

PLAYBILL®

LOOKINGGLASS THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

IRAQ, BUT FUNNY



lookingglass

MAY 29 - JULY 20, 2025



Lookingglass Theatre Company Presents

IRAQ, BUT FUNNY

WRITTEN BY ATRA ASDOU^{^^} • DIRECTED BY DALIA ASHURINA^{SDC}

Scenic Designer
Omid Akbari

Costume Designer
Mara Blumenfeld^{us}

Lighting Designer
Christine A. Binder^{us}

Sound Designer
Christie Chiles Twillie

Projections Designer
Michael Salvatore
Commendatore^{us}

Composer
Avi Amon

Properties Supervisor
Amanda Hermann

Intimacy & Fight Director
Sheryl Williams

Stage Manager
Isabel Patt^{*}

Director of Production
Nikolaj Sorensen

CAST

Susaan Jamshidi^{*} Actor 1
Gloria Imseih Petrelli Actor 2
James Rana^{*} Actor 3
Sina Pooresmaeil^{*} Actor 4
Atra Asdou^{^*} Actor 5

UNDERSTUDIES

Tina Arfaee^{*}, Chris Khoshaba, Yourtana Sulaiman

Artistic Director
Kasey Foster[^]

Managing Director
Jamey Lundblad

THERE WILL BE ONE 15-MINUTE INTERMISSION.

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[^]Member of Lookingglass Theatre Company, Ensemble Member or Artistic Associate.
^{*}Member of Actors' Equity Association (AEA), the union for professional actors and stage managers.
+ Member of United Scenic Artists, Local 829 of the IATSE.
SDC Member of Society of Directors and Choreographers, the union for directors and choreographers.



PRODUCTION STAFF

Assyrian Language Coach
Ninawa Chimon

Dialect Coach
Vaneh Assadourian

Assistant Stage Manager
Lili Bjorklund

Dramaturg
Naysan Mojgani

Script Supervisor
Isabel Lee Roden

Choreographer
Alex Salgado

Production Coordinator
Kate Sullivan Coombs

Technical Director
Dan Machalinski

Technical Director
Skate Ehling

Head Carpenter
Sky Bradley

Assistant Lighting Designer
Daniel Friedman

Lighting Supervisor
Aaron Lichamer

Assistant Lighting Supervisor
Karen Wallace

Sound Supervisor
Max Volpert

Assistant Sound Supervisor
Maya Reter

Costume Director
Savana Nix

Costume Design Assistant
Brenda Winstead

Wig & Makeup Coordinator
Megan Pirtle

Assistant Costume Shop Manager
Lucy Elkin

Assistant Properties Supervisor
Persephone Lawrence-Wescott

Props Artisan
Jonathan Berg-Einhorn

AV Supervisor
Andres Fiz

Projections Programmer
Parker Molacek

Projections Technicians
Florence Borowski
Elli Green
Devin Meseke
Avery Spellmeyer

Wardrobe Supervisor
Auden Granger

Wardrobe Assistant
Sydnee Lasseigne

Wardrobe Assistant Cover
Mila Fleur McCoy

Light Board Operators
Jack O'Connor and Ellie Fey

Light Board Op Covers
Sam Eads and Karen Wallace

EOS Programmer
Molly Garrison

Sound Board Operator
Ian C. Weber

Sound Board Operator Cover
Harper Justus

Sound Technician
Aidan Gardner

Scenic Charge Artist
Sarah Lewis

Draftsman
Chris Winnemann

Carpenters
Cecilia Chan
Benjamin Cormalleth
Karin Hannemann
Ian Samsami
Dalton Smith

