



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 4, 2017

Press release #1722

For more information contact:

Marita Meinerts Albinson, 612.225.6142

maritaa@guthrietheater.org

Elizabeth Deacon, 612.225.6193

elizabethd@guthrietheater.org

**The Guthrie Theater presents the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project's
production of *BIRDS SING DIFFERENTLY HERE***

**Iraqi Immigrant and Refugee Stories Come to Life in the Dowling Studio
Three Performances: October 27–29, 2017**

(*Minneapolis/St. Paul*)—The Guthrie Theater (Joseph Haj, Artistic Director) proudly announces the next production in the Dowling Studio 2017-2018 Season, *Birds Sing Differently Here*, presented by the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project (IARP). Directed by **Taous Claire Khazem** and created by **Dylan Fresco**, Taous Claire Khazem and Iraqi Voices program participants, *Birds Sing Differently Here* will play for three performances only—October 27 and 28 at 7:30 p.m. and October 30 at 1 p.m.—in the Dowling Studio. As part of the Level Nine Series to ensure greater access for audiences, all tickets for *Birds Sing Differently Here* are \$9 (general admission) and are on sale now through the Guthrie Box Office at 612.377.2224, toll-free 877.44.STAGE and online at guthrietheater.org.

Based on the true stories of 12 Iraqi-Minnesotan refugees and immigrants, *Birds Sing Differently Here* is an original theater piece which weaves together tales of sweetness, sorrow, grief and discovery. Inventively performed in both English and Arabic, participants of the Iraqi Voices program come together with a cast of professional actors to tell “the story of a thousand olive pits and seven thousand praises, tokens of love and a chilling escape from the desert of death.” *Birds Sing Differently Here* shares the ache of endings and the fullness of new opportunity.

In conjunction with the performance, patrons will be able to engage with the work from the Iraqi Voices program, a collaborative art lab that gives Iraqi immigrants and refugees in Minnesota a platform to share their stories through bookmaking and documentary filmmaking.

In March 2017, the 12 Iraqi-Minnesotan immigrants and refugees came together under the direction of theater artists Taous Claire Khazem and Dylan Fresco to create an original and innovative theater performance based on their personal stories. They continued an extensive creative process for eight weeks, learning ensemble work and participating in storytelling and theater exercises. Rehearsals for the show began in July, with a workshop version of *Birds Sing Differently Here* on stage at Dreamland Arts in August.

Birds Sing Differently Here is directed by Khazem and created by Fresco, Khazem and the Iraqi Voices program participants: **Nada Alabbasi, Sumaya Ameen, Ali Alshammaa, Hannaa Al-Azzawi, Mazin Chilab, Abdullah Flaija, Salwa Mohialdeen, Arwa Naji, Dhifaf Sarhan, Ahmed Al Shaikhli, Bahaa Al Shaikhli and Rawan Al Shaikhli.**

The diverse intergenerational cast includes six Iraqi community members (Nada Alabbasi, Ali Alshammaa, Hannaa Al-Azzawi, Adel Naji, Ahmed Al Shaikhli and Bahaa Al Shaikhli) and four professional actors: **Ashawnti Ford, Dylan Fresco, Aamera Siddiqui and Mohammed Yabdri.** Together, they offer a window into the personal lives of those committed to creating bridges of communication, understanding and support between the people of Iraq and the United States.

The creative team for *Birds Sing Differently Here* includes **Andrea Gross** (Costume Designer), **Mike Wangen** (Lighting Designer), **Peter Morrow** (Sound Designer), **Bill Cottman** (Projection Designer), **Vanessa Healey** (Stage Manager) and **Cameron Quie** (Carpenter). The script is compiled and edited by **Dylan Fresco.**

Birds Sing Differently Here is part of the Guthrie's Level Nine Series, an initiative devoted to the creation of a theater that wrestles with urgent questions and inspires dynamic dialogue with its audience, expands the diversity of voices, visions and styles on its stages, and engages community members currently underserved by its work.

Programming in the Dowling Studio is supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Iraqi Voices 2017 is made possible in part by the Headwaters Foundation, and by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, and the Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

ABOUT THE IRAQI AND AMERICAN RECONCILIATION PROJECT

Founded in 2007, the Minneapolis-based Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project engages Iraqis and Americans in the arts, education, and cultural and professional exchanges in an effort to counter negative stereotypes, strengthen cultural awareness and understanding, and provide a platform for cross-cultural dialogue.

THE GUTHRIE THEATER (Joseph Haj, Artistic Director) was founded by Sir Tyrone Guthrie in 1963 and is an American center for theater performance, production, education and professional training, dedicated to producing the great works of dramatic literature and to cultivating the next generation of theater artists. Under Haj's leadership, the Guthrie is guided by four core values: Artistic Excellence; Community; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and Fiscal Responsibility. The Guthrie produces a mix of classic and contemporary plays on three stages and continues to set a national standard for excellence in theatrical production and performance, serving nearly 400,000 patrons annually. In 2006, the Guthrie opened a new home, designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Jean Nouvel, located on the banks of the Mississippi River in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Open to the public year-round, it houses three state-of-the-art stages, production facilities, classrooms, full-service restaurants and dramatic public lobbies. guthrietheater.org

###