

Golden Thread Productions Proudly Presents
World Premiere



THE FIFTH STRING



ZIRYAB'S PASSAGE TO CORDOBA

May 2-18, 2014

Oakland & San Francisco



www.goldenthread.org

FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



It is quite a challenge to write, direct and produce a world premiere all at once. It would have been literally impossible to accomplish this without the boundless talent, generosity and excellence of the cast, the musicians and my partners in crime: Mokhtar Paki and Faraz Minooei. What a privilege to be surrounded by these fantastic artists. I feel grateful every day I walk into a room full of creativity and realize that it is just another day at the office.

The office of course also includes our dedicated staff who on a daily basis balance strategic, operational and artistic challenges. A big shout out to Michelle, Cassie, Fatima, Evren and Navid!

Golden Thread Productions is entering a new phase. In two years, we will celebrate our twentieth anniversary. Since our founding in 1996, we have developed and produced over a hundred plays from and about the Middle East, supported the careers of numerous Middle Eastern American artists, and created a space for dialogue and community engagement. In 2013, the company with community input completed a five-year strategic plan that identified three major areas of focus: space development, building a robust audience and artist community, and leading deeper dialogues locally, nationally and internationally. To accomplish these goals, the Board of Trustees has committed to doubling the organization's budget over the next five years by increasing earned and contributed revenue. Increased revenue will support strengthening of infrastructure: growing staff and developing a new space. We will be leaving Z Space at the end of 2014 for new digs yet to be identified.

You are the backbone of Golden Thread. Without your support we would not have lasted 18 years. Thank you for believing in our vision and for helping us make it a reality. As we take the next steps towards our brilliant future together, I feel heartened by your presence here tonight. Find me or any of our staff in the lobby and tell us what you think of the play, how you feel about Golden Thread and our path ahead. We want to hear from you.

You are the fifth string that completes us!

Torange Yeghiazarian

Golden Thread Productions Proudly Presents
Commissioned by the Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California
Presented in Partnership with Brava Theater Center

World Premiere

THE FIFTH STRING

ZIRYAB'S PASSAGE TO CORDOBA

Writer & Director Torange Yeghiazarian
Composer & Music Director Faraz Minooei
Set, Costume & Key Art Design Mokhtar Paki
Musicians Gari Haggerty, Oud
..... Ali Bazyar, Percussion

Acting Ensemble: Munaf Alsafi, Camila Betancourt Ascencio, Jamie Coventry, Deborah Eliezer, Majd Murad, Maruf Noyoft, Naima Shalhoub

Production Team

Production Stage Manager Gregg Hood
Assistant Stage Manager Yara Badday
Costume Manager Michelle Mulholland
Wardrobe Team Melissa Kaitlyn Carter, Dorothy Martinez,
..... Ninva Warda
Technical Director Aaron Niles
Scenic Painting Mokhtar Paki
Set Build Support Jim Lucas & Christopher Tse
Sound & Lighting Support Alejandro Acosta

Outreach Cassie Garcia
Graphic Design Navid G. Maghami
Promotional Video Production Haleh Hatami
Box Office Michelle Mulholland

The Fifth String: Ziryab's Passage to Cordoba is made possible in part by generous contributions from the California Arts Council, East Bay Foundation, One Nation Bay Area, and The Zellerbach Family Foundation. Golden Thread Productions is grateful for operational support from Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, the San Francisco Arts Commission and the Hewlett Foundation. This production would not be possible without the support of numerous individuals who contributed to the commission fund by the Islamic Cultural Center and Golden Thread's spring fundraising campaign.



CAST OF CHARACTERS AND SCENES

- Prologue Ensemble

1. It's All in the Name – The year is 802 and Baghdad is the center of the world. The oud masters compete for Caliph Harun Al Rashid's attention but it's young Ziryab who garners his praise.

Aliah, Ziryab's Daughter Camila Betancourt Ascencio
..... Naima Shalhoub & Deborah Eliezer
Caliph Harun Al Rashid Jamie Coventry
Jafar Barmaki, the Vezir Maruf Noyoft
Abu Nuwas, the Court Jester Majd Murad
Ishaq Mawsili, Oud Master Munaf Alsafi
Ibrahim Mahdi, Oud Master Maruf Noyoft
Ziryab Naima Shalhoub
Court Dignitaries & Servers Ensemble

2. Baghdad Falling – Harun Al Rashid's son, Ma'mun usurps power from his brother and Ziryab is forced to leave his home, Baghdad.