Scenic Painters
Zhanna Albertini
Rachel Meierotto

Electricians
Art Zarko
Sam Eads
Kevin Kress
Sam Sage
Maddy McKinney

Tailor
Austin Pettinger

Stitchers
Angela Clyde
Finnegan Chu
Madeleine Shows

Floor Manager
Olivia Zapater-Charrette

Deck Crew
Hanna Smaglis

Deck Crew Cover
Kevin Vilchez

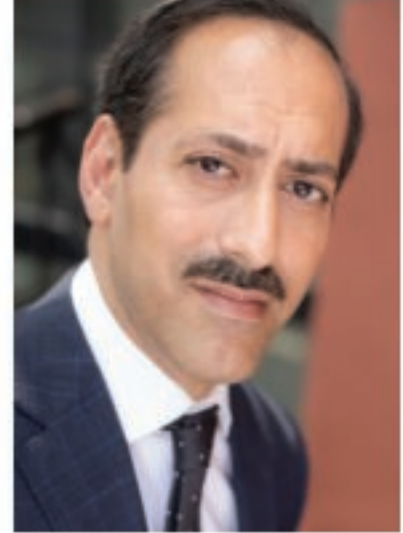
WHO'S WHO



Susaan Jamshidi



Gloria Imseih Petrelli



James Rana



Sina Pooresmaeil



Atra Asdou



Tina Arfaee



Chris Khoshaba



Yourtana Sulaiman

WHO'S WHO

Susaan Jamshidi she/her (Actor 1) is excited to be back at Lookingglass having previously played Sympathy the Learned in *The Arabian Nights*, directed by Mary Zimmerman, and u/s in *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*. Most recently Susaan was seen at Goodman Theatre for her 6th year as Mrs. Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol*. Other recent Chicago credits: Goodman (*The Winter's Tale*, *Yasmina's Necklace* and new play workshops), Writers (*Eurydice*), Steep (*Light Falls*), Raven (*Right to be Forgotten*), Northlight (*Faceless*), VG, Drury Lane, The Gift, Theatre Wit, Remy Bumppo, and more. Regional Credits: Seattle Rep (*Selling Kabul*), Arena and Berkeley Rep (*The Arabian Nights*), Rep of St. Louis (*Faceless*), Notre Dame Shakes (*Midsummer*), and more. Film/tv: *Christmas on the Ranch*, *Hibernation*, *The Tam and Kevin Show*, *After: A Love Story*, *Don't Worry About It*, *The Wallet*, *Chicago Med*, *Chicago PD*, *Sirens*. MFA – DePaul, Rep: Paonessa. (AEA/SAG/AFTRA) @susaanlayla

Gloria Imseih Petrelli she/her (Actor 2) is a Chicagoland born and based actor, playwright, intimacy choreographer, and community organizer. She is pleased to be making her Lookingglass debut in this incredible new work. Recent acting credits include *A LIE OF THE MIND* (Raven), her own *SPEECHALICIOUS*, (a commission for The Story Theatre), *MOSQUE4MOSQUE* (About Face Theatre), *Layalina* (Goodman New Stages). She is First Floor Theatre's current Blueprint Commissioned playwright. Find out more at www.thegloriamseihpetrelli.com. Gloria's art is informed and strengthened by the tenacity of her community; please consider a donation to Palestine Legal, USPCN, or Middle East Children's Alliance.

James Rana he/him (Actor 3) BROADWAY: *The Band's Visit*. OFF BROADWAY: *The Government Inspector* (Red Bull Theater), *Serendib* (Ensemble Studio Theatre), *Shogun Macbeth* (Pan Asian Rep), *Marat/Sade*, *Mother Courage* (Classical Theatre of Harlem). NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL: *The Kite Runner* (1st National Tour), *The Band's Visit* (1st National Tour/Toronto), *Loves Labors Lost* (Royal Shakespeare Company), *Macbeth* (Bonn Biennale). REGIONAL: Huntington Theatre, Kennedy Center, Denver Center, Shakespeare Theatre Co., Human Race Theatre, Contemporary American Theatre Festival. IMPROV: Over 10 years with ComedySportz NYC. FILM/TELEVISION: *Chicago Fire*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *Madam Secretary*, *The Tony Awards*, *Conan O'Brien*, *A Girl Like You With A Boy Like Me*. James wrote, produced, and starred in the short film *Strays* (Jury Award - Independent Shorts Awards).

Sina Pooresmaeil he/him (Actor 4) Theater: *Three Tall Persian Women* (Shakespeare and Company), *When the Rain Stops Falling* (Lenfest Center for the Arts). TV credits: *High Maintenance*. Developed work at NYTW, Irish Rep, Clubbed Thumb, Arena Stage, and Rattlestick Playwrights Theater. Wrote and acted in short films, *Auto Plus* and *Inkshop*. Represented by Framework Entertainment. MFA Acting Columbia University.

Atra Asdou she/her (Actor 5, Playwright) is a writer and actor commanding traditional stage dramas (Steppenwolf, Goodman, Lookingglass, Yale Repertory) and non-traditional written and improvised comedy (The Second City, iO Chicago, Brooklyn Comedy Collective). As a Lookingglass Ensemble Member, she was recently awarded two writers in residencies, a MAP Fund grant, and a Venturous Theater Fund grant for her full-length play, *Iraq, But Funny*. Atra also wrote and performed three original, critically acclaimed satirical sketch revues for The Second City Chicago e.t.c. stage. Her debut feature screenplay, *IZZA*, was a beloved finalist at The Chicago International Film Festival Industry Days, and her short films, *Renee* and *Fever* have earned festival laurels from around the world. Atra's recent TV/Film credits include *Zero Day* and *And Just Like That...* She lives in NYC, performing stand up around the city and improvising at Brooklyn Comedy Collective with Donna's Beef.

