



A PLAY BY  
**MOTTI LERNER**

**NOVEMBER 7 - DECEMBER 15, 2013**



Written by **Motti Lerner**  
Translated by **Hillel Halkin**  
Directed by **Jimmy McDermott**  
**The World Premiere**

# PAULUS

Written by **Motti Lerner**  
Translated by **Hillel Halkin**  
Directed by **Jimmy McDermott**

Silk Road Rising commissioned the translation of *Paulus* from Hebrew into English.

The video and/or audio recording of this performance by any means whatsoever are strictly prohibited.

## DEDICATION

Silk Road Rising's world premiere production of *Paulus* is dedicated to **Jo Anne Davis**, the long serving President of our Board of Directors. Under Jo Anne's leadership, the company undertook a new strategic plan which resulted in the expansion of the company's artistic offerings, including online video plays and online civic engagement initiatives. Jo Anne has worked tirelessly to assist the company in growing its budget, board, and staff. Silk Road Rising is honored to recognize Jo Anne Davis for her dedication to creating dialogue through art and empathy through storytelling.

## CAST LIST

**Daniel Cantor\*** | Paulus  
**Torrey Hanson\*** | Jesus  
**Bill McGough\*** | Hananiah  
**Dana Black** | Drusilla  
**Anthony DiNicola** | Trophimos  
**Carolyn Hoerdemann** | Adima  
**Glenn Stanton** | Nero, Eleazar  
**D'Wayne Taylor** | Lysias, Felix

### Ensemble

**Torrey Hanson, Dana Black,**  
**Kroydell Galima, Carolyn Hoerdemann,**  
**Scott Shimizu, D'Wayne Taylor**

### Understudies

**Kroydell Galima, Daniel Houle,**  
**Virginia Lee Marie Martinez,**  
**Jonathan Nichols, Scott Shimizu**

## PRODUCTION TEAM

**Malik Gillani** | Producer  
**Jamil Khoury** | Producer  
**Jimmy McDermott** | Director  
**Corey Pond** | Production Manager  
**Donald E. Claxon\*** | Stage Manager  
**Dan Stratton** | Set Designer  
**Elsa Hiltner** | Costume Designer  
**Rebecca A. Barrett** | Lighting Designer  
**Peter J. Storms** | Sound Designer  
**Jesse Gaffney** | Props Designer  
**Neal Ryan Shaw** | Dramaturg  
**Ellie Humphrys** | Master Electrician  
**Jason Pikscher** | Technical Director  
**Glenn Stanton** | Fight Choreographer  
**Becca McCracken, Claire Simon Casting** | Casting Director  
**George Bajalia** | Assistant Director  
**Heather Timmerman** | Assistant Stage Manager  
**Ashley Thompson** | Wardrobe Supervisor  
**Sarah Ibis** | Program Editor  
**George Bajalia** | Marketing Associate  
**Lindsay Byrne** | House Manager  
**Al Gillani** | Box Office Coordinator  
**Deann Baker** | Video Coordinator and Editor

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\* Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

## CAST BIOS



**Daniel Cantor** (Paulus) is delighted to be making his Silk Road Rising debut. In Chicago Daniel has appeared at the Goodman, Drury Lane, Victory Gardens, Chicago Shakespeare, and Next; Off Broadway at the

Promenade, Minetta Lane, and Soho Playhouse; in the National production of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*; regionally at the American Conservatory Theater, Cincinnati Playhouse, Milwaukee Rep, and Cleveland Play House, among many others; in TV and Film on *Law & Order*, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, *Conviction*, *The Sopranos*, *As the World Turns*, *Loving*, *Asphalt Man* (Korea), *The Auteur Theory*, and *Alchemy*.



**Torrey Hanson** (Jesus, Ensemble) has performed in about 140 plays in 30 years, 75 of them in 17 seasons at the Milwaukee Repertory as a member of the resident acting company. In Chicago, he was most

recently seen in *Spoon River Anthology* at Provision Theater Company. Other regional credits include Seattle Repertory Theatre, Intiman Theatre, A Contemporary Theatre, The Empty Space Theatre, The Cleveland Play House, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Indiana Repertory Theater, The Resident Ensemble Players at University of Delaware, Northwestern University, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Utah Shakespeare Festival, Madison Repertory Theatre, and Subaru Theater Company in Tokyo. He has also appeared on *Cheers* and *Wings* on NBC.



