



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-Popular Iraqi TV Show Makes Big Hit in Provinces-

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Al Kut, Wasit Province - A lucky audience in this town 125 kilometers southeast of Baghdad got a special treat May 3 with a free performance by the cast of the popular Iraqi Television show "Bait al-Teen" or Mud House."

Roughly 1,500 people filled Municipal Hall in al-Kut to see the Mud House cast perform the play "Nas wa Nas" (People to People) sponsored by the Wasit Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), in coordination with the 214th Brigade Combat Team and the Iraqi Police Force. Police estimated another 3,000 people were waiting outside the theater.



The cast of "People to People" on stage in Al Kut

The Television series, produced by Al-Sumaria TV, depicts family life in a typical Iraqi village whose houses are built of earth. The action is set during the 1950s and 1960s; critical decades in the nation's political and economic development.

For many Iraqis and villagers in particular it was a time of social upheaval as technology and industry spurred people to migrate from the countryside to cities and traditional values began to give way to western modes of work and behavior. The resulting social confusion and pressures – as seen in the difference between "city and country cousins" -- form the humorous basis of the show's plots.

Mud House was also the first comedy play performed in the Province since Saddam Hussein was deposed by Coalition Forces in 2003 and according to Vanessa Beary, public diplomacy officer for the Wasit Provincial Reconstruction Team, "The large turnout was a positive indicator of Wasit's desire for a return to normalcy."

Col. Peter Baker, commander of the 214th, said the event gave the people of Wasit and opportunity to forget their troubles, if only for a night. "It was impossible not to be caught up with the audience's laughter," he said. "I was challenged by the language barrier, but the actors were so good ... it transcended both language and cultural barriers."

Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) handled security for the event. 1st Lt. Randy Heath, a platoon leader for Company F, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, said the event demonstrated a big step forward in security. "The community had trust in the security provided by the Iraqi Police and the Iraqi Army," he said.

Baker noted that the ISF remained conscious of the risks posed by the large number of people gathered. "It's an indication of the growth of their capabilities. They are more proactive and organized. There were no incidents."

Because of the large turnout, the actors held an encore performance on the following day.

Iraq's most popular TV drama is "Love and War," produced by Al Sharqiya ("The Eastern One") satellite television network, Iraq's first privately-owned satellite TV channel.

Only a year old, the series mixes both comedy and drama with romance and even the occasional musical number. Set against the backdrop of ongoing violence in Baghdad the show has enthralled the Iraqi TV viewing public with its frankness and sympathetic characters; a number of whom are caught up in sectarian violence becoming victims of bomb attacks and kidnapping.

Also extremely popular with Iraqi TV audiences is the home improvement show "Labor and Materials," another Al Sharqiya production. The show with its 15-minute episodes is reality TV at its best as the Labor and Materials crew and host spring on a family whose home has been damaged and not only repair it but supply furniture and appliances like stoves and fridges.

The concept underlying the show, its producers say, is to display the spirit of hope and generosity that still flourishes in Iraqi communities despite the violence and hatred that captures much of the media's attention.