

We learned to differentiate:

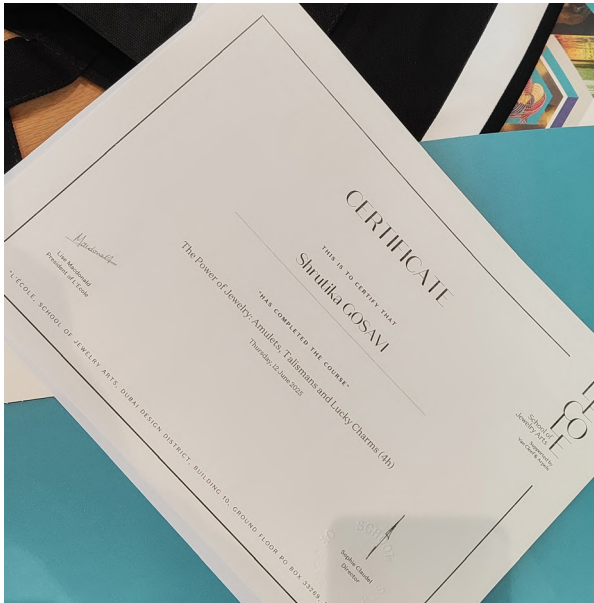
1. **Amulets:** Protective pieces believed to guard against negative energy. Think the evil eye, khamsa, and scarab rings — symbols worn daily yet rooted in sacredness.
2. **Talismans:** Intentionally crafted to attract love, strength, and luck. Personalized pieces like engraved rings or energy-charged crystals.
3. **Lucky Charms:** Often superstition-based, meant to invite fortune — the four-leaf clover, horseshoe, and ladybug being global favorites.

These aren't just categories — they are windows into human longing, faith, and the need to feel safe and seen.

History Meets Pop Culture

One fascinating detour led us to the story of Elizabeth Taylor's charm bracelets, inspired by Balangandās — symbolic, multi-charm pieces carried by enslaved Africans to Brazil. Over time, these evolved from spiritual protectors into artistic expressions of cultural memory and resilience. This intersection of history and Hollywood highlights how these ancient ideas persist and grow.

From jade in China, symbolizing virtue,



to Dzi beads in Tibetan Buddhism, believed to hold cosmic energy, we began to see how stones themselves are revered across cultures — not just for beauty, but for their spiritual essence.

Ancient Beliefs, Contemporary Luxury

Even modern luxury brands echo these ancient beliefs:

1. Van Cleef & Arpels' signature four-leaf clover reflects hope and luck.
2. Cartier's panther embodies strength and sensuality.
3. Chanel's pearls and leopards, Bulgari's snake, David Webb's animal totems, Hemmerle's amulets, and Dior's Signs of Identity charm bracelet — all draw from spiritual or protective roots, remixed into contemporary elegance.

These aren't random motifs — they're powerful echoes of belief systems that have endured for centuries.

Touching the Past, Literally

What made the course truly engaging were its hands-on elements. We identified our birthstones using charts based on zodiac and birth eras — a surprisingly intimate exercise. Holding uncut stones and feeling their texture and temperature added another layer of connection. These weren't just objects anymore; they were companions with memory and meaning.

The final activity brought it all together: categorizing jewelry pieces on a map by region and style — abstract, nature-inspired, calligraphic, or universal. It was like curating a mini-exhibition, guided by everything we had absorbed.

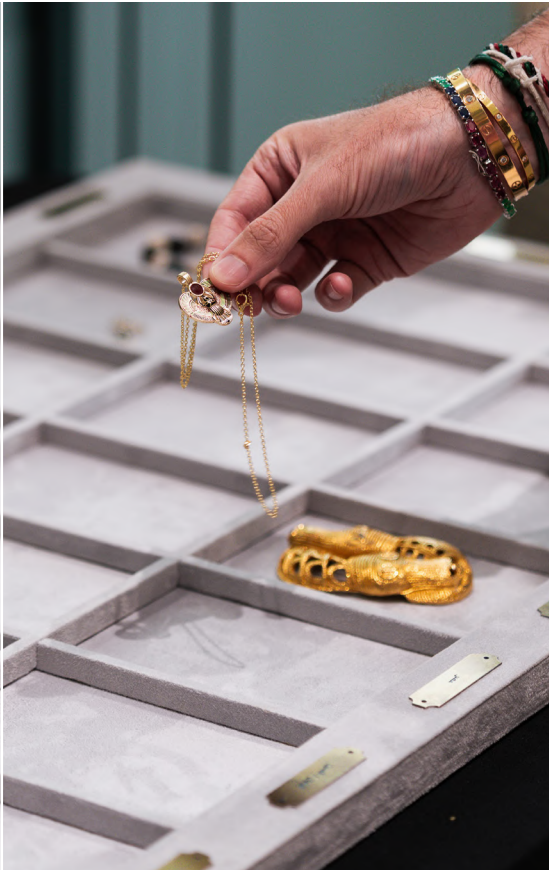
A Personal Takeaway

As I received my certificate of completion, I realized what I was taking away was far greater: a new lens. Jewellery isn't simply about adornment — it's about belief systems, protection, identity, and memory. In every charm or talisman, we carry a bit of hope, a plea for love, a shield against harm.

