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For Immediate Release

WHO: **Golden Thread Productions and Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California**

WHAT: **Rumi x 7 = Tales from the Masnavi** (US Premiere)
A lyrical fusion of circus arts and classical Persian poetry
Directed by Hafiz Karmali
Performed by an ensemble of actors, acrobats, dancers and musicians

DATES: November 18 & 19, 2011

TIME: Friday at 7:00 PM, Saturday at 3:30 PM and 7:00 PM

VENUE: Islamic Cultural Center (1433 Madison Ave., Oakland, 94612)

TICKETS: General Admission \$20; Children 12 and under \$10

BOX OFFICE: www.ICCNC.org and (510) 832.7600

**HAFIZ KARMALI SHARES THE PLAYFUL SIDE OF ISLAM
IN *RUMI X 7 = TALES FROM THE MASNAVI***

**The US premiere play by international artist, Hafiz Karmali kicks off the innovative partnership
between Golden Thread Productions and Islamic Cultural Center**

(October 24, 2011 – Oakland, CA) **Golden Thread Productions** and the **Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California (ICCNC)** embark on a ground-breaking partnership to present alternative images of Islam through theatre. By offering drama classes for youth and presenting innovative professional performances inspired by Islamic arts and ideas, Golden Thread will provide Muslim youth and families with theatre that reflects our experience while offering all Bay Area audiences a window into a topic often perceived as inaccessible and taboo.

Fresh from his highly praised direction of ***Night Over Erzinga*** by Adriana Sevahn Nichols, Karmali turns his attention to staging Rumi's poetry as fun-filled vignettes that are entertaining and inspiring. The fables are selected from Rumi's ***Masnavi*** and include familiar tales such as The Elephant in Darkness and The Grammarian and Boatman, as well as lesser-known gems. Just in time for the holidays, this enchanting performance with live music will premiere at the Islamic Cultural Center in Oakland in preparation for touring in 2012.

Golden Thread's founder, Torange Yeghiazarian explains "Golden Thread's education program celebrates the rich tapestry of Middle Eastern art and literature by offering theatre classes and original performances rooted in that tradition. Our work provides positive and inspiring references that help our children develop confidence and connect with their heritage. Simultaneously, audiences of all backgrounds are offered the opportunity to connect with the Middle East creatively."

ICCNC's managing director, Reza Rohani welcomes the new partnership with Golden Thread, "This relationship represents an ideal step towards realizing our mission which is to celebrate Islam through art,



culture and education programs. ICCNC is eager to work with local arts organizations that reflect the diversity of Bay Area's Muslim community. We strive to create a dynamic space where the wider community participates in the exchange of contemporary perspectives on Islam."

Rumi x 7 is the first play in a new series, **ISLAM 101**, designed to educate the public about Islam through theatre. Director Hafiz Karmali has undertaken the development of this series which will first and foremost explain the emergence of Islam as an Abrahamic faith that is the third dimension of what until now has been exclusively known as the Judeo-Christian tradition. **Karmali** has a special interest in cross-cultural performances with a view to showcasing indigenous performing arts of the Islamic world. Prior to *Night Over Erzinga*, Karmali directed three new plays at the ReOrient Festival 2009 and the US premiere of *Island of Animals* based on encyclopedic writings by Ikhwan al-Safa (Brethren of Purity, a group of Muslim scholars) at Golden Thread Productions.

RUMI'S MASNAVI is widely recognized as one of the greatest collections of Sufi poetry ever written and is revered throughout the Middle East and around the world as the Quran in Persian. The thirteenth-century Sufi poet Jalal al-din Rumi composed this edifying work for the benefit of his students in the order named after him, popularly known as the whirling dervishes. In order to convey his message of divine love and unity he threaded together entertaining stories and allegorical homilies. Drawing from folk tales as well as sacred history, Rumi's poetry is often comic as well as spiritually profound. The *Masnavi* was composed during the final years of Rumi's life. He began dictating the first book around the age of 54 circa 1258 and continued composing verses until his death in 1273. The sixth and final book would remain incomplete.

