

For Immediate Release
November 18, 2020



World Premiere of Amir Nizar Zuabi's *This Is Who I Am*, Directed by Evren Odcikin, to Open December 13

In New Play Written for Two Actors Performing and Cooking in Real-Time Via Zoom, a Father in Ramallah and His Son in New York City Work Through the Emotional Complexities of Preparing a Cherished Family Recipe

Performances Now Run December 5, 2020 - January 3, 2021

PlayCo and Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, in association with American Repertory Theater at Harvard University, the Guthrie Theater, and Oregon Shakespeare Festival, today announce that Amir Nizar Zuabi's *This Is Who I Am*, directed by Evren Odcikin, opens officially on Sunday, December 13, at 4pm EST. This world premiere run of the play—all performances of which take place live—now runs December 5 - January 3.

In *This Is Who I Am*, an estranged father and son separated by continents reunite over Zoom. From their respective kitchens in Ramallah and New York City, they recreate a cherished family recipe and struggle to bridge the gap between them, one ingredient at a time. Told through the intimacy of a video call with humor and humanity, Amir Nizar Zuabi's new play explores the unpredictable nature of grief and the delicacy of family connection across geographical and generational divides.

This Is Who I Am's cast includes Ramsey Faragallah (Dad) and Yousof Sultani (Son). The design team, working with actors to adapt their home kitchens for live performances of the play, includes Mariana Sanchez (Set), Dina El-Aziz (Costume Consultant), Reza Behjat (Lighting), James Ard (Sound), and Ido Levran (Video Systems Editor); Joseph Haj is the production dramaturg.

Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company Artistic Director Maria Manuela Goyanes says, "If you had told me my first commissioned play for Woolly Mammoth would be a co-production with five other major arts institutions in the country, written by the brilliant Amir Nizar Zuabi, and live-streamed rather than performed on stage, I would have had trouble believing you! Yet to categorize this project as a piece of pandemic theatre feels incorrect. Amir has written a story specifically meant to be told through a video call, connecting form and content seamlessly. The experience is intimate and still inherently theatrical. I am so honored to have co-commissioned this piece with PlayCo and to continue to poke at the boundaries of what theatre can be; both online and in person."

PlayCo Founding Producer Kate Loewald says, “This project has come together as PlayCo celebrates 20 years of producing new plays by international writers. It’s a joy and an honor to continue our creative relationship with Amir Nizar Zuabi, whose *Oh My Sweet Land* is a highlight of PlayCo’s body of work to date. I’m so happy to be working alongside Maria Goyanes, whom I admire so much, and to partner with an amazing group of theatres across the country. I’m moved to see artists and organizations rally around this experiment in theatre-making for our time—one that gets as close to live theatre as is possible right now. It’s a beautiful demonstration of PlayCo’s mission to generate a global program of new work that puts artists and audiences in conversation with the world. That feels more necessary than ever in this moment of isolation and alienation.”

Having presented his site-specific “wrenching and shrewd solo show” (*The New York Times*, in a Critics’ Pick review) *Oh My Sweet Land* in kitchens across New York City with PlayCo, Zuabi expands the meaning of site-specificity with this new piece. Performed in two actors’ kitchens (in which they cook), the play is also set across the divide of two computer screens. Zuabi here deepens his exploration of the kitchen as a space of sensorial stimulation, familial legacy, and discussion that organically slips between intimate and external circumstances—and finds a new setting to consider: Zoom. In *This Is Who I Am*, two actors perform a balancing act of care and resentment, closeness and vast separation, as they cook in real-time over video chat.

Zuabi, who grew up in Palestine, moved to London for a time, and currently resides in Jaffa, explains, “I left my country at a certain point and remembered these awkward long-distance conversations. Now, many hours of my day have been spent Zoom-ing since January; one of the big frustrations is that we’re very close, and I can look at people’s houses and feel very intimate with them but at the same time we’re deprived of our sensory ability and are separated by two walls of glass. But if two people are both cooking the same dish, at least the smells are similar and the noises might be happening at the same time, so suddenly we are creating a mutual world. All of these things combined in creating this: my need to take revenge from Zoom and its limitations; the fact that food was on the table for this project from the very get-go; and the fact that as I’m grieving [the loss of my own parents four and five years ago] a lot of other people started grieving from the actual pandemic.”

Zuabi adds, “This play for me is about grief and the way we negotiate it. It’s about distance and how we negotiate it. It’s about manhood and how we negotiate it. And it’s about love and how it negotiates us.”

