

Mosaic Theater Company Media Release

Ari Roth, *Founding Artistic Director* • Serge Seiden, *Managing Director & Producer*



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MOSAIC THEATER COMPANY OF DC ANNOUNCES

INAUGURAL 2015–2016 SEASON: THE CASE FOR HOPE IN A POLARIZED WORLD

*Resurgence of acclaimed Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival
at core of eight intercultural productions*

(Washington, D.C.) A potent new voice and wellspring of intercultural art will emerge this fall with the launch of Mosaic Theater Company of DC's inaugural season. The theater's eight productions — including a host of programs, readings in conjunction with the Women's Voices Theater Festival, and limited runs at Arena Stage and Woolly Mammoth Theater, alongside a half-dozen offerings at Mosaic's flagship Atlas Performing Arts Center home — expand on its renowned **Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival** to take audiences beyond the frontlines of conflict zones to make the case for hope in a fractious world.

True to its mission to produce inclusive, provocative, transformational and socially relevant works, Mosaic Theater asks: **How do we respond to the most vexing dilemmas and debates of our moment?** There are no easy answers to the challenges experienced by young black men in our cities, to the polarization of parties in the Middle East Conflict, or to the persistence of genocide in our time. Mosaic Theater's inaugural 2015-16 season will contribute to broader civic conversations — in Washington and nationwide, within and across faith communities — through our artists' vigorous, uncensored storytelling and our candid, robustly-curated panels, Peace Cafés, and other innovative discussion formats.

"The plays this inaugural season bespeak an urgency," says **Founding Artistic Director Ari Roth**. "They point to wounds in our society that the theater is uniquely able to address. As a social medium, theater brings people together to grapple with difficult subjects, but in so doing — in experiencing a common reckoning — we point to the possibility of reconciliation not through tragedy, but through catharsis. Mosaic is committed to bringing an intentional mix of communities together to encounter our shared humanity on stage, as we work with the finest actors, directors and designers in our city. Our playwrights will speak truth to power and to the private parts of the individual soul, with the ultimate goal of prompting reflection, discussion, uplift and impact."

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Roth began forging Mosaic Theater following his well-documented separation from Theater J after an 18-year run as artistic director. During his tenure, he built the fledgling theater into the largest, most respected Jewish theater in North America. A producer, playwright and educator, Roth has produced more than 129 productions, including 44 world premieres, orchestrated the acclaimed *Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival* to dramatize intercultural encounters, and co-founded the Peace Café (in 2000, with Mimi Conway and Andy Shallal, both members of Mosaic's new board of directors) to foster community dialogue informed by the common experience of works of art.

The season opens with *Unexplored Interior*, the world premiere of Jay O. Sanders' epic that takes an African NYU film student on a journey back to Rwanda to confront the violence that destroyed his family. It continues with **Marcus Gardley's *The Gospel of Lovingkindness***, a poignant elegy to a fatal encounter between two young black men, conjuring the ghost of civil rights activist Ida B. Wells who rallies a community reeling from the untimely deaths and opposing trajectories of two of its bright lights.

From January through April, 2016, **The Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival** features the works of Israeli, Arab and American authors chronicling the impact of recent conflicts in Gaza, Lebanon and Israel on the Palestinian and Israeli family — and a much-divided American Jewish community. The festival's theme, **"The War Comes Home"** is launched in a stirring solo performance, as playwright **Aaron Davidman presents the festival's cornerstone, *Wrestling Jerusalem***, his evolving excavation into the contours of conflict while grappling with the complexities of identity, history and social justice.

The festival also features ***I Shall Not Hate*, based on the memoir by Izzeldin Abuelaish**, a Gaza doctor who remains committed to coexistence even after tragedy befalls his family. And the **world premiere of *After the War* by Motti Lerner**, author of last season's Helen Hayes Award-nominated *The Admission*, ignites the festival with a powerful tale of homecoming that explores whether a family can heal the wounds inflicted from sharp political division. Two other limited runs, ***Eretz Chadasha: The Promised Land***, about the plight of Sudanese refugees seeking asylum in Israel (running at Woolly Mammoth Theatre), and ***Hkeele***, about a Lebanese matriarch remembered by her American granddaughter (running in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle at Arena Stage) round out the festival.

"At their core, these plays are about building a sense of hope and possibility in a polarized world," shares **Producing Director Serge Seiden**. "In exploring cultural intersection, change and conflict, they unearth the power of family and personal connection, striking a chord with audiences no matter where they come from." Seiden will direct the season finale, **Cori Thomas' rousing romantic comedy, *When January Feels Like Summer***, following five young lives colliding with one another and the many flavors of desire across Washington's multicultural landscape.