Al Tabari, the Al Jazeera Reporter Majd Murad
Ma'mun Deborah Eliezer
Ziryab Naima Shalhoub
People of Baghdad Ensemble

3. The Wild Wild West – Ziryab stays in Tunis for ten years then leaves for Cordoba via Algeciras, the port city by Gibraltar where he is greeted by Abu Nasr Mansur, a Jewish merchant, not to be confused with the 11th-century Muslim scholar by the same name!

Aliah, Ziryab's Daughter Camila Betancourt Ascencio
Berber Tribe Ensemble
Court Opinion-leaders Ensemble
Ziryab Naima Shalhoub & Munaf Alsafi
Abu Nasr Mansur, Merchant Majd Murad

4. Network of Like-minded Allies – Ziryab meets the Emir Abdel Rahman II as he mourns the death of his father whose ancestors were killed by the Abbasids, the usurpers of the throne who moved the capital from Damascus to Baghdad.

Emir Abdel Rahman II Jamie Coventry
Ziryab Munaf Alsafi

5. Art Makes Society – Ziryab at the height of his fame and popularity in Cordoba. His daughter, Aliah grows up and marries the nobleman, Mohammed Ibn Rostam.

Aliah, Ziryab's Daughter Naima Shalhoub
 Ziryab Munaf Alsafi
 Emir Abdel Rahman II Jamie Coventry
 Mohammed Ibn Rostam Maruf Noyoft
 Children, Fashion Models Ensemble
 Wedding Guests, Stylists

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6. The Conservatory – Aliah leads a class at the conservatory of music established by Ziryab.

Aliah, Ziryab's Daughter Deborah Eliezer
 Students Ensemble
 Ziryab Munaf Alsafi

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7. The Legacy of a Father – Ziryab passes on and Aliah recalls his final days.

Aliah, Ziryab's Daughter Camila Betancourt Ascencio
 Naima Shalhoub
 Deborah Eliezer

– Finalé Ensemble

TIMELINE OF ZIRYAB'S LIFE

- 711 AD** — Tariq Ibn Ziyad defeats the last Visigoth King Roderic paving the way for the Muslim takeover of the Iberian Peninsula
- 750** — The Abbasids defeat the Umayyads in Damascus
- 754** — The Abbasids move the capital from Damascus to Baghdad
- 755** — Abdel Rahman I arrives in Cordoba after his entire family is massacred in Damascus
- 789** — Ziryab is born
- 786–809** — Harun Al Rashid's reign in Baghdad
- 813** — Ma'mun, Harun Al Rashid's son deposes his brother Amin in Baghdad
- 813** — Ziryab leaves Baghdad
- 823** — Ziryab arrives in Cordoba
- 822–852** — Abdel Rahman II rules Cordoba
- 857** — Ziryab dies
- 912–929** — Abdel Rahman III takes Cordoba to its height

THE MAKING OF THE FIFTH STRING

The Fifth String is based on actual historical facts and figures. But as any student of history will quickly point out, one historian's fact is another one's fiction. Reading ancient history books, I am always struck by how story-like they are. Al Tabari, one of the major historians of the Golden Age of Islam is part storyteller, part moralist, and part chronicler. In a way, One Thousand and One Nights, aka The Arabian Nights is as much a history book as any. It chronicles the lives of ordinary people in addition to kings, noble men and women, and the jinn, of course. This play is told in this tradition. While much of it is historically accurate, we embrace the uncertainties and there are a number of ruptures of time and place—all in the service of storytelling.

Our story is set at the end of the first Millennium, which marks the Muslim expansion into Asia, North Africa and Europe, a time replete with tales of heroism, grandeur and unprecedented achievements—except Western European and thus American history books refer to this period as the “Dark Ages.”

Ziryab lived during those years. We know for certain that he was a very talented young musician in Baghdad studying under the one and only oud master, Ishaq Mawsili, Caliph Harun Al Rashid's premiere court musician. Some say Mawsili was jealous of Ziryab's skills and expelled him; others site political upheaval as the cause for Ziryab's departure from Baghdad.

