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For immediate release

WHO: Golden Thread Productions and Asian American Theater Company

WHAT: LANGUAGE ROOMS (West Coast premiere)

A dark comedy about identity and misguided patriotism

By Youssef El Guindi

Directed by Evren Odcikin

Cast: Mujahid Abdul-Rashid*, James Asher*, William Dao, Terry Lamb*

*Member Actors Equity Association, United Scenic Artists

DATES: November 10 – December 4, 2011

TIME: Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays at 8:00 PM; Sundays at 7:00 PM

VENUE: Thick House (1695-18th St., San Francisco, 94107)

TICKETS: Previews & Thursdays pay-what-you-can at the door, \$20 in advance

General Admission \$28; Students, seniors, Theatre Bay Area members \$20

BOX OFFICE: goldenthread.org and (415) 913-7366

HOMELAND SECURITY IS A LAUGHING MATTER IN YUSSEF EL GUINDI'S *LANGUAGE ROOMS*

**The West Coast premiere play by the second winner of
the prestigious Middle East America Award marks the first collaboration between
Golden Thread Productions and Asian American Theater Company.**

(October 10, 2011 – San Francisco, CA) **Golden Thread Productions and Asian American Theater Company (AATC)** join forces for their first ever collaboration to present the West Coast premiere of **LANGUAGE ROOMS**, a dark comedy from **Youssef El Guindi** (author of **BACK OF THE THROAT, JIHAD JONES AND THE KALASHNIKOV BABES**), celebrated Egyptian American playwright and the 2010 recipient of the coveted **Middle East America Award**.

In **LANGUAGE ROOMS** (which won the Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award in 2010), Ahmed is a shining example of the American Dream, working as a translator in a Homeland Security detainment facility. His workplace “frenemy” Nasser, a Muslim of Asian descent, soon brings him some bad news—that his loyalties are being called into question. As office politics take a turn for the absurd all around him, Ahmed realizes that much more than just his job hangs in the balance.



El Guindi, who has a long standing relationship with Golden Thread, described his play like this: “You could think of LANGUAGE ROOMS as 1984 meets THE OFFICE. At least in the first half of the play. In the second half, we add the ‘American immigrant family drama’ to the mix of paranoia and office politics.” Torange Yeghiazarian, Artistic Director of Golden Thread Productions, observed: “The genius of El Guindi’s writing is his ability to confront serious themes—family bonds and prejudice—with wry humor and intelligent writing that bring out the absurdity of the situation.” El Guindi has since been honored by the American Theatre Critics Association: the M. Elizabeth Osborn Award, and received the prestigious commission by Middle East America: A National New Plays Initiative.

LANGUAGE ROOMS is an unexpected juxtaposition of a comical political thriller and an American immigrant family story. It specifically looks at the question of ‘home’ and ‘fitting in’ from the perspective of Arab Americans and Asian American Muslims, but the issues it raises and the stereotypes it skewers are universal to every American’s experience. El Guindi explains further: “The wonderful optimism of this country, the propulsion to keep going, to reinvent, that weightlessness, the acceptance that you can change your name, your history, kick your past to the curb as you gun for a new beginning, I think all those good things end up gutting you of a center, a wholeness. What becomes of your touchstones, your anchor, your *story*, after you leave so much behind? Who are you when you’re always in flux?”

LANGUAGE ROOMS was inspired by the story of Captain James Yee, the Asian American Muslim Army chaplain arrested (since released and exonerated) for possible sympathies with the prisoners he was counseling. It has been the perfect vehicle for AATC and Golden Thread, two well-respected local companies who look at Asian identity in the United States from different but overlapping angles, to form a collaboration. The two companies have been developing this play over the last year through numerous readings and workshops.

“In fact, it’s funnier than THE OFFICE and more disturbing than BRAZIL—it’s one of the best plays I’ve read in the past decade,” says Darryl Chiang, AATC’s Executive Director *emeritus*. Pearl Wong, AATC’s Managing Director, notes that “LANGUAGE ROOMS has us face the absurd struggle we’ve all gone through to be a part of the American fabric, and the love-hate relationship we have with ourselves because of it.”

Background information about Asian American Theater Company and Golden Thread Productions

Asian American Theater Company was founded in 1973 to connect people to Asian American cultures through theatre. By developing and performing plays through workshops, staged readings, and full productions, we aim to entertain our audiences and train our artists. Through live performances that express the diversity of Asian American experiences, we seek to enrich American theater and increase the presence of Asian American stories on stage.

Golden Thread Productions is a nationally recognized non-profit organization universally acknowledged as the leading theater company devoted to Middle Eastern voices and experiences. Founded in 1996 by **Torange Yeghiazarian**, Golden Thread’s mission, to give voice to Middle Eastern writers, is a national treasure, made more urgent and vital with all that is currently happening in the Middle East.

For 15 years, Golden Thread has pioneered the field of Middle Eastern American theatre. The organization’s mission is to make the Middle East a potent presence on the American stage and a treasured cultural experience. Through its work, Golden Thread aims to create a world where the common human experience supersedes cultural and political differences.