As producing director, Seiden brings with him 25 years of experience from Studio Theatre, where he advanced from positions as stage manager and literary manager to the role of producing director. At Studio he directed 35 productions as well as plays and musicals presented at Adventure Theatre-MTC, Theater J, Metrostage, Olney Theatre Center and Synetic Theater. Under Seiden's direction, last year's production of *Bad Jews* ran 15 weeks, broke Studio box office records and received four Helen Hayes Award nominations, including Outstanding Director.

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Mosaic Theater's formation has created a city-wide convergence of diverse talent that has brought acclaimed playwrights and directors to join Roth and Seiden, including Mosaic Theater **Resident Director Jennifer L. Nelson** in collaborative artistic exploration. "Just as a visual mosaic combines the form, color and texture of different materials, Mosaic Theater is about the integration of different philosophies of performance art," shares Nelson. "Each individual shape, substance and feel will influence the whole statement."

Jennifer L. Nelson has joined Mosaic Theater as Resident Director of Artistic Development, bringing more than 40 years of experience as an actor, playwright, administrator, professor and director and two-term president of the League of Washington Theatres. She is senior advisor for special programming at Ford's Theatre, and previously served for 11 years as the producing artistic director of the African Continuum Theatre. She is also a veteran of Living Stage Theatre Company at Arena Stage, and has directed productions at Ford's, Round House, Woolly Mammoth, Theater of the First Amendment, Theater J and more.

Lorna Mulvaney rounds out Mosaic Theater's leadership as General Manager and Associate Producer, having recently served as the Associate Production Manager of Studio Theatre where she managed the execution of multiple 11-show seasons. Other finance and producing experience includes work with Washington Performing Arts, the International Festival of Arts and Ideas, and Hartford Stage.

Last month Mosaic Theater's 21-member board of directors approved a \$1.5 million budget to fund this ambitious inaugural season. The theater is well on its way to meeting its financial goals, last month garnering \$237,000 in contributions and pledges toward a \$250,000 challenge grant from The Reva and David Logan Foundation, to go alongside \$180,000 raised before the challenge. The grant will provide a one-to-one match for new and increased donations received through June.

Mosaic Theater Company of DC 2015-16 Schedule*

Women's Voices Theatre Festival

Readings at the National Museum of Women in the Arts

1250 New York Ave NW, Washington, DC

Monday, October 5 at 8:00 pm – *Hkeele (Talk to Me)* by Leila Buck

Monday, October 12 at 7:30 pm – *Run Home* by Jennifer L. Nelson

Monday, October 19 at 7:30 pm – *The Place We Built* by Sarah Gancher

For more information, go to www.womensvoicestheaterfestival.org

Unexplored Interior

(This is Rwanda: The Beginning and the End of the Earth)

By Jay O. Sanders

Directed by Derek Goldman

Featuring Erika Rose and Michael Anthony Williams

Atlas Performing Arts Center, Lang Theatre

October 29—November 29, 2015

Mosaic Theater launches its inaugural season with a world-premiere epic about the madness and majesty of Rwanda. Raymond, a film student at NYU, returns to Rwanda to uncover the roots of violence that have destroyed his family, including his beloved grandfather, a Tutsi master storyteller whose legacy Raymond seeks to redeem. Staged by Derek Goldman (*Our Class, In Darfur*), this production takes place in the 260-seat Lang Theatre.

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The Gospel of Lovingkindness

By Marcus Gardley

Directed by Jennifer L. Nelson

Featuring Deidra LaWan Starnes

Atlas Performing Arts Center, Lab II

December 9, 2015—January 3, 2016

A hymn-and-hip-hop-tinged elegy, updated for its Washington premiere, the play tells the story of Manny, a 17-year-old who sings for President Obama at the White House and is shot to death three weeks later on the South Side of Chicago for his Air Jordan sneakers. Manny's mother retraces the trajectory of her son's fateful encounter with Noel, a fellow teenager with heartbreaking setbacks of his own, as she conjures the ghost of Ida B. Wells, the Civil Rights activist now 158 years old, who offers a challenging perspective for the family and our community. Staged by Mosaic Theater Resident Director Jennifer L. Nelson (*The Whipping Man*), this poignant chamber production will take place in the 100-seat Lab II Space at The Atlas.

Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival: The War Comes Home

January – April 2016

Israeli, Arab and American authors chronicle the impact that recent conflagrations in Gaza, Lebanon, and Israel have had upon the Palestinian and Israeli family and a much-divided American Jewish community. Stunning solo performances, a theatricalized documentary, and one stirring homecoming ignite this year's acclaimed festival that's brought DC audiences such heralded productions as Return to Haifa and The Admission.