**Bill McGough** (Hananiah) was seen most recently in *Invisible Man* at Court Theatre. At Timeline Theatre, he performed in *The Front Page* (Jeff Nomination for Ensemble)

and *The Farnsworth Invention* (Jeff Award for Ensemble). He has also performed with Next, Collaboraction, Steppenwolf, Goodman, Writers', Northlight, CCPA, Raven, and The Hypocrites, with whom he received a Jeff Citation Nomination for his portrayal of Willie Loman in *Death of a Salesman*. Feature films include *In Memoriam*, *The Christians*, *Let's Go to Prison*, and *Design*. Television credits include *Sirens*, *Chicago Fire*, *Shameless*, and *The Chicago Code*.



**Dana Black** (Drusilla, Ensemble) was most recently seen in American Blues Theater's production of *Hank Williams: Lost Highway*. Past credits include Stage Left's *Rabbit*, Ruckus and Tympanic Theatre's *Brewed*,

Next Theatre's *After the Revolution*, Lifeline's *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Theatre Seven's *The Chicago Landmark Project*, Caffeine Theatre's *Wreckage*, and Silk Road Rising's *Pangs of the Messiah*. Other Chicago credits include work with Chicago Dramatists, TUTA, Piven Theatre, BackStage, New Leaf Theatre, and Timeline. Dana is a graduate of The School at Steppenwolf and an associate artist with Chicago Dramatists. She proudly works during the day as the assistant to the Executive Director of the Goodman Theatre. Love to Baude.



**Anthony DiNicola** (Trophimos) makes his Silk Road Rising debut. He recently appeared in *Measure for Measure* at the Goodman Theatre. Chicago credits include *American Storm* (Jeff Award Nominee for Best Actor

in a Supporting Role) and *In the Heart of America* with Theatre Seven, where he is also a company member. Anthony tours year long to colleges, universities, and military institutions around the world performing *Sex Signals*, a comedy-educational show about dating, sex, and consent. On television, he most recently appeared on NBC's *Chicago Fire*. Anthony is a proud graduate of the School at Steppenwolf. With love to M.



**Kroydell Galima** (Ensemble, Understudy) is thrilled to work with Silk Road Rising for the first time. He recently understudied for Lookingglass's world premiere of *Big Lake Big City*. He also appeared with Profiles Theatre

in their world premiere of *In The Company of Men* and in TimeLine Theatre's Midwest premiere of *Concerning Strange Devices From The Distant West*. Kroydell started a multi-arts collaborative ensemble called CUBE; their first performance was a staged *Bach Cantata 199: My Heart Swims In Blood, a story of redemption*. Thanks to Hope, his friends and family, and everyone at Gray Talent Group for their continued love, support, and generosity.



**Carolyn Hoerdemann** (Adima, Ensemble) was seen in the Goodman Theatre's *Measure for Measure* and *Camino Real*, and Timeline Theatre's *My Kind of Town*; before that she was in the critically acclaimed

*Overweight Unimportant Mishape: A European Supper* at the Trapdoor Theatre. Other recent projects include *Venus* at the Steppenwolf Garage and the Jeff Award winning *Scorched* at Silk Road Rising. Carolyn is a company member at Collaboraction and the European Repertory Company. She has also worked with The Chicago Children's Theatre and American Players Theatre in Wisconsin. She is a faculty member at The Theatre School at DePaul and is represented by Paonessa Talent.



**Scott Shimizu** (Ensemble, Understudy) is thrilled to be making his debut with Silk Road Rising. Recent Chicago credits include Claudio in *Much Ado about Nothing* and The Man in *The Ghost is Here*. Scott graduated from

Northwestern University, where he received a degree in Theatre with a certificate in Musical

Theatre. Thanks to Mom, Dad, Natalie, Alex, and the rest of the gang for their constant love and support. Hope you enjoy the show!



**Glenn Stanton** (Nero, Eleazar) returns to Silk Road Rising where he was last seen in *INVASION!* He was also recently seen in the role of d'Artagnan in Lifeline Theatre's *Three Musketeers*. Glenn has also worked with

such Chicago theaters as the Goodman, Chicago Shakespeare, House, Illinois Theater Center, Signal Ensemble, and Metropolis PAC. Regional theater credits include Utah Shakespeare Festival and Cumberland County Playhouse. Glenn's TV credits include *Sirens* (USA), *Betrayal* (ABC), *Desperate Measures* (ID), and *A King's Way* (Pilot). He has also done voiceover work for Comcast and the city of Oklahoma. He received his BFA in Musical Theater from Ohio Northern University.



