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MOSAIC THEATER COMPANY OF DC ANNOUNCES RETURN OF
“VOICES FROM A CHANGING MIDDLE EAST FESTIVAL: THE WAR COMES HOME”
ANCHORED AT ATLAS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER & OTHER VENUES, JANUARY 6—MAY 1, 2016

FOUR-MONTH FESTIVAL BEGINS WITH TANDEM SOLO PERFORMANCES:
WRESTLING JERUSALEM, FEATURING AMERICAN-JEWISH PERFORMER AARON DAVIDMAN
JANUARY 6-24, 2016
I SHALL NOT HATE, FEATURING PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI ACTOR GASSAN ABBAS
JANUARY 23—FEBRUARY 14, 2016

Israeli, Arab, and American artists unite for five-play Festival,
affirming collective commitment to constructive dialogue and unfettered artistic expression

(Washington, DC) Mosaic Theater Company of DC announces the return of the critically acclaimed Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival, an expansive exhibition of some of the finest Israeli, Arab and American artists from across the country and around the world. The five offerings included in the 2015-16 Festival, which runs from January 6—May 1, 2016, grapple with issues of peace and conflict in a divided Middle East. The Festival’s theme, “The War Comes Home,” highlights the ramifications of sustained unrest on Jewish and Arab families, the turbulence of large-scale human migration and the profound impact that events in the Middle East have had on our own polarized political climate here in the United States.

The Festival was conceived in 2000 by Mosaic Theater Founding Artistic Director Ari Roth during his 18 year tenure at Theater J and was inaugurated with David Hare’s Via Dolorosa. The Festival quickly became a critical and commercial success, introducing DC audiences to such innovative and challenging works as Rachel Havrelock’s Charles McArthur Award-nominated From Tel Aviv to Ramallah: A BeatBox Journey featuring Yuri Lane (2007), Motti Lerner’s Pangs of the Messiah (2007), Hillel Mitelpunkt’s The Accident (2009), Hadar Galron’s Mikveh (2010, under the Festival banner, “Voice of the Woman”), Boaz Gaon’s adaptations Return to Haifa (2011, performed in Arabic and Hebrew by the Cameri Theatre) and Boged (Traitor): An Enemy of the People (2013) and Motti Lerner’s The Admission (2014, performed both at Theater J and Studio Theatre, presented by Busboys and Poets) and many others. In addition to these and a host of panel discussions featuring a wide array of experts and stakeholders, the Festival gave birth to The Peace Café interfaith discussion forum, a joint venture between Roth, Iraqi-American restaurateur Andy Shallal and journalist Mimi Conway (both Shallal and Conway are Mosaic Theater Company board members).

A host of veteran Festival artists and audience favorites join the 2015-16 lineup which begins with Aaron Davidman’s acclaimed Wrestling Jerusalem, a project originally commissioned by Theater J for the 2007 Voices Festival under the title Chasing Justice/Seeking Truth or It’s Just Not That Safe Anymore and subsequently workshopped at Theater J in 2009 and 2011 under its current title. The stirring solo performance in which the performer takes on the identity of —continued—
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some 17 different Palestinian, Israeli, British and American characters—currently on a 2015-16 national tour that includes runs at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis (this past fall) and at 59E59 Theatres in New York City (later this spring)—follows one man’s deeply personal journey to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Under the direction of Cornerstone Theatre Artistic Director and Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company Member Michael John Garcés, the stage play runs in the 260-seat Lang Theatre from January 6-24, 2016. The piece is currently being adapted into a feature film starring Davidman under the direction of Dylan Kussman.

"I wrote Wrestling Jerusalem to answer the question: How do you feel about what’s going on in Israel?” explains Davidman. “Wrestling Jerusalem presents a range of voices…Israeli, Palestinian, American, British, men, women, who each have reflections about their lives that illuminate aspects of the conflict and, hopefully, open our hearts to their perspectives.”

