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## Golden Thread Continues “Islam 101” with *The Fifth String: Ziryab’s Passage to Cordoba*

**The family-friendly production with original music takes a playful look at a musical genius and 9<sup>th</sup>-century cultural trail-blazer.**

SAN FRANCISCO (March 12, 2014) - **Golden Thread Productions** presents *The Fifth String: Ziryab’s Passage to Cordoba*, the second play to come out of its innovative “Islam 101” initiative, which is **dedicated to creating dynamic plays inspired by Islamic art and philosophy**. Written and directed by **Torange Yeghiazarian** with original music by **Faraz Minooei** and production design by **Mokhtar Paki**, *The Fifth String* is a multifaceted performance created collaboratively with an ensemble of actors, clowns, and musicians. The piece is commissioned by the **Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California** and presented in partnership with San Francisco’s **Brava Theatre Center** with presentations in Oakland and San Francisco in May 2014. It will also have a third engagement at San Francisco’s **ODC** in December 2014.

Meet Ziryab, the 9<sup>th</sup>-century musician and cultural icon, in this family-friendly new play with live music: a musical genius, a star of the Baghdad court, and a fashion innovator. *The Fifth String* playfully tells the story of his beginnings in Iraq, his life as an immigrant to Cordoba, and his lasting contributions in music, fashion, and culture that continue to reverberate today. Widely credited with adding a fifth string to the oud and with introducing Persian and Arabic influences to Spanish music, Ziryab’s life becomes an inspiration for this modern retelling as a story-within-a-story in the tradition of *1001 Nights*.

*Fifth String* is presented on May 2–4, 2014, at the Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California (1433 Madison Street, Oakland); May 15–18, 2014, at Brava Theatre Center (2781 24<sup>th</sup> Street, San Francisco); and December 4–7, 2014, at ODC (3153 17<sup>th</sup> Street, San Francisco). **For tickets (\$15-\$22, free for children under 12) and more information, visit [goldenthread.org](http://goldenthread.org).**

Launched in the aftermath of 2010 Quran-burning scandal in Florida, “Islam 101” aims to reframe the national conversation on Islam and those who practice it. Artistic Director Torange Yeghiazarian has this to say about the importance of this unique initiative: “Our youth need and deserve more meaningful representations of the Middle East than Broadway or Hollywood’s versions of ALADDIN and THE JUNGLE BOOK.” The first production out of “Islam 101” was RUMI X 7: TALES FROM THE MASNAVI based on the poetry of the world-renowned poet and toured the Bay Area for two years.

Literary Artistic Associate Evren Odcikin adds: “We are always looking for thoughtful ways to respond to our current political and social reality. “Islam 101” is a great example of the kind of programming Golden Thread can put forth in collaboration with other like-minded community and arts organizations. I am especially excited that it highlights a very influential figure lesser-known in Western circles and does it in a playful and smart manner that is perfect for kids and their parents.” Production designer Mokhtar Paki elaborates: “Not only did Ziryab revolutionize fashion by establishing the concept of day/evening-wear

and seasonal fabrics and color, he also introduced deodorant, tooth paste, and bleach to medieval Europe.”

Original music for the THE FIFTH STRING world premiere is composed by Faraz Minooei who toured with Yo Yo Ma and Kayhan Kalhour in 2009. Live music will be performed by **Gary Haggerty** on oud and **Ali Bazyar** on percussion. The ensemble features actors, clowns, singers, and musicians: **Munaf Alsafi**, **Camila Betancourt Ascencio**, **Jamie Corventry**, **Deborah Eliezer**, **Majd Murad**, **Maruf Noyoft**, and **Naima Shalhoub**.

Golden Thread is the nation’s premiere home for the development of voices from the Middle East and stories about the region. This season continues Golden Thread’s long-standing history of staging rarely seen perspectives in American theatre. This fall, Kamee Abrahamian’s *Dear Armen* explores the memoirs of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century gender-bending exotic dancer, Armen Ohanian. In her solo performance, *Mahmoud*, Tara Grammy challenges her own preconceived notions of the Middle Eastern man. New Threads staged readings showcas diverse voices and complex narratives that will enrich American theatre.

### **Background information on Golden Thread Productions**

Golden Thread Productions is the first American theatre company devoted to Middle Eastern voices and experiences. Founded in 1996 by Torange Yeghiazarian, Golden Thread’s mission, to develop and produce plays from and about the Middle East is made more urgent and vital in light of current US-Middle East relations and the changes sweeping through the region.

Golden Thread’s founder, Torange Yeghiazarian explains “in our vast imagination, the Middle East is defined not by geographical boundaries and political separations, but as the shared experience of the people, who throughout history have been touched by its tales, melodies and aromas. The Middle East lives inside us, as we redefine ourselves, we redefine the Middle East.”