Director Evren Odcikin (Associate Artistic Director at OSF), who worked for Golden Thread Productions when they likewise presented an acclaimed production of *Oh My Sweet Land* on the West Coast, describes a close personal identification with Zuabi’s work. “*This is Who I Am* is my introduction to OSF audiences as an artist, and I am proud that my new artistic home is helping uplift this personal play from one of my favorite writers. It’s a great alignment of OSF’s programmatic values and my personal mission to champion Middle Eastern and Middle Eastern American stories and artists.” Odcikin, who is an immigrant from Turkey, adds that he was struck by the play’s nuanced depiction of masculinity with a Palestinian father and a Palestinian-American son. “I have never seen an accurate depiction of my personal experience as a Middle Eastern male immigrant on American stages. The nuance and care Amir has given to both the Father and Son in the play, I haven’t seen that. My hope is that the audience will experience this complicated relationship as a gift as personal and imperfect as cooking together can be.”

Diane Paulus, A.R.T. Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director, says, “The pandemic has created both necessities and opportunities to make new art forms and producing models. This partnership across five theaters is emblematic of the resilience and innovation we need to embrace in our industry and the institutional responsibility to support artists during this challenging time. The A.R.T. is very grateful to join the team in supporting Amir and the brilliant company of artists assembled to bring his deeply moving play—born out of this moment—to life.”

Joseph Haj, artistic director of the Guthrie Theater and production dramaturg for *This Is Who I Am*, said, “Last season the Guthrie presented Amir’s beautiful production of *Grey Rock*, and our audiences fell in love with the piece. I’m incredibly admiring of Amir and his work and I’m thrilled to be

able to join this fantastic creative team. The opportunity to work with such a smart, creative, and passionate group of people is one I'm thankful for and I think our audiences, across all of the partners, are going to be offered something quite special."

Performance Schedule and Tickets

Preview performances begin December 5 at 4pm EST and continue December 8 and 10-12 at 8:30pm EST and December 6 and 9 at 4pm EST. **Critics are welcome as of December 13 at 4pm EST, which also serves as the production's official opening.** Post-opening performances take place December 15-19, 22, 23, 26-30 and January 2 at 8:30pm EST and December 20, 26, 27, 31, January 2 and 3 at 4pm EST.

Tickets to *This Is Who I Am* start at \$15 and are available online at woollymammoth.net, by phone at (202) 393-3939, and via email at tickets@woollymammoth.net. To make this production accessible for as many audiences as possible, special rates for tickets to preview performances will be offered; more details to come.

About Amir Nizar Zuabi

Amir Nizar Zuabi (Playwright) is an award-winning theater writer and Director and the Artistic Director of ShiberHur, and has served as Associate Director of Young Vic London (2009-2017). Zuabi is also a member of Union of Theatres of Europe (UTE) for artistic achievement, an artistic advisor for the Palestinian National Theatre, and an alumni of Sundance Theatre Lab. Writing and directing credits include *I Am Yusuf and This Is My Brother*, *In the Penal Colony*, *Alive From Palestine*, *Oh My Sweet Land* (PlayCo NYC, Young Vic/Théâtre de Vidy-Lausanne), *The Beloved* (co produced by ShiberHur/Young Vic), *Three Days of Grief*, *West of Us the Sea*, *Mid Spring Musical*, *Asmahan*, and *Grey Rock*. He also created three full-length dance pieces with collaborator Samar King: *Dry Mud*, *Against a Hard Surface*, and *Last Ward*. Directing credits include *Samson and Delilah* (Flanders Opera, Antwerp); *Jidariya*, by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (Edinburgh International Festival, Bouffes du Nord and World Tour); *Forget Herostratus*; *le Mallade Imaginer*; *War or More*; *Sneeze*; *Deep Sorrow*; *Fall Tale*; *When The World Was Green*; *Lanterns Of The King Of Galilee*, and *Taha the Publisher*. Zuabi was the first Middle Eastern director to be asked to direct for the Royal Shakespeare Company, for which he directed *The Comedy of Errors*. Zuabi recently created *Grey Rock* for La MaMa in New York (currently on tour) and is writing new plays for the Riksteren in Stockholm and for the National Theatre London. He was recently appointed Artistic Director of a cross-border cultural festival produced by Good Chance Theatre.

