



# **Rumi x 7 = Tales from the Masnavi**

## ***A Poetic Circus Extravaganza***

### **Contact**

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### **Summary Description**

A lyrical fusion of circus arts and classical Persian poetry  
Performed by an ensemble of actors, acrobats, dancers and musicians  
Directed by Hafiz Karmali

### **Producer Details**

Produced by Golden Thread Productions in partnership with the Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California. Funded in part by grants from the San Francisco Arts Commission, California Arts Council and the East Bay Foundation.

### **Credits**

The Ensemble: Jamie Coventry, Aylin Guvenc, Rachel L. Jacobs, Mahsa Matin, Aliah Najmabadi, Maruf Noyoft, Wiley Naman Strasser.  
Director: Hafiz Karmali  
Dramaturgy: Torange Yeghiazarian  
Lighting: Jim Cave  
Sound: Taylor Gonzalez  
Costumes: Ninva Warda  
Props: Daniel Yelen  
Production Manager: Wan-Yin Tang  
Stage Manager: Junelle-Johannah Taguas  
Assistant Director: Jameyla Kiswani  
Photography: DavidAllenStudio.com  
Videography: Huy Vu

### **Performance Information**

Length: 50-minute performance with live and recorded music  
Cast Size: 7-member ensemble  
Performance space: 24 x 30 feet, open or semi-circular, outdoor or indoor  
Sound: recorded music, live piano, trombone, accordion and percussion  
Lights: 1 follow spot with general theatrical lighting and/or natural lighting  
Set/Props: 8x8 trunk

### **Tour Dates**

March, April, May 2012  
November, December 2012

**Press photos and video available at [www.goldenthread.org](http://www.goldenthread.org)**



# Rumi x 7 = Tales from the Masnavi

## A Poetic Circus Extravaganza

Directed by Hafiz Karmali

**Golden Thread Productions** proudly presents Hafiz Karmali's **RUMI X 7 = TALES FROM THE MASNAVI**, a poetic circus extravaganza that is both entertaining and inspiring. Seven tales by the globally admired Sufi poet Rumi selected from his masterwork, the Masnavi are presented as fun-filled vignettes that fuse classical Persian poetry with circus arts and commedia dell'arte. Performed by a seven-member ensemble of actors, acrobats, musicians and dancers, the fables include familiar tales such as The Elephant in Darkness and The Grammarian and Boatman, as well as lesser-known gems; together they celebrate the cycle of life and humanity's universal bond. Originally performed in the mountains of Northern Pakistan and subsequently in a mosque courtyard in Tashkent Uzbekistan, **RUMI X 7 = TALES FROM THE MASNAVI** premiered in the US in November 2011 and is slated to tour in spring and fall 2012.

With **RUMI X 7 = TALES FROM THE MASNAVI** Golden Thread embarks on a ground-breaking program to create innovative professional performances based on Islamic arts and ideas presented in an eclectic style fusing eastern and western traditions. Offering youth and families an opportunity to experience Islam in an inspiring and entertaining way, Golden Thread aims to provide the general public alternative images of Islam while providing the Muslim community self-affirming narratives that help connect the younger generation with their heritage's playful side. **RUMI X 7** is the first play in a new series, **ISLAM 101**, designed to educate the public about Islam through theatre. Director Hafiz Karmali has undertaken the development of this series which will first and foremost explain the emergence of Islam as an Abrahamic faith that is the third dimension of what until now has been exclusively known as the Judeo-Christian tradition. **Karmali** has a special interest in cross-cultural performances with a view to showcasing indigenous performing arts of the Islamic world. Prior to **NIGHT OVER ERZINGA**, Karmali directed three new plays at the ReOrient Festival 2009 and the US premiere of **ISLAND OF ANIMALS** based on encyclopedic writings by Ikhwan al-Safa (Brethren of Purity, a group of Muslim scholars) at Golden Thread Productions.

