

# Urge for Going Press Packet

## Contents:

Press Release

Production Photos and Links

Interviews with the Playwright

About Golden Thread

## Golden Thread Proudly Presents the West Coast Premiere of Whiting Award Winner Mona Mansour's *Urge For Going*

SAN FRANCISCO (July 1, 2013) **Golden Thread Productions** continues to celebrate Middle Eastern American woman's voices this fall with the West Coast Premiere of *Urge for Going* by Whiting Writers' Award winner, **Mona Mansour**. This searing and funny family story set in a Palestinian refugee camp, follows one daughter's drive to overcome her circumstances. Offering a feast of personalities and juicy dialogue, *Urge for Going* will be directed by Golden Thread's Literary Artistic Associate, **Evren Odcikin** whose direction of *Language Rooms* in 2012 received a "critic's pick" by the Los Angeles Times. *Urge For Going* runs November 14<sup>th</sup> – December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at **Z Below** (470 Florida St., San Francisco).

Golden Thread's Founding Artistic Director **Torange Yeghiazarian** says: "I'm delighted to welcome Middle East America Honoree Mona Mansour to our Golden Thread family. Mona offers a rare combination of intelligence, heart and humor with extraordinary ability to write characters that feel like one's own family members. It is thrilling to watch Mona's growth as an artist and the well-deserved national attention her work is receiving." Fresh out of a residency at Ground Floor at Berkeley Rep, Playwright **Mona Mansour** says: "I'm excited to look again at this piece that really is fairly autobiographical and very close to my heart...I don't think stories about the Middle East are being told enough, and they surely aren't being told truthfully."

Director **Evren Odcikin** adds: "Mona mixes the personal with the political, the funny with the tragic with such craft. Mona is an actor's writer through and through. I cannot wait to dive into the world she's created with the amazing cast of actors we've assembled." *Urge for Going* features some of the Bay Area's finest actors including, Terry Lamb, Tara Blau, Julian Lopez-Morillas, and introducing Camila Betancourt Ascencio in the lead. *Urge for Going* is the first play in a trilogy written by Mansour exploring her family heritage. *The Hour of Feeling*, 2<sup>nd</sup> in the trilogy was premiered at the Humana Festival and Steppenwolf Theatre will premiere the final piece, *The Way West*.

**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 year's Fall Season highlights two **female playwrights**, whose plays speak to the diversity in voices and complexity in narrative of Middle Eastern Americans as well as **American theatre**.

[www.goldenthread.org](http://www.goldenthread.org)

**Urge for Going | November 14 – December 8, 2013**

**By Mona Mansour | Directed by Evren Odcikin**

***Sometimes the only way to live is to leave***

What do you do when the only way to live is to leave? Jamila, a studious 17-year-old Palestinian girl growing up in a Lebanese refugee camp, feverishly prepares for the university exam that is her only way out of the impoverished world she calls home. Winner of the 2012 Whiting Writers' Prize and Middle East America honorable mention, Mansour offers a feast of personalities and juicy dialogue in this searing and funny family story.



## **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's mission, to give voice to Middle Eastern writers, is a national treasure, made more urgent and vital with all that is currently happening in the Middle East.

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; a comprehensive Outreach Education Program; plus commissions, tours, and partnerships with esteemed co-presenters. In 2010, Golden Thread partnered with the San Francisco International Arts Festival to co-present the highly acclaimed Syrian troupe, Al-Khareef.

