



FESTIVAL OF ARABIC
MUSIC & ARTS



المملكة الأردنية
ROYAL JORDANIAN

مسرحية هاجر

HAGAR A Play By Aksam Alyousef

NOV 8		7:30 PM	PREVIEW	NOV 11		2:00 PM
NOV 9		7:30 PM	OPENING	NOV 11		7:30 PM
NOV 10		7:30 PM		NOV 12		2:00 PM

THE THEATRE CENTRE - BMO INCUBATOR - TORONTO

Directed by Morgan Norwich, Performed by Amena Shehab



MAPLE ARTS



More information at www.canadianarabicfestival.ca / www.pleiadestheatre.org





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- **INSPIRATIONS:** new, relevant stories exploring their experiences;
- **TRANSLATIONS:** sharing stories from other languages for all audiences;
- **ADAPTATIONS:** exploring existing works through their lens.

A tax-deductible donation to Pleiades Theatre may be made by cheque, VISA, MasterCard, or online through zeffy on our website or CanadaHelps.org. To make a donation, please mail a cheque to the address below or contact us at:

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www.maplearts.co

HAGAR

Co-produced by Hagar Collective, Pleiades Theatre,
and Canadian Arabic Orchestra – Maple Arts

By Aksam Alyousef

Director - Morgan Norwich

Performed by Amena Shehab

Production Manager - Emma Westray

Lighting Designer - Mathilda Kane

Stage Manager & Sound Designer - Heather Bellingham

English and Arabic Captioning - Maher Sinno

Projection Designer - Alexander Boldt

Scenic Painter - Aboud Salman

Running time is 50 minutes with no intermission.

Please turn off your cell phones before the performance. The taking of photographs or video and use of any kind of recording device is prohibited in the theatre.

We acknowledge that Pleiades Theatre operates in Tkaronto: the traditional and sacred territory of the Wendat, the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee, Métis, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and many other Nations recorded or unrecorded.

This territory is the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant.

These Nations have taken care of this land for countless generations. They continue to do so today, and they will do so for generations to come. We are grateful to be able to work, live, create and grow on this land.

Season Sponsor



Government Support



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I met Amena Shehab in 2015 in Edmonton, a city to which we had both recently relocated -- me in 2014 from Toronto, her in 2013 after the war broke out in Syria with her three children. I could go on forever about her fiery, insistent passion for theatre; her riotous and risqué sense of humour; her cooking. But suffice it to say we formed a strong and supportive bond that eventually resulted in the first production of Hagar in 2018.

Amena and I have brought to this project our shared but vastly different experiences as mothers of young children. When I first read the script, it was the evening before my own son's first birthday, and the character's raw determination, loneliness, and grief so resonated with me on that day that I had to put it down. I texted Amena and said, "I can't finish this right now, but I'm in."

How can people there imagine the face of just one mother who sees her child murdered?

Hagar asks this of Europeans, of white North American settlers. And the answer is we can't, and we don't want to, because it is a living nightmare. And so the focus of our storytelling on stage is to lay bare the specific and unique experiences of women and mothers living through war. While much of the staging is symbolic and theatrical, specific touches of realism that are recognizable to mothers everywhere -- the careful way we move around a baby's crib to make sure they are safe without waking them, the constant and automatic swaying and rocking, the way we stare in awe at their quiet faces once they are finally asleep--have been woven throughout.

The devastating coincidence of presenting this play in the context of the atrocities being inflicted upon Gaza over the last several weeks is not lost on us. While the work was originally created in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, we have continued and will continue to see families violently displaced and disrupted by war and oppression. We invite you to consider this play in the context of the present moment, but also in the context of Ukrainians who have sought refuge; of the women's liberation movements in Iran and Afghanistan; in the continued separation of Indigenous mothers and their babies here in Canada.

We thank you for getting into the boat alongside Hagar today, and for bearing witness to the story of just one mother.

Morgan Norwich, Director

Audience Advisory: This play deals with described and/or enacted violence, both physical and sexual, in the context of war. There are sound effects of gunfire. This may be especially triggering for some patrons.



AKSAM ALYOUSEF

PLAYWRIGHT

Born in Damascus, Syria // Lives in Edmonton, AB

Selected Theatre Credits

Honey and Nuts / Concrete Theatre / Playwright

Souls / Multicultural Theatre / Playwright and Director

Hagar / Alma Theatre / Playwright

F.O.B / Alma Theatre / Playwright and Director

Here There Be Night. (The Letter) / Workshop West / Playwright

Awards and Nominations

Best Play Award for 2022 in the competition held by the Arab Theatre Institute for *Adeeb*.

