



December 9, 2019
Press release #1792

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information contact:
Marita Meinerts Albinson,
612.225.6142
maritaa@guthrietheater.org

Allie McCurnin, 612.225.6196
alliem@guthrietheater.org

GUTHRIE THEATER PRESENTS THE MIDWEST PREMIERE OF
HEATHER RAFFO'S AWARD-WINNING PLAY *NOURA*,
DIRECTED BY TAIBI MAGAR ON THE McGUIRE PROSCENIUM STAGE

“One of the finest new plays I’ve ever reviewed.
Full of unexpected revelations and flashes of sudden, blinding illumination.”
– Terry Teachout, *The Wall Street Journal*

(*Minneapolis/St. Paul*) — The Guthrie Theater (Joseph Haj, artistic director) today announced the cast and creative team for the compelling play *Noura*, written by playwright/actor **Heather Raffo** and directed by **Taibi Magar**, which centers on a family of Iraqi immigrants in New York City adapting to their new identities as U.S. citizens. *Noura* premiered at Shakespeare Theatre Company in 2018 with Raffo in the

title role. An exploration of motherhood, marriage and identity in modern America, this brilliant new work received the prestigious Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding Original New Play as part of the 2019 Helen Hayes Awards.

Noura will run January 11 – February 16, 2020, on the McGuire Proscenium Stage. Single tickets start at \$15 for preview performances (January 11–16) and regular tickets start at \$25. Tickets are on sale now through the Box Office at 612.377.2224, 1.877.44.STAGE (toll-free) or online at guthrietheater.org. Post-play discussions and access services (ASL-interpreted, audio-described and open-captioned performances) are available on select dates and by request.

It's Christmas Eve in New York City, and Noura — a newly minted U.S. citizen — is preparing to host an Iraqi meal and growing more homesick by the minute. Her husband and son have fully embraced their American names and identities, but Noura feels restless and displaced. Even so, she eagerly welcomes her dinner guests until secrets are revealed and the evening begins to unravel.

Raffo, whose mother is American and father is Iraqi, often draws on her personal background to influence her work. *Noura* developed out of a series of workshops Raffo led with Arab American women responding to Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Built loosely on the structure of Ibsen's play, *Noura* explores many of the same themes. Much like Nora Helmer, Noura weighs cultural and societal expectations against her own personal needs and desires.

"Through the lens of a family of Iraqi immigrants, *Noura* explores what it means to be an American," Raffo recently said. "It's a story about modern marriage and motherhood, and at its heart, it's about how we balance the pull of rugged individualism with the call to purpose, community and belonging."

Raffo and Magar often explore cultural identity through theater. The Guthrie previously produced Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire* in the Dowling Studio during the 2007–2008 Season, and Magar directed Danai Gurira's *Familiar* on the McGuire Proscenium Stage during the 2017–2018 Season.

The Guthrie's production of *Noura* will utilize a cultural consultant throughout the rehearsal process in partnership with the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project. IARP creates bridges of communication, understanding and support between Americans and Iraqis in response to decades of sanctions, war and occupation. IARP's original theater piece *Birds Sing Differently Here*, based on the true stories of 12 Iraqi Minnesotan refugees and immigrants, was presented in the Dowling Studio in 2017.

www.reconciliationproject.org

Related to *Noura*, the Guthrie will host an In Conversation event on January 26, 2020, to celebrate and create dialogue around local, national and international Arab artistry. The evening will include a panel discussion with Artistic Director Joseph Haj and artists from New Arab American Theater Works' production of *Zafira and the Resistance* (presented by the Guthrie in October 2019), the Guthrie's production of *Noura*, Remote Theater Project's production of *Grey Rock* and Hanane Hajj Ali's *Jogging*. Panelists and ticketing information will be announced at a later date.

The cast of *Noura* includes **Aarya Batchu** (Guthrie: debut) as Yazen (alternate performances), **Gamze Ceylan** (Guthrie: debut) as Noura, **Layan Elwazani** (Guthrie: debut) as Maryam, **Fajer Kaisi** (Guthrie: debut) as Tareq, **Akshay Krishna** (Guthrie: debut) as Yazen (alternate performances) and **Kal Naga** (Guthrie: debut) as Rafa'a.

The creative team for *Noura* includes **Taibi Magar** (director), **Matt Saunders** (scenic designer), **Dina El-Aziz** (costume designer), **Reza Behjat** (lighting designer), **Sinan Refik Zafar** (sound designer/composer), **Carla Steen** (resident dramaturg), **Keely Wolter** (voice and dialect coach), **Aaron Preusse** (resident fight director), **Jennifer Liestman** (resident casting director), **Katie Hawkinson** (stage manager), **Olivia Louise Tree Plath** (assistant stage manager), **Shaymaa Hasan** (cultural consultant) and **Taous Claire Khazem** (assistant director).

Heather Raffo (playwright) is an award-winning playwright and actor who was the solo writer and performer of the international and off-Broadway hit *9 Parts of Desire*, which bridged her Iraqi and American roots and received countless awards and nominations, including the Lucille Lortel Award,

Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and Marian Seldes-Garson Kanin Fellowship. She also authored the libretto for the opera *Fallujah*, which was commissioned by the Annenberg Foundation and City Opera Vancouver.

Raffo received her B.A. in English from the University of Michigan and her M.F.A. in Acting Performance from the University of San Diego. She has taught and performed at dozens of universities and arts centers in the U.S. and around the world, engaging audiences in the politics and arts of Iraq and sharing her own experience as an Iraqi American.

Taibi Magar (director) is an Egyptian American, Obie-winning director based in New York and a graduate of the Brown University/Trinity Rep M.F.A. program. She is committed to both classics and new work that wrestle with complicated humanistic and political questions evoked by potent characters and poetic language.

In New York, Magar has directed and developed work for *Ars Nova* (*Underground Railroad Game*, a *New York Times* and Tony Awards Critics' Pick), The Foundry Theatre, Theatre for a New Audience and WP Theater. She is an alumnus of the Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab and the recipient of a Stephen Sondheim Fellowship, Oregon Shakespeare Festival Fellowship, Public Theater Shakespeare Fellowship and Theatre for a New Audience Actors and Directors Project Fellowship. Regionally, she has directed and developed work at Alley Theatre, Trinity Rep, Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, Shakespeare & Company, Oregon Shakespeare Festival and many academic institutions, including The Juilliard School, Fordham University and New York University.

This production of *Noura* is sponsored by Ameriprise Financial.

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 cultivating the next generation of theater artists. Under Haj's leadership, the Guthrie is guided by four core values: Artistic Excellence; Community; Equity, Diversity 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 more than 350,000 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

###