Meanwhile, just down the hall in the 160-seat Sprenger Theatre, Israeli artist Shay Pitovsky directs the American premiere of I Shall Not Hate, an adaptation of Nobel Peace Prize nominee Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish’s moving 2012 memoir. Palestinian-Israeli actor Gassan Abbas plays Dr. Abuelaish, a celebrated champion for peace in the Middle East despite losing three of his daughters to Israeli tank fire in the Gaza Strip in 2009. The play is performed in Arabic and Hebrew with English subtitles, and runs from January 23—February 14, 2016. This new bilingual adaptation, updated for the production with the approval of Dr. Abuelaish, follows the play’s 2013 run at the Habima Theatre in Tel Aviv.

Reporting on the 2013 production, the publication Al-Monitor writes "The complex and riveting figure of Abuelaish is being portrayed by the noted actor Gassan Abbas, a native and resident of the Arab-Israeli town of Umm al-Fahm. He stands alone on stage for an hour as the doctor and father who loses three of his daughters and tells a tale that no playwright could have invented—only reality could. 'Usually, actors say we are actors. We are playing a role,' Abbas says. 'I am not playing a role. I am playing this role because it says things I want to say. I have played many roles in my life, but this one is a step up because of the subject.'"

For Roth, the opening dyad of solo performances that kick off the Festival emphasizes the interplay of narratives at the heart of the Mosaic mission. "It's absolutely exhilarating," Roth says, “to have this range of perspectives holding forth under one ecumenical roof at the Atlas—a new home with multiple spaces and ample room to stage, discuss and process these completely absorbing, challenging and heart-opening stories."

The well-documented separation of both Roth and the Festival from Theater J after fourteen years of successful Israel-related programming—a decision that came at the behest of Theater J’s parent organization, the DCJCC—stirred the national and international artistic communities. Many saw the decision as a response to mounting pressure from conservative stakeholders who raised issue with the Festival’s rigorous probing of difficult questions pertaining to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the ongoing Occupation, as well as the Festival’s embrace of uncompromised community dialogue. Over 130 artistic directors from around the country signed an open letter in Roth’s support, which was documented by the New York Times, Washington Post and other national and Israeli publications. Over 40 Israeli playwrights and directors, along with the Israeli Institute of Drama, signed letters of support for the Festival programming. The achievements of the Festival, and its subsequent cancellation, were chronicled in the final three chapters of Pulitzer Prize-winning author David K. Shipler’s recent book Freedom of Speech: Mightier than the Sword, published by Knopf in May of this year and available this sprint in paperback.

“The Voices Festival serves as a necessary bridge to Israel, importing and sharing a range of viewpoints: historical, emotional, sequential, and not parochially—that challenge our previously held beliefs and awaken our empathy,” wrote the Association for Jewish Theatre in a letter to the board of the DCJCC one year ago. “Clearly the consistent and robust audience turnout is a valuable indicator among others, showing the need in the community that this festival provides.”

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Later in the Festival, Mosaic Theater Company stages *Eretz Chadasha (The Promised Land)*, written by Pitovsky and Sachar Pinkas under the direction of Michael Bloom (Off-Broadway’s *Sight Unseen*). The production, which runs from February 16-28, 2016 in Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company’s 100-seat rehearsal room before touring several area universities, is an eerily-relevant story about the waves of young Sudanese refugees crossing the desert to enter Israel legally and illegally, testing the limits of a welcoming society.

Next up for the Festival is playwright Motti Lerner’s explosive new drama *After the War*, directed by Sinai Peter (*Return to Haifa, Pangs of the Messiah*) in the Lang Theatre from March 24-April 17, 2016. This new play, from the author of the controversial *The Admission*, chronicles one Israeli family’s traumatic fallout after the 2006 war in Lebanon. The Festival concludes with Leila Buck’s poignant solo show *Hkeelee (Talk to Me)*, a probing portrait of a woman reconciling with the memory of her grandmother and her own American-Lebanese identity. Directed by Noelle Ghoussaini, this limited three-performance run takes place in the 200-seat Kogod Cradle at Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater on April 30 and May 1, 2016. (Forthcoming press releases will offer casting, programming updates and key bios for later offerings in the Festival.)