About Evren Odcikin (Director)

Evren Odcikin is a theater director, writer, and arts administrator with a deep commitment to bringing underrepresented stories and voices to the American stage. He serves as the Associate Artistic Director at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and is a founding member of the MENA Theater Maker Alliance steering committee, a founder of Maia Directors, and a resident artist at Golden Thread Productions. A celebrated new plays director, he has worked at NYTW, Geva, Berkeley Rep, South Coast Rep, The Lark, Kennedy Center, InterAct (Philadelphia), Cleveland Public Theatre, Magic Theatre, Golden Thread, and Crowded Fire with such writers as Melis Aker, Kevin Artigue, Guillermo Calderón, Christopher Chen, Jeusun Choi, Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig, Yussef El Guindi, Prince Gomolvilas, MJ Kaufman, Hannah Khalil, Jonas Hassen Khemiri, Michael Lew, Mona Mansour, Rehana Lew Mirza, Baruch Porras Hernandez, Betty Shamieh, Caridad Svich, and Lauren Yee, amongst many others. As a writer, he is under commission with Leila Buck to create *1001 Nights (A Retelling)* for Cal Shakes and his translation of Sedef Ecer's *On the Periphery* premiered at Golden Thread and Crowded Fire in 2020. Recognitions include a 2016 "Theatre Worker You Should Know" feature in *American Theatre Magazine*; a 2015 National Director's Fellowship from the O'Neill, NNPN, the Kennedy Center, and SDCF; and a 2013 TITAN Award from Theatre Bay Area. Evren was born and raised in Turkey and is a graduate of Princeton University. odcikin.com

About the Cast

Ramsey Faragallah (Dad) is an actor, a writer, & teacher. Onstage he has appeared at the Kennedy Center, The Public Theater, Playwrights Horizons, Manhattan Theater Club, Rikers Island and other minimum and maximum security prisons, Yale University, Sundance, The McCarter, The Culture Project, Williamstown, Hartford Stage, Red Bull, New York Stage & Film, The New Vic (London) and theaters throughout Europe and Australia. His many television appearances include recurring and guest star roles in *Tommy*, *Bull*, *Mozart in the Jungle*, *Taken*, *Madame Secretary*, *The Black List*, *Homeland*, the *Law & Order* trifecta, & thirteen seasons with David Letterman. He has appeared in the films of Sidney Pollack, Sidney Lumet and several films of Woody Allen. Voiceover work for *RadioLab*, *This American Life*, *Playing on Air*, *NOVA*, Random House, Penguin and others. Ramsey studied with Ms. Stella Adler, is a member of The Actors Center and is enthusiastically dedicated to restoring, driving & racing vintage automobiles.

Yusuf Sultani (Son) was most recently seen on stage in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* at Arena Stage in D.C. Other credits include *And Then There Were None* (Drury Lane), *Photograph 51* (Court Theatre), *Heartland* (InterAct Theatre), *Miss Bennet: Christmas At Pemberley* and *Guards at the Taj* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater), *The Doppelgänger: An International Farce* and *The Fundamentals* (Steppenwolf Theater), *United Flight 232* (House Theatre), *Disappearing Number* and *Inana* (TimeLine Theatre), *Othello* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater), and *The Hundred Flowers Project* (Silk Road Rising). Film credits include *Glass House*. Television credits include "The Brave" (NBC), "Empire" (FOX), and "Chicago Fire" (NBC). Sultani received his BFA in Performance from Virginia Commonwealth University.

About the Creative Team

Mariana Sanchez (Scenic Designer) is a scenic designer with a background in architecture originally from Mexico, based in the New York area. Some of her credits include: *Anatomy of a Suicide* (The Atlantic Theater), *Marys Seacole* (LTC3), *Fade* (Primary Stages), *Troy*, *Winter's Tale* (The Public), *Frontieres Sans Frontieres* (Bushwick Starr), *Oh My Sweet Land* (PlayCo). Regional: *Manhatta*, *War* (Yale Repertory), *The Copper Children*, *Manhatta*, *The River Bride*, *All's Well That Ends Well* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Mojada* (St Louis Rep), *The Niceties* (Geva Theater), *Fetch Clay*, *Make Man* (Dallas Theater Center), *Skeleton Crew* (Baltimore Center Stage), *The Wolves*, *Fade* (TheaterWorks), *Peter Pan* (Yale University) among others. She holds an MFA from the Yale School of Drama and B. Arch. from National Autonomous University in Mexico City.