Background information about Golden Thread Productions and the Islamic Cultural Center

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's mission to give voice to Middle Eastern writers is a national treasure, made more urgent and vital given current events in the Middle East.

For 15 years, Golden Thread has pioneered the field of Middle Eastern-American theatre. The organization's mission is to make the Middle East a potent presence on the American stage and a treasured cultural experience. Through its work, Golden Thread aims to create a world where the common human experience supersedes cultural and political differences. To that end, Golden Thread has supported countless Middle Eastern artists in all phases of their careers. From live performances to educational outreach, Golden Thread plays a vital role in the production of original stories about topics rarely explored on the American stage.

In 2008, Golden Thread launched a multifaceted Education program. The main elements are: Theatre Curriculum inspired by Middle Eastern Arts & Literature; Teaching Residencies; Student Matinee Performances of Main Stage Productions; and the Fairytale Players: Inspired by popular performance traditions in the Middle East the Fairytale Players employ epic story-telling, physical theatre and circus arts techniques in creating performances based on stories from the Middle East. Hafiz Karmali's **Islam 101** is a collaboration with Golden Thread's Fairytale Players.

Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California (ICCNC) is a non-profit, community-based organization that celebrates Islam through art, culture and education. Centrally located in downtown Oakland, ICCNC provides a space to give voice to contemporary and diverse perspectives of Islam and to cultivate dynamic exchange of ideas about Islam through art, culture, and education programs. No special attire is required to attend the center. Both Muslims and non-Muslims are encouraged to participate in the many cultural activities available, including art exhibits, Islam and Authors lecture series, musical performances, classes for youth and a café/bookstore open daily.



Artist Biography

Hafiz Karmali (Director) most recently directed the highly acclaimed world premiere of NIGHT OVER ERZINGA by Adriana Sevahn Nichols in San Francisco. Other Golden Thread credits include: three new plays at the ReOrient Festival in 2009: ABAGA by Torange Yeghiazarian; A MARRIAGE PROPOSAL (Egyptian Chekhov) and THE REVIEW (via "skype") both by Yussef El-Guindi; as well as in 2006, the Ikhwan al-Safa's fable ISLAND OF ANIMALS.

Hafiz has a special interest in cross-cultural performances with a view to showcasing indigenous performing arts of the Islamic world. With theatre productions of esoteric/mystical fables such as Attar's CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS (Ismaili Centre, London) Hafiz seeks to promote a better understanding of the arts and ideas of the Muslim world. To this end, he has directed AZAAN – A COURT ENTERTAINMENT in collaboration with performers from Ismaili communities in London and Tajikistan (Guest of Honor: His Highness the Aga Khan); RUMI X 7 – TALES FROM THE MATHNAVI sponsored by the EEC with an acting company in Uzbekistan; WATER FOR LIFE, AKF London, in collaboration with a dance company from Gujarat (Guest of Honor: Princess Zahra Aga Khan); and with folk artists of Karimabad, Hunza, LEGEND OF THE BALTIT FORT – a dance-theatre program sponsored by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), hosted by His Highness and Prince Ameen. More recently, to commemorate Prince Karim Aga Khan's golden jubilee (50th Anniversary) as spiritual leader, Hafiz co-wrote and directed ALI TO KARIM – A Tribute to the Ismaili Imams, an international touring theatre production.

After pursuing his MFA in Directing at Carnegie-Mellon University School of Drama, Hafiz served an apprenticeship at the American Repertory Theatre where he assisted internationally renowned directors Robert Wilson and Andrei Serban. While at the A.R.T., Mr. Karmali was a teaching fellow in the English Department at Harvard University for courses taught by Professor Robert Brustein. A recipient of an AKF Scholarship, Hafiz spent one year conducting research in Iran and is currently based in Paris where at École Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Sorbonne) he is finalizing his doctorate thesis on classical Ismaili philosophy.