Wrestling Jerusalem

Written and performed by Aaron Davidman

Directed by Michael John Garcés

Atlas Performing Arts Center, Lang Theatre

January 6-24, 2016

One man's journey to comprehend the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it courses through his divided psyche. 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 while 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.

I Shall Not Hate

Based on the memoir by Izzeldin Abuelaish

Directed by Shay Pitovksy

Featuring Gassan Abbas

Atlas Performing Arts Center, Sprenger Theatre

January 23—February 14, 2016

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. In the 180-seat Sprenger Theatre.

Eretz Chadasha: The Promised Land

By Shachar Pinkhas and Shay Pitovsky

Directed by Michael Bloom

At Woolly Mammoth Theater Company / February 16-28, 2016

On tour at area universities / February 29—March 6, 2016

The youth ensemble of Habimah, Israel's national theater, created this documentary-infused kaleidoscope chronicling the waves of Sudanese refugees who crossed the desert to enter Israel legally and illegally, finding themselves stranded in a drama of relocation and displacement. Adapted for an American troupe and staged by the former artistic director of the Cleveland Play House, Michael Bloom (Off-Broadway's *Sight Unseen*), this story personalizes a history of immigration and asks pointed questions about race and the limits of empathy in a welcoming society.

After the War

By Motti Lerner

Directed by Sinai Peter

Featuring Paul Morella and Michael Tolaydo

Atlas Performing Arts Center, Lang Theatre

March 24—April 17, 2016

This new play from the author of *The Admission* tells the story of a middle-aged Israeli expatriot returning to Tel Aviv after the 2006 war in Lebanon following an 18-year absence. Trying to make amends for the fallout caused from sharp political differences within the family, the play explores whether healing can be achieved in a wounded family, even as new reports of calamity in Lebanon exacerbate efforts as father, brother and son do battle. Staged by longtime *Voices Festival* resident director Sinai Peter in the Lang Theatre. Part of the Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival.

Hkeele (Talk to Me)

Written and performed by Leila Buck

Directed by Noelle Ghoussaini

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, Kogod Cradle

April 30—May 1, 2016

A probing portrait of a cosmopolitan Lebanese matriarch as remembered by her Lebanese-American granddaughter who attempts to piece together her beloved Teta's story. Moving between voices, faiths, times and spaces, from Beirut to Bethesda and beyond, *Hkeele* invites you to engage in an interactive exploration of what it means to be(come) American: what we hold onto, what we let go and how those choices come to shape who we are. This three-performance limited run plays in Arena Stage's intimate 200-seat Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle.

When January Feels Like Summer

By Cori Thomas

Directed by Serge Seiden

Atlas Performing Arts Center, Lang Theatre

May 19—June 12, 2016

From the director of *Bad Jews* and *The Apple Family Plays* comes this romantic urban comedy about an unlikely pair of teenagers working at two different Burger Kings who become unexpected heroes, while an immigrant accountant struggles with visibility and sexual reassignment preparation, and two stifled romantics begin to stumble toward each other during one strangely warm winter. Transported to Anacostia and H Street, this Off-

Broadway hit follows five colliding lives as change hums in the air and the many flavors of desire saturate the streets, convenience stores and Metro stations of the city. In the Lang Theatre.

***Mosaic Theater Company of DC** is an independent, intercultural theatrical force, dedicated to making art that is inclusive, uncensored, transformational and socially relevant. We develop, present and produce thought-provoking and entertaining plays and musicals with an edge, offering audiences a comprehensive engagement through a variety of programs including an annual intercultural festival, like our Voices From a Changing Middle East, providing a fusion of perspectives on a common theme or region. Bringing a mix of communities together to encounter our shared humanity on stage while grappling with many of the pressing social and political issues of our times, Mosaic Theater contributes to broader civic conversations in our city and within our intrafaith and interfaith communities, as the theater becomes a charged, welcoming space for probing drama and debate, create thrilling experiences that matter and have impact.*

Mosaic Theater received its certificate of incorporation from the District of Columbia as a domestic not-for-profit corporation on Dec. 24, 2014, and is applying to the IRS for tax-exempt status. Tax-exempt donations are being made to Mosaic Theater Company of DC, c/o Atlas Performing Arts Center, 1333 H Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Donors that require confirmed 501(c)(3) status to make a gift may donate through the theater's official fiscal agent, CultureCapital, at 975 F Street NW, Washington, DC 20004. CultureCapital also accepts gifts via wire, direct debit and stock transfer. Donors may contact Ari Roth at 202-399-7993 (x150) or ari@mosaictheater.org with any questions.

For more information on ticketing, membership, discounts, parking, and groups, go to mosaictheater.org.

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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: Sunday, May 22nd at 7:30 PM

Meet Mosaic:

MosaicTheater.org

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