Whether worn for faith, superstition, or fashion, jewelry has — and always will — carry stories. In a world that constantly changes, that enduring power remains beautifully timeless.



Shrutika Gosavi is an acclaimed artist, poet, and art educator based in the UAE. Holding a Master's in Fine Arts, she has received several international awards and fellowships. A full-time visual artist living in Sharjah for over a decade, she has created an extensive body of work that explores human emotions and the soul's relationship with the world. She is also building the Urban Sketchers Sharjah Chapter, fostering a creative community.





CURTAIN UP, HEARTS FULL: WHY MTDXB'S GUYS AND DOLLS HIT ALL THE RIGHT NOTES

You don't expect to walk into a Dubai theatre and feel like you've stepped onto the streets of 1950s New York — complete with gamblers, showgirls, rotary phones, and the shimmer of Broadway-style spectacle. But that's exactly what happened on a recent Saturday night as MTDXB brought *Guys and Dolls* to life with flair, finesse, and a whole lot of heart.

POV: You've been watching theatre in Dubai for 13 years (with a bit of playwrighting, direction, and production thrown in), and you're a regular at Dubai Opera and local community shows — so, yes, you allow yourself to give MTDXB a solid Grade A.

You know how sometimes we glorify the things we don't do? We look at others' passions and think, "Wow, that's so cultured," while quietly underestimating our inclinations. I used to do that — until I stopped. I stopped pretending I enjoyed what I thought I should enjoy and started owning what makes my heart sing. For me, that's musical theatre. I returned from a short April 2024 trip to New York, where I watched *Moulin Rouge*, *Wicked* & *Juliet*, and more! My head was buzzing with Broadway glitter. Then, I stumbled upon MTDXB's *Grease* in June 2024. I wasn't ready to step out of that NYC reverie — but I did. And if you've heard me raving about MTDXB since then, you know I'm so glad I did.

It was through *Grease* that I truly acknowledged something: musicals are my thing. Always have been. I've seen quite a few in the region — *The Lion King* in Abu Dhabi, *Hamilton* too — but those were visiting productions. What Dubai was missing was a

musical theatre culture, and MTDXB is filling that gap beautifully.

So yes, this is a review of their latest production (*Guys and Dolls*), but it's also an ode to the group itself. What began in 2021 as a small group of passionate performers looking for a creative outlet has become one of Dubai's most exciting artistic communities. They're celebrating four years of theatre, friendship, and flair this year. They claim that they are more than a theatre group — it's a family. A thriving, glitter-drenched, harmony-filled family.

On a recent Saturday night (May 2024), I walked into 1950s New York — with flats on because I knew there'd be dancing. I'd already seen a few of their productions, so I knew better than to underestimate them. Outside, it was peak Dubai summer — muggy and sticky. But inside, the carnival had just begun. What strikes me is how seriously they take their craft — not in a stiff, overwrought way, but with full-hearted talent, commitment, and joy. *Guys and Dolls* pulled us right into a world of broad-stroke archetypes and classic tropes: gamblers, showgirls, sermons, salvation, and sizzling chemistry.

The musical delivered exactly what it promised: energy, comedy, nostalgia, and a

delicious kind of chaos. The stage was alive with life — bustling, bouncing, and beautifully coordinated. The stage design was next-level: the doors, the rotary dial phones, the diner signage, the iconic New York fire escapes — even the underground sewage manhole! Yes, they thought of everything. The auditorium walls were adorned with posters of Guys and Dolls productions performed globally over the decades; great touch.

And the costumes? Pearls, polka dots, faux fur, pink frilled frocks, shimmering gowns — I wanted to raid that entire wardrobe. Fashion folks, are you listening? Let's bring those bows and headbands back.

The cast was electric.

Nathan Detroit (Glenn Atkinson) was a riot — the shiny purple shoes alone deserve a standing ovation — and his chemistry with Adelaide (Bethanie Mitchinson) was pure musical theatre gold. Bethanie's comic timing, big gestures, and showstopping delivery of Adelaide's Lament had us giggling and cheering.