Dina El-Aziz (Costume Designer). Off-Broadway credits include *I Thought I Would Die But I Didn't* (The Tank), *Eh Dah? Questions for My Father* (Hypokrit Theatre/NYTW Next Door), *The Russian and The Jew* (Anna & Kitty Inc/The Tank), *Dead Are My People* (Noor Theater/NYTW's Next Door), *Field Awakening* (Corkscrew Festival), and *Alternating Currents* (The Working Theater); Other theater credits: *P*ssyC*ck Know Nothing*, *News Of The Strange*, *Marjana and the Forty Thieves*, and *Pay No Attention to the Girl* (Target Margin Theater). Regional: *9 Parts of Desire* (Portland Center Stage); *King Lear* (Northern Stage); *Noura* (The Guthrie); *Noura* (The Old Globe); *Yasmina's Necklace* (Premiere Stages); *Selling Kabul* (Williamstown Theatre Festival); *Pay No Attention to the Girl* (Target Margin Theater/Spoletto Festival); *We've Come to Believe*, *The Corpse Washer*, and *How to Defend Yourself* (Actors Theatre of Louisville/43rd Humana Festival); and *Heartland* (Geva Theatre Center). Film: *Roommates* (Short), *Keiko's Hands* (Short), *Jihadi Street* (Short), *Shift* (Short), and *Prisoners of War* (Short). El-Aziz is the recipient of a JS Seidman Award.

Reza Bejat (Lighting) is a NYC based lighting designer who was born and raised in Iran where he worked with some of the prominent directors for several years. Reza received the Knight of Illumination Award for *Nina Simone: Four Women* in 2019. Off-Broadway: *Disclaimer* (Public Theater- UTR), *Veil Widow Conspiracy*, *Henry VI*, *Hamlet*. Regional and others: *Gianni Schicchi* (Michigan Opera Theater), *Richard & Jane & Dick & Sally* (Baltimore Center Stage), *Noura* (Guthrie Theater), *Queen* (Geva Theater), *Native Son* (PlayMakers Rep), *Everybody Black*, *The This Place* (Actors Theater of Louisville), *Nina Simon: four Women* (Alabama Shakes), *The Roommate* (Long Wharf Theater), *Guards at the Taj* (Central Square Theater, MA), *Notes of the Strange*, *Yogibogeybox* (Target Margin), *Waiting For Godot* (New Yiddish

Rep), *Dead Are My People* (Noor Theater), *Whore from Ohio*, *Labor of Life* (New Yiddish Rep), *This Is The Color* (New Georges), *Fillx7* (The Flea Theater).

James Ard (Sound Designer) is a San Francisco-based designer, noisemaker, mechanic, broadcast artist, and theater vagrant who composes soundscapes and music for humans, dogs, parrots, and bicycles. Recent credits include *9 Parts of Desire* at Portland Center Stage, *Utopia* with Cutting Ball Theater, *Exit Strategy* at Aurora Theater Company, and the *ReOrient* festival with Golden Thread Productions. Ard is an occasional Podcast Coordinator at SF Sketchfest and a Resident Artist with both Golden Thread Productions and Crowded Fire Theater.

Joseph Haj (Dramaturg) is the Artistic Director of the Guthrie Theater, where he has directed *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cyrano de Bergerac* (his own adaptation), *Romeo and Juliet*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *King Lear*, *South Pacific*, *Pericles*, and *West Side Story*, which was the highest-grossing production in Guthrie history. Prior to joining the Guthrie in 2015, he served as Producing Artistic Director at PlayMakers Repertory Company. As a director, Haj has worked at theaters across the U.S. and directed projects in a maximum-security prison, rural South Carolina, the West Bank, and Gaza. He received an M.F.A. from The University of North Carolina before beginning a career in acting and working with many internationally known directors. He was named one of 25 theater artists who will have a significant impact on the field over the next quarter-century by *American Theatre* magazine, and he is the recipient of the 2000 NEA/White House Millennium Council Grant awarded to 50 American artists, 2014 Zelda Fichandler Award (SDCF), and 2017 Rosetta LeNoire Award (AEA). Haj lives in Minneapolis with his wife Deirdre, who is the director of the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival. They are the proud parents of Samantha, an undergraduate at Smith College.

About PlayCo

PlayCo (Kate Loewald, Founding Producer and Robert G. Bradshaw, Managing Director) is an Obie Award-winning Off-Broadway theater. PlayCo produces adventurous new plays from the U.S. and around the world, to advance a dynamic global experience of contemporary theater and expand the voices and perspectives represented on U.S. stages.