**D'Wayne Taylor** (Lysias, Felix, Ensemble) is making his Silk Road Rising debut, and couldn't be more thrilled. His most recent performance was in The Goodman Theatre's production of *Sweet Bird of Youth*. He has had

the opportunity to perform in several other productions in Chicago, including Steep's *In Arabia We'd All Be Kings*, The Mary Arrchie's *Cherrywood*, Remy Bumppo's *Changes Of Heart*, Caffeine Theatre's *Brutal Imagination*, Theater Oobleck's *Straus At Midnight*, Griffin's *Stage Door*, and The Hypocrites's *Our Town*. When he is not on stage, D'Wayne can be seen and heard on several television and radio commercials throughout the year.



**Daniel Houle** (Understudy) is excited to be working with Silk Road Rising. He received his BFA in acting from the University of Rhode Island. After graduation Daniel toured



for a year with The National Players, where he appeared as Don John in *Much Ado about Nothing*. Daniel moved to Chicago in 2002 and has since worked with Teatro Vista, Speaking Ring Theater Company, American Theater Company, Timeline Theater, Bohemian Theater Ensemble, Prop Theater, Oak Park Festival Theater, and most recently with Step Up Productions. Daniel would like to thank his family and friends for their continued love and support.



**Virginia Lee Marie Martinez** (Understudy) was born and raised in the Midwest and has trained both domestically and internationally. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point,

with a BFA in Musical Theater, then traveled Europe and studied for a semester in London, England. Virginia has worked and collaborated on many original projects with Chicago Fusion Theatre Company (now Wayward Productions), Beast Women Productions, National Pastime Theater, and Teatro Luna. In addition, Virginia is a certified Pure Yoga instructor, singer/songwriter, and budding creator/producer. She's extremely grateful for the opportunity to work with Silk Road Rising!



**Jonathan Nichols** (Understudy) is very happy to be working with Silk Road Rising for the first time. Most recently, he was seen as Emperor Joseph II in Oak Park Festival Theatre's production of *Amadeus*. In

and around Chicago, he has had the pleasure of working with ShawChicago, Remy Bumppo Theatre, First Folio Theatre, Shakespeare on the Green, Rising Moon Theatre, and MPAC, as well as in several productions with Eclipse, City Lit, Circle, and Raven Theatres. A native of Kentucky, Jonathan also spent three seasons with The Lexington Shakespeare Festival.

## PRODUCTION TEAM BIOS



**Malik Gillani** (Producer) is the Founding Executive Director of Silk Road Rising. Malik is a recognized leader in the creation of innovative arts programming that expands artistic access. Most notably, he developed SRR's model for

creating online video plays, which are now being accessed across the globe. Malik also established SRR's arts integrated education program, Myths to Drama, which was heralded as one of the finest elementary school arts education programs in the Chicago Public Schools system. He also piloted a new arts education program for high school and elementary school students in partnership with San Diego's Playwrights Project called EPIC (Empathic Playwriting Intensive Course). Malik Gillani earned a B.A. in Liberal Arts from St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, with an emphasis on the Great Books. He is a Kellogg Executive Scholar (Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University) and has been awarded a Certificate of Professional Achievement in Nonprofit Management. Malik is currently pursuing a Masters in Non-Profit Administration from North Park University.



**Jamil Khoury** (Producer) is the Founding Artistic Director of Silk Road Rising. He is currently writing the full length version of his play *Mosque Alert*, part of an online interactive new play development and civic

engagement project. He is also preparing for the shoot of his new video play, *Multi Meets Poly: Multiculturalism and Polyculturalism Go On a First Date*. Jamil devised two critically acclaimed cabarets, *Re-Spiced: A Silk Road Cabaret* (2012) and *Silk Road Cabaret: Broadway Sings the Silk Road* (2009). He conceived of and was a featured playwright in SRR's production of *The DNA Trail: A Genealogy of Short Plays about Ancestry, Identity, and Utter Confusion* (2010). His short play *WASP: White Arab Slovak Pole* inspired the video play *both/*

*and* (2011) and the documentary film *Not Quite White: Arabs, Slavs, and the Contours of Contested Whiteness* (2012). His video play *The Balancing Arab* (2012) was adapted from his short play *63rd and Kedzie*, originally part of Theatre Seven's *Chicago Landmark Project*. Jamil is also the author of the plays *Precious Stones*, *Fitna*, and *Azizati*.