One undisputed fact about Ziryab's life however is the fifth string. In nearly every document about Ziryab's life, he is credited with adding a fifth string to the oud and thus expanding its musical range. Another undisputed fact is that Ziryab transported the art and culture of Baghdad to Cordoba in Spain, where he established a conservatory of music as well as an institute of beauty and culture. He had many children, anywhere from five to thirteen, depending on whose account one reads. His daughter, Aliah directed Ziryab's music conservatory after his death.

There is no documentation of the actual music created or performed by Ziryab. The earliest references to musical conventions and theories of the time are by Farabi in his masterpiece, The Great Book of Music, written less than a century after Ziryab's death. The terminology used in the Conservatory scene is directly taken from Farabi's manuscript. But the music created for the play, based on classical Persian, Arabic and Andalusian music, is more inspired by the life and work of Ziryab, not based on any extant notations.

Five books served as the main resource for this play and I would highly recommend them for further reading:

The Arabian Nights translated by Husain Haddawy,
When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World by Hugh Kennedy
Ornament of the World by Maria Rosa Menocal
A History of the Arab Peoples by Albert Hourani
Iran in Spain by Shojaeldin Shafa, translated by Mehdi Semsar

Torance Yeghiazarian

Islam 101

A Golden Thread Initiative in Partnership with the Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California

To positively shift America's perception of Islam, in 2010 Golden Thread launched Islam 101, an initiative to develop and tour dynamic and colorful performances inspired by Islamic art and philosophy. Through this work, we also reach out to Muslim communities with thoughtful performances that are identity-affirming. By bringing both communities together at performances, we create opportunities for interaction and dialogue among individuals that may otherwise rarely interact in the same cultural setting. In 2011, the first play in the series, Rumi X 7 = Tales from the Masnavi by Hafiz Karmali premiered at the Islamic Cultural Center. The second play in the series, The Fifth String: Ziryab's Passage to Cordoba is based on the colorful character and life of Ziryab, the 9th-century musician and cultural guru. The third and final play in the series will explore the Sciences: mathematics, medicine, astronomy and chemistry.

WHO'S WHO



Ali Bazyar (Percussion) – Born in 1980 Tehran, Iran, Ali began his Tombak training under master Bakhtiari at nine years of age. Ali also trained with Master Bahman Rajabi and Mohammad Tayebi. Ali performed with different ensembles in Iran before leaving the country in 2004. After resettling in the US, he began experimenting with other world percussions such as Cajon, Djembe, and Udu. Ali Bazyar currently resides in San Francisco Bay Area. He is engaged and is collaborating as a versatile percussionist with various established musicians and bands while continuing academic pursuit in music.



Gari Haggerty (Oud) – Gari Hegedus has been performing traditional music from Ireland, Scotland, France, Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa for the past twenty years. Gari performs on a wide range of traditional instruments including: Oud, violin, Turkish Saz, Yayli Tambor, Irish pennywhistle, Mandocello and flute. He began devoting his life to music with the study of Celtic and Bretagne music. From there he was led eastward into the intense practice and performance of Turkish classical and Mevlevi ceremonial music. He toured with the Mevlevi Dervish Order of America for several years, and continues to participate in Turkish ceremonial and devotional gatherings around the country. A highly sought after recording and performing artist, Gari's repertoire and playing styles range from Turkey and Greece into the Arab lands, Iran and India. Gari's main instruments are the oud, violin, saz and mandocello, yet he began his musical career with fiddle and mandolin, and had devoted a decade of his life to the violin before learning of his ancestral Hungarian name, Hegedus, meaning "violinist." As a composer and performer, Gari has developed the art of taksim (improvisation) to a deeply soulful level for which he has become highly recognized.



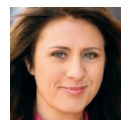
Munaf Alsafi (Ensemble) is a San Francisco-Bay Area actor and musician. Born in Iraq but raised in the deep south of the United States, delta blues influenced his music and his love of folklore. He moved to the bay area in 1992 and has spent many years in South America, North Africa, Europe, and the Middle East living, traveling, and learning the music and instruments of those regions. As an actor, Munaf has performed in several plays including performances in ReOrient Festival 2012, *Burqavaganza*, *Ten Acrobats*, *Aftermath*, and *Urge For Going*.