The company has presented work in Los Angeles, Washington D.C., New York, and Cairo, Egypt. Golden Thread receives play submissions from around the globe and is frequently host to visiting artists from the Middle East through the US State Department and the Kennedy Center’s exchange programs. An active contributor to Theatre Communications Group’s international efforts and Theatre Without Borders, Golden Thread’s year-round schedule consist of the ReOrient Festival of short plays; development and production of full-length plays, Youth Outreach activities; plus commissions, tours, and partnerships with esteemed co-presenters. [goldenthread.org](http://goldenthread.org)

## **THE FIFTH STRING Biographies**

**Torange Yeghiazarian (Playwright/Director)** is the Founding Artistic Director of Golden Thread Productions where her latest play, 444 DAYS was premiered in 2013. Torange received a 2012 Gerbode-Hewlett Playwright Commission Award to write ELLINGTON'S ISFAHAN. Her short play CALL ME MEHDI is included in the anthology "Salaam. Peace: An Anthology of Middle Eastern-American Drama," TCG 2009. She directed the world premiere of STUCK by Amir Al-Azraki and VOICE ROOM by Reza Soroor in ReOrient Festival 2012. Her articles on contemporary theatre in Iran have been published in The Drama Review (2012), American Theatre Magazine (2010), and Theatre Bay Area Magazine (2010). She has contributed to the Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures and Cambridge World Encyclopedia of Stage Actors. Born in Iran and of Armenian heritage, Torange holds a Master's degree in Theatre Arts from San Francisco State University.

**Mokhtar Paki (Production Designer)** is a Bay Area visual artist, art teacher, and sometimes architectural designer. In 2012, Mokhtar designed dozens of puppets for the shadow-play JANA AND BALADOOR, written and directed by Bahram Beyzaie. Mokhtar's visual art has been shown at the Persian Center, Canessa Gallery, Intersection for The Arts, and Oliver Gallery. His caricatures and illustrations have appeared in local as well as European publications. Mokhtar has an MA in Creative Writing, and has published several short stories and articles. His novel SHAMAYEL-E-MANA was published in Sweden and Iran. His second novel, SHAHRZAD THE SILENT is under publication.

**Faraz Minooei (Music Director)** was born in Tehran and began playing santur at the young age of nine. While studying with Behnam Mehrabi, he discovered a deep spiritual desire to study music, seeing music as an "unexplainable souvenir from the eternal truth". Faraz received his B.A. from San Francisco State University in 2008 as a Nagle Scholar and the first World/Jazz music major with santur as his primary instrument! As a full-time musician, Faraz is a performer, composer, ethno-musicologist and teacher. He views studying music as a never-ending mission. In view of that, he has also had the good fortune to study with masters such as M. R. Lotfi, H. Omoumi, Royal Hartigan, Hafez Modirzadeh, Michael Dessen, Kojiro Umezaki and Christopher Dobrian. Since 2006, he has lectured and performed at many universities including SFSU, UCI, UCLA, UCSC Stanford University and at the Society of Ethnomusicology. He has performed with noted ensembles in the United States, among which was his collaboration in 2009 with Yo Yo Ma and Kayhan Kalhor in the Silk Road Ensemble (for the 50th anniversary of the Lincoln Center) and the collaboration as a composer and santur player with the film director Bahram Beyzaie for the play "Jana & Baladour". Recipient of numerous scholarships and grants, he earned his Masters of Fine Arts degree in music with emphasis in Integrated Composition, Improvisation, and Technology from the University of California in Irvine. His thesis, "Abstracting" Iranian Classical Music, challenges the traditional practice of Iranian Classical Music to introduce innovative and transformative functions of the music in contemporary society.

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**FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:**

**Golden Thread Productions** proudly presents

World Premiere

**THE FIFTH STRING: ZIRYAB'S PASSAGE TO CORDOBA**

A family-friendly play with live music about a 9<sup>th</sup>-century cultural trail-blazer

Written and directed by **Torange Yeghiazarian** in collaboration with the FIFTH STRING ensemble

Original Music by **Faraz Minooei**

Production Design by **Mokhtar Paki**

**Featuring:** Munaf Alsafi, Camila Ascencio Betancourt, Ali Bazyar, Jamie Coventry, Deborah Eliezer, Gary Haggerty, Majd Murad, Maruf Noyoft, Naima Shalhoub

**Dates:** May 2–4, 2014, at the Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California, 1433 Madison Street, Oakland  
May 15–18, 2014, at Brava Theatre Center, 2781 24<sup>th</sup> Street, San Francisco  
December 4–7, 2014, at ODC, 3153 17<sup>th</sup> Street, San Francisco.

**Tickets:** General Admission \$ 20 in Advance, \$22 at the Door  
Students, Seniors, TBA \$15 in Advance, \$17 at the Door  
Children Under 12 FREE

**Running time:** Approximately 70 min

**Info & Tickets:** [goldenthread.org](http://goldenthread.org)

*Please bring your student ID or TBA Membership card when you pick-up your tickets at Will Call.*

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Hi-res publicity images are available at [goldenthread.org](http://goldenthread.org). For interviews with the Artistic Director and key artists, please contact [press@goldenthread.org](mailto:press@goldenthread.org).

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