Mosaic Theater furthers the successful precedent set by its first two productions with an ambitious schedule of free community programming to complement these productions. Nightly post-show talkbacks and conversations will take place after every performance during the Festival, featuring affiliated artists and affinity partners, as well as experts and stakeholders in the region. Confirmed affinity partners who are curating events include J Street, New Israel Fund, ADAMS (All Dulles Area Muslim Society), Israeli and Palestinian youth band Heartbeat, interfaith student initiative New Story Leadership, philanthropy network Peace and Security Funders Group, literary and visual arts project Al Mutanabbi Street Starts Here DC in conjunction with the Split this Rock poetry initiative, the Institute for Policy Studies’ Epicenter project on art and activism and the University of Maryland’s Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies. Confirmed participants include poet Marcia Lynx Quale, musicians Aaron Schneyer and Mosche Snowden, author John Feffer, Peace and Security Funders Group Executive Director Alexandra Toma, New Story Leadership Founder and CEO Paul Costello, ADAMS Board Chairman Rizwan Jaka, Muslim interfaith leader Farhanahz Ellis, journalist Shlomi Eldar, Prof. Yoram Peri of the University of Maryland, poet Safia Elhillo, Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish and performers Aaron Davidman and Gassan Abbas.

**Aaron Davidman (Writer and performer)** is a playwright, actor, director and producer. He is drawn to stories of ethnic history and cultural complexity that challenge our assumptions of the “other”. Aaron served as Artistic Director of Traveling Jewish Theatre in San Francisco from 2002-2011. Among many works at TJT he conceived, co-wrote and directed the international collaboration *Blood Relative* about the Israeli-Palestinian story; co-wrote and performed in *God’s Donkey*; originated the role of Momik Neuman in *See Under: Love*, based on the David Grossman novel; and directed *Death of a Salesman*. Outside of TJT Aaron’s work includes directing the world premiere of *This World in a Woman’s Hands* by Marcus Gardley and the world premiere of Gardley’s *Love is a Dream House in Lorin*, both at Shotgun Players, and the world premiere of Gardley’s *The Road Weeps, The Well Runs Dry* at Perseverance Theatre in Juneau, Alaska. He directed *Golda’s Balcony* and *The Chosen* at TheatreWorks, and he appeared in Theatre J’s 10th Anniversary production of *The Chosen* at Arena Stage. His play *Wrestling Jerusalem*, commissioned by Ari Roth and supported in part by the Sundance Institute Theatre Program, TJT and Theater J, received its world premiere in 2014 at Intersection for the Arts in San Francisco to critical acclaim. It is now touring nationally and being made into a feature film directed by Dylan Kussman. Aaron received his theatrical training at Carnegie Mellon University, earned a BA from the University of Michigan and an MFA in creative writing/playwriting from San Francisco State University. More about Aaron at aaron davidman.com.

**Michael John Garcés (Director)** is very pleased that *Wrestling Jerusalem* is part of the inaugural season of Mosaic Theater. He is the Artistic Director of Cornerstone Theatre Company in Los Angeles, a community-engaged ensemble, where he most recently directed *California: The Tempest* by Alison Carey. Michael is a company member at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company where he has directed several productions including *Lights Rise on Grace* by Chad Bekim, *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation about the Herero of Namibia*... by Jackie Sibblies Drury, and *The...—continued—*
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Convert by Danai Gurira. Other work in Washington DC includes red, black and GREEN: a blues by Marc Bamuthi Joseph which was presented at The Kennedy Center, and the upcoming world premiere of Aaron Posner's D.C. Merchant which is being produced by The Folger Theatre.

Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish, MD, MPH (Author and co-adaptor) is a Palestinian physician and an internationally recognized human rights and inspirational peace activist. Dr. Abuelaish has been nominated for three consecutive years for the Nobel Peace Prize. He has been named one of the 500 Most Influential Muslims five consecutive years by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre in Jordan, as well as one of the 500 Most Powerful Arabs in the World. In Canada, he was named one of the Top 25 Canadian Immigrants, and was appointed to the Order of Ontario in 2013. Dr. Abuelaish has been given seven honorary degrees from the University of Manitoba, Queen's University, Victoria University, Sault College, McMaster University, University of Saskatchewan, and The University of Western Ontario. He has also received several prestigious awards, including the Mahatma Gandhi Peace Award of Canada, the World Citizenship in Action Award, the Stavros Niarchos Prize for Survivorship, the Lombardy Region Peace Prize, and the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. His long list of admirers includes Jimmy Carter, Nobel Laureates Elie Wiesel and John Polanyi, and Barak Obama. Dr. Abuelaish has been interviewed by prominent journalists, including Christiane Amanpour, Anderson Cooper, Sir David Frost and Zeinab Badawi, and he has appeared on prominent media outlets such as BBC News Hard Talk, Fox News Channel (FOX), CNN, Al Arabiya News, London’s The Telegraph, ABC, TVO, The Globe and Mail, The Economist, The New York Times, Vanity Fair, the Boston Globe, People Magazine. Dr. Abuelaish has been referred to as the Nelson Mandela of the Middle East, and has been compared to Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King.

Dr. Abuelaish’s internationally best-selling book, I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor's Journey on the Road to Peace and Human Dignity, an autobiography that centers on his life, his achievements, and the loss of his daughters and nieces in the 2009 Gaza War, has been translated to 23 languages and has achieved critical acclaim. It has become a testament to his commitment to forgiveness as the solution to conflict and the catalyst towards peace. Dr. Abuelaish is the Founder and President of the Daughters for Life foundation, which provides education and leadership training to girls and women in the Middle East, regardless of religion and/or citizenship. Currently, Dr. Abuelaish lives with his five children in Toronto where he is an associate professor of Public Health at the University of Toronto.

Shay Pitovsky (Co-adaptor and director) is a playwright, director and Artistic Director of Elad Theater, and from 2008-2015 was Artistic Director of the Young Habima Company. He is an alumnus of the Dramatic Arts School of Seminar Hakibbutzim (directors division), and of the School for Drama Writing. Projects at The Habima Theater include: Ten Minutes from Home (after the 20th anniversary of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin), the promised land and God Waits at the Station (both international projects by the UTE), The Nose by Gogol, Monsieur de Pourceaugnac by Moliere, The Oath (based on a Jewish tale) and I Shall Not Hate (based on the autobiography by Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish). At Haifa Theater: The adventures of a donkey that is all pure (based on a children’s book by Nachum Gutman). Fringe Festival projects include: The Breakdown by Durrenmatt (Winning Best Show of the Year, Best Director, and Best Costumes), Beatrice (based on a short story by Nahum Gutmann) and Drawers (a dance-theater performance).

Gassan Abbas (Performer) is an Israeli-Palestinian stage and screen actor. He received his education from the Tel-Aviv University, where his focus was on television and theater. He has worked in many of Israel’s leading theaters, including the Cameri Theater, and Beit Lessin Theater. He has either acted in, or directed, over 70 theater productions and 20 movies, including a number of foreign productions. In 2001, Abbas founded Diwan El-Lajon theater in his hometown of Umm al-Fahm. He was named Best Actor at the Carthage Cinema Festival in Tunisia in 2006, and again at the Acco Festival of Alternative Israeli Theatre in 2009 for his role in Hertzval Said. Abbas currently works at the Habima Theater in Tel-Aviv.

The creative team for Wrestling Jerusalem includes set designer Nephelee Andonyadis, lighting designer Allen Willner, sound designer Bruno Louchouard, choreographer Stacey Printz and stage manager / technical director Wolfgang Lancelot Wachalovsky.