Aksam Alyousef is a playwright, Journalist, director and producer in theatre and television. He has a MA in drama from the University of Alberta. After graduating from the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus in 1994, Aksam began his career as an assistant professor at the same Institute and as a journalist. In 2001 Aksam moved to Qatar to work as a drama teacher and then at Aljazeera Children Channel as a scriptwriter and producer. Since coming to Canada in 2016, Alyousef has written and directed many new plays, including *Honey and Nuts*, *Souls*, *Hagar*, *F.O.B*, *Rehearsal*, and *Adeeb*.



MORGAN NORWICH

DIRECTOR

Born in Toronto, ON // Lives in Toronto, ON

Selected Theatre Credits

TRAPPED! / Rhubarb Festival / Director

The Homemaker / Toronto Fringe / Director

Redheaded Stepchild / SummerWorks, multiple tours / Director

Scheherezade / Next Stage Festival / Director

Muhammad of Yorkville / SummerWorks / Director

Born and raised in Tkaronto, Morgan Norwich is a director, creator, arts administrator, and performer. For ten years, she and playwright Johnnie Walker created and produced new works as Nobody's Business Theatre. Their most notable project, *Redheaded Stepchild*, written and performed by Johnnie and directed by Morgan, was published in 2016 by Playwrights Canada Press. Specializing in producing for festivals, Morgan has worked for the Toronto Fringe, The Rhubarb Festival, and SummerWorks in a variety of managerial and curatorial roles. She is currently the Managing Director of SummerWorks. Morgan continues to perform as a founding member of BoylesqueTO, Canada's premiere "Boylesque" troupe, where she emcees under the stage name Balonia Wry.

**AMENA SHEHAB****ACTOR**

Damascus, Syria // Lives in: Edmonton, AB

Amena Shehab is an Arab-Canadian actress and playwright who has brought her captivating journey to Edmonton's theatre scene. Exploring womanhood, motherhood, and migration, she has played roles in *Nine Parts of Desire* (Maggie Tree), *Souls* (Edmonton International Fringe Theatre Festival) and *Medea* (University of Alberta). Her solo performance in *Hagar* (Alma Theatre) poignantly depicts a Syrian refugee experience. Amena has also embodied Sammar in *F.O.B* and Nahla in *Harun* for the Edmonton Fringe. Other credits include *E-Day* (The Serial Collective), *Rehearsal* (Syrian Heritage Association), *All That Binds Us* (Azimuth Theatre), and *Here There Be Night* (Workshop West). An accomplished Arab playwright and actress, Amena's migration to Canada ignited her passion for storytelling. From *The Amazonamachy* (Tiger Heart's Collective) to *The Shoe Project* coordinator (Workshop West and Skirts-A-Fire), she empowers newcomer women and enriches Edmonton's cultural landscape. Amena also received the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Arts Awards: Creative Encouragement Award, 2023.

**EMMA WESTRAY****PRODUCTION MANAGER**

Born in Windsor, ON // Lives in Toronto, ON

Selected Theatre Credits

The Chemical Valley Project / Broadleaf Theatre/TPM / Producer
Cannibal / Next Stage Festival / Producer

The World Made Itself & Infinitely Yours / Progress Festival /
Producer

hiraeth / SummerWorks Performance Festival / Producer

MARRY ME MARRY ME MARRY ME MARRY ME / House + Body /
Producer

Emma Westray (she/her) is an arts administrator and artistic producer living and working in Tkarón:to. She is committed to uplifting new artistic voices and developing projects that question the status quo, meeting audiences where they are with a focus on community building and accessibility.

Emma is an alum of Generator's Artist Producer Training program and has a decade of experience as a freelancer, working with the Paprika Festival, Nightwood Theatre, Broadleaf Theatre, TIFF, Theatre Direct, the Toronto Fringe Festival, and more. Most recently, Emma was the Festival Producer for the SummerWorks Performance Festival and is currently working as the Associate Producer at Theatre Passe Muraille.



MATHILDA KANE

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Born in Toronto, ON // Lives in Toronto, ON

Selected Theatre Credits

Killing Time: A Gameshow Musical / Mixtape Projects /
Lighting Designer

ECHO / a front company / Lighting Designer

A Perfect Bowl of Pho / Send Noods Productions /
Lighting Designer

Pus / Road Trip Collective / Associate Lighting Designer

UNCOVERED (2023) / The Musical Stage Company /
Lighting Designer

Mathilda is a Tkaronto based Lighting Designer, Theatre Maker, member of a front company, and a 2023/24 Nightwood Theatre Innovator. She is a Queer second generation Canadian of Scottish, Indian, German, and Guyanese descent. She attended Toronto Metropolitan University for Performance Production and Design. She is focused on exploring the boundaries of 'designable space' in theatre, They take a collaborative approach to creation and care greatly for fostering long term creative relationships.