We flew to Hawaii for a hot second — headbands and paper sunglasses included (offered to the audience) — and yes, I wanted to live there forever.

Jack Bruce as Nicely-Nicely Johnson was hilarious, but he gave us something tender at the moment of his musical epiphany: heartfelt!

Of course, high-roller Sky Masterson (Bryn Mitchell) fit in right under the setting — flamboyant, and he wore it all well — his dancing shoes and singing voice. He wore the carefree attitude well only until he fell in love with mission worker Sarah Brown (Sinead O'Donovan). Sinead had a calming demeanor

that had a substantial impact throughout the show; we loved her.

The choreography by Danielle Romero was show-stealing.

Dancers seamlessly used every level of the auditorium — floors, aisles, and stages. It was a symphony of movement, perfectly timed and bursting with personality. The energy was contagious; you couldn't help but grin, tap your toes, and bounce along. And the band — yes, a live 14-piece professional band — was right there on stage, making it all even more magical. Was this the first time they had an orchestra, we think so.

The standout moments kept coming:

- When the two lead ladies (Sarah and Adelaide) sang in sync, it was goosebumps and glitter.
- When Sky turned up in missionary garb — costume change magic and hilarious!
- The confessions in front of the General at the mission — heartwarming and heartfelt. It put the spotlight on each character/actor and how they shone. Big Jule, you are a star. Benny Southstreet and Rusty Charlie, take a bow and autographs, please!
- That final number? Pure theatre joy.
- The one-liners were sharp and familiar and still made us laugh out loud. "Why do you want to have dinner with me?" "Because I'm hungry." Classic. "I thought I hated him. I still hate him. But then that's love." Gold.

MTDXB's curtain call isn't just a bow. It's a celebration — heartbeats pounding, breathless hugs, an entire audience up on their feet, dancing, clapping,







grinning like kids on Christmas morning. You walk out of the auditorium, still humming the tunes. You download the playlist. You sing it in the car. You belt it in the shower. It becomes your week's soundtrack.

Oh, the joy of seeing familiar faces in new roles.

To us loyal regulars, there's something extra fun in that. You whisper to your friend, "Wasn't that the Fairy Godmother in Cinderella?" Yep. She was. When we walked in, she was on the stage with a mic, glamouring, welcoming, and performing. As co-founder Bethanie Mitchinson beautifully put it, "In a city as fast-paced as Dubai, it can sometimes be difficult to find a sense of belonging. But through MTDXB, we've created a space where people can connect, express themselves, and be part of something truly special."

Could we become part of the act next time?

They even handed us missionary flyers and offered to shine our shoes. We were invited to sit on the stage, too. And even dance alongside. They did go immersive — and while I loved it, part of me wondered if they could have taken it further. Could we become part of the act next time? Just a thought! Usually, there is a temptation and attempt to add a Dubai touch to the productions (they did so when they staged Cinderella), but we were glad this one was untouched.

They've built a space where passion meets performance. A place where a city that often races ahead can pause, tap its foot, sing a little, and remember what it's like to feel something live, real, and unscripted. We're still singing: Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat.

This was MTDXB's ninth show — their third full-scale musical — and featured a cast of 50+ and that incredible band. As director Claire Bennett put it, Guys and Dolls is about "love, luck, and community." And that's precisely what MTDXB has become for Dubai's theatre lovers. Here's to more nights like this. More standing ovations. More impromptu kitchen karaoke vibes. And more of MTDXB doing what they do best — reminding us that community theatre isn't "less than." Sometimes, it's everything.



Purva Grover is an author, journalist, and creative entrepreneur. She is the founder-editor of storiesoverart.com, a sanctuary for all who find solace, inspiration, and purpose in art. In a world that often overlooks the significance of art, she stands firm in her belief that it is essential, more so than anything else.



FESTIVAL

AZIMUTH 2025 is back. Set for 25 – 26 September, right after Saudi National Day, the fifth edition of AlUla’s iconic music and arts festival invites guests to turn the national holiday into a five-day cultural escape. This year’s AZIMUTH promises a weekend of music, art performances, and adventure at the breathtaking Thanaya venue, where desert landscapes and starlit skies create an unforgettable open-air experience. Don’t miss your chance to secure tickets at the best price before they sell out. Each year, a diverse lineup of local, regional, and international artists has delivered unforgettable performances against AlUla’s dramatic rock formations, positioning AZIMUTH as an experiential celebration of music, artistic performance, and culture unlike anything else in the region. Fans can look forward to a host of world-famous names, to be revealed soon, alongside some of the Middle East’s fastest-rising talents. These soon-to-be-confirmed acts follow in the footsteps of past AZIMUTH global headliners such as Ben Böhrer, James Blake, Ghostly Kisses, The Blaze, Seth Troxler, Jamie Jones, and more, alongside some of the region’s fastest-rising talents like Cosmicat, RDJ, Biirdperson, and Baloo. Whether you’re returning or discovering it for the first time, AZIMUTH invites you on an immersive journey through sound, culture, and AlUla’s breathtaking landscapes—all set to unfold until sunrise.