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The creative team for *I Shall Not Hate* includes set and costume designer Niv Manor, original lighting designer Ziv Volushin, sound designer Hilit Rosenthal, dramaturge Shachar Pinkhas translation consultant Tami Rubin and stage manager Rachel Hamilton.

For full company bios and additional production information visit mosaictheater.org/wrestling- jerusalem and mosaictheater.org/i-shall-note-hate. Full company information is included below.

Nightly discussions will follow every performance of both *Wrestling Jerusalem* and *I Shall Not Hate*. Check MosaicTheater.org/events for regular updates.

**Wrestling Jerusalem Opening Night:**
Thursday, January 7th at 8:00 PM
Mosaic Theater Company staff, board, and affiliated artists celebrate the openings of *Wrestling Jerusalem*. For further information, or for tickets, contact Contessa Riggs at 202-399-7993 ext 157, or email contessa@mosaictheater.org.

**Production Information**

_Wrestling Jerusalem_
Written and performed by Aaron Davidman
Directed by Michael John Garcés
January 6-24, 2016

**ABOUT:** One man’s journey to comprehend the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it courses through his divided psyche and argumentative community. Originally commissioned by Theater J in 2007, Davidman’s evolving excavation into the contours of conflict now illuminates a personal story that grapples with the complexities of identity, history and social justice. *Wrestling Jerusalem* gives voice to a dozen characters, animating their struggles, soul searchings and defensive barriers that give way to a spiritual oneness that offers a promise of peace in the midst of bloodshed. Part of the Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival.

**CAST:**
Aaron Davidman

**CREATIVE TEAM:**
Director: Michael John Garcés
Set designer: Nephelie Andonyadis
Lighting designer Allen Willner
Sound designer: Bruno Louchouard
Choreographer: Stacey Printz
Stage manager / technical director: Wolfgang Lancelot Wachalovsky

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**I Shall Not Hate Opening Night:**
Monday, January 25th at 7:30 PM

**Production Information**

_I Shall Not Hate_
Based on the memoir by Izzeldin Abuelaish
Adapted by Izzeldin Abuelaish and Shay Pitovsky
Directed by Shay Pitovsky
Featuring Gassan Abbas
January 23—February 14, 2016

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ABOUT: The story of the Gaza fertility doctor (nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize) who refuses to relinquish his commitment to coexistence, even after tragedy befalls his family during Operation Cast Lead. The production, performed in Hebrew and Arabic by one of Israel’s leading Palestinian actors, Gassan Abbas, brings humanity and heroism to the role of Abuelaish, in a script adapted and staged by one of our Festival’s featured young artists, the Israeli director, Shay Pitovsky. Part of the Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival. Performed in Arabic and Hebrew with English subtitles.

CAST:
Gassan Abbas

CREATIVE TEAM:
Author: Izzeldin Abuelaish
Director: Shay Pitovsky
Set and costume designer: Niv Minor
Original lighting designer: Ziv Volushin
Sound designer: Hilit Rosenthal
Dramaturge: Shachar Pinkhas
Translator: Tami Rubin
Stage manager: Rachel Hamilton

Plan Your Visit:
TICKETS: Tickets for Wrestling Jerusalem and I Shall Not Hate are $20-$40, plus applicable fees. For information on savings programs such as student discounts, neighborhood nights, community nights, military and first responder discounts, and others, visit mosaictheater.org/tickets. Tickets may be purchased online at mosaictheater.org, or by phone at 202-399-7993, or at the Atlas Performing Arts Center Box Office at 1333 H Street NE, Washington DC 20002.

Atlas Performing Arts Center Box Office: 202-399-7993 ext. 2

PRICING TIERS:
General: $20-40
Senior: 10% discount
Military and first responder: 10% discount
Under 30 and student: $15 tickets
Neighborhood Night: $15 tickets on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sunday nights for Mosaic Theater neighbors in Northeast or Southeast.
Community Conversation: $10 tickets once a month for Mosaic Theater neighbors in Northeast or Southeast.