Camila Betancourt Ascencio (Ensemble) was most recently seen as Jamila in Golden Thread's production of *Urge for Going*. She trained at Stella Adler Studio in New York. She is so excited and grateful to be a part of this new and exciting show. Some past roles include Sister Helen (*Dead Man Walking*), Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*), Rosie (*Really Rosie*) and Florence (*Female Odd Couple*). Camila speaks four languages and in her spare time she enjoys playing guitar, singing, dancing and learning as much as she can. She is so grateful for the wonderful family and friends in her life.



Jamie Coventry (Ensemble) – After being raised in central California by a family of eccentrics, Jamie studied theatre arts in Santa Fe, music in San Luis Obispo and education in San Francisco. Clown being the next logical step, Jamie completed two years of study at the Clown Conservatory at San Francisco Circus Center. Jamie has traveled the globe performing and teaching music, theater, and clown. He has worked with Flynn Creek Circus, Circus of Sound, New Pickle Circus, Sweet Can Circus, Circus Bella, The Pickle's School Tour, and is one half of the award winning clown duet, Coventry and Kaluza. He is also the co-creator of a band that hearkens back to the days of vaudeville, the harmonica trio, Tin Sandwich.



Deborah Eliezer (Ensemble) is delighted to return to Golden Thread. She last appeared in *Ecstasy | a waterfable* and previously performed in *Karima's City* which represented the U.S. in the '04 Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre. Deborah is currently the Associate Artistic Director of foolsFURY Theater. Recent foolsFURY performances include *The Seeing Place*, *Port Out, Starboard Home* by Sheila Callaghan (SF & NYC), *All You Can Eat, Monster in the Dark*, and *The Devil on All Sides* (SF & NYC). She has also worked with Woman's Will, The Puppet Players, Marin Shakespeare Company & Antenna Theater. As a pro voiceover, her voice can be heard on The Sims video games, animations, toys or radio ads. She holds a B.A. Cum Laude from SFSU and is a Certified Sound, Voice Movement Healing Arts Practitioner. www.deboraheliezer.com.

Gregg Hood (Production Stage Manager) has served as the Resident Production Stage Manager with the African-American Shakespeare Company for four years. Mr. Hood's recent Bay Area Production Stage Management work has been with PBT for Carlos Carvajal's *Nutcracker*, foolsFury for *Port Out, Starboard Home* at Z Space and La MaMa, Mugwumpin for *Future Motive Power* at the Old Mint, ODC, UPT, Fracture a Femur, WCT and over 250 other corporate clients. A Native of Miami, Gregg is a graduate of San Francisco State University's Theatre Arts Program and has served as the Acting Director of Schools and Theatre Arts instructor for AIM Schools in Oakland.



Faraz Minooei (Composer & Music Director) was born in Tehran and began playing santur at the young age of nine. While studying with Behnam Mehrabi, he discovered a deep spiritual desire to study music, seeing music as an "unexplainable souvenir from the eternal truth". Faraz received his B.A. from San Francisco State University in 2008 as a Nagle Scholar and the first World/Jazz music major with santur as his primary instrument! As a full-time musician, Faraz is a performer, composer, ethno-musicologist and teacher. He views studying music as a never-ending mission. In view of that, he has also had the good fortune to study with masters such as M. R. Lotfi, H. Omoumi, Royal Hartigan, Hafez

Modirzadeh, Michael Dessen, Kojiro Umezaki and Christopher Dobrian. Since 2006, he has lectured and performed at many universities including SFSU, UCI, UCLA, UCSC Stanford University and at the Society of Ethnomusicology. He has performed with noted ensembles in the United States, among which was his collaboration in 2009 with Yo Yo Ma and Kayhan Kalhor in the Silk Road Ensemble (for the 50th anniversary of the Lincoln Center) and the collaboration as a composer and santur player with the film director Bahram Beyzaie for the play "Jana & Baladour". Recipient of numerous scholarships and grants, he earned his Masters of Fine Arts degree in music with emphasis in Integrated Composition, Improvisation, and Technology from the University of California in Irvine. His thesis, "Abstracting" Iranian Classical Music, challenges the traditional practice of Iranian Classical Music to introduce innovative and transformative functions of the music in contemporary society.