**RUMI'S MASNAVI** is widely recognized as one of the greatest collections of Sufi poetry ever written and is revered throughout the Middle East and around the world as the Quran in Persian. The thirteenth-century Sufi poet Jalal al-din Rumi composed this edifying work for the benefit of his students in the order named after him, popularly known as the whirling dervishes. In order to convey his message of divine love and unity he threaded together entertaining stories and allegorical homilies. Drawing from folk tales as well as sacred history, Rumi's poetry is often comic as well as spiritually profound. The **Masnavi** was composed during the final years of Rumi's life. He began dictating the first book around the age of 54 circa 1258 and continued composing verses until his death in 1273. The sixth and final book would remain incomplete.

### Background information about Golden Thread Productions and the Islamic Cultural Center

**Golden Thread Productions** is a nationally recognized non-profit organization 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 given current events 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. To that end, Golden Thread has supported countless Middle Eastern artists in all phases of their careers. From live performances to educational outreach, Golden Thread plays a vital role in the production of original stories about topics rarely explored on the American stage.



In 2008, Golden Thread launched a multifaceted Education program. The main elements are: Theatre Curriculum inspired by Middle Eastern Arts & Literature; Teaching Residencies; Student Matinee Performances of Main Stage Productions; and the Fairytale Players: Inspired by popular performance traditions in the Middle East the Fairytale Players employ epic story-telling, physical theatre and circus arts techniques in creating performances based on stories from the Middle East. Hafiz Karmali's **Islam 101** is a collaboration with Golden Thread's Fairytale Players.

**Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California (ICCNC)** is an independent, non-profit, community-based organization that celebrates Islam through art, culture and education. Centrally located in downtown Oakland, ICCNC provides a space to give voice to contemporary and diverse perspectives of Islam and to cultivate dynamic exchange of ideas about Islam through art, culture, and education programs. No special attire is required to attend the center. Both Muslims and non-Muslims are encouraged to participate in the many cultural activities available, including art exhibits, Islam and Authors lecture series, musical performances, classes for youth and a café/bookstore open daily.

### **Artist Biographies**

**Hafiz Karmali (Director)** most recently directed the highly acclaimed world premiere of **NIGHT OVER ERZINGA** by Adriana Sevahn Nichols in San Francisco. Other Golden Thread credits include: three new plays at the ReOrient Festival in 2009: **ABAGA** by Torange Yeghiazarian; **A MARRIAGE PROPOSAL** (Egyptian Chekhov) and **THE REVIEW** (via "skype") both by Yussef El-Guindi; as well as in 2006, the Ikhwan al-Safa's fable **ISLAND OF ANIMALS**. Hafiz has a special interest in cross-cultural performances with a view to showcasing indigenous performing arts of the Islamic world. With theatre productions of esoteric/mystical fables such as Attar's **CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS** (Ismaili Centre, London) Hafiz seeks to promote a better understanding of the arts and ideas of the Muslim world. To this end, he has directed **AZAAN – A COURT ENTERTAINMENT** in collaboration with performers from Ismaili communities in London and Tajikistan (Guest of Honor: His Highness the Aga Khan); **RUMI X 7 – TALES FROM THE MATHNAVI** sponsored by the EEC with an acting company in Uzbekistan; **WATER FOR LIFE**, AKF London, in collaboration with a dance company from Gujarat ; and with folk artists of Karimabad, Hunza, **LEGEND OF THE BALIT FORT**. More recently, Hafiz co-wrote and directed **ALI TO KARIM – A Tribute to the Ismaili Imams**, an international touring theatre production. After pursuing his MFA in Directing at Carnegie-Mellon University, Hafiz served an apprenticeship at the American Repertory Theatre where he assisted internationally renowned directors Robert Wilson and Andrei Serban. While at the A.R.T, Mr. Karmali was a teaching fellow in the English Department at Harvard University for courses taught by Professor Robert Brustein. A recipient of an AKF Scholarship, Hafiz spent one year conducting research in Iran and is currently based in Paris where at École Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Sorbonne) he is finalizing his doctorate thesis on classical Ismaili philosophy.