## **ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES**

**MONA MANSOUR's** (Playwright, URGE FOR GOING) play THE WAY WEST will get its world premiere in spring of 2014 at Steppenwolf, directed by Amy Morton. The play received a BareBones workshop at the Lark Play Development Center (directed by Lindsay Firman) where Mona was a Fellow in 2012. THE HOUR OF FEELING (directed by Mark Wing-Davey) received its world premiere in the 2012 Humana Festival in Louisville. Following that, it was part of the High Tide Festival in the U.K. as part of the Rifle Hall plays. URGE FOR GOING (directed by Hal Brooks) received a LAB production in the 2011 season at the Public Theater, and will have its West Coast premiere in fall 2013 at Golden Thread in San Francisco (directed by Evren Odcikin). THE VAGRANT, the third play in the trilogy, was selected to be workshopped at the 2013 Sundance Theater Institute. Mark Wing-Davey will direct. Mona was a member of the Public Theater's Emerging Writers Group, a Core Writer at Minneapolis' Playwrights' Center, and has just been selected for membership in New Dramatists. Other plays include ACROSS THE WATER, GIRL SCOUTS OF AMERICA and BROADCAST YOURSELF (part of Headlong Theater's *Decade*). With Tala Manassah she has written THE HOUSE, for Noor Theatre, AFTER, and THE LETTER, which premiered in November 2012 at Golden Thread's ReOrient Festival; Mona and Tala were in residence this summer at Berkeley Rep as part of Ground Floor, where they worked on a musical play called THE WIFE. Television credits: DEAD LIKE ME and QUEENS SUPREME. Honorable mention, 2010 Middle East America Playwright Award; 2012 Whiting Award.

**EVREN ODCIKIN** (Director, URGE FOR GOING) is the literary artistic associate for Golden Thread Productions, where he has been producing the reading series New Threads for the last three years and led the selection process for and helped produce the ReOrient 2012 Festival and Forum. In 2013, he will also produce the world premiere of Torange Yeghiazarian's 444 DAYS. For Golden Thread, he directed the West Coast premiere of Yussef El Guindi's LANGUAGE ROOMS (coproduced by Asian American Theater Company), which moved to the Los Angeles Theater Center and was a critic's pick for Los



*Angeles Times*. His other directing credits include the world premiere of Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig's 410[GONE] and the West Coast premiere of Jonas Hassen Khemiri's INVASION! for Crowded Fire Theater; THE OLDEST PROFESSION (two Bay Area Theatre Critics' Circle Award nominations) and MACHINAL (three BATCC Award nominations including best director and best production) for Brava Theater Center; West Coast premiere of THE PLAY ABOUT THE NAKED GUY ("Honorable Mention" from *Bay Area Reporter*) for Impact Theatre; and RHINO for Boxcar Theatre ("Most Inventive Staging of 2010" from *SF Weekly*, "Best Play of 2010" from *SF Bay Times*). He has directed readings and workshops at American Conservatory Theater, Magic Theatre, Aurora Theatre Company, Cutting Ball, PlayGround, and Bay Area Playwrights Festival amongst others. Upcoming productions include the West Coast premiere of Mona Mansour's URGE FOR GOING for Golden Thread and the world premiere of Christopher Chen's MUTT for Impact Theatre and Ferocious Lotus. Born and raised in Turkey and a graduate of Princeton University, Evren was awarded Theatre Bay Area's 2013 TITAN Award for Directors and selected as an Emerging Theatre Leader by Theatre Communications Group for their American Express Leadership Bootcamp. For more information visit: [odcikin.com](http://odcikin.com)

---

## **FOR CALENDAR EDITOR:**

### **2 Play Pass**

The 2 Play Pass includes admission to 444 DAYS and URGE FOR GOING on any date, EXCEPT Opening Nights.

Z Below - 470 Florida Street, San Francisco CA 94110 – Capacity 73

All events run between October 17 – December 8, 2013

2 Play Pass

\$45 Adult General

\*\*\*

### **West Coast Premiere**

### **URGE FOR GOING by Mona Mansour**

Directed by Evren Odcikin

**A searing and funny family story of one daughter's drive to overcome her circumstances.**

Z Below - 470 Florida Street, San Francisco CA 94110 – Capacity 73

November 14 – December 8, 2013

NOTE: No performance on Thursday November 28<sup>th</sup> (Thanksgiving Day) and No Saturday Matinees

Performances are Thursday–Saturday at 8pm; Sunday at 3pm

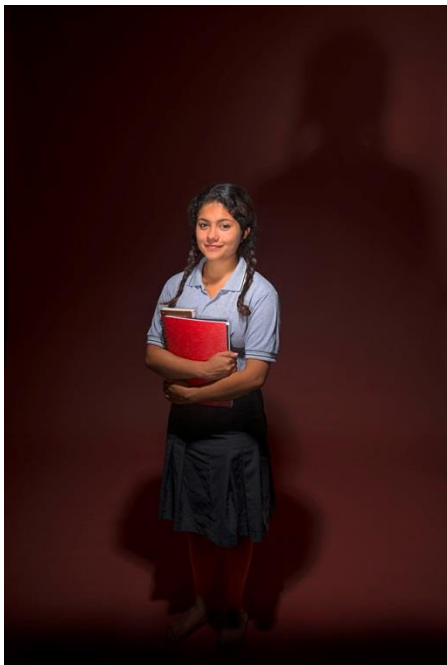
OPENING NIGHT: Saturday, November 16<sup>th</sup> at 8pm