Tina Arfaee they/any (Understudy Actor 1 & 5) is an actor, comedian, and occasional burlesque performer. They've been writing and performing on multiple stages in Chicago since 2012, most notably at the Second City as a member of their touring company and at the Annoyance Theater with Matt Damon Improv. With MDI they wrote and starred in *In-Diana: a web series*. They also appeared on an episode of *Chicago Fire*, *Centered: the web series*, and short film, *The Sweatshirt*. They are represented by Grossman & Jack. @tinatwocats

Chris Khoshaba he/him (Understudy Actor 3 & 4) is excited to be making his debut with Lookingglass Theatre Company, especially in the telling of an Assyrian story. Most recently, he has had the pleasure of understudying Emmy Award-nominated writer Michael Shayan in his touring one man show, *Avaaz*. Previous credits include: *Billy Elliot* (Paramount Theatre); *Layalina* (Goodman Theatre); *Porchlight in Concert: Sunday in the Park with George*, *RENT* (Porchlight Music Theatre), *The Tragedy of King Christophe* (The House Theatre of Chicago); *I Call My Brothers* (Interrobang Theatre Project); *King Lear* (Redtwist Theatre). BFA Acting, UIUC. Represented by Big Mouth Talent.

Yourtana Sulaiman she/her (Understudy Actor 2) is thrilled to be making her Lookingglass Theatre debut with *Iraq, but Funny*. Sulaiman is an Iraqi-Assyrian actor based in Chicago. Recent credits include, *Little Women* (Northlight Theatre), *Happy Days Are Here Again* (Steep Theatre), *Chagall in School* (Grippo Stage Company), *the singularity play*, (Jackalope Theatre), NBC's *Chicago Fire* and more. She is currently represented by Gray Talent Group. @yourtana on Instagram for more shenanigans. Khaya Atour.

Dalia Ashurina she/her (Director) is an Assyrian-American director and writer focusing on explosive theatricality and subverting existing narratives. She was listed in the Forbes 30 Under 30 Hollywood and Entertainment 2025 publication. Her Broadway credits include serving as Associate Director of *Sweeney Todd* and as the Resident Director at *Phantom of the Opera*. She has worked with Shakespeare and Company, Lookingglass Theater, San Francisco Playhouse, Center Theater Group, Cornerstone Theater, Arena Stage, Wayward Artists Ensemble and Parsnip Ship Podcast. Internationally, she directed the concert *Omar Bashir, Back to My Assyrian Roots* at the University of Salamanca in Spain. She is an alum of UC Irvine where she graduated with a B.A. in Drama and honors in directing. She received a grant from the National New Play Network to write *Edessa of Baghdad* with composer Avi Amon and is the 2024-2025 SDOF Denham Fellow for *Iraq, But Funny*. Member of SDC. @your_gal_dal

WHO'S WHO

Omid Akbari he/him (Scenic Designer) was recently named THE 2024 BURRY FREDRIK DESIGN FELLOW. He is a freelance scenic designer and costume concept artist based in NYC. He holds an M.F.A in Theater Design at the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale. His recent credits include: Long Wharf Theatre: *Unbecoming Tragedy*; Boise Contemporary Theater: *The Life You Gave Me*; Playhouse on Park: *The Irish And How They Got That Way*; Juilliard: *The Seven*; Shakespeare & Company: *Three Tall Persian Women*; Yale Repertory Theatre: *Wish You Were Here*; Iseman Theatre: *Furlough's Paradise*; Iseman Theatre: *Macbeth*. www.omidakbari.com

Mara Blumenfeld they/them (Costume Designer) has designed costumes for over 40 Lookingglass productions, including such company favorites as *Lookingglass Alice*, *The Arabian Nights*, *Metamorphoses*, and *Cascabel*. Based in Chicago, she has designed numerous productions for Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Writers Theatre, and Court Theatre. A frequent collaborator with fellow Ensemble Member Mary Zimmerman, their credits include the Broadway and Off-Broadway productions of *Metamorphoses*, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* at Second Stage Theatre, and *Rusalka*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *La Sonnambula* for the Metropolitan Opera. Regional credits include: 12 seasons with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and numerous productions at the McCarter Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Huntington Theatre Company, Asolo Repertory Theatre, and the Weston Playhouse, among others. Internationally, her work has been seen in Canada (Stratford Shakespeare Festival), the UK (Barbican Center and Donmar Warehouse), France (Opera du Rhin), Italy (Teatro alla Scala), Australia (The Australian Ballet), China (Wuzhen Theatre Festival), and Japan (K-Ballet and Disney TokyoSea). She is the recipient of four Jeff Awards, and was the 2012 recipient of the Michael Merritt Award for Excellence in Design and Collaboration.