**Motti Lerner** (Playwright) teaches playwriting at the Kibbutz College in Tel Aviv. His plays have been produced in the United States, Israel, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, South Africa, Australia, Canada and India.

Among his plays are *Kastner*, *Pangs of the Messiah*, *Paulus*, *Pollard*, *Exile in Jerusalem*, *Passing the Love of Women*, *Autumn*, *Hard Love*, *The Hastening of The End*, *The Murder of Isaac*, *Benedictus*, and *In the Dark*. He has written screenplays for the films *Loves in Betania*, *The Kastner Trial*, *Bus Number 300*, *Egoz*, *A Battle in Jerusalem*, *The Silence of the Sirens*, *Altalena*, *Spring 1941* (with Joseph Fiennes in the lead role), and twelve episodes of the TV drama series *The Institute*. He is a recipient of the best play award (1985) and the Israeli Motion Picture Academy award for the best TV drama in 1995 and in 2004. In 1994 he won the Prime Minister's of Israel Award for his creative work. His book *According to Chekhov* was published in 2011. His play *The Admission* will open in Theatre J in Washington DC in March 2014. He has taught playwriting and screenwriting at Duke University, Knox College, and Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi.

**Hillel Halkin** (Translator) is an American-born Israeli writer, critic, and translator. His work has appeared in *Commentary*, *New Republic*, and *Jerusalem Post*. He also serves on the editorial board of the Jewish Review of Books. A master translator from Hebrew and Yiddish, his translations include work from contemporary and classical authors. He recently released the novel *Melisande! What are Dreams?* and rendered into English Moyshe Kulbak's *The Zelmenyaners*.



**Jimmy McDermott** (Director) is the 2012-2013 Michael Maggio Directing Fellow at The Goodman Theatre. Credits include *The Maids* and *The Puppetmaster of Lodz* (Writers' Theatre, where he also served as Associate

Artistic Director), *The Fourth Graders Present an Unnamed Love Suicide* and *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and Salome* (the side project), *Waiting for Godot* (Redtwist Theatre), *2,000 Feet Away* (Steeple Theatre), and the U.S. premiere of *Boojum! Nonsense, Truth and Lewis Carroll* (Chicago Opera Vanguard & Caffeine Theatre). He received the Joseph Jefferson Award (non-Equity wing) for his direction of Strange Tree's *The Three Faces of Dr. Crippen*, part of Steppenwolf's 2011 Garage Rep. He is an adjunct professor at University of Illinois, Chicago and at DePaul University. [www.jimmymcd.com](http://www.jimmymcd.com)

**Corey Pond** (Production Manager) is thrilled to have joined Silk Road Rising full time. Previous work at SRR includes assistant director for *Re-Spiced* and *The Lake Effect*; house manager for *Yellow Face*, *Re-Spiced* and *Night Over Erzinga*; and stage manager for various staged readings. Corey holds a BA in Theatre from Illinois State University where he studied directing. Directing credits include *Lady Lazarus* (Gorilla Tango), "Flash" (KCACTF Region III, Best Director), *Doubt* (FreeStage, ISU), and "Going Nowhere" and "Double Feature" (Heartland Theater, 10-Minute Play Festivals in Normal, IL). Corey also enjoys adapting from sources like short stories ("The Lottery"), albums (Everybody), and autobiographies (Stranger at the Gates).

**Donald E. Claxon** (Stage Manager) is happy to be back at Silk Road Rising Theatre. His Chicago credits include work with Chicago Opera Theater, Grant Park Music Festival, The Court Theatre, Paramount Theater (Broadway Series), The Second City, About Face Theater, *The Addams Family: A New Musical*, and Dreamwork's *Shrek: The Musical* (Production Assistant). Regionally, he has worked with Mobile Opera, Peninsula Players, Yale Opera, Florentine Opera, Glimmerglass Festival, Barrington Stage, and Yale Repertory Theatre. He is a graduate of Wabash College and The Yale School of Drama.