(Running time approx. 90 min)

Thursdays	\$10 In Advance and \$Pay What You Can at the Door
Friday Evenings	\$30 Adult General and \$25 Stu/Snr/TBA Members
<u>Opening Night</u>	<u>\$45 Adult General and \$40 Stu/Snr/TBA Members</u>
Saturday Evenings	\$35 Adult General and \$30 Stu/Snr/TBA Members
Sunday Matinees	\$25 Adult General and \$20 Stu/Snr/TBA Members

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

Photos Available for Download at: <http://www.goldenthread.org/urge-for-going/>  
Click on Press Tab, then click on photo and save as image.





PEOPLE

## MONA MANSOUR Urgent Tales

She views politics as a question of who's sitting with you around the breakfast table

AN INTERVIEW BY  
CARIDAD SVICH



**M**ONA MANSOUR'S WORK CATCHES YOU unawares.

In her play *Urge for Going*—which received a 2011 Public Theater LAB production in New York City under Hal Brooks's direction, and will have its West Coast premiere Nov. 14–Dec. 8 presented by Golden Thread Productions at Z Space in San Francisco, with Evren Odickin at the helm—the conflicts within a family of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon rise and fall in ways that leave you breathless.

In *The Hour of Feeling*—which received its premiere in the 2012 Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville under Mark Wing-Davey's direction—the complex call to return to his homeland becomes the focal point of a story of a man at a crossroads in his life.

This season Mansour's tragicomic family play *The Way West* debuts at Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago under Amy Morton's direction (April 3–June 8), and audiences unfamiliar with her work will undoubtedly be charmed and moved by her piquant and incisive writing voice. What distinguishes Mansour's work is its depth of feeling, its compassion for the thorny and entwined nature of family, identity and politics—and a delicate way with comedy that she's been honing since an early-career stint writing and performing with L.A.'s famed Groundlings troupe in the 1990s.

The recipient of a 2012 Whiting Award, Mansour has continued to incubate new plays: *The Vagrant* was developed

at the 2013 Sundance Theatre Lab, and she was in residence this summer at Berkeley Repertory Theatre's Ground Floor development series with *The Wife*, co-written with her frequent collaborator Tala Manassah. Since 2011 she has also been collaborating with New York University's Continuum Company and playwrights Mia Barron and Carson Kreitzer on the provisionally titled *Natalya Project*, about the murders of a Russian journalist and a Chechen human rights worker.

Mansour and I conversed by e-mail this past April.

**CARIDAD SVICH:** Writing for the theatre, by its very nature, is political. Once you put something on stage in front of or amongst others, you are engaging in a dialogue with the world. Yet, sometimes the word "political" throws people off. Why do you think that is?

**MONA MANSOUR:** To say as a writer that you want to focus on topics other people see as "political" is in itself a political decision. But to say that you are going to eschew those topics and focus solely on aesthetics is also a political decision. It's a question of semantics, yes? For me, politics are (as Mourid Barghouti says in his beautiful memoir *I Saw Ramallah*) "the family at breakfast. Who is there? Who is absent and why?" To add to this, politics are also a question of who's in the (metaphorical) room—who is allowed in? What's stopping those who aren't? For me, political questions are intrinsically human. I don't see "politics" as some separate thing.



From left, Tala Ashe, Ted Sod, Demosthenes Chrysan and Ramsey Faraqallah in *Urge for Going*, at the Public Theater in New York City in 2011.

You have a Lebanese background, and certainly *Urge for Going* has almost the feeling of memoir about it. How did this play and its prequel, *The Hour of Feeling*, come about?