Christine A. Binder she/her (Lighting Designer) is a Chicago based lighting designer who has been working in theatre, opera, and dance for over 30 years. In theatre, she has designed lighting for Writer's Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare, The Court Theatre, Northlight Theatre Company, Goodman Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, The Steppenwolf Theatre Company, and Geva Theatre Company among many others. Her opera designs include work with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Opera Theatre, San Francisco Opera, Grand Théâtre de Genève, Sieji Ozawa Matsumoto Festival in Japan, and Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. She is an Artistic Associate with the Lookingglass Theatre Company. She has been nominated for the Joseph Jefferson Award several times and is the recipient of the Dora Award for Best Lighting Design for the Canadian Opera Company's production of Eugene Onegin. She is the Head of Lighting Design for The Theatre School at DePaul University.

Christie Chiles Twille she/her (Sound Designer) Credits: *Clyde's* (Theatreworks), *Fireflies* (Northlight), *The Niceties and Mom*, *How'd You Meet the Beatles* (Forward), *We Are Continuous and Vietgone* (GEVA), *The Way She Spoke*, and *Indecent* (Milwaukee Chamber) *Black Butterflies*, *Pretty Fires*, *Kill Move Paradise*, *Stew*, *Home* (Milwaukee Black Theatre Festival), *Carmella Full of Wishes* (Chicago Children's Theatre; First Stage - Milwaukee; Seattle Children's Theatre), *The Mountaintop* (American Players Theatre/PBS, Madison, WI), *A Year with Frog and Toad*, *Milo Imagines the World*, (Chicago Children's Theatre), *Notes from the Field* (Timeline); *Shapeshifters* (UArts); *The Wiz* (TYA) (Children's Theatre of Madison). Her film credits include *Alone*, *The Clearing*, *A Space for Empathy* (Emory University) and *The Pandemic Trilogy*. Christie is also a pianist, Music Director, Composer and Conductor with over 40 musical credits. Among them are *HAIR* (Asolo), *Five Guys Named Moe*, *Newsies*, *The Gospel at Colonus*, *Raisin*, *A Jolly Holliday* (Skylight), *Dreamgirls* (Paramount, Goodspeed, McCarter).

Michael Salvatore Commendatore (Projections Designer) Originally from Rhode Island and lived in Chicago for 7 years, Michael currently lives in Massachusetts with his amazing wife, Katie, and their lovable cats, Sebastian and JJ. For over a decade, Michael has traveled around the country designing for theatre, opera, dance, installations and more at places such as the Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Arizona Opera, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, The Great Northern Festival, Spoleto Festival, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, The Public Theatre, Music Theatre Wichita, Portland Stage, Yale Repertory Theatre, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and more. He also received a Jeff award for Best Projection Design in Chicago for his work in *It Came From Outer Space the Musical* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Training: Yale School of Drama, MFA in Design. Visit michaelcommendatore.com

Avi Amon he/they (Composer) is a Turkish-American composer and sound artist. Theater work includes music, songs, & sound design for projects with: Ars Nova, The Kennedy Center, New York Theater Workshop, The Old Globe, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, PAC NYC, Page73, Signature Theater, The Public, and Waterwell. Avi's film scores have been featured at Cannes, Disney, DOCNYC, HBO, Hulu, Slamdance, SWSX, Tribeca, and 2024 Venice Film Festival. Avi's score for the documentary *EVERYTHING YOU HAVE IS YOURS* is available on all streaming platforms and *MOTHER/ROAD*, a multimedia performance piece exploring grief & memory, will premiere at The Shed in 2026. Avi is a MacDowell Fellow and has received additional support from the Jonathan Larson Grant, Berkeley REP, Dramatists Guild, Mercury Store, New Music USA, and The O'Neill National Music Theater Conference, among others. Avi is the music director at the 52nd Street Project and teaches at NYU. www.aviamon.com

Amanda Herrmann they/them (Properties Supervisor) Lookingglass credits include: *Circus Quixote*, *Lucy & Charlie's Honeymoon*, *Villette*, *Her Honor Jane Byrne*, *Frankenstein*, *Act(s) of God*, *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Seas*, *Plantation!*, *Hard Times*, *Moby Dick*, *Beyond Caring*, *Mr. and Mrs. Pennyworth*, and *Life Sucks*. Amanda is also the prop designer at Teatro Zinzanni and is an artistic associate at Remy Bumppo Theater Company.

