



World Premiere

**WE SWIM
WE TALK
WE WAR
GO TO**

by Mona Mansour
directed by Evren Odcikin

November 16-December 16, 2018
Potrero Stage, San Francisco

FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Welcome to our final event of 2018! We designed this season to elicit meaningful conversation. We wanted to tackle large issues that reflect the national debate. But like the best theatre and the best works of art, *We Swim* resonates deeply on a very personal level. I have two young cousins in the U.S. military. Both are the sweetest, kindest, most generous-hearted people I know. And every time I see their picture in uniform, it breaks my heart. Partly because I worry for their safety, but mostly because of what they represent in my mind: American foreign policy — which I find deeply problematic — and in particular, U.S. military presence in the Middle East for the past 30 years, which, in my mind, has been disastrous for the region.

So this is what happens. I look at someone I love and all I see is the politics they seemingly endorse by the choices they make. I am unable to discuss my true feelings on this subject with them — I am not as brave as Mona. Where does this leave us?

When I first read Mona's proposal for Middle East America: A National New Plays Initiative, I immediately thought about my cousins. Maybe if we watch this play together, I would be able to talk about my feelings, I thought. And as the play has evolved over the past four years, I have come to love and appreciate Mona's extraordinary talent even more, in that, she has created a play that through a deeply personal conversation examines some of our most deeply held values.

My deep gratitude goes to our Middle East America partners, The Lark in New York and Silk Road Rising in Chicago, for their investment in the development of this play. Their trust and support for what was merely an idea has resulted in a play that for me, and I hope some of you, is life-changing.

On that note, please lend your support to Golden Thread during these final days of the year. You are our most important partner in our creative endeavor and without your support many essential stories will go untold.

Thank you for being here and enjoy the show.

Torange Yeghiazarian
Founding Artistic Director

Take our audience survey!
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Golden Thread Productions presents

World Premiere

WE SWIM, WE TALK, WE GO TO WAR

by Mona Mansour[§]

directed by Evren Odcikin[§]

Cast (in order of appearance)

She	Sarah Nina Hayon*
He	Joshua Chessin-Yudin
The Arab	Adam El-Sharkawi*
The American	Tre'Vonne Bell

Production Team

Scenic Design	Kate Boyd [§]
Lighting Design	Cassie Barnes [§]
Projection Design	Mona Kasra
Sound Design	Sara Huddleston
Costume Design	Michelle Mulholland [§]
Graphic Design	Navid G. Maghami
Movement Specialist	Slater Penney
Translation and Arabic Coach	Hala Baki
Stage Manager	Karen Runk* [§]
Assistant Stage Manager	Benjamin Shiu [§]
Production Manager	Grisel Torres [§]
Assistant Director	Hala Baki
Technical Director	Chris Swartzell
Fight Choreographer	Carla Pantoja

* Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers

§ Golden Thread Productions Resident Artist

We Swim, We Talk, We Go to War was commissioned by **Middle East America: A National New Plays Initiative**, created by Golden Thread Productions (San Francisco), The Lark (NYC), and Silk Road Rising (Chicago).

We Swim, We Talk, We Go to War was developed at the 2017 Bay Area Playwrights Festival, a program of the **Playwrights Foundation** (Amy L. Mueller, Artistic Director).

This production was made possible in part by generous grants from the **Sam Mazza Foundation**, **Walter and Elise Haas Fund**, **California Arts Council**, **National Endowment for the Arts**, **The Fleishhacker Foundation**, and **The Tournesol Project**.

Golden Thread is a resident company of **Potrero Stage**, operated by **PlayGround**, and this show is presented as part of PlayGround's Potrero Stage Presenting Program.



SINK OR SWIM?

Middle East America Initiative helps change the narrative.



We Swim, We Talk, We Go to War is a prime example of Golden Thread's commitment to changing the narrative as it pertains to Middle Eastern characters and stories.