**Torange Yeghiazarian (Dramaturg, Producer)** is the Founding Artistic Director of Golden Thread Productions, where she has devoted her professional life to exploring Middle Eastern cultures and identities through theatre arts. In this capacity, Torange launched, ReOrient, an annual festival of short plays showcasing alternative perspectives of the Middle East. Torange's latest play, **444 Days** received a staged reading at Golden Thread in 2011. Her play **Call Me Mehdi** is included in "Salaam.Peace: An Anthology of Middle Eastern-American Drama" published by TCG in 2009. Other plays include **Waves**, **Dawn at Midnight**, **Behind Glass Windows**, **Abaga**, and **Publicly Resting**. Torange's articles on contemporary theatre in Iran have been published in *American Theatre Magazine* and *Theatre Bay Area Magazine*. In 2008, Torange adapted the poetry of Simin Behbehani to the stage in **I Sell Souls**. In 2007, she collaborated with Iranian, Israeli and American artists on creating **Benedictus**. Other directing credits include **A Girl's War** by Joyce Van Dyke, **Nine Armenians** by Leslie Ayvasian, **Tamam** by Betty Shamieh, **Three Stops and Scenic Routes** by Yussef el Guindi. As a teaching artist, Torange has taught playwriting to at-risk youth and led acting and play development workshops for youth and adults at Golden Thread. Born in Iran and of Armenian heritage, Torange holds a Master's degree in Theatre Arts from San Francisco State University.

**Jim Cave (Lighting)** recently designed **NIGHT OVER ERZINGA** for Golden Thread. Other designs include **THE SOLDIER'S TALE** and **THE ECCENTRICITIES OF A NIGHTINGALE** for the Aurora Theatre and **THE ISLANDERS** and **OLIVE KITTERIDGE** for Word for Word. He directed and designed The Residents' musical extravaganza **SAM'S ENCHANTED EVENING** and will be directing Erling Wold's opera **CERTITUDE AND JOY**, the prayer of a mother on drowning her three children in the bay, at Bindlestiff Theatre in March. He is the Stage and Production Supervisor for the Laney College Theatre.

**Jamie Coventry (Ensemble)** Raised in central California by a family of eccentrics, Jamie studied theatre arts in Santa Fe, music in San Luis Obispo and education in San Francisco. Clowning seemed like the next logical step, so Jamie completed two years of study at the Clown Conservatory at San Francisco Circus Center. Jamie has traveled the globe performing and teaching music,



theater, and clown, and believes that education through art can change the world. He has worked with Flynn Creek Circus, Circus of Sound, New Pickle Circus, The Pickle's School Tour, and is one half of the award winning clown duet, Coventry and Kaluza.

**AyLin G (Ensemble)** born and raised in Turkey is the progeny of a Turk and a Texan (who auspiciously fainted during a whirling dervish ceremony in Konya before AyLin's birth). Once an angst-filled performer in New York City, AyLin weathered four bumpy years at Sarah Lawrence College during which she transformed college flora in the name of performance and installation art. In her spare time, between instigating and collaborating on art-making schemes, she obtained an MA in Special Ed. She has never kept good records, and still believes the process can be more interesting than the product.

**Taylor Gonzalez (Sound)**, a 22 year old student studying theater at Laney College. This is Taylor's first show with Golden thread productions. This past summer he traveled to Edinburgh, Scotland with the Fusion Theater Company to perform "Polaroid Stories" by Naomi Iizuka in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe as a sound designer.