Sheryl Williams she/her (Intimacy & Fight Director) is originally from Phoenix, AZ, she became an Intimacy Professional after studying Stage Combat and Musical Theater at Columbia College Chicago. She has been supporting intimate theatrical storytelling throughout the Chicagoland area since 2017. As Court Theatre's Culture and Consent Consultant and T.I.E Assistant Faculty member, helping artists find the joy in their process drives her work, and she enthusiastically supports productions with tools to incorporate boundary-informed, consent-based storytelling. Works include: *Falsettos*; *Raisin in the Sun*; *Berlin* (Court Theatre) *Fun Home* (Porchlight Music Theatre), *The Listeners* (The Lyric Opera), and *Translations* (Writers Theatre) and contributor in Intimacy Directing for Theater.

WHO'S WHO

Ninawa Chimon (Assyrian Language Coach) is a passionate educator and linguist with over ten years of experience in language instruction. She holds a Master's degree in Linguistics from Northeastern Illinois University and a Bachelor's in English Literature. Currently, she teaches ESL (English as a Second Language) at Joliet Junior College. In addition to her teaching role, Ninawa is the Curriculum Designer and Director of the Educational Department at Rinyo, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving the Assyrian (Syriac) language and creating resources for young learners. She also volunteers with the Assyrian Church of the East, teaching the Assyrian language. Known for her warm, student-centered approach and deep cultural insight, Ninawa is widely respected by her colleagues and learners alike.

Vaneh Assadourian she/her (Dialect and Vocal Coach) is an actor, voice artist and dialect coach born and raised in Tehran, Iran. Previous dialect coaching: *English* (Goodman Theatre and Guthrie Theater). She is currently starring in *The Da Vinci Code* at Drury Lane Theatre. Other collaborations include work with Steppenwolf Theatre, Geffen Playhouse, Yale Repertory Theatre, Pioneer Theatre Company and TheatreWorks Silicon Valley. Assadourian is fluent in Farsi, Armenian and speaks conversational German. She holds a BA in Acting from UCLA's School of Theater, Film & Television and is repped by Stewart Talent Chicago and SLJ Management. @Vaneh_33

Isabel Patt they/them (Stage Manager) is so honored to be making exciting, new work with Lookingglass and this incredible team! Recent Chicago credits: *Lavender Men* (About Face Theatre), *Bernarda!* (Teatro Vista/Steppenwolf), *The October Storm* (Raven Theatre), and touring with *The Second City* from 2021-2023. Select Regional Credits: *El Coquí Espectacular* and *The Bottle of Doom* (Long Wharf Theatre), *The SpongeBob Musical...* (First Stage), *Carmela Full of Wishes* (Children's Theatre Company). In addition to stage managing, Izzy was recently traveling the world with Pina Bausch's *The Rite of Spring/common ground[s]* in collaboration with the UK's Sadler's Wells and Senegal's École des Sables as company manager. They can also be found working as a house manager at The Neo-Futurists. Izzy is a member of Actors Equity Association and holds a B.A. in Theatre Arts from the University of Minnesota.

Lili Bjorklund they/them (Asst Stage Manager) is thrilled to be debuting with Lookingglass and this stunning production! Lili is fresh off the heels of stage managing a cast of 130 actors of all abilities and ages for *Don't Stop Believin'* with Magic Moments in Colorado. Other works include 7 productions with *Death & Pretzels* as Resident Stage Manager, *Corduroy* (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre), *Mothers* (The Gift Theatre), *How Blood Go* (Congo Square Theatre), *Our Dear Dead Drug Lord* (Steep Theatre), *Nine to Five*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Xanadu*, *Ragtime*, *The Legend of Georgia McBride* and *Shout! The Mod Musical* (Metropolis Performing Arts Centre), *A Christmas Carol* (Goodman Theatre 2021), *The Abuelas* and *Hope: Part II* (Teatro Vista), *Poison* (The Plagiarists), *Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins* (Strawdog Theatre 2018) and *Fun Harmless Warmachine* (The New Coordinates). Lili holds a degree in Theatre for Social Change from Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, IA.

Nikolaj Sorensen he/him (Director of Production) is a multi-disciplinary, multi-hyphenate, multi-racial artist living and working in Chicago. At various points in his career he has been: a set designer, a technical director, a projections designer, a painter, a carpenter, an SAT tutor, a stage manager, a curator of Zoom visual gags, and extremely unemployed. He's done these things all over town (often concurrently), but primarily at Northwestern University, Piven Theatre Workshop, Mudlark Theatre, and Collaboration. Now, he's mostly a production manager, activist, and cat dad who also makes time for Dungeons and Dragons, experimenting in the kitchen, and reading by the lake.