Golden Thread's founder, Torange Yeghiazarian explains *"in our vast imagination, the Middle East is defined not by geographical boundaries and political separations, but as the shared experience of the people, who throughout history have been touched by its tales, melodies and aromas. The Middle East lives inside us, as we redefine ourselves, we redefine the Middle East."*

To that end, Golden Thread has supported countless Middle Eastern artists in all phases of their careers. From theatrical plays to educational outreach, Golden Thread plays a vital role in the production of original stories about topics that usually haven't been explored on the American stage.

The company has presented work in Los Angeles, Washington D.C., New York, and Cairo, Egypt. Golden Thread receives play submissions from around the globe and is frequently host to visiting artists from the Middle East through the US State Department and the Kennedy Center's exchange programs. An active contributor to Theatre Communications Group's international efforts and Theatre Without Borders, Golden Thread's year-round schedule consist of the ReOrient Festival of short plays (scheduled for 2012); a comprehensive Outreach Education Program; plus commissions, tours, and partnerships with esteemed co-presenters. In 2010, Golden Thread partnered with the San Francisco International Arts Festival to co-present the highly acclaimed Syrian troupe, Al-Khareef.

Future productions: Rumi x 7 = Tales from the Masnavi conceived and directed by **Hafiz Karmali** will be performed November 18 & 19, 2011 at the Islamic Cultural Center, Oakland. Looking ahead to next season, Golden Thread will co-present guest companies from Egypt and Iran at the San Francisco International Arts Festival and produce its signature event, ReOrient Festival and Forum, now held once every three years, in October 2012.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Yussef El Guindi (Playwright)'s most recent productions include **PILGRIMS MUSA AND SHERI IN THE NEW WORLD** at ACT in Seattle, and **LANGUAGE ROOMS** at the Wilma Theater in Philadelphia. The latter play won the Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award, as well ACT's New Play Award. Other productions: **THE REVIEW**, a short internet play performed via Skype with actors in Cairo and San Francisco, produced by Golden Thread Productions. **JIHAD JONES AND THE KALASHNIKOV BABES**, produced at Golden Thread Productions in San Francisco, at InterAct Theater in Philadelphia, and at Kitchen Dog theater in Dallas, as part of the National New Play Network. It has also been performed at Theater Schmeater in Seattle and Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater in Massachusetts.

OUR ENEMIES: LIVELY SCENES OF LOVE AND COMBAT, produced by Silk Road Theatre Project in Chicago, where it was Jeff Nominated, and was among the six finalists for the 2009 American Theater Critics Associations Steinberg/New Play Award. The American Theater Critics Association gave it the 2009 M. Elizabeth Osborn Award. **BACK OF THE THROAT**: winner of the 2004 Northwest Playwrights' Competition held by Theater Schmeater. It won L.A. Weekly's Excellence in Playwriting Award for 2006. It was also nominated for the 2006 American Theater Critics Associations Steinberg/New Play Award. It was first staged by San Francisco's Thick Description and Golden Thread Productions; then later presented in various theaters around the country including The Flea Theater in New York.

Another play of his, **TEN ACROBATS IN AN AMAZING LEAP OF FAITH**, staged by Silk Road Theatre Project, won the After Dark Award for Best New Play in Chicago in 2006.

His two-related one-acts, **ACTS OF DESIRE**, were staged by the Fountain Theatre in Los Angeles. **BACK OF THE THROAT**, and the two related one-acts, now titled, **SUCH A BEAUTIFUL VOICE IS SAYEDA'S** and **KARIMA'S CITY**, have



been published by Dramatists Play Service. The latter one-acts have also been included in The Best American Short Plays: 2004-2005, published by Applause Books. His play, TEN ACROBATS IN AN AMAZING LEAP OF FAITH, is included in *Salaam/Peace: An Anthology of Middle-Eastern-American Playwrights*, published by TCG in 2009. Yussef holds an MFA from Carnegie-Mellon University and was playwright-in-residence at Duke University.

Evren Odcikin (Director) is a Turkish American director based in San Francisco and works as the literary artistic associate with Golden Thread Productions, where he is currently producing the 2012 ReOrient Festival and produces the annual new plays reading series. For the company, he has directed the world premieres of Denmo Ibrahim's ECSTASY | A WATERFABLE and Ignacio Zulueta's 22 MINUTES REMAINING, as well as numerous readings. His other Bay Area directing credits include THE OLDEST PROFESSION, MACHINAL (Three 2009 Bay Area Theatre Critics' Circle Award nominations including best director and best production), and a workshop of Anthem Salgado's BARE KNUCKLE at Brava Theater Center, where he is a company artist; THE PLAY ABOUT THE NAKED GUY for Impact Theatre ("2010 Honorable Mention" from Bay Area Reporter); RHINO for Boxcar Theatre ("Most Inventive Staging of 2010" from SF Weekly, "Best Play of 2010" from SF Bay Times); and BLOOD WEDDING for Shotgun Players. He has also directed staged readings and workshops for Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Cutting Ball Theater, Magic Theatre, and TheatreFirst. He is one of the 2011 Global Age Project directors for Aurora Theatre.

High-res jpegs are available through goldenthread.org

Interviews with the playwright and key artists can be arranged by contacting Annette Dilanchian of Golden Thread Productions [a.dilanchian@gmail.com] or Brechin Flournoy at Sagacity Communications [sagacity.co@gmail.com].

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