

## WHO'S WHO



**LUBANA AL QUNTAR** was born in Damascus, Syria to a family of traditional singers. A descendant of famous Syrian singer, Amal Al Atrash, and renowned composer and singer, Farid Al Atrash, Lubana grew up with an ear and a voice for music. She trained in classical international conservatories under the supervision of world-renowned opera singers such as Galina Khaldieva, Kenneth Woollam, and Maestra Mya Besselink. She has taken master classes with world-famous opera singers, namely Maestro Daniel Barenboim, Maestro Ricardo Mutti, and Sara Beaker. As a coloratura soprano, Lubana's rare and dramatic voice breathes life into the wide repertoire she sings in folk, traditional Syriac and Aramaic languages, pop, and classical opera. Lubana's ability to variate between Arabic and Western techniques as a soloist in opera is second to none. In 1995, Lubana won the prestigious title of the First Arab Opera Singer from Syria, receiving international fame and recognition. In 1996, she won the first audience prize and fourth overall prize in a Belgrade International Singing Competition. In 2000, she was awarded fifth prize at the The Queen Elizabeth Singing Competition, Brussels, Belgium. Since 1996, she has toured internationally in over 10 countries in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and North America. Between 2006 and 2012, she served at the Syrian National Conservatory as the Voice Chair for the Department of Opera Singing. While in that capacity, she founded and launched the Department of Classical Arabic Singing allowing students to study both Western and Arabic forms together for the very first time. Represented by MAP talent agency, Lubana continues to share her craft to promote and preserve ancient Syrian cultural heritage.



**ANDREA ASSAF** is a poet, playwright, director, performer, and cultural organizer. She is the founding Artistic and Executive Director of Art2Action Inc., and Co-Director/National Coordinator of the National Institute for Directing & Ensemble Creation in partnership with Pangea World Theater. Her seminal work, *Eleven Reflections on September*, was commissioned by Pangea and has been featured at The Carver Community Cultural Center, the National Asian American Theatre Festival at OSF (produced by CAATA), La MaMa ETC, The Apollo Theatre, The Kennedy Center, and internationally. She is currently re-creating the project as a multi-city, community-engaged series titled *Eleven Reflections on the Nation*. Awards include: 2021 Silk Road Film Awards Cannes (Director, Best Experimental Feature), 2020 Pushcart Prize Nomination, 2019 NEFA National Theatre Project, 2019 & 2011 NPN Creation Fund Commission, 2017 Finalist for the Freedom Plow Award for Poetry & Activism, 2010 Princess Grace Award/Gant Gaither Theater Award for Directing, and more. Andrea has a master's degree in Performance Studies and a BFA in Acting, both from NYU. She currently serves on the Board of the Consortium of Asian American Theatres & Artists (CAATA), Alternate ROOTS, and is a founding Steering Committee member of the Middle Eastern/North African Theatre-Makers Alliance (MENATMA).



**JENNIFER JEAN'S** poetry collections include *VOZ*, *Object Lesson*, and *The Fool*. Her teaching resource book is *Object Lesson: a Guide to Writing Poetry*. Her poems and co-translations have appeared in *POETRY Magazine*, *Rattle*, *The Common*, *Waxwing*, *Terrain*, *On the Seawall*, and elsewhere. She's received honors, residencies, and fellowships from the Kenyon Review Writers Workshop, the Academy of American Poets, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, DISQUIET/Dzanc Books, the Kolkata International Poetry Festival, and the Women's Federation for World Peace. Jennifer is an organizer, and co-translator of Arabic poetry, for the Her Story Is collective—for which she is developing the bilingual anthology *Other Paths for Sharazad Contemporary Poetry by Arab Women*. She edits translations for *Consequence Forum* and is the senior program manager of 24PearlStreet, the Fine Arts Work Center's online writing program.



**LUJAIN JO** is an Iraqi filmmaker, singer, and multidisciplinary artist. Most of her work documents the living world and its varied elements through a poetic and meditative perspective, with the aim of reconsidering destructive power dynamics. Her first feature film "Rahhala" is an experimental audio visual exploration of humanity's dominance and exploitation of different beings. As part of her strong interest in the manifestation of movement in life, her work included collaboration with musicians and dancers such as Michaela De Prince, Khansa, Postcards, and other alternative artists in Lebanon. Over the past decade, Lujain has worked with multiple media platforms including The Associated Press, Megaphone News, the Anti-Racism Movement, Khateera, and Amnesty International on issues related to social movements, migrant workers, police brutality, and feminism.

## WHO'S WHO (cont.)



**MAHJABIN KHANZADA** was born and raised in Kabul, Afghanistan. At the age of 18, she began working as an interpreter for the U.S. Army in Kabul. On August 9th, 2021, Mahjabin was put on an emergency evacuation flight to the US, 6 days later the Taliban controlled all of Afghanistan. Today, Mahjabin lives with her family in the Bay Area- together they are working hard to rebuild their lives with courage and resilience. Mahjabin is grateful to be able to share her story so more people can learn about the realities of what is happening to the Afghan community, both in Afghanistan, and abroad.