*Urge for Going* was the result of me sitting down for the first time and writing about my father's homeland. He isn't Palestinian; but near his village are two camps, and I was always aware of the camps' existence. In the late 1970s when the Lebanese Civil War got worse, my cousins came to California to live with us, and it was all brought very close. Without going into a whole political rundown about Lebanon, I'll at least say that these camps were created in 1948. Temporary camps. And here we are, 60 years later, and the situation has really not gotten better. I was struck by how Chekhovian this existence could be—people longing to return home, just across the border, and in this endless state of waiting. Through all that a family came to me, and, yes, much of my own family and extended family got funneled into those two plays. Don't we all do that in one way or another?

*Urge for Going* takes place in 2003, in a camp in Southern Lebanon—a father who once had been a star academic, his son and daughter, his wife, brother and brother-in-law, all in one room. I wrote *The Hour of Feeling* second, wanting to explore one segment of the father's life—his trip to London in 1967 where he delivers a paper on Wordsworth. In *Urge for Going*, you hear a bit about the poem "Tintern Abbey," and in *The Hour of Feeling*, you see young Adham and his wife Abir go from 1967 Palestine to London. It's his finest hour. And at the end

he has to decide whether or not to go home (and into war, essentially).

The newest play in this trilogy is called *The Vagrant*. It's not done yet. It poses the question: What if Adham stays in England after 1967? What does his life look like? So *Urge for Going* is his life if he goes back to

the Middle East, and *The Vagrant* is if he doesn't; neither route is a "winning" one. Both involve heartbreak.

*The Way West*, which you workshoped at the Lark Play Development Center in New York, shows a very different side of your writing voice. For one, it's a California play, and I know you grew up in SoCal, but it's also hyperreal in a way. How are you building your body of work? Is there for you a clear path?

Ha! No clear path! I often say *The Way West* is my mother's play—it's her worldview, her West Coast American ethos, which is part of my life. Now I want *you* to answer. How do you build your body of work? Is it intuitive, or has there been some planning it out?

Building a body of work for me has been mostly about chasing what inspires me, rather than as a result of meticulous planning, although I do tend to write serially around themes or conceptual ideas. Did you start writing for live performance as a result of your training as an actor?

## brief-residency Master of Fine Arts in Writing

### Ideally suited to the writing life

- study with a great community of writers
- write in your own home

### Flexible Scheduling

- 10-day residencies in spring and fall in Louisville followed by a 6-month semester of one-on-one independent study with a faculty mentor or
- 10-day residency abroad in summer followed by a 9-month semester of one-on-one independent study with a faculty mentor

### Playwriting Faculty

David-Matthew Barnes, Larry Brenner, Gabriel Jason Dean, Helena Kriel, Kira Obolensky, Eric Schmiedl, Charlie Schulman

For more information,  
see [spalding.edu/mfa](http://spalding.edu/mfa) or email [mfa@spalding.edu](mailto:mfa@spalding.edu)

SPALDING MFA



PEOPLE

I am a better actor now than I ever was when I was an actor. I like writing or creating moments that are things I can *feel*, but that I know I couldn't quite *do* when I was acting. They were above my reach.

How did the piece you started working on at the NYU grad acting program—the one about journalist Anna Politkovskaya—come about? At the helm are Jim Calder, who's taught movement at NYU for years, and Eliza Baldi, who is shaping that play. It's comprised of different pieces of writing by the actresses who have worked on it, as well as writing done by me, Mia Barron and Carson Kreitzer. We've all been in communication again lately because we're trying to get another round of working on it—and also because Anna was very critical of Putin, and was covering the conflict in Chechnya, which is now more topical than ever. Her source in Chechnya was a human-rights worker named Natalya Estemirova—Anna stayed with her when she went to Grozny. And the two women were both assassinated.



Rasha Zamamiri and Hadi Tabbal in *The Hour of Feeling* at Actors Theatre of Louisville in 2012.

Writing doesn't come from staying in a safe place—good writing, anyway. You have to stick your neck out, go on the ledge (whatever that means for you), get out of the comfort zone, and see what is really driving a piece into being. How do you navigate fear and vulnerability in your process? I'm almost always uncomfortable in some way or other. Getting out of my comfort zone is an easy commute.