Thanks always to her mentors, friends, and Laur.



HEATHER BELLINGHAM

STAGE MANAGER & SOUND DESIGNER

Born in Peterborough, ON // Lives in Toronto, ON

Selected Theatre Credits

The First Stone / New Harlem Productions et al. / Assistant Stage
Manager

Take d Milk, Nah? / Pandemic Theatre et al./ Stage Manager

The Chemical Valley Project / Broadleaf Theatre / Stage Manager

Sound of the Beast / New Harlem Productions et al. / Stage
Manager

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street / Talk Is Free
Theatre / ASM

Awards and Nominations

Harold Award, House of Sarah Stanley 2021

Heather has worked in stage management on 90+ shows throughout Canada and internationally, ranging from small-scale Fringe productions, to pieces in festivals such as World Pride and Panamania, to large scale shows at the Stratford Festival and for Mirvish. She has even stage managed a private performance for royalty. See credits at heatherbellingham.wordpress.com Follow @blue84HB.



MAHER SINNO | ماهر سنو
ENGLISH AND ARABIC CAPTIONING

Born in Beirut // Lives in Toronto, ON

Selected Theatre Credits

Three Sisters / Howland Company & Harthouse Theatre / Val (Solyoni)
Gods of Jericho (workshop) / Factory Theatre / Lightning
Rebirth of Leila & Kays / Soulpepper Theatre / Leila & Kays + Writer
Rubble (workshop) / Cahoots Theatre / Mo
Mhajjir / Paprika Festival / Writer
Hair / Harthouse Theatre / Assistant Director

Awards and Nominations

Queer Emerging Artist Award / Buddies in Bad Times Theatre;
Sterling Award Nominee for Outstanding Fringe Production alongside
the team of The Green Line.

Maher Sinno | ماهر سنو (they/he) is an Arab actor, writer, & director
based in Tkaronto working in both Theatre and Film.

Since graduating Theatre school, Maher has worked with several
theatre companies across Canada including St John's TODOS
productions, Edmonton's In Arms Collective, and Toronto's various
theatres including Passe Muraille, Cahoots, & Soulpepper. In Film/TV,
Maher is in a Samsung/Bell commercial as well as guest starring on
Unis TV's Tout Sexplique. Maher is also a performer mixing the art of
slam poetry & gender performance.

Maher continuously works on inclusion of marginalized voices in
theatre spaces specially the Arabic-speaking community. Maher is
excited to start collaborating with Pleiades Theatre and Canadian
Arabic Orchestra.



ALEXANDER BOLDT
PROJECTION DESIGNER

Born in Edmonton, AB // Lives in Edmonton, AB

Selected Theatre Credits

Hagar / Edmonton Fringe Festival / Sound & Projection Designer
Apricot Stones / Edmonton Fringe Festival / Sound Designer
Post, Like, Share, Beware / The X-Factory / Actor
Sonder / Edmonton Fringe Festival / Composer & Sound Designer
F.O.B / Edmonton Fringe Festival / Stage Manager

Alex is a theatre technician who does things from video
projections to sound design. He graduated from Red Deer College
for Theatre Production and currently lives in Edmonton.

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John Van Burek retired in 2017 as the Founding Artistic Director of Pleiades Theatre and as a seminal figure in the translations of works by Canadian and international authors especially between French and English.

In parallel with her husband's accomplishments and throughout her own professional career, Anne Nenarokoff-Van Burek, a noted author, identified and translated celebrated works of literature, particularly from original French and Russian texts.

Pleiades Theatre in Toronto has been the beneficiary of the Van Bureks' insights and energies and it is to honour and to build upon these legacies that our Theatre has established a perpetual Fund named for these two important Canadians and designated to carry on their personal specialty, standards and skills.

We gratefully acknowledge support for the Fund by:

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- The McLean Foundation
- The Norman and Margaret Jewison Charitable Foundation
- The John McKellar Charitable Foundation
- The Catherine and Maxwell Meighen Foundation

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Pleiades Theatre is a member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT) and engages, under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement, professional Artists who are members of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association. Pleiades Theatre also abides by the PACT Agreement with members of the ADC (Associated Designers of Canada), and the Playwrights Guild of Canada. We are also an active member of the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA).

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