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THE SHROUD MAKER

BY AHMED MASOUD

DIRECTED BY MARINA JOHNSON

STARRING ROXANE ASSAF-LYNN

SET DESIGN JONATHAN BERG-EINHORN

LIGHTING DESIGN MARY MOUTON

SOUND DESIGN RONNIE MALLEY & ERIC BACKUS

COSTUME DESIGN RAJA ALKAM

& NEVIN ABDELGHANI

LIGHTING DESIGN MARY MOUTON

STAGE MANAGER CHARLOTTE BREANNE BROWN

PHOTOS SCOTT DRAY

MARCH 16 - APRIL 8, 2023

What's the best business in Gaza? Hajja Souad, an 80-year-old woman living in the El Shujaia Neighborhood, has the right idea. She has survived decades of wars, deportation, and oppression by making and selling shrouds for the dead, profiting from the continuous Israeli attacks. A dark comedy in its US premiere.

**CHICAGO DRAMATISTS 798 N. ABERDEEN ST. CHICAGO, IL
Tickets & Information: www.ivpchicago.org**

THE SHROUD MAKER

By Ahmed Masoud

Directed by Marina Johnson

Set By Jonathan Berg-Einhorn

Lighting By Mary Mouton

Sound by Ronnie Malley and Eric Backus

Understudy: Anelga Hijjar

Stage Management: Charlotte Brown

Box Office: Marisa Ferreira

Photography: Scott Dray

Press: SHOUT Marketing

The cast consists of one actor who plays all the below roles.

Hajja Souad: Main character, 80 years old

Mahmoud Abu Dia: Souad's Father, 45 years old, Palestinian farmer from Aqqur Village

Little Souad: 11 years old

Mrs. Cunningham, 55 years old, wife of the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem

Sir Alan Cunningham, British High Commissioner in Jerusalem

Ellian: Orphan Child and Hajja Souad's adopted son, married to Basma

Basma: Ellian's wife and Ghassan's mother

Ghassan: Ellian's and Basma's son, Hajja Souad's grandson

The action is set in: Shuja'ia in Gaza City during a limited Israeli incursion to destroy tunnels between Israel in Gaza in March 2018, and in Aqqur Village near Jerusalem, Jerusalem House, Hebron & various locations in the Gaza Strip.

A Note from the Director

When I first read Ahmed Masoud's *The Shroud Maker* I was struck by the candor of the main character, Souad. She lives the words of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's saying, "Sarcasm helps me overcome the harshness of the reality we live, eases the pain of scars, and makes people smile." Through this critical sarcasm, we see the contradictions of what it means to look for freedom while living a life where borders, barriers, and conflict shape every next step. Masoud showcases the multitudinous layers of Souad's identity while putting the relationship between imperialism, orientalism, and their effects on indigenous populations into direct conversation providing the audience with insight into the Israeli occupation of Palestine that can't be gleaned from contemporary media.

Masoud draws on the heritage of the "hakawati" (from Arabic words meaning "story" and "talk"), part of the Middle Eastern heritage of oral tradition where a storyteller used folktales, allegories, satire, music, and grand movement to entertain audiences while enabling moments of catharsis in times of strife. Additionally, the hakawati was considered a keeper of stories, passing on tales deemed important enough to be solidified into the archive of the audience's minds. With *The Shroud Maker*, art is a response and not an escape.

This particular story is centered around true events like the Nakba ("catastrophe") in 1948 when Palestinians were displaced and expelled from their homes. It's worth noting that, while Souad's interactions with Sir Alan and Lady Cunningham are fabricated, the characters are based on historical figures. Cunningham was the seventh and last British High Commissioner of Palestine and the picture of him removing the flag from Haifa port was made famous through history books. By weaving together the real and the imagined, Masoud's play allows audiences to think capaciously about the past and continued violence against Palestinians and the complex matrix of decisions those living under occupation have to navigate in order to survive and thrive.

There are no easy answers for Souad and the end of the play sees her making a choice that, to some, might seem drastic. However, it is one of the few instances where the character is able to make her own decisions. For her entire life, decisions were made for her by external forces, first by her family, then the Cunninghams, and then the socio-political realities of her situation shaped every next step. At the end of her life, she finally finds agency that has been denied to her. Rather than seeking proximity to power and becoming a collaborator, Souad weaponizes the only power she has. Masoud's writing forces the audience to grapple with the complexity of her decision-making, pushing beyond the binaries about Palestinian life and death often found in Western media. Through Souad, *The Shroud Maker* asks us to consider the many valences of liberation and how they affect our choices for ourselves, and our communities, for the future.