I have written many plays that revolve around issues of displacement and what it does to the psyche—it's been central to a lot of my work, in part because there are histories of displacement in my family. Borders upon borders traversed. What is your lens on displacement as a writer? "Borders upon borders traversed," that's really lovely. Yes, I am always thinking about this. What is lost when you leave a place? What are you forced to give up? I think in the

AT THE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

MAJORS

- BFA in Acting
- BA in Theatre Arts
  - Design & Technical Production
  - Directing
  - Producing & Management
  - Theatre Performance
  - Theatre Studies
  - Writing for Stage

MINORS

- Musical Theatre
- Arts for Communities
- Arts Management
- Drama Therapy
- Speech Therapy

INTERVIEWS & AUDITIONS

- New York
- Atlanta
- Chicago
- Dallas
- San Francisco

*Theatre Recruitment & Admissions*  
Marymount  
Manhattan College  
221 East 71st Street  
New York, NY 10021  
theatre@mmm.edu  
(212) 774-0767

**MarymountManhattan**  
a college of the liberal arts

Richard Wright's *Native Son* (photo by Susan Cook)





Gayle Rankin, Deirdre O'Connell and Nadia Bowers in *The Way West* at the Lark in NYC in 2011.

case of my Middle East plays, the Palestinian narrative is so heightened because it asks, "What does that heartbreak look like when you aren't allowed to go back?"

Do you think a play can ever transcend questions of identity?  
Of course! We all hope for that, right? I had a woman come up to me the first time *The Hour of Feeling* was read, and she told me that Adham's "decision" to not go back to

Palestine affected her deeply because she'd made that same decision about Eritrea years ago. A split-second decision that's impossible to make, and one you have to live with the rest of your life.

Multilingualism in playwriting is an issue that affects us all (as was clear in Diep Tran's article on multilingual theatre in *AT* Feb. '13, for which we were both interviewed). It obviously affects casting

as well as the actual writing—what words to use when? How much needs to be explained to an audience? Some folks might say, in that very parochial way, keep it English-only, y'know?

I can't address the "keep it English" thing. It seems so not in touch with what's happening. A girl in China can do a fashion blog, and if the fates line up, *Vogue* or *Teen Vogue* or whoever's readers can find out about her, and suddenly she has a say in the zeitgeist. Given that access, how can we limit how many languages are spoken in a play? Beyond that, of course, there is no such thing as one American English anyway. But you know that!

Are there little rituals in your writing life that you cherish or sustain to keep yourself going?  
I have to think about that. I like doing research. I find it very grounding. ☒

**Caridad Svich received Arizona Theatre Company's 2013 National Latino Playwriting Award for her play *Spark*, and a 2012 Obie Award for lifetime achievement.**

*The United States Institute for Theatre Technology, Inc.*  
*congratulates its outstanding 2013 award recipients*

**Thomas DeGaetani Award**  
First Stage  
**Special Citation**  
Cobalt Studios  
**Joel E. Rubin Founders Award**  
Tom Young  
**Golden Pen**  
Richard Pilbrow, *A Theatre Project*

*Distinguished Achievement Awards*  
Sound: **Ottis Munderloh**  
Architecture: **Timothy Hartung**  
Costume and Scenic Design: **Desmond Heeley**  
Technical Production: **Neil Mazzella**  
**2013 Herb D. Gregg Award**  
Kimberly Poppiti for  
*"War Horse,"* (Fall 2011)  
**Herb Gregg Merit Awards:**  
Dan Gray for  
*"No Place Like Home,"* (Winter 2012)  
E. Shura Pollatsek for  
*"From Hot Metal to Delicate Flowers,"* (Spring 2012)  
all published in *TD&T*, Theatre Design & Technology

