

Good evening. I'd like to welcome you all tonight on behalf of the Lebanese Club and Arab Student Organization at MIT. Thank you for joining us in commemorating a great man, whose tragic death this past month still echoes with deep pain in the hearts and minds of Arabs across the world.

It was Mr. Akkad's ironic fate to have died on the very hands of those whom he worked hard his whole life to discredit and abolish from the West's often misconstrued perceptions of the Arab world. His loss is gravely felt today.

Before we screen Akkad's masterpiece, "Lion of the Desert", Michel ElAshkar would like to share with us a few glimpses of Akkad's life and mission. He had the honor of knowing him in person over the last few years.

Michel himself is an actor, dramatist, producer, and engineer. Born in Zahle, Lebanon, Michel immigrated to the United States in 1983 and graduated as a Civil Engineer from the University of Massachusetts at Lowell. He founded ASHKAR Consulting Group, a civil engineering and land surveying firm in 1989 and became member of the board of Surveyors in the state of Massachusetts in 1996. Hailing from a family of artists, his passion for poetry, writing, and acting culminated in his internationally acclaimed monodrama, "A Child of Life", a theatrical interpretation of 2 acts chronicling many of the highlights of Lebanese-American poet and artist Kahlil Gibran's life. A Child of Life, performed to standing ovations in many world capitals, has received a number of international awards and "Kahlil Gibran Day" proclamations from the mayors of nine U.S. cities since its debut in 1999. In January 2003, Al-Jazeera network ran an exclusive documentary highlighting Michel's artistic contribution as an Arab-American.

Thank you Michel for offering to share with us your moments with the late Akkad.

Loai Naamani