**Dan Stratton** (Set Designer) has many theatre design credits to his name, including *The Beautiful Dark* for RedTwist Theatre; *Invasion!*, *The Lake Effect*, and *Respiced: A Silk Road Cabaret* for Silk Road Rising; *Fallow*, *The Knowledge*, *Kill the Old Torture their Young*, *Lakeboat*, *Festen*, *Love and Money*, and *Moment* for Steep Theatre; *The Aliens* for A Red Orchid Theatre; *Posh* for Fool's Fury; *As You Like It* for Two Pence Shakespeare; *Peter Pan: A Play* for LookingGlass Theatre; *Suicide Inc.* for Gift Theatre Company; *Abigail's Party* for A Red Orchid Theatre; and *R.U.R.* for Strawdog Theatre Company. Dan went to the University of Michigan and Northwestern University. [www.danstrattonsetdesign.com](http://www.danstrattonsetdesign.com)

**Elsa Hiltner** (Costume Designer) is delighted to return to Silk Road Rising after designing costumes for *Night Over Erzanga* last fall. Favorite Chicago theatre company credits include Collaboration, Eclipse Theatre, First Folio Theatre, Signal Ensemble Theatre, Teatro Vista, Victory Gardens, and Walk-about Theater. Regional company credits include Balagan Theatre (Seattle), Book It Repertory Theatre (Seattle), and Next Act Theatre (Milwaukee). Elsa is a company member of Collaboration and Signal Ensemble, and is an Artistic Associate of First Folio Theatre. Recently, Elsa lived in the Middle East studying costume history. For more information about her designs please visit [www.elsahiltner.com](http://www.elsahiltner.com).

**Rebecca A. Barrett** (Lighting Designer) is thrilled to be returning to Silk Road Rising. She has worked as a lighting designer and lighting coordinator in and around Chicago for the past ten years. Her favorite designs include *Golden Child* (for which she and SSR received an After Dark Award for Design/Technical Achievement); *Pajama Game*, *You Can't Take It With You*, *Never the Sinner*, and *Glass Menagerie* (Northwestern University); *Dorian* (Bailiwick); and *New Anatomies* and *Impossible Marriage* (Foreground Theatre Company). Rebecca graduated from Ithaca College with a BFA in Theatrical Production Arts and her MFA from Northwestern University. See more of her work at [www.rbarrettdesign.com](http://www.rbarrettdesign.com).

**Peter J. Storms** (Sound Designer and Composer) is the Resident Sound Designer at Silk Road Rising, where he designed *Invasion!*, *Night Over Erzanga*, *Yellow Face*, and *Scorched*, for which he received a 2011 Joseph Jefferson Equity Award for Outstanding Sound Design. Peter has also worked with Circle, Noble Fool Theatri-

cals, Theatre Building Chicago, Raven, and TimeLine, among others. He serves as the accompanist for Unity Temple in Oak Park, is the touring keyboardist for Michael Londra and Beyond Celtic, and spends his days developing software. Special thanks to Juliana for her love and support. Full resume at [www.peterstorms.com](http://www.peterstorms.com)

**Jesse Gaffney** (Props Designer) is a resident designer at Silk Road Rising and is glad to be working on another challenging production. Elsewhere in Chicago she is an artistic associate with 16th Street Theatre and has worked with Victory Gardens, Fox Valley Rep, Lifeline, Remy Bumppo, Chicago Children's, and Congo Square Theatre Companies, among others. Outside Chicago, Jesse has worked for Allenberry Playhouse, Notre Dame Shakespeare Festival, Peninsula Players, and The Arrow Rock Lyceum. Jesse is a St. Louis native and an Illinois Wesleyan graduate. You can see how many her props are created at [theatreprojects.blogspot.com](http://theatreprojects.blogspot.com). Thanks and love to Warwick.

**Neal Ryan Shaw** (Dramaturg) is delighted to continue his stint as Silk Road Rising's Resident Dramaturg. As such, he has worked on the recent productions of *Invasion!*, *The Lake Effect*, and *Night Over Erzanga*, as well as numerous staged readings and workshops. Recently, Neal also had the pleasure of working on *Unwilling and Hostile Instruments* at Theatre Seven, as one of a team of dramaturgs. He received his Master of Arts from Illinois State University and is a member of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. [www.nealryanshaw.com](http://www.nealryanshaw.com).