*2013 Architecture Awards*  
**MERIT AWARDS**  
**Garsington Opera Pavilion**, Wormsley Estate, Stokeschurch, High Wycombe, United Kingdom  
Architect: Snell Associates  
Theatre Consultant: Iain MacKintosh, TheatrePlan and Anne Minors Performance Cons.  
Acoustical Consultant: Sound Space Design  
**Wagner Noel Performing Arts Center**, University of Texas at the Permian Basin, Midland, Texas  
Architect: Boora Architects  
Associate Architect: Rhotenberry Wellen Architects  
Theatre Consultant: Auerbach Pollock Friedlander  
Acoustical Consultant: Jaffe Holden  
**Valley Performing Arts Center**, Northridge, California  
Architect: HGA Architects and Engineers  
Theatre Consultant: Auerbach Pollock Friedlander  
Acoustical Consultant: McKay Conant Hoover, Inc.  
**"Rosie the Riveter Visitor Education Center & Craneway Pavilion"**, Richmond, California  
Architect: Marcy Wong Donn Logan Architects  
Lighting Consultant: Architecture and Light  
Acoustical Consultant: Charles M. Salter Associates  
Sound System: Meyer Sound  
Client: The National Park Service  
Owner: Orton Development Inc.  
**Kilden Performing Arts Center**, Kristiansand, Norway  
Architect: ALA Architects Ltd.  
Associate Architect: SMS Arkitekt AS  
Theatre Consultant: Theatre Projects Consultants  
Acoustical Consultant: Arup Acoustics (Concert Hall), Brekke & Strand Akustikk AS

To learn more about **USITT** and its awards, visit [www.usitt.org](http://www.usitt.org) or call **800-938-7488**, ext. 101

## **Mona Mansour in Conversation with Golden Thread's Artistic Director Torange Yeghiazarian:**

**Torange Yeghiazarian:** Let's get right to it. I remember first reading URGE FOR GOING back in 2008. What was the "urge" for writing this play and how has the play evolved through the years?

**Mona Mansour:** It started off as me wanting to explore my father's homeland, Lebanon. And from there, I began to find out more and more about the situations for Palestinians there, and was struck with how Chekhovian, in a way, their existence is. They're in this eternal waiting game, in temporary camps set up over 60 years ago, in some cases just miles from what is now the Israel-Lebanon border, waiting to go home. It was my first big production, and premiered at the Public Theater in April 2011 as part of their Public LAB series. It was an incredible experience, just huge for me—and it was fast. We had two weeks to rehearse before previews started. Now it's been two years and I'm excited to look again at this piece that really is fairly autobiographical and very close to my heart, and have more perspective on it. And make it better. And I'm so, so excited to work with Evren Odickin! The crush is mutual! He's so smart and so intuitive in his approach to the writing — I can't wait to see what he does with the play.

**TY:** What role does identity play in URGE FOR GOING? Yours, the characters' and possibly even the viewers?

**MM:** How to even address that fully? Identity is just endlessly fascinating and endlessly complicated to me. I grew up in the same house as my brother and sister (clearly!) but I know they don't identify themselves as Arab-American or Lebanese-American, and I absolutely do. That part of my cultural background, my childhood and beyond, has completely influenced how I view things personally and politically (if we even want to make those distinctions). I wrote this play for American audiences, most definitely—but I want it to reach Arab and Arab-American audiences. I don't think stories about the Middle East are being told enough, and they surely aren't being told truthfully.

One of the challenges in this kind of a piece is, how much do what you need to help out an American audience? Sometimes you have to, I've found, add exposition you wouldn't want to normally—but without which an American audience will be lost.

**TY:** Mona, you have received a lot of positive attention in the last two years. You have been awarded the Whiting Prize and are slated for world premiere production at the Steppenwolf in addition to a west coast premiere at Golden Thread. Congratulations! How does it feel? What are the rewards and challenges of living the life of a busy playwright?

**MM:** It's so funny to think about all that. I've had some lovely things line up. The Whiting was a phenomenal experience—you don't even know you've been nominated, there's nothing you do along the way, and you just get a phone call out of the blue telling you you've won!