Naysan Mojjani he/him (Dramaturg) is a freelance dramaturg and producer focused on supporting playwrights and new plays. Naysan is the resident dramaturg and artistic advisor at Round House Theatre, where he previously served as Associate Artistic Director. Additionally, he has worked on new and classic work with theatres around the country, including Theatre de la Jeune Lune, Theatre Squared, Signature Theatre, Contemporary American Theatre Festival, and Arena Stage, and has taught at UC San Diego and George Mason University. Naysan holds a PhD in Theatre & Drama from UCSD, and a BA from Carleton College. He currently lives in New Orleans with his wife and two children.

Isabel Lee Roden they/them (Script Supervisor) is an actor/writer based in Chicago. They're delighted to return to Lookingglass after Script Supervising *Iraq, But Funny's* workshop this past November! UPCOMING: Playing Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* at the American Shakespeare Center, as well as roles in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Pirate Ballad of Bonny and Read* (Fall 2025). THEATRE: *Twelfth Night*, *Sense & Sensibility*, *Macbeth*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *King Lear* (Illinois Shakespeare Festival); *A Tale of Two Cities* (u/s, Shattered Globe); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Julius Caesar* (The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, LIVE! Tour); *The Tempest* (Oak Park Festival Theatre). TV/FILM: *Chicago Fire* (NBC Studios); *Moondays* (Atlantic Pictures).

Alex Salgado (Choreographer) Alex Salgado began his dance journey at the age of 15, discovering his passion for movement through his high school's dance ensemble. Early on, he demonstrated a commitment to fostering inclusive spaces in the dance community by founding and directing an LGBT dance company for youth. With training from renowned instructors, Alex has built a career as both a performer and educator, sharing his love for dance across the Midwest. He is dedicated to inspiring the next generation by teaching dance to youth and adults, emphasizing creativity, expression, and community.

Daniel Friedman he/him (Asst. Lighting Designer) A Chicago based lighting designer, Daniel has designed lighting with Matter Dance Company, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Token Theatre, Momentary Theatre, The Gift Theatre, Haymarket Opera Company, Drury Lane Theatre, Oil Lamp Theater, Interrobang Theatre Project, Redtwist Theatre, First Floor Theatre, Red Tape Theatre, Emerald City Theatre, and Haven Theatre among many others. Daniel has served as an associate and assistant lighting designer on productions at San Francisco Opera, Palm Beach Opera, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Lookingglass Theatre Company, Writers Theatre, Hartford Stage, Dallas Theater Center, Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera, Goodman Theatre, Court Theatre, Folks Operetta, Timeline Theatre, Victory Gardens Theatre, among others. Visit danielfriedman.com.



A Note From The Artistic Director

It is so easy to pick a side. You're here or you're there. You're with, you're against. You're pro or you're anti, and by picking one we lose sight of everything in between, which is where humanity lives. Why do I love this show so much? It puts me in another person's shoes, or sandals. It allows me to listen and understand from the heart vs. through the news or my neighbors or my dear friends, each of whom grew up with different family histories and fears. We are a country and a world so divided, where sides are increasingly chosen and people are increasingly forgotten.

Lookingglass wants to leave audiences feeling changed, charged, and empowered. These three goals are each uniquely special but the one that rings most true for me today is changed. And that doesn't mean flipping to another side, it means finding myself in the middle with the rest of humanity. And laughing together on our way toward it.

Today, we hear the story of an Assyrian experience, and I can't wait to see who we get to hear from next.

With mad love,

Kassey Foster

Artistic Director, Lookingglass Theatre Company

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Lookingglass Theatre Company plies its craft and paints its dreams in what is now called Chicago, the traditional homelands of the Council of the Three Fires: the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi nations. Other tribes such as the Miami, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sauk, Meskwaki and Fox also call this area home. Indigenous people continue to live in the region, and practice their heritage and traditions, including care for the land and waterways.

For more information and other resources please consider visiting the website for the Chi-Nations Youth Council (<https://chinations.org/>). And to learn more about where you live and Indigenous Sovereignty please visit Native-Land.ca.

