## Newsweek

**NEWSWEEK DECEMBER 19, 2005** 

## Periscope



THEATER

## Plays for Peace

HORTLY AFTER 9/II, members of New York's Bond Street
Theatre went to Pakistan's refugee camps to entertain
Afghan children. There, they met a group of Afghan actors who had escaped—because the Taliban had banned all arts—and formed Exile Theatre.
A year later, the two groups met in Kabul to collaborate on "Beyond the Mirror," a multi-



PERFORMING HISTORY: 'Mirror' captures decades of Afghan life

media work depicting life in Afghanistan from the Soviet invasion of 1979 through the fractious mujahedin years and the repressive Taliban regime to the U.S. invasion of 2001.

"Mirror," currently on tour,

vividly depicts the horrors of war, hunger, fear and violence. Using mime, acrobatics, live music, traditional dance, puppetry and video montage, Bond Street's Joanna Sherman and Exile's Mahmoud Shah Salimi codirect an inventive piece based on the true stories of Afghans who survived three decades of cruelty and hardship. The tales are told without sentimentality-with no words, no sets and few props-by eight Afghan and U.S. actors in starkly haunting scenes. In one, a puppet, representing a gurgling, crawling child, is suddenly killed by a land mine; in another, an execution is abstractly depicted with wooden poles. A lively bread-baking episode is joyously evoked. Even the beauty of Afghanistan is captured, as snowcapped mountains and verdant valleys are projected on a screen while a musician plays soulful music on the rubab—an ancient lute. The first Afghan play to go abroad, "Mirror" acknowledges Afghanistan's horror-filled past, but also the promise of its present.

-VIBHUTI PATEL