

For immediate release

ReOrient 2015 Festival Plays Announced

Selections feature vibrant and surprising writing from and about the Middle East

SAN FRANCISCO (September 11, 2014) **Golden Thread Productions**, the first American theatre company focused on the Middle East, is proud to announce the eight short plays selected for its prestigious ReOrient 2015 Festival of Short Plays. The winners feature returning ReOrient favorites **Yussef El Guindi**, **Mona Mansour**, **Tala Manassah**, and **Silva Semerciyan**, as well as emerging Middle Eastern-American playwrights such as **Nahal Navidar**. Also noteworthy is the inclusion of three UK-based playwrights: Semerciyan, **Hassan Abdulrazzak**, and **Hannah Khalil**. ReOrient 2015 will be the US debut for Abdulrazzak and Khalil. Two ReOrient newcomers **Emma Goldman-Sherman** and **Ken Kaissar** round out the winners. Selected from 75 submissions from 15 countries, the winning short plays are diverse in content and style, highlighting the multiplicity of Middle Eastern perspectives and identities. In addition, six playwrights received **Honorable Mentions**: **James Christy**, **J. Thalia Cunningham**, **Jesse Freeman**, **Tariq Hamami**, **Mara Lockowandt**, and **Madison Niederhauser**.

The ReOrient 2015 Festival of Short Plays will run **September 10–October 4, 2015 at Z Below** in San Francisco. A sneak peek selection from ReOrient 2015 plays will be presented as a staged reading on **Monday, September 29, at 7pm at the Thick House** (1695 18th St., San Francisco). The presentation is part of the company's New Threads staged reading series, which is **free and open to the public**. .
<http://www.goldenthread.org/programs/new-threads-2014/>

Golden Thread's Founding Artistic Director **Torange Yeghiazarian** says: "This year's selection process was particularly difficult, because we faced extraordinarily high quality of plays. It's such a thrill to discover new writers and follow common themes in the submissions. For example, this year we had two very strong plays humanizing a tyrant. There seems to be an urge to explore the mind of some of the leaders who have been toppled, perhaps to understand how to deal with the ones who have not."

Literary Artistic Associate **Evren Odcikin**, who led the selection process for the ReOrient Festival, adds, "Each of our ReOrient playwrights brings a unique voice and point of view to the festival. I cannot wait to see how these beautiful and wildly diverse plays speak to each other and connect with our audiences. I couldn't be prouder of Golden Thread for sustaining that dialogue, and supporting the work of these hard-working artists."

ReOrient Festival of Short Plays was inaugurated in 1999 to present alternative perspectives of the Middle East and to showcase the multiplicity of stories, voices, and styles from the region and has since become Golden Thread's most recognized and celebrated program. This ambitious festival, now presented triennially, turns San Francisco into a Mecca for innovative, spirited, and thought-provoking theatre from and about the Middle East. It has served as a springboard for the careers of top Middle Eastern-American playwrights such as Yussef El Guindi and Betty Shamieh, and has introduced Bay

Area audiences to significant and rarely-produced dramatic works from the Middle East by authors such as Sadegh Hedayat, Fatma Gallaire, and Tawfiq Al-Hakim. Alongside Middle Eastern voices, ReOrient also features the work of non-Middle Eastern playwrights, and has included premieres by such distinguished American playwrights such as Naomi Wallace, Eric Ehn, and Israel Horovitz. Since 2009, in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the festival, Golden Thread has organized the ReOrient Forum, a weekend-long convening in San Francisco aimed at expanding the dialogue on theatre, the Middle East, and current hot topics that illuminate the region's relationship with the US.

REORIENT 2015 FESTIVAL

September 10–October 4, 2015 at Z Below

ReOrient 2015 Forum: October 3–4, 2015 at Z Space

Lost Kingdom by Hassan Abdulrazzak (London, UK)
Picking Up the Scent by Yussef El Guindi (Seattle, WA, USA)
Counting in Shaab by Emma Goldman-Sherman (New York, NY, USA)
Ceasefire by Ken Kaissar (Yardley, PA, USA)
Bitterenders by Hannah Khalil (London, UK)
The House by Tala Manassah and Mona Mansour (New York, NY, USA)
Songs of Our Childhood by Nahal Navidar (Los Angeles, CA, USA)
Turning Tricks by Silva Semerciyan (Bristol, UK)

Honorary Mentions

Egyptian Song by James Christy (Princeton, NJ, USA)
Unveiled by J. Thalia Cunningham (Delmar, NY, USA)
The Legendary Fingers Nowicki by Jesse Freeman (Brooklyn, NY, USA)
Final Request by Tariq Hamami (Bronx, NY, USA)
A Traveller's Guide to the West Bank Settlements by Mara Lockowandt (London, UK)
In the In-Between by Madison Niederhauser (Houston, TX, USA)

Golden Thread Productions Fall Season:

This fall, the company will present *Mahmoud* by Tara Grammy (10/16-26) and *Dear Armen* by Kamee Abrahamian (10/30-11/9) at the Thick House. Golden Thread will continue to introduce exciting and vital new voices from and about the Middle East in the New Threads play-reading series which will include: ReOrient 2015 Sneak Peak (9/29), *The Luxor Express* by Daria Polatin (10/6), *Isfahan Blues* by Torange Yeghiazarian (10/13), *Sabra Falling* by Ismail Khalidi (10/20), and *Baghdad Wedding* by Hassan Abdulrazzak (10/27). Golden Thread will close the season by bringing back the timeless tale of *The Fifth String: Ziryab's Passage to Cordoba*. A feast for the eyes, this ensemble performance with live music is suitable for audiences of all ages, and will run for one week at ODC in San Francisco, December 4 to 7.

www.goldenthread.org

Background information on Golden Thread Productions

Golden Thread Productions is a nationally recognized non-profit organization universally acknowledged as the leading theater company devoted to Middle Eastern voices and experiences. Founded in 1996 by

Torange Yeghiazarian, Golden Thread Productions develops and produces complex and surprising plays from and about the Middle East that celebrate the multiplicity of its perspectives and identities. The company's mission is to make the Middle East a potent presence on the American stage and to make theatre a treasured cultural experience for audiences of all ages and cultural backgrounds.

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."*

In 2013, Golden Thread was recognized by American Theatre Wing, the producers of the Tony Awards, for its important work in the national theatre scene, and was featured in the Bay Area in ABC 7's Profiles of Excellence for its work in the local community.

"[Golden Thread] provides, in addition to a dependable variety of aesthetic pleasures, crucial space for public consideration and dialogue." —SAN FRANCISCO BAY GUARDIAN

"At a time when the Middle East dominates the headlines, [Golden Thread] aspires to forge clarity out of chaos and incites us to look past the 24/7 media blitz." —SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Hassan Abdulrazzak is of Iraqi origin, born in Prague and living in London. He trained as a cell and molecular biologist and worked at Imperial College and Harvard University. His first play, *Baghdad Wedding*, premiered at Soho Theatre, London (2007). Other productions were at the Belvoir Theatre, Sydney (2009) and by Akvarious productions in India (2012). It was also broadcast on BBC Radio 3. It will have a staged reading by Golden Thread Theatre in the USA later in 2014. His second play, *The Prophet* was staged at the Gate theatre, London and had a reading by Noor theatre in NYC (2012). He has written several short plays including *The Tale of Sindbad and the Old Goat* that was part of the multi-author play *Arab Nights* (produced by Metta theatre), which premiered at Soho Theatre (2012) then toured the UK and *You Don't Have To Be American To Get Laid But It Helps*, part of *Waiting for Summer*, produced and directed by Swivel Theatre Company (2014). He has also written two full-length screenplays and translated several plays for the Royal Court theatre (Arabic to English).

Emma Goldman-Sherman's plays include *Wombshot*, *Perfect Women*, *Antigone's Sister*, and *Abraham's Daughters*. Her work has been produced in New York City, Washington D.C., Kansas City, Los Angeles, London, and Zagreb by Manhattan Theatre Source, Theatre Conspiracy, Circle Rep Lab, New Georges, Ensemble Studio Theatre, The Women's Project & Productions and All Out Arts Inc. Her plays have been developed at WordBridge, The Drama League, The Millay Colony for the Arts, The Ragdale Foundation. She earned her MFA from the University of Iowa where she received The Richard Maibaum Award for Plays Addressing Social Justice. Her play *Why Birds Fly* was a finalist at The Cutting Ball Theatre for their 2014 Risk Is This Festival. She is grateful to be included in The ReOrient Festival.

Yussef El Guindi's most recent productions include *The Ramayana* (co-adaptor) at ACT; and *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (winner of the Steinberg/American Theater Critics Association's New Play Award in 2012; Gregory Award in 2011) also at ACT, and at Center Repertory Company (Walnut Creek, CA) 2013; and *Language Rooms* (Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award), co-produced by Golden Thread Productions and the Asian American Theater Company in San Francisco; at the Wilma Theater in Philadelphia (premiere), and at the Los Angeles Theater Center. His play *Our Enemies: Lively Scenes of Love and Combat* was produced by Silk Road Theater Project and won the M. Elizabeth Osborn award. It's included in the anthology *Four Arab American Plays*, published by McFarland Books. His plays *Back of the Throat*, as well as *Such a Beautiful Voice is Sayeda's* and *Karima's City*, have been published by Dramatists Play Service. *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New Word* was

published in the September, 2012 issue of *American Theatre Magazine*, and will soon be published by Dramatists Play Service, along with his play, *Jihad Jones and The Kalashnikov Babies*.