I think right now the biggest challenge is juggling projects, to be honest. I have a lot of new work coming up, in different stages, so I try to stay in each play as best I can, even if I've had to put one on the back burner for a time. I still have my day job life, but luckily that's freelance, so I can't complain about that too much. I guess what I mean about juggling is also making sure I am really grounded in the work of each play as I turn my attention to it. I just finished a week in Chicago, doing a workshop of my California play, *The Way West*, at Steppenwolf. And it's so funny to go from that world (Stockton, pretty much now) to, for example, *Urge for Going* (a Palestinian camp in Lebanon, 2003). But I do sort of love the action of jumping from one world to another. And it definitely reflects the split-cultural existence I had growing



## About Golden Thread

**Golden Thread Productions – Organizational Biography.** Founded in 1996, Golden Thread Productions is dedicated to exploring Middle Eastern cultures and identities as expressed around the globe. We present alternative perspectives of the Middle East by developing and producing theatrical work that is aesthetically varied and politically and viscerally engaging, while supporting countless Middle Eastern artists in all phases of their careers. Our mission is to make the Middle East a potent presence on the American stage and also to make theatre a treasured cultural experience within Middle Eastern communities. We build cultural bridges by engaging the community in an active dialogue and facilitating collaborations among artists of diverse backgrounds with the aim of creating a world where the common human experience supersedes cultural and political differences. **MISSION.** Golden Thread Productions is dedicated to exploring Middle Eastern cultures and identities as expressed around the globe. We present alternative perspectives of the Middle East by developing and producing theatrical work that is aesthetically varied and politically and viscerally engaging, while supporting countless Middle Eastern artists in all phases of their careers. Our work builds cultural bridges by engaging the community in an active dialogue. Our mission is to make the Middle East a potent presence on the American stage and also to make theatre a treasured cultural experience within Middle Eastern communities.

**HISTORY AND PROGRAMMING.** Founded in 1996 by playwright and director Torange Yeghiazarian, Golden Thread has been a pioneer in Middle Eastern-American theatre and is widely acknowledged for the excellence and innovation of its programming. The company's debut production was *OPERATION NO PENETRATION, LYSISTRATA 97!*, an adaptation of the classic Greek comedy in which Palestinian and Israeli women unite to force men into signing a peace treaty. Other highlights include *LOVE MISSILE*, an original musical (2003); *BENEDICTUS*, a collaboration of Iranian, Israeli, and American artists (2007); *ECSTASY | A WATERFABLE*, Denmo Ibrahim's ensemble-generated play inspired by a Sufi fable (2009); and the first Middle East America commission *NIGHT OVER ERZINGA* by Adriana Sevahn Nichols (2011). Golden Thread's offerings include full-length productions; the ReOrient Festival of short plays; the staged reading series New Threads; and a robust education program, including teaching residencies, curriculum-based student performances, and the Fairytale Players, a touring ensemble that performs children's stories from the Middle East at schools, libraries, and festivals.

**NATIONAL IMPACT.** The Middle Eastern-American perspective is given more urgency in the larger context of the United States' relationship to the Middle East since September 2001. As such, Golden Thread has made a deliberate effort to have a national presence as a facilitator of conversations about this important region. In 2008, Golden Thread, in partnership with Lark Play Development Center (NYC) and Silk Road Rising (Chicago), launched Middle East America (MEA): a National New Plays Initiative in 2008. The Initiative awards \$10,000 to an American playwright of Middle Eastern heritage for the development and production of a new play. In 2009, Theatre Communications Group (TCG) published the first-ever anthology of Middle Eastern-American drama, which described Golden Thread as "the fountain-head of Middle Eastern-American theatre and the generative force behind this major and growing new voice in American Theatre." In 2012, Golden Thread artistic associate and the 2011 MEA winner Yussef El Guindi was awarded the prestigious Steinberg Prize for Best New Play. Golden Thread has supported





El Guindi's career from the very beginning with numerous productions, including BACK OF THE THROAT (2005), JIHAD JONES AND THE KALASHNIKOV BABES (2008), and LANGUAGE ROOMS (2011).

**GLOBAL REACH.** Golden Thread's work is borderless and reaches beyond the United States. The organization receives play submissions from around the globe and is frequently host to visiting artists from the Middle East through exchange programs of the US State Department and the Kennedy Center. An active contributor to Theatre Communications Group's international efforts and Theatre Without Borders, Golden Thread continues to identify ways to provide opportunities for international artistic exchange, increase the presence of American theatre artists and their work abroad, and facilitate the presentation of work by international artists in the U.S. To this end, Golden Thread has hosted artists from the Middle East at the TCG National Conference and presented their work in San Francisco. Golden Thread's global reach is enhanced by an active presence on the internet (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) and evidenced by visits to the company's website from over 100 countries.

