

GOLDEN THREAD PRODUCTIONS WITH BRAVA! FOR WOMEN IN ARTS
PRESENT

WHAT DO THE WOMEN SAY? 2023

FIGHTERS & FOR FREEDOM

March 8, 2023 • Wednesday • 7 PM - 9 PM
Brava Theater Center, San Francisco & via Livestream

WELCOME Sahar Assaf, Executive Artistic Director

MY VOICE IS MY HOME Marjan Vahdat

WHERE DO YOU LIVE? an exchange between poets Jennifer Jean*
and Hanna Mohammed*
Reader: Rahaf Abuobeid

ONCE I WAS THERE a short film by Elham Al-Zabaidy*

ME AND KUNTA KINTE an exchange between writers Letta Neely*
and Thawra Yaqoub Mohhamed*

**EXCERPT FROM "HOLD ON,
WHEN EVERYTHING CHANGES
IN A FLASH"** Mahjabin Khanzada accompanied by Layle
Omeran on Oud directed by Polina Smith

**RAHHALA: HAYYA ALA
HAYYA - رَحَّالَه: هَيَّا عَلَى هَيَّا *** Lujain Jo

THIS WOMAN, THIS SEA A duet by Andrea Assaf and Lubana Al
Quntar

**11 REFLECTIONS:
SAN FRANCISCO** A devised performance on the theme of
"Fighters for Freedom", directed by
Andrea Assaf

with Lubana Al Quntar, Rahaf Abuobeid,
Alaa Ibrahim, Nida Khalil, Layle Omeran,
and Mahjabin Khanzada

CONVERSATION Marjan Vahdat, Jennifer Jean, Mahjabin
Khanzada, Layle Omeran, Polina Smith,
Amy Merrill*, Andrea Assaf and Lubana Al
Quntar with Sahar Assaf.

* members of *Her Story Is*, a collective of independent women artists from Iraq and the U.S.

* **Content Advisory:** This film contains graphic description of domestic violence.

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

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.

PROGRAM CREDITS

Rahaf Abuobeid, Actor
Alaa Ibrahim, Actor
Nida Khalil, Actor
April Ballesteros, Stage Manager
Miranda Erin Campbell, Stream Technician
Alba Lluch, Brava Production Manager
Drea Schwartz, Brava Technical Director
Carlie Mari, Brava Lead Sound Engineer
Arielle Flinkman, Brava Audio Deck Assistant
Angelica Rodriguez, Brava House manager
Elle Ghini, Lighting Technician
Jaime Serra dos Santos, A2/Deck Assistant

SPECIAL THANKS

Martha Richards
Mona Masri
Dina Zarif

GOLDEN THREAD STAFF

Sahar Assaf, Executive Artistic Director
Michelle Mulholland, Managing Director
Sheila Devitt, Marketing & Engagement Manager
Linda Maria Girón, Operations Associate
Soluna Espinosa Pieb, Development & Patron Services Associate
Wendy Reyes, Production Associate
Heather Rastovac Akbarzadeh, Program Manager, Golden Thread Fairytale Players
Navid G. Maghami, Art Director

GOLDEN THREAD BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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May Allam, Treasurer
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Founded in 1996, **Golden Thread Productions** is the first American theatre company devoted to the Middle East. Golden Thread produces passionate and provocative plays from and about the Middle East that celebrate the multiplicity of its perspectives and identities. Golden Thread is a developmental catalyst and vibrant artistic home to artists at various stages of their career. Golden Thread brings the Middle East to the American stage, creating treasured cultural experiences for audiences of all ages and backgrounds. Our headquarters are located on the ancestral home of the Ramaytush Ohlone. www.goldenthread.org



Brava! for Women in the Arts (co-presenter) celebrates over 30 years as a professional arts organization dedicated to cultivating the artistic expression of women, LGBTQIA, people of color, youth, & other underrepresented voices. www.brava.org

SPONSOR



WomenArts is dedicated to increasing the visibility of women artists in all art forms. SWAN Day (Support Women Artists Now) is an international holiday designed to showcase the power & diversity of women's creativity. www.womenarts.org

COMMUNITY PARTNERS



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Started in 1909 in the U.S., International Women's Day (March 8) is an occasion marked by women's groups around the world. This date is also commemorated at the United Nations and is designated in many countries as a national holiday. When women on all continents, often divided by national boundaries and by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic and political differences, come together to celebrate their Day, they can look back to a tradition that represents at least over a century of struggle for equality, justice, peace and development.