

Mosaic Theater Company Press Release

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



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Mosaic Theater Company Launches National Tour of Renowned Voices from a Changing Middle East Festival

February Tour Presents Three Shows from Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Perspectives on Four College Campuses

Washington, DC—**Mosaic Theater Company of DC** takes its acclaimed **Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival** on tour this winter, bringing several of its seminal Festival productions (**I SHALL NOT HATE**, **VIA DOLOROSA**, and the recent film adaptation of **WRESTLING JERUSALEM**) to the University of Oklahoma, Grinnell College, and Eastern Mennonite University for presentations of each project, and culminating in a special evening at the University of Chicago's Logan Center for the Arts where excerpts from all three works will be shared in a single evening. The tour reflects different dimensions of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the efforts to achieve reckoning and reconciliation through live performance and discussion, in works performed in English, Arabic, and Hebrew (with translated surtitles).

Mosaic's founding artistic director Ari Roth stated: "I am thrilled to be sharing the work of the great Palestinian-Israeli actor Gassan Abbas with a wider audience as he reprises his role as Izzeldin Abuelaish in **I SHALL NOT HATE**. I am equally delighted that Aaron Davidman will join us for parts of the tour to talk about the impact that both the theatrical and cinematic versions of **WRESTLING JERUSALEM** have had on audiences across the country. Rounding out this incredible group of performers are David Bryan Jackson and Jonathan Tindle, who will each bring to life David Hare's **VIA DOLOROSA**—the play that originally started this Festival back at Theater J in 2000."

The *Voices from a Changing Middle East Tour* will kick off in Norman, Oklahoma at Oklahoma University's Weitzenhoffer Theatre on February 2 with performances running through February 4, then play at Grinnell College from February 9-11, at Eastern Mennonite University from February 15-18, and will conclude on February 20 at the University of Chicago. After the concluding performance, Roth will lead a post-show discussion with the audience based on Mosaic Theater Company's "Peace Café" model of using food-for-thought menu selections from the plays to prompt sharing of personal narratives as a tool to build bonds of candor and understanding.

When **I SHALL NOT HATE** was staged in Mosaic Theater Company's inaugural season, Peter Marks of the *Washington Post* said: "[**I SHALL NOT HATE** is] one of the most effective bio-

plays I have ever experienced...You will like Abbas's Abuelaish for his folksy sense of humor, admire him for his reflexive candor—and mourn with him over his terrible losses...with an unadulterated, intuitive grasp of the blunt-force impact of Abuelaish's memories, and performed by Abbas with an understated dignity, the 75 minute piece is one of those eloquent pleas for understanding that speaks louder than 100 manifestos..."

Likewise, Nelson Pressley of the *Washington Post* called Mosaic Theater Company's production of **WRESTLING JERUSALEM** "Breathtaking...Sweeping yet personal...a panoramic overview of one of the world's most chronic conflicts."

And writing in 2000 of **VIA DOLOROSA**, Nelson Pressley wrote "VIA DOLOROSA may be the quintessential David Hare play for [this] reason: It is peopled by passionate intellectual figures who toss their conflicting ideologies in the audience's collective lap." *The New York Times* wrote after the show's opening on Broadway, "*Via Dolorosa* has...an astonishing abundance of stories, characters and ideas."

"The *Voices From a Changing Middle East Tour* gives Mosaic the opportunity to spread our robust conversations and intercultural productions to new audiences beyond the DC area. This tour is designed to build empathy among audiences and curate conversations across departments. We are so proud to be partnering and building relationships with these four universities across America, and look forward to expanding relationships like these with other institutions in the years ahead," said Roth.

About Mosaic Theater Company and the Voices Festival:

Independent, intercultural, entertaining, and uncensored, Mosaic Theater Company of DC is the award-winning home for transformational, socially-relevant art, producing work by authors on the front lines of conflict zones, including its nationally acclaimed Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival which brings the souls and struggles of the people of the Middle East—particularly in Israel/Palestine—to life. Created in 2000 by Founding Artistic Director Ari Roth when he led Theater J to become the largest Jewish theater in the country, the Voices Festival became the critically-hailed yet controversial program that triggered the dramatic inception of Mosaic Theater Company at the end of 2014 after Theater J's parent organization, the DCJCC, canceled the Voices Festival in response to select community pressure and ousted Roth for his protestations. Hundreds of noted figures in the world of American and international theater contested the termination, including Pulitzer Prize-winning author Tony Kushner and The Public Theater's Oskar Eustis, who called Roth's ouster "an act of political censorship." An open letter, signed by an unprecedented 120 artistic directors around the country (including The Court Theatre's Charles Newell), demanded Roth's reinstatement, stating: "*A free people need a free art; debate, dissent, and conflict are at the heart of what makes theater work, and what makes democracy possible.*"