American theatre has a complicated history with plays from or about the Middle East that has resulted in patterns of misrepresentation and exclusion. These plays rarely receive the institutional support to be created in the first place. That is why in 2008, Golden Thread partnered with Silk Road Rising (Chicago) and The Lark (NYC) to establish Middle East America: A National New Plays Initiative. The program awards a \$10,000 commission to a playwright of Middle Eastern descent. In addition, they get intensive development support from all three partners and possible production opportunities at either Golden Thread and/or Silk Road Rising. Playwrights are also provided with travel funds to attend workshops and productions in all three cities.

Mona Mansour is the third winner of the Middle East America Distinguished Playwright Award. Past winners are Armenian-American writer/actor Adriana Sevahn Nichols and Egyptian-American playwright Yusef El Guindi.

Photo: At the 2016 Middle East America Convening at the Lark in New York City, Founding Artistic Director Torange Yeghiazarian (left) led a conversation with playwright Mona Mansour. Yusef El Guindi and Adriana Sevahn Nichols joined via Skype.



CAST



Though born in Los Angeles, **Tre'Vonne Bell (The American)** was raised in Oakland and has considered it his home for more than 20 years. He received training at the Los Medano's Theatre Department in Pittsburgh, CA. His Bay Area credits include the KCAT Best New Play nominee *My Block*, the *Hip Hop Musical* and the critically acclaimed *Ruined*. His most recent performance in *Hooded, or Being Black for Dummies* was directed by Lisa Marie Rollins, and earned him a nomination for a Theatre Bay Area Award in 2018. When he's not acting, Tre'Vonne enjoys an active life in the outdoors, playing sports, and learning new cultures through his travels.



Joshua Chessin-Yudin (He) is honored and grateful to be making his debut with Golden Thread. He was recently seen on stage in Seattle in Theatre 22's production of *The Happiest Song Plays Last* (Elliot), Arts West's *Really, Really* (Cooper), and *My Mañana Comes* (Whalid). He currently resides in New York. Josh would like to thank Evren, Mona, the cast, the designers, and the rest of the Golden Thread team for making this production possible and for the opportunity to work. Thanks Mom, Dad, Celia, all my family and friends, and Karl Bury. joshuacy.com



Adam El-Sharkawi* (The Arab) is thrilled to be making his Golden Thread debut. Recent credits include the world premiere of Theresa Rebeck's *Zealot* (South Coast Repertory), *Disgraced* (Capital Stage), *All's Well That Ends Well* (Great River Shakespeare Festival), *Sinbad: The Untold Tale* (Adventure Stage Chicago), *Romeo and Juliet* (New Swan Shakespeare Festival), and *Harper Regan* (Steep Theatre).

Adam holds an MFA from California State University, Fullerton, where he is also an adjunct faculty member.



Sarah Nina Hayon* (She) is a three-time Drama Desk Nominee. Passionate about new plays, she has originated countless roles and developed plays both on and off-Broadway, including Manhattan Theatre Club, The Roundabout, Public Theatre, BAFTA, and right here with Golden Thread. Theatre highlights include: *Seascape* (A.C.T., Pam MacKinnon, upcoming), *Sweat* (A.C.T., Loretta Greco), *Swimmers* (Marin Theatre Company, Mike Donahue, TBA finalist), *Water by the Spoonful* (The Old Globe, Eddie Torres), *Bright New Boise* (Partial Comfort, Davis McCallum, Drama Desk nomination). TV and film credits include *13 Reasons Why*, *Succession*, *Pose*, *Danny DeVito's Curmudgeons*, *Heirloom*, *Unforgettable*, *Parker & Maggie*, *Are We There Yet?*, *The Green*, *SATC*, *Law & Order*, and *Avatar*.