–Marina Johnson



Ahmed Masoud (Playwright) is the author of the acclaimed novels *Come What May* (Victorina Press 2022) and *Vanished – The Mysterious Disappearance of Mustafa Ouda* (Rimal Books 2015). Ahmed is a writer and director who grew up in Palestine and moved to the UK in 2002. In 2019, he worked with Maxine Peake on [Obliterated](#), a theatrical experiment and artistic protest - you can learn about it [here](#). Ahmed's Theatre and Radio Drama credits include: *Application 39* (WDR Radio, Germany 2018) *Camouflage* (London 2017), *The Shroud Maker* (London 2015 – still touring), *Walaa, Loyalty* (London 2014, funded by the Arts Council England), *Escape from Gaza* (BBC Radio 4 2011). Ahmed is the founder of Al Zaytouna Dance Theatre (2005 – 2013) where wrote and directed many productions with subsequent tours in the UK and Europe, including *Unto the Breach* (London and Vienna 2012) *Between the Fleeting Words* (London, Zurich, Freiburg, Ljubljana, Madrid 2010 – 2012). *Ila Haif* (London, Freiburg 2008-2010) *Hassad* (London 2007-2008). After finishing his PhD research, Ahmed published many journals and articles including a chapter in the *Britain and Muslim World: A Historical Perspective* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011). Most recently, Ahmed launched his new artistic initiative called [PalArt Collective](#). For more information, please see www.ahmedmasoud.co.uk



Marina Johnson (Director) (she/they) is a third-year Ph.D. candidate in Theatre and Performance Studies Department at Stanford University, with a research focus on Palestinian Theatre. Johnson is also pursuing Ph.D. minors in Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Critical Studies in Race and Ethnicity. She was a 2021-2022 Graduate Public Service Fellow with the Stanford Haas Center. She is the co-artistic director of the Nitery Experimental Theatre on Stanford's Campus. Marina received her MFA in Directing from the University of Iowa. They are the co-host of *Kunafa and Shay*, a podcast produced by HowlRound Theatre Commons. Johnson is a member of Silk Road Rising's Polycultural Institute and is an Associate Literary Manager and dramaturg with Golden Thread Productions' 2023 ReOrient Festival. Prior to beginning her Ph.D, she was a Visiting Assistant Professor at Beloit College for three years. She is currently dramaturging Stanford's Mainstage *Julius Caesar* and completing a praxis project as part of the Certificate for Critical Consciousness and Antioppressive Pedagogy.

Recent directing credits include: *Shakespeare's Sisters*, *The Palestinian Youth Monologues*, *Supposed Home*, *Man of God*, *Five Lesbians Eating a Quiche*, and *In the Next Room* at Beloit College. Additionally, she was the assistant director and dramaturg on *As Soon As Impossible* (Stanford, 2021) and dramaturg and assistant director for *Twice, Thrice, Frice* at Silk Road Rising (2019). Her work has been published in MATC's Theatre/Practice, Eumenica, and in Arab Stages. Marina-Johnson.com



Roxane Assaf-Lynn (Hajja Souad) Roxane Assaf-Lynn (she/her/hers), originally from New Orleans, moved to Chicago to continue her pursuit of work in the performing and visual arts. She had leading roles with the Contemporary Arts Center, Louisiana State University and the Loyola New Orleans University Opera Workshop.

She has also worked professionally in both cities as a classically trained mezzo-soloist and chorister with additional work as a voiceover artist, which gained Assaf-Lynn her SAG credentials.

At age 35, after 'discovering' Palestine (the land of her paternal grandparents) and moving to the West Bank as a freelance journalist and contributor to the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, Assaf-Lynn devoted her stage work to original presentations by invitation, such as her own performance piece *Now that I'm an Arab*, for the Chicago Humanities Festival, a video dramatization for broadcast in the role of esteemed activist Cedar Duaybis, the role of "Nabila" in *The Voice of Rachel Corrie* for American Friends Service Committee and a staged reading of Dr. Robert Hostetter's *The Longing*. Her most significant contribution included the launch of Chicago's venerable Silk Road Theatre Project with Jamil Khoury's *Precious Stones*, a two-woman play with six characters and narration that received favorable reviews and an extended run.

Assaf-Lynn received her master's degree from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University and taught college courses for nearly two decades in media literacy, news coverage of Palestinians, journalism and video reporting, most recently at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her study abroad tours have concentrated on the Palestinian struggle in the context of religion.

Her reports and opinion pieces as a journalist have appeared in recognized and respected news outlets around the world. Her work and passion continues with volunteering for arts organizations preserving the life of theatre, cabaret and opera, co-founding Chicago Cabaret Professionals and the Chicago Paris Cabaret Connexion, as well as working for peace and social justice initiatives.