Majd Murad (Ensemble) is very excited to join Golden Thread for the production of *The Fifth String* after being involved in the workshop this summer. He is a recent graduate of the Professional Training Program at Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre where he explored mask, clown, and melodrama in an ensemble-based setting. His recent work includes an acclaimed one-man show, *Blood Fruit* about how he came out to his Catholic-Iraqi family. Visit majdmurad.com for more information on his projects. Majd is also an aspiring mask maker specializing in leather. Check out his work on artemasks.com.



Maruf Noyoft (Ensemble) is a native of Tajikistan. He holds BA degree in music from Tajikistan's University of Art and Culture. Since childhood Maruf has had a love of music, theater and film. Maruf first began acting for Tajik TV and has since transitioned to his working behind the camera as a freelance filmmaker. Maruf first worked with Golden Thread in *Rumi X 7* and admires Golden Thread's pursuit to bring to the stage his shared culture to American audiences.



Mokhtar Paki (Production Designer) is a Bay Area visual artist, art teacher, and sometimes architectural designer. In 2012, Mokhtar designed doz-

ens of puppets for the shadow-play, *Jana and Baladoor*, written and directed by Bahram Beyzaie. Mokhtar's visual art has been shown at the Persian Center, Canessa Gallery, Intersection for The Arts, and Oliver Gallery. His caricatures and illustrations have appeared in local as well as European publications. Mokhtar has an MA in Creative Writing, and has published several short stories and articles. His novel *Shamayel-e-Mana* was published in Sweden and Iran. His second novel, *Shahzad the Silent* is under publication.



Naima Shalhoub (Ensemble) is a songstress, musician and educator who is thrilled to be making her Golden Thread debut in *The Fifth String*. After

receiving her M.A. in Postcolonial Anthropology in San Francisco, Naima turned her focus toward music and song as vessels for storytelling, healing and movement building. Believing in the power of sharing messages from the soul through sound, Shalhoub immersed herself in her cultural roots in Lebanon and started writing her own music embracing both joy and sorrow, and the spaces between. In 2010 she began performing her music in the Bay Area, getting featured on radio stations and reputable venues, and began building fan bases internationally such as in Beirut and Kashmir. Naima recently released her first single and music video "herstory of soul," and is currently teaching, performing, and working on her debut full-length album.



Torange Yeghiazarian (Playwright & Director) is the Founding Artistic Director of Golden Thread Productions where her latest play, *444 Days*

premiered in 2013. Torange received a Gerbode-Hewlett Playwright Commission Award to write *Isfahan*, a new play about Duke Ellington Orchestra's tour to Iran, slated to premiere in 2015 as a co-production with the African American Shakespeare Company. Her short play *Call Me Mehdi* is included in the anthology "Salaam. Peace: An Anthology of Middle Eastern American Drama," TCG 2009. Torange directed the world premiere of *Stuck* by Amir Al-Azraki and *Voice Room* by Reza Soroor in ReOrient Festival 2012. Her articles on contemporary theatre in Iran have been published in *The Drama Review* (2012), *American Theatre Magazine* (2010), and *Theatre Bay Area Magazine* (2010). She has contributed to the *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures* and *Cambridge World Encyclopedia of Stage Actors*. Born in Iran and of Armenian heritage, Torange holds a Master's degree in Theatre Arts from San Francisco State University.



About Golden Thread Productions

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.

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Thank You

Farah Bullara, Edris Cooper, Jim Lucas, Raeshma Razvi, Azita Sayyah, Christopher Tse

Everyone at ICCNC and Brava!

Intersection for the Arts

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Coming Up Next at Golden Thread Productions

October 2014

Dear Armen (World Premiere)

Kamee Abrahamian

Mahmood

by Tara Grammy

February 2015

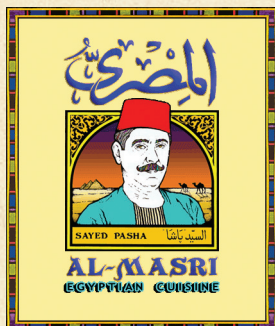
Isfahan (World Premiere)

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Shakespeare Company

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