Mosaic Theater Company launched in December, 2014 as a Resident Arts Partner at The Atlas Performing Arts Center in Northeast DC and provides a forum for bold, expressive art, dedicated to being a model of diversity and inclusion while building a fusion community to address some of the most pressing issues of our times. Mosaic has gone on to win the 2017 John Aniello/Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Emerging Theatre Company while being named

“Best Small Theater” by the readers of the *Washington Post Express*. In this same year, Roth has been recipient of the DC Mayor’s Arts Award for Visionary Leadership and named by the Chronicle of Philanthropy as one of “15 People Changing the Nonprofit World.”

Over 14 seasons at Theater J, the Voices Festival grew to become a hub for civic and cultural drama in Washington, DC, offering 20 provocative productions and 39 workshop presentations to tens of thousands of local and regional audience members. Among the highlights: Motti Lerner’s West Bank drama, *Pangs of the Messiah* (2007); Hadar Galron’s cry for feminism within the religious community, *Mikveh* (2010); The Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv’s production of *Return to Haifa*, performed in Hebrew and Arabic and adapted by Boaz Gaon from the landmark Palestinian novella by Ghassan Kanafani (2011); and the acclaimed, controversial 2014 production of Motti Lerner’s *The Admission*, which soon transferred to Studio Theatre, about an alleged massacre outside Haifa during the war of 1948. In Mosaic’s inaugural season, the Voices Festival staged five works including *Wrestling Jerusalem* by Aaron Davidman; *I Shall Not Hate* by Izzeldin Abuelaish; *Hkeelee* by Leila Buck; *Promised Land* by Shachar Pinkhas and Shay Pitovsky; and *After the War* by Motti Lerner. In Season Two, the Festival marked the 50th anniversary of The Occupation with dual Israeli/Palestinian perspectives, offering Gilad Evron’s *Ulysses on Bottles* and *The Return* by Hanna Eady and Edward Mast.

Now in its third season at Mosaic, the Voices Festival launches a four-campus national tour, with several of its seminal works traveling to Oklahoma and Eastern Mennonite Universities, Grinnell College, and the University of Chicago. In spring of 2018, Mosaic will bring two nationally renowned directors and two sets of multilingual ensembles to DC to produce the most ambitious productions of the Festival’s history. In March, Broadway director Mark Brokaw will direct *PAPER DOLLS*, a play with music by Philip Himberg, based on the acclaimed Israeli documentary film by Tomer Heymann about Filipino guest workers in Tel Aviv who care for elderly Orthodox men by day and headline a rousing drag show by night. The Festival—and Mosaic’s Third Season—will then culminate with *THE VAGRANT TRILOGY*, staged by heralded director Mark Wing-Davey and developed in collaboration with New York’s Public Theater. This epic production consists of three interlocked hour-long plays by Lebanese-American Mona Mansour, about the dramas of a displaced Palestinian family spanning four decades. For more information, go to www.mosaictheater.org

Mosaic’s full tour schedule is as follows:

Feb 2-4 at Oklahoma University, Norman, OK

Feb 2 – *I Shall Not Hate* at 8 pm

Feb 3 – Screening of *Wrestling Jerusalem* with filmmaker Aaron Davidman at 3 pm

Feb 3 - *I Shall Not Hate* at 8 pm

Feb 4 – *Via Dolorosa* at 3 pm followed by artists panel and Peace Cafe

Feb 9-11 at Grinnell College; Grinnell, Iowa

Feb 9 – Screening of *Wrestling Jerusalem* at 7 pm

Feb 10 - *I Shall Not Hate* at 8 pm

Feb 11 – *I Shall Not Hate* at 3 pm

Feb 15-18 at Eastern Mennonite University; Harrisonburg, VA

Feb 16 - I Shall Not Hate at 7:30 pm

Feb 17 - I Shall Not Hate at 2 pm & 7:30 pm

Feb 18 - Via Dolorosa at 2 pm

Feb 20 at University of Chicago's Logan Center for the Arts

Selections from I Shall Not Hate, Wrestling Jerusalem and Via Dolorosa at 7:30 pm

Bios of key performers & authors:

Gassan Abbas (Performer, I Shall Not Hate) 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 international 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 Theater in 2009 for his role in *Hertzel Said*. Abbas currently works at the Habima Theater in Tel-Aviv.