CREATIVE TEAM



This is **Mona Mansour's* (Playwright)** fourth production with Golden Thread, where she is a Resident Artist. *The Vagrant Trilogy* was recently produced at the Mosaic Theater in D.C., directed by Mark Wing-Davey. Of the trilogy, *The Hour of Feeling* premiered at the Humana Festival (directed by Wing-Davey), and a new Arabic translation was presented at NYU Abu Dhabi as part of its Arab Voices Festival; *Urge for Going* was produced at the Public Theater (directed by Hal Brooks) and at Golden Thread (directed by Odcikin); *The Vagrant* was workshopped at the Sundance Theater Institute. Other plays include *The Way West* (Labyrinth Theater, directed by Mimi O'Donnell; Steppenwolf, directed by Amy Morton; Marin Theatre Company, directed by Hayley Finn); *Unseen*



(Gift Theater, directed by Maureen Payne-Hahner). Mona was a member of the Public Theater's Emerging Writers Group and is a member of New Dramatists. With Tala Manassah, she has written *Falling Down the Stairs*, recently part of Atlantic Theater's Middle Eastern Mixfest, as well as short plays *Kamal's Letter* and *The House*, both presented at Golden Thread's ReOrient Festival. Their play *Dressing* is part of *Facing Our Truths: Short Plays About Trayvon, Race and Privilege*, a collection of plays commissioned by the New Black Festival. 2012 Whiting Award, 2014 Middle East America Distinguished Playwright Award, 2018 MacDowell Fellow. monamansour.com



Evren Odcikin[§] (Director) is the Director of New Plays and Marketing at Golden Thread and a founder of Maia Directors, a

consulting group for organizations and artists engaging with stories from the Middle East and beyond. Golden Thread credits include Mona Mansour's *Urge For Going*, Yussef El Guindi's *Language Rooms* (LA Times Critic's Pick), Said Sayrafiezadeh's *Autobiography of a Terrorist*, Kevin Artigue's *The Most Dangerous Highway in the World*, and Denmo Ibrahim's *Ecstasy, a waterfable*. He has worked at Berkeley Rep, South Coast Rep, the Lark (NYC), O'Neill Theatre Center, Kennedy Center, InterACT (Philadelphia), Cleveland Public Theatre, TheatreSquared (Arkansas), Magic Theatre, SF Playhouse, Shotgun Players, Crowded Fire, TheatreFirst, and Playwrights Foundation with such writers as Melis Aker, Guillermo Calderón, Christopher Chen, Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig, Prince Gomolvilas, Lauren Gunderson, David Jacobi, MJ Kaufman, Hannah Khalil, Jonas Hassen Khemiri, Michael Lew, Rehana Mirza, Marisela Traviño Orta, Betty Shamieh, Caridad Svich, and Lauren Yee, amongst many others. Awards include a 2015 National Directors Fellowship and a

2013 TITAN Award from Theatre Bay Area. He was named a "Theatre Worker You Should Know" by American Theatre Magazine in 2016. Next up: Jordan Tannahill's *Late Company* at NCTC and Gabriel Jason Dean's *Heartland* at InterACT. odcikin.com

Hala Baki (Translation, Arabic Coach, and Assistant Director) is a theatre director and PhD candidate at UC Santa Barbara. Her research explores the relation of Arab American theatre with its social and political contexts. Recent directing credits include *Baggage* by Fateh Azzam, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Bertolt Brecht, and *The King's Elephant* by Sa'adallah Wannous. Previously, she served three years as the production manager for Teenage Drama Workshop at CSU Northridge. She's grateful to Golden Thread for the opportunity to dive into this exciting new play (pun intended).

Cassie Barnes[§] (Lighting Designer) is a Resident Artist with Golden Thread and the resident lighting designer with Bay Pointe Ballet. Her credits include San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Shotgun Players, Bay Area Children's Theatre, Peninsula Youth Theatre, and most recently, Crowded Fire. Although she got her start in theatre, she now splits her time between theatre and dance productions, which have led her to work with Applegate Dance Company, Bayer Ballet, Ledoh with Salt Farm, Joe Orrach, and Meredith Webster. She holds a degree in Theatre Arts and Women and Gender Studies from SF State University.