**HANAA MOHAMMED** is a poet and academic critic who holds a Ph.D. in Arabic literature and a Sharjah Award for Arab Creativity in Literary Criticism 2017. She is a professor and trainer in creative writing, such as poetry, short stories, and novels. Hanna writes in the field of poetry, criticism, short story, and children's literature and has participated in poetry festivals and critical conferences across Iraq, Tunisia, UAE, and Germany.



**ELHAM NASSER AL-ZUBAIDY** is a visual artist and the daughter of the late well-known Iraqi visual artist Nasser Al-Zabedy. She graduated from the Fine Arts Institute in Basra, Iraq, in 1984. After Elham worked extensively with local and international civil society organizations and noticed that initiatives mainly concerned widows and divorced women, she saw a need to support women in the cultural, artistic, and media fields in Iraq. Elham started the Lotus Cultural Women's League in 2016 to do just that. Today, it is a cultural NGO with a mission to provide training, advocacy, cultural promotion, and psycho-social support for Iraqi women.



**LETTA NEELY**, originally from Indianapolis, Indiana, is a Black lesbian playwright, performer, poet, mother, teacher and activist who has been involved in liberation movements all her life. Her work focuses on connections and intersections.



**LAYLE OMERAN** is a music artist currently based in Berkeley, CA. A student of Arabic music, Layle has studied the Arabic oud with many renowned teachers and performs locally and at times regionally as an oudist and as a singer. Layle is a lead singer and teacher in the Bay Area Arabic Music Ensemble, Aswat, and a musician in several community projects. With interests in the intersections of social justice, community music, and healing work, Layle's work explores narratives around identity and experience. Layle is also a Development Coordinator at the East Bay Meditation Center in Oakland, CA. Follow Layle on Instagram @laylomer



**POLINA SMITH** founded Crescent Moon Theater Productions (CMT) with the mission of creating original and thought-provoking new work that uplifts stories too often overlooked and aims to demonstrate art's powerful ability to inspire social and personal change. CMT's most recent production, 'Hold On, When Everything Changes in a Flash,' featured four young adults sharing their lived refugee experiences and what it means to now call the US home.  
[www.crescentmoontheaterproductions.com](http://www.crescentmoontheaterproductions.com)

## WHO'S WHO (cont.)



**MARJAN VAHDAT** was born in 1976 and started music by taking piano lessons and also Persian singing with different masters. Marjan has developed her personal style based on the Persian vocal tradition of classical and folk music, with a contemporary expression, with a special interest in the styles from different regions in Iran for more than two decades. She has been taking part in many international festivals and concerts in the world. She has worked with many composers in Iran, Europe, and the US. She has always searched for ways to make her music relevant to the present world. she took Persian music and poetry to new heights in her expression. Following her participation in the album Lullabies from the Axis of Evil (2004), Marjan together with her sister Mahsa started a long-lasting collaboration with the Norwegian record label Kirkelig Kulturverksted (KKV) and its leader Erik Hillestad who has produced most of their albums. This collaboration led to a worldwide release of a series of award-winning and critically acclaimed records and a number of tours and concerts in many countries. She has a history of collaboration with "Grotowski Institute" "Teatr ZAR" for almost ten years in her work.



**THAWRA YOUSIF YAQOUB** holds a Ph.D. in theatrical arts from the College of Fine Arts in Baghdad and works as a Project Manager with the Basra-based Lotus Women Cultural League. She works on projects related to empowering women, stopping violence against women, and preserving Afro-Iraqi heritage in Basra. She is one of the founding members of the Regional Network for Development and Anti-Racism in North Africa and the Middle East. She is a community leader, educator, and retired professor of theater.

## ACTORS



**RAHAF ABUOBEID** is a Syrian American language learner and teacher. She started theater in 2019. She loves exploring her voice, creating stories, and the experiences she gets to share on stage. Rahaf is also a modern and contemporary dancer, she has performed at Brava theater last year for "a day in Paris" with other 165 great dancers of all ages. Some of the things she likes to do besides dancing and theater are wood carving, reading, playing her guitar and Ukulele, writing poems, traveling, and learning new languages while building language maps.



**ALAA IBRAHIM** received her PhD in Neuroscience back in 2018 from Germany. She moved to the US in 2019 for her postdoctoral training at UCSF and she currently works as an R&D research scientist in a pharmaceutical company in the Bay area. When she isn't in the lab Alaa enjoys working with Aswat ensemble to learn percussion and singing! She also enjoys doing yoga, hiking and cooking for family and friends.



**NIDA KHALIL** is a Palestinian American, originally from Lifta, Palestine and now living in Oakland, CA. She is a Community School Program Manager for Oakland Unified School District. In addition, Nida is a self-taught international mosaic artist and a voice-over artist, who has acted in several Brava Theatre and Golden Thread Productions. She holds an undergraduate degree in English Literature & Education from San Francisco State University and a graduate degree in Social Work from California State University, East Bay. Nida is a social justice advocate, equity warrior, and lifelong learner. She was awarded the 2018 Local Hero Award by the City of Oakland, was a keynote speaker for the My Red Shoes 2019 conference, and was named a 2022 nominee for the Care Warrior award.