Izzeldin Abuelaish is a Palestinian medical doctor who was born and raised in Jabalia Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip. His work as both a healthcare practitioner and a peace advocate mobilizes health as a tool for peace. Dr. Abuelaish has received a number of awards and nominations in recognition of his promotion of peace through health, and has been given seven honorary degrees from the University of Manitoba, Victoria University, Sault College, McMaster University, University of Saskatchewan, Queen's University, and The University of Western Ontario. In addition to sharing the stage with several Nobel Peace Laureates such as Senator Romeo Dallaire, Dr. James Orbinski, Shirin Ebadi (Iran), and Leymah Gbowee (Liberia), he has been nominated three years consecutively for the Nobel Peace Prize. Dr. Abuelaish's book, *I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor's Journey*, an autobiography inspired by the loss of his daughters Bessan, Mayar, and Aya and his niece Noor to Israeli shelling on January 16, 2009, has achieved critical acclaim. Published in 2010, it has become an international best-seller and has been translated into 23 languages.

Sir David Hare is a British playwright and director, noted for his deftly crafted satires examining British society in the post-World War II era. Plays include *Slag* (1970), *The Great Exhibition* (1972), *Knuckle*, (1974), *Teeth 'n' Smiles* (1975), *Plenty* (1978), *Pravda: A Fleet Street Comedy* (co-written with Howard Brenton in 1985), *Racing Demon* (1990), *Murmuring Judges* (1991), and *The Absence of War* (1993). More recent plays include *Stuff Happens* (2004), which follows President George W. Bush and his advisers in the years leading up to the Iraq War; *The Power of Yes* (2009) about the 2008 financial crisis; *South Downs* (2011); *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (2014); and *The Moderate Soprano* (2015). Hare became known as a screenwriter for his film adaptation of *Plenty* in 1985. He also adapted his play *The Secret Rapture* (1988) for film in 1994 and helmed the films *Wetherby* (1985) and *Strapless* (1989), for which he penned the screenplays. He wrote and directed *Page Eight* (2011), *Turks & Caicos* (2014), and *Salting the Battlefield* (2014), a trilogy of television films about aging M15 agent Johnny Worricker (played by Bill Nighy). His screenplay adaptations Michael

Cunningham's novel *The Hours* and Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader* (released in 2002 and 2008, respectively) were nominated for Academy Awards. In 2011 Hare received the PEN Pinter Prize, given to a British writer of outstanding merit. He was knighted in 1998.

Jonathan Tindle (*Via Dolorosa* at OU and U of C) has been an actor for over thirty years on stage, screen, and radio. He adapted and produced Tennyson's epic verse drama *Maud: The Madness* into a one-person play, which received three separate productions in different cities and was nominated for the New York Innovative Theatre Award. Other one-person shows include *Bed Among The Lentils* (Helen Hayes Award nomination) and *The Santaland Diaries*. He also authored the one-person play *Watching Fire* (performed by Dolf Lungren at Another Octopus, NYC). Off Broadway credits include: *Arcadia*, *Pity In History*, *No End of Blame*, *Scenes From an Execution*, *Pentecost* (Atlantic Stage 2), *Roger&Tom* (HERE); *Not all Korean Girls Can Fly* (EST); *The Bacchae 2.1* (The Flea); *Welcome to Our City* (The Mint). Regional credits include: the world premiere of Keith Reddin's *Some Brighter Distance* (City Theatre, Pittsburgh); *The Swan* (Round House Theatre, Helen Hayes Award nomination), *The Chemistry of Change* (Round House Theatre); *Three Sisters*, *The Caretaker*, *The Bacchae* (Studio Theatre); *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (Washington Stage Guild, Helen Hayes nomination); as well as productions at The Kennedy Center, Eugene O'Neil Theatre Center, LA Theatre Works, Merrimack Rep, Signature Theatre, The Shakespeare Theatre, and Virginia Stage. Film Credits include: *Dovid Meyer*, *Delenda*, *Second Born*, *The Hunley*, *Full-Moon Fables* (SAG Peer Award), *The Gentleman*, and *The Day Lincoln Was Shot*. TV appearances include: *The Blacklist*, *Boardwalk Empire*, *I love You But I Lied*, *Person of Interest*, *Wired City*, *Law & Order*, *All My Children*, and *The Tick*.