Kate Boyd[§] (Scenic Designer) is a scenic and lighting designer and a teacher. She is a Resident Artist with Golden Thread, where she has designed sets for ReOrient 2017 and *The Most Dangerous Highway in the World*, and sets and lights for *Isfahan Blues*. Other credits include scenic design for *Everything is Illuminated*, *Safe House*, *Mud Blue Sky*, and *Rapture, Blister, Burn* (Aurora Theatre) and *Altar Boyz* (Center Rep). She has also



designed for Magic Theatre, Merola Opera, SF Conservatory of Music, Company C Ballet, Marin Theatre Company, TheatreWorks, and Brava. Kate teaches stagecraft and design Lick-Wilmerding High School and was a recipient of the Gerbode Design Fellowship.

Sara Huddleston (Sound Designer) is pleased to return to Golden Thread where she last designed *Autobiography of a Terrorist*. Bay Area sound design credits include: *The Gangster of Love*, *Reel to Reel*, *Grandeur*, *Fool for Love*, *Dogeaters*, *And I And Silence*, *Every Five Minutes*, *Hir*, *Terminus*, *Se Llama Cristina* (Magic Theatre); *Octopus* (Magic/Encore Theatre Company); *Oslo*, *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, and *Gem of the Ocean* (Marin Theatre Company); *I Call My Brothers*, *410[GONE]*, and *Invasion!* (Crowded Fire); *Kiss* (Shotgun Players); *In On It* and *T.I.C.* (Encore Theatre Company); *ANNIVERSARY!* (Word for Word); and *A Round Heeled Woman* (Z Space).

Mona Kasra (Projection Designer) is a new media artist and Assistant Professor of Digital Media Design at the University of Virginia. She is the co-founder of the Institute for Interanimation, an artist collective focused on the interplay between new technologies and human experience, and a member of DWZ, a Dallas-based collective dedicated to post-disciplinary, place-based explorations of new, old, and yet-to-be-revealed forms of performance. Her selected design credits include *Holy Bone*, *Flesh World*, *(w)hole*, *T.N.B.*, *blahblah* (DWZ Collective); *Seven Guitars*, *Arctic Circle*, *[I]nquiry* (University of Virginia Drama); and *Phase 3* (ii). She holds an MFA in Video Art and a PhD in Arts & Technology.



Michelle Mulholland[§] (Costume Designer and Managing Director) is delighted to return to designing costumes for Golden Thread, a role that brought her to the company in 2011. A

costume designer in the Bay Area for ten years, her work includes *Urge for Going* and *Night Over Erzinga* (Golden Thread); *You For Me For You* and *I Call My Brothers* (Crowded Fire); *Daniel's Husband*, *Cock*, and *Harbor* (New Conservatory Theatre Center); *Totalitarians* (Z Space); *Lucia Berlin Stories* (Word for Word); and the original *Tenderloin* (Cutting Ball). She is also the Managing Director of Golden Thread. With more than 17 years of non-profit management experience, she has been enabling the company's exponential growth by professionalizing policies and procedures, creating year-round development strategies that focus on donor cultivation, and implementing a fully-integrated patron management system. She is grateful to be part of this amazing team.

Slater Penney (Movement Specialist) has an Emmy for motion capture, performed a duet on TEDx, and successfully toured original devised work locally and internationally. Notable credits include work with the Submarine Show, Naked Empire Bouffon Company, California Revels, Bay Area Children's Theatre, Kinetic Arts Productions, and Lunatique Fantastique. Slater graduated from UC Santa Cruz with a BA in Theatre Arts, trained at the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre, and is currently in his second year of the Dramatic Arts MFA program at UC Davis.