Now celebrating its 20th year, PlayCo has produced 37 new plays from the United States, Central and South America, Europe, Russia, South and East Asia, and the Middle East. PlayCo's distinctive international programming links American theatre with world theater, American artists with the global creative community, and American audiences with a whole world of plays. Previous productions include Jorge Ignacio Cortiñas' wry and wrenching *Recent Alien Abductions*, Lee Sunday Evans' *New York Times* Critics' Pick production of Stefano Massini's *Intractable Woman: A Theatrical Memo on Anna Politkovskaya*, the sold-out run of Amir Nizar Zuabi's critically-acclaimed *Oh My Sweet Land*, Guillermo Calderón's *Villa*, Christopher Chen's *Caught* (Obie Award for Playwriting, 2017), Maria Milisavljevic's *Abyss*, Kyle Jarrow & Lauren Worsham's *The Wildness*, debbie tucker green's *generations*, Aya Ogawa's *Ludic Proxy*, Antonio Vega's *The Duchamp Syndrome*, and more.

PlayCo's office space on the island known as Mannhatta (Manhattan), and the rehearsal and performance spaces we use throughout New York City, are located in Lenapehoking, the homeland of the Lenape people.

About Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company

Woolly Mammoth is "the hottest theater company in town" (Washington Post); priding itself on developing, producing, and making theatre that disrupts conventional processes and stimulates transformative experiences. For almost four decades, Woolly has held a unique position at the leading edge of the American theater, earning a reputation for staying "uniquely plugged in to the mad temper of the times" (New York Times). The co-leadership of María Manuela Goyanes (Artistic Director) and Emika Abe (Managing Director) is supported by a core company of artists that holds itself to a high standard of artistic excellence. Woolly is relentless in its desire to take risks, experiment, innovate, interrogate, and create a radically inclusive community. Located in Washington, DC, Woolly Mammoth stands upon

occupied, unceded territory: the ancestral homeland of the Nacotchtank whose descendants belong to the Piscataway peoples.

About American Repertory Theater

American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) at Harvard University is a leading force in the American theater, producing groundbreaking work that is driven by risk-taking and passionate inquiry. A.R.T. seeks to expand the boundaries of theater by programming transformative theatrical experiences, always including the audience as a central partner, and is committed to a long-term process of centering anti-racism in its practice, policies, culture, pedagogy, governance and organizational structure. Under the leadership of Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director Diane Paulus and Executive Producer Diane Borger, A.R.T. has received 19 Tony Awards including: *Pippin*, *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*, and *All the Way*. Other Broadway productions include *Jagged Little Pill*; *Waitress* (also US National Tour and in London's West End); *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*; *Finding Neverland*; *The Glass Menagerie*; and *Once*. A.R.T.'s club theater, OBERON, has been recognized annually as a top performance venue in the Boston area, and has attracted national attention for its innovative programming and business models. As the professional theater on the campus of Harvard University, A.R.T. is committed to playing a central role in the cognitive life of the University, catalyzing discourse, interdisciplinary collaboration, and creative exchange among a wide range of academic departments, institutions, students, and faculty members. Dedicated to making great theater accessible, A.R.T. actively engages more than 5,000 community members and local students annually in project-based partnerships, workshops, conversations with artists, and other enrichment activities both at the theater and across the Greater Boston area. A.R.T. acknowledges that its theaters are situated on the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Massachusetts Tribe.

About the Guthrie Theater

The Guthrie Theater (Joseph Haj, Artistic Director) is an esteemed center for theater performance that seeks to illuminate our common humanity and transform our world through the power of live theater. Based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and firmly rooted in the community since 1963, the Guthrie is dedicated to producing classic and contemporary works with excellence, cultivating artists and inspiring the next generation of theatergoers.

About Oregon Shakespeare Festival

Founded by Angus Bowmer in 1935, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) has grown from a three-day festival of two plays to a nationally renowned theatre arts organization that presents an eight-month season of up to 11 plays that include works by Shakespeare as well as a mix of classics, musicals, and world-premiere plays and musicals. OSF's play-commissioning programs, which include [American Revolutions: the United States History Cycle](#), have generated works that have been produced on Broadway, internationally, and at regional, community, and high school theatres across the country. The Festival draws attendance upwards of 400,000 to more than 800 performances annually and employs 400 to 600 theatre professionals.

OSF invites and welcomes everyone, and believes the inclusion of diverse people, ideas, cultures, and traditions enriches both our insights into the work we present onstage and our relationships with each other. OSF is committed to equity and diversity in all areas of our work and in our audiences.

OSF's mission statement: "Inspired by Shakespeare's work and the cultural richness of the United States, we reveal our collective humanity through illuminating interpretations of new and classic plays, deepened by the kaleidoscope of rotating repertory."

Press Contact

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