WRESTLING JERUSALEM PERFORMANCE DATES:
Pay-What-You-Can preview performance at 8:00 PM on Wednesday, 1/6
Opening night at 8:00 PM on Thursday, 1/7
Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays at 8:00 PM
Student matinee at 11:00 AM on Thursday, 1/21
Saturdays at 3:00 PM and 8:00 PM
Sunday, 1/17 at 3:00 PM and 8:00 PM
Sunday, 1/10 and 1/24 at 4:00 PM
Full calendar: mosaictheater.org/wrestling-jerusalem

I SHALL NOT HATE PERFORMANCE DATES:
Pay-What-You-Can preview performances at 5:00 PM on Saturday, 1/23, and 7:00 PM on Sunday, 1/24
Opening night at 7:30 PM on Monday, 1/25

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Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays at 8:00 PM
Student matinee at 11:00 AM on Thursday, 2/11
Saturdays at 3:00 PM and 8:00 PM
Sundays at 3:00 PM and 7:30 PM
Full calendar: mosaictheater.org/i-shall-note-hate

METRO: Mosaic Theater Company is in residence at the Atlas Performing Arts Center, which is a twenty-minute walk from the Union Station Metro Station (Red Line). When exiting the station, follow signs to the bus parking garage. Exit the back of the garage and turn right onto H Street.

If coming by the Metro Center or Chinatown Metro Stations, patrons can catch the X2 or X9 busses, getting off at H St & 14th St NE.

Additional directions: mosaictheater.org/plan-your-trip.

PARKING: Mosaic Theater Company has partnered with the Atlas and H Street Parking to provide valet parking throughout the season for nearly every performance. Patrons can pre-purchase valet parking for $20, which can either be used at the nearby valet drop-off, or as a self-parking voucher at the lot at 1008 H Street NE.

For more information, or to purchase valet parking: mosaictheater.org/parking.

Mosaic 8 packages are now on sale and may be purchased by calling the Atlas Performing Arts Center box office at 202-399-7993 ext 2, or by visiting mosaictheater.org.

Mosaic Theater Company of DC is committed to making powerful, transformational, socially-relevant art, producing plays by authors on the front lines of conflict zones and providing audiences with a dynamic new venue for the dramatizing and debating of ideas including an annual intercultural festival, like our acclaimed Voices From a Changing Middle East series.

With an emphasis on the playwright's vibrant voice, muscular structures and a powerful collaborative fusion with directors of vision and story-telling integrity, Mosaic plays marry a love of ideas, character, conflict, immediacy, and personal and public resonance, working with the finest actors in our city to create thrilling performances that matter. Our plays speak truth to power and to the private parts of our soul prompting reflection, discussion and uplift, while creating lasting impression; in short, we make art with a purpose and strive for impact.

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Opening Nights for Mosaic Theater Company of DC’s inaugural 2015-16 season:

**Unexplored Interior:** Monday, November 2nd at 7:30 PM
**The Gospel of Lovingkindness:** Sunday, December 13th at 7:30 PM
**Wrestling Jerusalem:** Thursday, January 7th at 8:00 PM
**I Shall Not Hate:** Monday, January 25th at 7:30 PM
**The Promised Land:** Thursday, February 18th at 8:00 PM (at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company)
**After the War:** Monday, March 28th at 7:30 PM
**Hkeelee (Talk to Me):** Saturday, April 30th at 8:00 PM (at Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater)
**When January Feels Like Summer:** Monday, May 23rd at 7:30 PM

Meet Mosaic: [MosaicTheater.org](http://MosaicTheater.org) • Facebook: facebook.com/MosaicTheater • Twitter: twitter.com/Mosaic_Theater • Blog: mosaictheater.org/Blog