**Rachel L. Jacobs (Ensemble)** recently returned to the Bay Area after touring in Hong Kong as a musical theater actress and voice artists for various TV shows, Movies, and Animes. She graduated from Oberlin College with a B.A. in Theater, and has also studied with the National Theater Institute, The St. Petersburg Theater Arts Academy, Shakespeare and Company, and A.C.T. Summer Training Congress. Favorite Credits include: Mrs. Givings, IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY; Kenny, FUDDY MEERS; and The Little Mermaid, A MURMURED TALE. Rachel will be performing next as Penny in HAIRSPRAY with Stage1 Theatre. For more information please visit: [www.RachelLJacobs.com](http://www.RachelLJacobs.com)

**Jameyla Kiswani (Assistant Director)** is a Palestinian-American director, producer, comedian (still disputed) and playwright. Kiswani has been a theatre professional her entire life; from backyard productions to main stage works she has been committed to the craft as a way to educate and entertain audiences by bringing them to a Masrah (theatre/stage) they can easily see themselves on. Original works include HIKAYAT AL NAKBA 2008 and THE GIVING TREE THE REMIXX 2011.

**Mahsa Matin (Ensemble)** is a living cartoon character. Her comedy is reminiscent of the golden age of silent films, with a touch of breakdancing thrown in. Mahsa is thoroughly musical, playing trombone, trumpet, and various percussion contraptions in performance. Her physicality is playful and vibrant. She can often be seen high in the sky performing on stilts, or playing trumpet atop her eight-foot unicycle.

**Aliah Najmabadi (Ensemble)** is a performer and scholar of Central Asian dance. Aliah holds a Master's degree in Performance from the University of London and B.A.'s in World Arts and Cultures & Iranian Studies from UCLA. Locally, Aliah performs with Ballet Afsaneh for which she served as assistant director from 2005-2006. Aliah first worked with Hafiz Karmali in Golden Thread's production of ISLAND OF ANIMALS and is now excited to be a part of this multi-talented cast which includes her husband, Maruf Noyoft. Aliah thanks cast & crew for lovingly including their young son, Shams in the creation of RUMI X 7.

**Maruf Noyoft (Ensemble)** is a native of Tajikistan. He holds BA degree in music from Tajikistan's University of Art and Culture. Since childhood Maruf has had a love of music, theater and film. Maruf first began acting for Tajik TV and has since transitioned to his working behind the camera as a freelance filmmaker. Maruf is happy to be once again on the stage with such a creative cast and crew and is honored to be a part of RUMI X 7 because he admires Golden Thread's pursuit to bring to the stage his shared culture to American audiences.

**Wiley Naman Strasser** is excited to be working with Golden Thread again, having worked with Evren Odcikin on WEEPING WILLOW and URGE FOR GOING earlier this year. Other bay area credits include work with Cutting Ball, Rapid Descent, Cabrillo Stage, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, Actor's Ensemble of Berkeley, and Bay Area Playwrights Foundation. Los Angeles credits include work with The Powerhouse, LA Opera, and Los Angeles Theater Center. In 2012, Wiley will be seen in Cutting Ball's TONTLAWALD and African American Shakespeare Company's XTIGONE.

**Ninva Warda (Costumes)** comes from an Interior Design background. she has been involved with art and design all her life. Rumi X 7 is her fourth attempt at Costume Design but, first time working with Golden Thread Productions. Ninva has a passion for all forms of art and literature: dance, theatre, music and poetry. She is always inspired and energized working with talented people and fascinated by the magic of theatre!

**Daniel Yelen (Props)** has been props master for Donld Pippin's Pocket Opera, Lamplighters Music Theater, and the San Francisco Mime Troupe. His costumes have appeared on the boards of Masquers Playhouse, Curtain Theater, and the San Francisco Free Civic Theater. He fancies himself an actor as well, and is currently enjoying the role of Dr. Chasuble in The Importance of Being Earnest, produced by the 16th Street Players. His next appearance will be in The Gondoliers, arguably the finest operetta in the Gilbert and Sullivan canon.