David Bryan Jackson (*Via Dolorosa* at EMU) first performed *Via Dolorosa* at Theater J in Washington D.C., and has since performed it in other cities across the U.S., including Boston, Los Angeles, and West Palm Beach. He has also acted at Pittsburgh Irish and Classical Theatre, and such D.C.-area theatres as the Shakespeare Theatre Company, Folger Theatre, Woolly Mammoth, Studio, Source, Scena and Signature Theatre, as well as Washington Stage Guild, Washington Shakespeare Company, Arena Stage, the Kennedy Center, the Potomac Theatre Project, and Olney Theatre Center (where he was literary manager for several years). He has also directed plays at several D.C area theatres. On-screen credits include the independent films *Dinner with the Alchemist* and *Her Tango*, as well as episodes of AMC's *Turn: Washington's Spies*. His voice can be heard in two *Star Trek* video games, and he played the title role in the award-winning short film *Unloved*. He has law degrees from both sides of the Atlantic, and he has also worked at various times as an attorney, editor, lumberjack, carpenter, Lucite embedder, stand-up comic, and troubadour (his *Song for the Earth* can be heard on Zoe Ravenwood's album *The Problem Might be Me*.)

Aaron Davidman is the author of *Wrestling Jerusalem*, which received its premier at Intersection for the Arts in San Francisco in 2014. The play was commissioned by Theatre J in Washington DC and supported in part by the Sundance Institute Theatre Program, TJT and Playwrights Foundation. He served as Artistic Director of Traveling Jewish Theatre in San Francisco from 2001 to 2011. Among many projects at TJT, he co-wrote and directed the international collaboration *Blood Relative* about the Israeli-Palestinian story, directed TJT's critically acclaimed production of *Death of a Salesman* and co-wrote and performed in *God's*

Donkey which toured the United States. He originated the role of Momik Neuman in Corey Fischer's Kennedy Center award-winning play *See Under: Love*, based on the David Grossman novel. Beyond TJT Davidman directed *Golda's Balcony* and *The Chosen* at Theatreworks and the world premiere of *This World in a Woman's Hands* by Marcus Gardley at Shotgun Players. He also directed the world premiere of Gardley's *Love is a Dream House in Lorin* at Shotgun for which he was named Best Director of 2007 by the East Bay Express. Davidman has also directed the world premiere of Gardley's *The Road Weeps*, *The Well Runs Dry* at Perseverance Theatre in Juneau, Alaska. As an actor, he has performed at San Francisco Playhouse, California Shakespeare Theatre, Utah Shakespeare Festival, Shotgun Players, Theatre J, Arena Stage, and many other theatres. Aaron received an MFA in Creative Writing/Playwriting from San Francisco State University. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan and received his theatrical training at Carnegie Mellon University. He is a recipient of the New Generations Fellowship from Theatre Communications Group and the 2016 Tikkun Award.

Ari Roth is a playwright, educator and founding artistic of Mosaic Theater Company of DC. Over the past two and a half seasons, Mosaic has played to 53,000 ticket holders and produced 21 mainstage productions, including offerings from the long-running festivals, Voices From a Changing Middle East and Locally Grow, which Roth established at Theater J. Over 18 seasons at Theater J, Roth built the fledgling DC theater into the largest Jewish theater in North America. In 2005, the *New York Times* called Theater J "The premier theater for premieres." After establishing Mosaic at the end of 2014, *The Washington Post* described its inaugural offering as "one of the most significant developments in Washington theater in years." In September 2017 Roth received the 32nd Mayor's Arts Award for Visionary Leadership. As a playwright, Roth's work has been nominated for five Helen Hayes Awards, including two for different productions of *Born Guilty*, originally produced by Arena Stage, later in repertory with its sequel, *The Wolf in Peter*. A graduate of the University of Michigan, Roth has been on its faculty since 1988, currently for its "Michigan in Washington" program.