Special thanks

Julie Anderton
Ashtar Ashurseen
Mariam Pera
Emanuel & Lilyan Asdou
Assyrian Aid Society
Natsu Onoda Power

Abbie Helene Roth, M.D.
Narimon Safavi
Silk Road Cultural Center
Jeremy Wechsler
Wardia Youkhana
M. Yousif Zebari
Mary Zimmerman

Our Ensemble Members

Lookingglass Ensemble

Atra Asdou	Christine Mary Dunford	Anthony Irons	Joey Slotnick
Kareem Bandealy	Laura Eason	David Kersnar	Philip R. Smith
Mara Blumenfeld	Anthony Fleming III	Louise Lamson	Heidi Stillman
Walter Briggs	Kasey Foster	Wendy Mateo	Tracy Walsh
J. Nicole Brooks	Raymond Fox	Daniel Ostling	Andrew White
David Catlin	Joy Gregory	Andre Pluess	Temple Williams III
Thomas J. Cox	Doug Hara	Ericka Ratcliff	Matthew C. Yee
Lawrence E. DiStasi	Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi	David Schwimmer	Mary Zimmerman
Kevin Douglas			

Artistic Associates

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Cordelia Dewdney	Joshua Horvath	Rick Sims	Troy West
Deanna Dunagan	Salomé Martinez Jr.	Alison Siple	Lindsey Noel Whiting
Sara Gmitter			

STAFF

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J. Nicole Brooks	Creative Producer, Mellon Playwright in Residence
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Allie DiSanto	Marketing Manager
Skate Ehling	Technical Director
Josh Essex	Executive Assistant + Spektrix Manager
Kasey Foster	Artistic Director
Jazmin Jones-Oliver	People and Culture Director
Oonagh Kelly	Audience Services Lead
Carlos García León	Assistant Director of Development
Jamey Lundblad	Managing Director
Dan Machalinski	Technical Director
Mantra Radhakrishnan	Donor Relations and Data Manager
Nikolaj Sorensen	Director of Production
Kylie Lucille Stover	Director of Ticketing and Audience Services

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Laughing Through: A Conversation with Iraq, But Funny's Playwright and Director

NAYSAN MOJGANI, DRAMATURG:

Why don't we start with your comedy background, Atra? And how that dovetails with acting for you.

ATRA ASDOU, PLAYWRIGHT:

I was a comedian before I was an actor: when I was a child, we didn't have bedtime, and we didn't have restrictions on what we could watch on TV. If something was sexual or had cuss words in it, my dad would just hit previous channel and then come back. We would watch George Carlin, Richard Pryor, Howie Mandel... All the 80s and earlier-than-80s folks. And we'd watch SNL and Mad TV, In Living Color. And then my dad got the family a camcorder, and my brothers and I would put on skits. And then when I was 11, I learned that acting is a thing that someone can do, and theater is a thing someone can do. My friend Nicole and her family introduced me to the theater. Then those two things kind of met within me after I graduated college. I went to college for theater, but when I graduated, I threw myself into improv, Second City, iO, and sketch writing, solo character work, solo shows. So that the two worlds have kind of intertwined.

NM:

And what is the origin of this play specifically?

AA:

My role in my family is the story receiver. Relatives would tell me stories, and I loved hearing them. My grandma, especially. Lookingglass sends out submission requests for their ensemble and artistic associates to submit work and pitch plays, so I had a seedling of an idea of a place to put my family's stories, and the idea of how the hard historical timeline impacts a familial generational timeline, and those two things merged together and those were the origins.

NM:

How close is the play to those familial stories? Is it just a jumping-off point, or are we really seeing your family on stage?

AA:

Back when the play was five hours long, in early drafts, it was closer to exact family stories. But now, no character is one-to-one with an actual person who existed. They're based on a generation that existed and what the generation felt at that time, but they are an amalgamation of several family members.

NM:

And Dalia, how did you become involved?

DALIA ASHURINA, DIRECTOR:

I was introduced to Atra through our mutual friend, playwright M. Yousif Zebari. And she slid into my DMs.

AA:

I did.

DA:

We got coffee and ended up talking for like four or five hours. And then she sent me a few pages and a few scenes, and I loved it. I was brought on for the first workshop at Lookingglass. And then they asked me to direct the show.

NM:

Do you see your own family story in the play?

DA:

Oh yeah. I feel like I learn about my own family from this show. There's a lot of overlap. The maternal line is very similar to mine. My mom's family is from Baghdad, so I have my own images of what that is, from family photos and stories. As in the show, there's such a diaspora of where people were, but between my grandmother and my grandfather on my mom's side, there's a lot of similarity.

NM:

This play follows generations of displacement, genocide, betrayal, and oppression — "ripe material for a comedy," as you say in the show. So, um... why is this a comedy?

