

Baghdad boy discovered on YouTube shines onstage

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Adil Faraj's YouTube video of him dancing in a Baghdad park led to months of Skype lessons and a performance with an American dance company.

[Baghdad boy Adil Faraj](#) [2], now 22 years old, has battled the odds to dance onstage after being discovered via YouTube and mentored by an American dance company via Skype, according to an Associated Press report.

Inspired by a Michael Jackson DVD, Adil Faraj used to dream of being a dancer in pre-war Baghdad. As a boy, he taught himself to dance with the help of videos in his small home, [hidden from disapproving conservative eyes](#) [3]. Despite having a flourishing arts scene in the 1960s and 1970s, opportunities for artistic expression plummeted following the 1991 Gulf War and the violent sectarianism that has shattered Iraq.

Although his parents were supportive, some of Faraj's relatives and neighbours appealed to Oais, Faraj's father, to make Faraj stop. "I severed ties with some of them, while some of them changed their opinions when they saw his successes and are now encouraging thim," said the 50 year old air conditioner salesman.

Faraj was dancing with a friend in a park when a policeman harassed them and assaulted his friend, claiming "[dancing is not normal](#)" [4]. Faraj has also been assaulted by youths accusing him of being gay. They would often practice in parks at odd hours, for the space and privacy.

Last year, Faraj posted a video on YouTube of him and a friend dancing in Baghdad's Abu Nuwas Park on the Tigris River. The video caught the attention of Jonathan Hollander, director of the Battery Dance Company in New York City. Hollander and his colleagues began teaching Faraj via Skype.

Six months of online lessons later, Faraj travelled to Amman for intensive rehearsals with Sean Scantlebury and Mira C of the Battery Dance Company. The American dancers were impressed with Faraj's determination, saying "It is inspiring to me to see him take on this huge work load and just do it without cracking. He's so resilient it reminds me how strong dancers have to be", she told AP.

Last weekend, the 22 year old danced in front of a full house as part of the Amman Contemporary Dance Festival, in the Jordanian capital. Following his solo to "Mad World", Faraj pumped his fists in the air to the sound of rapturous applause.

"I felt tremendous joy, it is like a dream." he said.



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