**CONSTITUENCY.** Golden Thread provides a link between Middle Eastern and non-Middle Eastern communities and an environment in which different Middle Eastern communities interact. Our education programs annually reach 3,000 youth and families. 60% of our mainstage audience is female; 70% is under 50; and 40% self-identify as Middle Eastern many of whom rarely attend other theatre. As a result, Golden Thread's programs expose our substantial non-Middle Eastern audience members to the genuine voices and alternative perspectives of the region and its worldwide diaspora, while simultaneously serving Middle Eastern audiences who rarely encounter meaningful reflections of their own culture and experience in popular media and performing arts.

**EDUCATION.** By providing theatre education rooted in Middle Eastern arts and literature, Golden Thread's Education Program addresses the parallel needs of Middle Eastern youth and families for self-affirming performing arts programming as well as the broad community's need for a deeper understanding of the Middle East in its rich diversity. Additionally, the program equips arts educators with much needed overview of the region and its culture. Golden Thread's multifaceted Education Program has three main elements: 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 original plays based on stories from the Middle East. Past productions include THE GIRL WHO LOST HER SMILE, THE PRINCESS AND THE MIRROR, NASRUDIN'S MAGNIFICENT JOURNEY TO SAMARKAND, and RUMI X 7 = TALES FROM THE MASNAVi. Student Outreach Performances of Main Stage Productions – To enrich students' understanding of main stage productions which help humanize the Middle East; Golden Thread invites students to attend performances at the theatre. Study guides provide historical, cultural and political context and link to California Education Standards. Teaching Residencies - Golden Thread teaching artists lead classes in performance and dramatic writing. Informed by the teachers' diverse immigrant background and multi-lingual skills, curriculum is customized to the specific needs of the host schools and cultural organizations.

**REORIENT FESTIVAL & FORUM.** The ReOrient Festival of short plays, now presented triennially was inaugurated in 1999 to present alternative perspectives of the Middle East, showcasing the diversity of artistic voices and styles from the region, and gathering various segments of the Middle Eastern community together with the non-Middle Eastern community for an evening of distinctive – yet shared – narratives. ReOrient has served as a springboard for the careers of top Middle Eastern-American playwrights such as Yussef El Guindi and Betty Shamieh. In addition, the ReOrient Festival has introduced audiences to significant dramatic works from the Middle East by authors that are rarely produced in the US such as Sadegh Hedayat, Fatma Gallaire, Tawfiq Al-Hakim, among others. While promoting the voices of the Middle East, young and old, the festival offers an opportunity to non-Middle Eastern playwrights to explore the region as a topic. The ReOrient Festival has premiered works by such distinguished American playwrights such as Naomi Wallace, Eric Ehn, and Israel Horovitz. In fact, the majority of plays submitted to the festival continue to be by non-Middle Eastern writers who appreciate the thoughtful and professional support that the festival offers. Since 2009, in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the festival, Golden Thread has organized 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.

**NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT.** Golden Thread ensures the discovery and development of new playwrights and plays through three distinct programs. The Kimia program facilitates collaborations that explore rare themes and/or bring together unlikely creative partners. For example, *BENEDICTUS* (2007) was an international collaboration among Iranian, Israeli and American artists to create a play exploring the political stalemate among the three nations. *ECSTASY | A WATERFABLE* (2008) was a commission to Denmo Ibrahim to create an ensemble-generated performance inspired by a Sufi fable. Middle East America, A National New Plays Initiative (MEA) is designed to help create a pipeline of high quality plays by Middle Eastern American playwrights. MEA offers \$10,000 commission, two years of development and productions in San Francisco and Chicago. *NIGHT OVER ERZINGA* (2011) by Adriana Sevahn Nichols and *THE MUMMY AND THE REVOLUTION* (2014) by Yussef El Guindi have been developed through this program. Islam 101 is an initiative to create dynamic, colorful and family-friendly plays inspired by Islamic art and philosophy that help create positive images of Islam for youth and build cultural bridges between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. *RUMI X 7 – TALES FROM THE MASNAVI* Conceived by Hafiz Karmali and *THE FIFTH STRING: ZIRYAB'S PASSAGE TO CORDOBA* by Torange Yeghiazarian are the current plays in this initiative.