Ronnie Malley (Co Sound Designer) (he/him) is a Palestinian-American multi-instrumentalist musician, actor, composer, sound designer, producer, playwright, and educator. As executive director of [Intercultural Music Production](#) he is committed to promoting cultural understanding through performance, education, and production. For over fifteen years, he has worked on regional and international theatrical productions including with renowned award-winning directors Mary Zimmerman, David Cromer, and Aaron Posner. His credits include: *Layalina*, *The Jungle Book*, *Mirror of the Invisible World* (Goodman Theatre); "Mo" (Netflix); *Little Syria* co-creator (Brooklyn Academy of Music); *The Band's Visit* (North American tour; Broadway Tony and Grammy Award-winner); *Macbeth* (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre); *The Shroud Maker*, *The Sultan's Dilemma*, *The Castle and the Sparrow* (International Voices Project); *Scenes From 73 Years* (Medina Theatre Collective); *American Griot* co-author (MVCC/Silk Road Rising/Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Award 2020); *A Disappearing Number* (Timeline Theatre); *Great Expectations* (Silk Road Rising/Remy Bumppo; Jeff nominated for Best Original Music), *Ziryab*, *The Songbird Of Andalusia* author and solo performer, *Obstacle Course* (Silk Road Rising); *The White Snake* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Arabian Nights* (Lookingglass, Arena Stage, Berkeley Rep Theatres). Ronnie has a BA in global music studies from DePaul University and is currently a graduate student at the University of Chicago. He is also a teaching artist and frequent guest lecturer at universities. Ronnie performs regularly with several global music ensembles and was awarded the 2023 Michael Jaffee Visionary Award from Chamber Music America. Ronnie is a member of Actors Equity Association and the American Federation of Musicians.



Eric Backus (Co-Sound Designer) (he/him) is a Chicago-based composer and sound designer, excited to work with IVP for the first time! Eric previously collaborated with co-designer Ronnie Malley on *Layalina* (Goodman) and *Ziryab, The Songbird of Andalusia* (Silk Road Rising). Other Chicago credits include productions at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Northlight, Writers, Windy City Playhouse, Music Theater Works, Raven Theatre, American Blues Theater, The Gift, and many others. Off-Broadway: *Hollow/Wave* (United Solo Festival), *Churchill* (New World Stages); Regional credits include productions at Milwaukee Rep, Northern Stage, TheatreSquared, The Rev, and Lake Dillon Theatre Co. In addition to theatre, Eric composes and sound designs for podcasts and film. www.ericbackus.com.





Mary Mouton (*Lighting Designer*) (she/her) is a (relatively) recent graduate with a passion for lighting design. This is her first time designing in a professional context, and she's so excited to help bring this show to life alongside IVP! Her previous lighting experience includes a variety of shows through University Theater at the University of Chicago.



Charlotte Breanne Brown (*Stage Manager*) (they/them) moved from Orlando, Florida to Chicago to pursue their MFA in Comedic Screenwriting from DePaul University. While everyone was making sourdough during the pandemic Charlotte picked up stage managing skills by working on virtual narrative improv shows through The Hideout Theatre (Austin, Tx) among many other virtual shows. One thing led to another and they found themselves working on their first scripted show *Human Resources the Musical* (dir. Mallory Schlossberg), a show that was done entirely via zoom and comprised people spanning across several states. As they say the rest is history and Charlotte can now be found stage managing shows whenever they can in addition to their job at Second City. Charlotte is excited to be working on their first in person scripted show along side the rest of the incredible cast and crew.



Raja Alkam and Nevin Abdelghani (*Costume Design*)

Born and raised in Turmusaya, Palestine, Raja Alkam has been keeping Palestinian culture alive in the Chicago suburbs by selling traditional Palestinian dresses called thobes for 9 years. She is influenced by her experience living through two intifadas and aims to develop a strong cultural identity in Palestinians for generations to come



Anelga Hajjar is an actor and award-winning playwright at Northwestern University. Her original play, "*Janitor's Baby*" is set to have a staged reading at Edge Theatre in Chicago this May. On campus, she is a member of Mee-ow Comedy and Titanic Long Form Improv (Team Pee Shy), where she enjoys making people laugh with sketch comedy and her impressions. Anelga hails from a Lebanese-Armenian household in Massachusetts. When she's not writing or performing she can be found singing, babysitting, and memorizing Spanish sensation Rosalía's repertoire.

Special Thanks to:

Ahmed Masoud, Fouad Teymour, Carson Becker, Zack Robinson, Lou Acerra, Mary Acerra, Jamil Khoury and Malik Gilani, Walter Stearns, Eugene Dizon, Omar Khalil, Samer Al-Saber, Scott Dray, Muhammad Eissa, Maen Al Sharif, Students for Justice in Palestine Chicago, Rohina Malik, Medina Theatre Collective, Maren Rosenberg, Uprising Theatre, Nicole Sieczka, Bobbi Masters, Maggie Dougherty, United States Palestinian Community Network, Teresa Hernando, Instituto Cervantes Chicago, The Goodman Theatre