AA:

I don't know that I could tell it as not a comedy. I cope and I digest the horrors of the world through comedy. Comedy is a way to help others access information and process hard, difficult truths and also helps to heal. Comedy brings people's guards down, and so it's an avenue to help us connect with each other and see the human in each other. If we can laugh together or laugh through something together, we've had a shared experience in joy. Laughing takes you out of your head and into your body and produces joy or healing.

NM:

I think that was great.

DA:

That was really good.

AA:

Another reason why I chose to tell this through comedy is because our people are not often depicted as funny. We're depicted as violent, we're seen as angry, we're

seen as not light-hearted. But, man, if you sat around the table with my parents, aunts and my uncles, you'd have a riot. So there's that side that I wanted to show, that we are funny.

NM:

There's a common idea that some things are okay to make jokes about, and some things are not. So, what do y'all say to audiences who are asking "Oh, are we allowed to laugh at this?"

DA:

The thing that I love about this play is that it talks about things that no one wants to talk about in any manner other than preciousness or vitriol. And here, we're not talking about those things in the way that you're used to talking about them. We're doing something else.

AA:

It's a very vulnerable and rebellious act, to laugh through something that is incredibly difficult. My favorite is when people catch themselves laughing and think "Oh! I shouldn't have laughed at that!" But something exorcised out of you. There's a time and place for stories that are about war and genocide that are not funny, and there is space for that. This is just a different side. If folks find themselves laughing, that's a good thing. We shouldn't ever forget: laughter is what kept people surviving through these things. I hope folks feel like they can laugh with us.

DA:

I hope people laughing in this show opens the door for them to go to those other plays. Sometimes you hear about the Very Serious Plays about Serious Topics that

We Should Be Speaking About and you go "Oh, I don't, that's not for me." I hope audiences come to this, and they laugh. And they say "oh, I want to know more about that, actually. I didn't get enough about that. Let me look it up." That would be lovely.

NM:

Final question. Whether Assyrian or not, what do you hope audiences get from this experience?

AA:

First and foremost, I hope they have a great time, where they go home, and they're still cracking up. I really hope they come away with that feeling of, "oh, I needed that!" And I hope that they learned something, and most of all, I hope, no matter what their background is, that they see themselves, which means that they see the human in themselves and in each other. That they see their stories in us. And that Assyrians see themselves. I really hope I make them proud.

DA:

I hope we make Assyrians proud. Also, I hope we surprise people. I really hope people come to see this and maybe don't actually know what they're expecting. And they think, "oh, I didn't know anything about that I'm shocked about all these things that I knew nothing about." That's what I hope for.

Who Are The Assyrians?

"Assyrian" refers to an ancient people of Mesopotamia, centered in and named for the city of Assur (located in modern Iraq), as well as to their modern-day descendants. Ethnically, Assyrians are distinct from their Arab, Persian, and Jewish neighbors, although the geographic and national territories of each have overlapped for millennia. Historically, Assyrians were among the earliest Christians and it continues to be the predominant religion in the Assyrian community today, but many faith traditions — Jewish, Pagan, as well as non-religious segments — exist within the Assyrian diaspora.

While Assyrians are often mistakenly referred to as "Syrian" — the ancient Greeks used the terms interchangeably — the two terms refer to distinct peoples (albeit neighboring peoples). Other terms that Assyrians may use to self-identify include Mesopotamian, Chaldean (originally an ancient tribe from southeast Mesopotamia, and later adopted to describe the predominantly-Assyrian Chaldean Catholic Church), Syriac (an ancient Mesopotamian language still used as the liturgical language in various Eastern Christian churches), and Aramean (originally a distinct ethnic group within the Assyrian Empire).

It's important to remember that "Assyrian" is an ethnic group, not a religious one, even if Christianity is deeply embedded within the Assyrian identity. Those Assyrians who do identify as Christian are predominantly members of the Assyrian Church of the East, the Ancient Church of the East, the Syriac Orthodox Church, or the Chaldean Catholic Church.

The ancestral homelands of the Assyrians included territory in modern-day Iraq, Türkiye, Iran, and Syria. After centuries of oppression and genocide, the majority of Assyrians today live outside that region, with significant population centers in the US, Sweden, Germany, and Australia. In the US, the largest Assyrian communities are found in and around Chicago, Detroit, Phoenix, and Stanislaus County, CA. Worldwide, there are roughly six million Assyrians. population centers in the US, Sweden, Germany, and Australia. In the US, the largest Assyrian communities are found in and around Chicago, Detroit, Phoenix, and Stanislaus County, CA. Worldwide, there are roughly six million Assyrians.

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