Karen Runk^{*§} (Stage Manager) moved to San Francisco with the intention of only staying for a few months... Over two decades later, she's still here! This is largely due to the talented folks at the SF Mime Troupe, where she is the resident Production Stage Manager, and thanks to Golden Thread Productions, where she is a Resident Artist as of 2018, but mostly due to rent control! Runk has also stage managed with Word for Word, Magic Theatre, SF Shakespeare Festival, Intersection for the Arts, and African American Shakespeare Company.



Benjamin Shiu § (Assistant Stage Manager) was recently the Stage Manager for Ferocious Lotus' production of *Two Mile Hollow*. Earlier in the year, he stage managed Bay Area Children's Theater's *Judy Moody & Stink* and *Inside Out & Back Again*, and Crowded Fire's *Revolt, She Said. Revolt Again*. He is a proud Resident Artist of Golden Thread Productions, where he has been part of the stage management teams for *Autobiography of a Terrorist*, *Oh My Sweet Land*, and ReOrient 2017 Festival.

Grisel (GG) Torres § (Production Manager) is from the Bay Area by way of migrant parents from Guanajuato, México. She studied Technical Theatre, Light Design, and Props Design at San Francisco State University. She also loves to paint and create movement-based performance art, and sees the two art forms as a vantage point for learning about self-healing. Recently, Grisel became the new Production Manager for Golden Thread Productions and is also the Venue Manager for the Joe Goode Annex in the Mission. She often designs lights for PUSH Dance Company and Queer Punk performance artist Keith Hennessy. She is extremely grateful to have a hand in making some of the Bay Area's best radical art.



Torange Yeghiazarian
(Founding Artistic Director)
founded Golden Thread in 1996,
where she has directed *Our*

Enemies: Lively Scenes of Love and Combat and *Scenic Routes* by Yussef El Guindi, *The Myth of Creation* by Sadegh Hedayat, *Tamam* by Betty Shamieh, *Stuck* by Amir Al-Azraki, and *Voice Room* by Reza Soroor, amongst others. She is also a playwright, whose plays include *Isfahan Blues* (Gerbode-Hewlett Playwright Commission Award), *444 Days*, *The Fifth String: Ziryab's Passage to Cordoba* (commissioned by ICCNC), and *Call Me Mehdi* (published in the TCG anthology

"Salaam. Peace: An Anthology of Middle Eastern-American Drama"). Her articles have been published in *The Drama Review*, *American Theatre Magazine*, and *Theatre Bay Area Magazine*. Born in Iran and of Armenian heritage, she holds a Master's degree in Theatre Arts from SFSU. She is one of the TCG Legacy Leaders of Color, and has received honors from the Cairo International Theatre Festival, the Symposium on Equity in the Entertainment Industry, and Theatre Bay Area.

* Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers

§ Golden Thread Productions Resident Artist

Special Thanks

Erin Anderson, Curtis Bellenot, Barbara Berkeley, Patricia Cotter, Crowded Fire Theatre Company, John Eisner, Sonia Fernandez, Zachariah Hammoudi, Joe Goode Annex, Eric Mansour, Kathleen Mansour, ODC, Shotgun Players, Wolfgang Wachalowsky, Jayne Wenger, Mark Weddle. UVA Drama, and Z Space



Potrero Stage is a 99-seat state-of-the-art performance space located in the heart of San Francisco's Potrero Hill neighborhood, operated by PlayGround, and serving as home to some of the Bay Area's leading new play developers and producers, including PlayGround, Crowded Fire, Golden Thread, and Playwrights Foundation, among others. For more information or to inquire about rentals, email info@potrerostage.org or call (415) 992-6677.



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Golden Thread Productions, founded in 1996, is the first American theatre company devoted to the Middle East. We produce passionate and provocative plays from and about the Middle East that celebrate the multiplicity of its perspectives and identities. We are a developmental catalyst and a vibrant artistic home to artists at various stages of their careers. We bring the Middle East to the American stage, creating treasured cultural experiences for audiences of all ages and backgrounds.



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