Ken Kaissar was born in Ramat Gan, Israel and grew up in Indianapolis, IN. His adaptation of Geoffrey Chaucer's THE CANTERBURY TALES was commissioned by Columbia University in 2008. His play THE VICTIMS OR WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO ABOUT IT (an absurdist take on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) was a runner-up for the 2009 Princess Grace Award and was honored by Golden Thread Productions, Silk Road Rising, and the Lark Play Development Center as part of the Middle East America Play Commission. His play CHAI was a finalist in the Oxford Theatre's National Ten Minute Play Contest. His work has been developed by the Philadelphia Theatre Company, Bristol Riverside Theatre, Fusion Theatre Company, and Mildred's Umbrella. He holds a BFA in directing from Carnegie Mellon University and an MFA in playwriting from Columbia University. He teaches playwriting and theatre history at Rider University and Stockton College.

Hannah Khalil - An award-winning Palestinian-Irish writer, Hannah's first short play, *Ring*, was selected for Soho Theatre London's Westminster Prize and her first full-length piece, *Leaving Home*, was staged at The King's Head. Further work includes *Plan D*, which was produced at Tristan Bates Theatre and nominated for the Meyer Whitworth Award. Most recently Hannah's play *Bitterenders* won Sandpit Arts' Bulbul 2013 competition and was staged at The Nightingale in Brighton. Her monologue *The Worst Cook in the West Bank* was performed as part of an evening of short plays about Arab women in the Arab Spring at the Old Red Lion in London and the Unity Theatre as part of the Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival. Hannah also writes for radio, and her new play *Last of the Pearl Fishers* will be on BBC Radio 4 early next year. In 2015 *Plan D* will be published as part of *Inside/Outside: Six plays from Palestine and the Diaspora* edited by Naomi Wallace and Ismail Khalidi.

Tala Jamal Manassah is deputy executive director of Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, the national leader in school-based social and emotional learning programs. As a playwright, she has co-written, with Mona Mansour, THE HOUSE, Noor Theater and the American Institute for Architecture; THE LETTER, Golden Thread/ReOrient Festival; AFTER, CUNY/Queens College; and DRESSING, part of *Facing Our Truths: Short Plays about Trayvon, Race and Privilege*. Manassah and Mansour were awarded a residency at Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor in 2013 to develop a musical play called THE WIFE. Most recently, they were given an Ensemble Studio Theatre/Sloan commission to write a play about 1970s Iraq. Manassah received her A.B. (honors) in philosophy and A.M. in the humanities at the University of Chicago.

Mona Mansour's *The Way West* had its world premiere in spring 2014 at Steppenwolf, directed by Amy Morton. The play received the 2013 Sky Cooper New American Play Prize from Marin Theatre Company, where it will get its West Coast premiere in 2015. *The Hour of Feeling* (directed by Mark Wing-Davey) premiered at the 2012 Humana Festival, then was part of the High Tide Festival in the U.K. *Urge for Going* received a LAB production in 2011 at the Public Theater, and had its West Coast premiere at Golden Thread (directed by Evren Odcikin). *The Vagrant*, the third play in the trilogy, was workshopped at the 2013 Sundance Theater Institute. Mona was a member of the Public Theater's Emerging Writers Group and is part of New Dramatists. With Tala Manassah she has written *The House*, *After*, and *The Letter*, and *Dressing*, part of *Facing Our Truths: Short Plays about Trayvon, Race and Privilege*; they have an EST/Sloan commission to write a play about 1970s Iraq. 2012 Whiting Award. 2014 Middle East America Distinguished Playwright Award. monamansour.com

Nahal Navidar is an Iranian-born playwright who was raised in upstate New York. Her play *110 Flights* has been workshopped at the Kennedy Center Playwriting Intensive and produced at the University at Albany and Proctor's Theatre New Play Festival. While teaching Speech and Drama internationally in the Micronesian Islands, Nahal founded *Fabulous Invalid Theatre Company* whose mission was to promote the voices of the Pacific and East Asian Diaspora. Short plays include *'Flicted* (WAM Theatre, NY), and *The Real Pain* (The Vagrancy, L.A.). In 2015, Nahal will premiere her first opera, *Donia*, written in collaboration with music composer Julia Adolphe. This will mark the team's first project in their effort to empower female voices on the American stage. Nahal is a member of The Vagrancy Playwright's Group. She holds an M.F.A. in Dramatic Writing from the University of Southern California, and splits her time between Los Angeles and New York.

Silva Semerciyan is currently a writer on attachment at the UK's National Theatre. In 2013, she was awarded a BBC Fellowship to be writer on attachment at the Bristol Old Vic where she is under commission to write a new original play. Her plays include *The Window* (Bristol Old Vic), *The Tinderbox* (Bristol Old Vic, adapted from the story by Hans Christian Andersen) *Gather Ye Rosebuds* (Theatre 503) winner, Best New Play, Brighton Fringe Festival, UK; *I and the Village*, shortlisted for the 2011 Bruntwood Prize; *Flashes* (Young Vic Theatre, London). Her first radio play, *Varanasi*, was shortlisted for a BBC audio drama award in 2013. She holds an MPhil (B) in Playwriting from the University of Birmingham, and she lectures in Contemporary Performance for the University of Gloucestershire.

Press tickets and interviews with the artists can be arranged by contacting Torange Yeghiazarian [torange@goldenthread.org] of Golden Thread Productions.