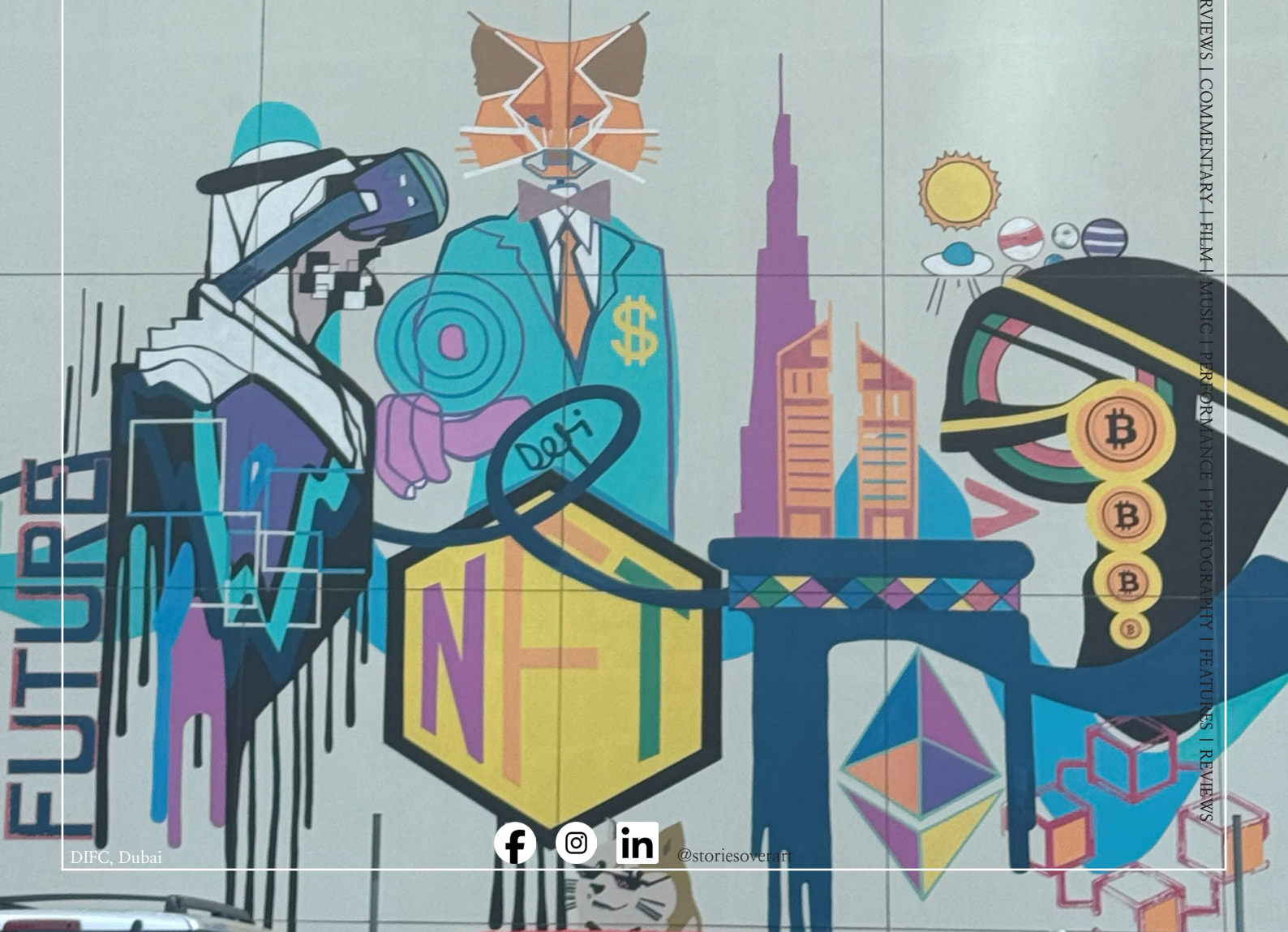
stories over art

middle east & beyond

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#13

We've all seen it — those bold brushstrokes on school corridors, the quirky murals in hidden cafés, or vibrant splashes of color tucked into street corners. Have you spotted a piece of art in the UAE that has left you in awe? Tell us about it! Where did you see it? What made it special?

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