**Jason Pikscher** (Technical Director) is thrilled to be rejoining Silk Road Rising where he has served as Technical Director or Production Manager for nine previous productions. Jason's fabrications have been seen across the country: at Houston Grand Opera, The Kennedy Center, Florida Grand Opera, Ford's Theatre, and Michigan Opera Theatre. In Chicago he has worked with Victory Gardens, Wildclaw Theatre, First Folio, Chicago Shakespeare, Marriott, Drury Lane Oakbrook, Harper College, North Central College, Rivendell, and Aboutface. Corporate displays include TLC, Animal Planet, Walgreens, and Microsoft. He is the resident Technical Director for the Broadway Series at the Paramount Theatre in Aurora, IL. Jason thanks his wife Andrea for her undying support, love, and tolerance of his work schedule. Jason is a proud Bradley University Alumni.

## COMPANY LIST

**Jamil Khoury** | Founding Artistic Director  
**Malik Gillani** | Founding Executive Director  
**Corey Pond** | Production Manager  
**Ethan Grant** | Development Associate  
**Deann Baker** | Video Coordinator & Editor  
**Maria Wagner** | Finance Director  
**Al Gillani** | I.T. & Box Office Manager  
**David Henry Hwang** | Artistic Ambassador  
**Steve Scott** | Artistic Advisor  
**Dan Stratton** | Resident Set Designer  
**Sarah Hughey** | Resident Lighting Designer  
**Peter J. Storms** | Resident Sound Designer  
**Jesse Gaffney** | Resident Props Designer  
**Neal Ryan Shaw** | Resident Dramaturg  
**Kareem Bandealy** | Artistic Associate  
**Rebecca A. Barrett** | Artistic Associate  
**Carol J. Blanchard** | Artistic Associate  
**Lavina Jadhvani** | Artistic Associate  
**Lee Keenan** | Artistic Associate  
**Becca McCracken** | Casting Director  
**Brandon Allen** | Arts Management Intern  
**Michael Mead** | Arts Management Intern  
**Andrew Skwish** | Poster Art Illustrator  
**Darrel Reese** | Graphic Designer  
**Richard Goerne** | Saints Coordinator  
**Sarah Ibis** | Program Editor

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### Board Officers:

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**Deanna Nord** | Secretary  
**Shirley Soo** | Treasurer

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**Malik Gillani** | Board Member  
**Jamil Khoury** | Board Member  
**Jeff Conlin** | Board Member  
**Ajay Mago** | Board Member  
**Vijay Murugappan** | Board Member

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**Sheila Chapman** | Alumni Board Chair  
**Karen Atwood** | Alumni Board Member  
**Frank Buttitta** | Alumni Board Member  
**Laura Meyer** | Alumni Board Member

SILK ROAD RISING is a proud associate of:



## LETTER FROM THE FOUNDERS: BETWEEN HISTORICAL FACTS AND DESIRED TRUTHS

Is *Paulus* historically accurate? Is *Paulus* biblically correct? Is *Paulus* an attack on Christian beliefs? Is *Paulus* a ruse to convert Jews? A resounding *no* to the latter two questions and a qualified *it depends* to the first two. As playwright Motti Lerner explains, “*Paulus* explores neither the historical Paul nor the mythological Paul, but rather a psychological Paul. A Paul who witnessed the crucifixion and was traumatized by it.” History cannot preserve the interior landscape of the Apostle Paul’s mind, nor can scripture, but art, on the other hand, can sure well imagine it. As Pablo Picasso said, “Art is the lie that brings us closer to truth.” Hence, *Paulus* coexists quite seamlessly with the historical and biblical narratives, not as a replica or a modern knock off, but as one artist’s interpretation: a celebrated Israeli Jewish atheist playwright discovers in the Apostle Paul a revolutionary Jewish thinker with a message of Universalism. Therein lie the play’s truth, accuracy, and correctness.

In a recent conversation with us, Motti Lerner expounded on this theme:

Like the gospel writer, the playwright is not a historian; he is not interested in relaying facts but in revealing truths...still, since we live in a world where truths and myths are continuously distorted by politicians, by clergy, and by the media, I want to make clear to the audience that I am not using any presumed lack of knowledge to manipulate them. I want the audience to trust the story, engage the story, argue with it, not reject it as somehow “false.”

Faith and doubt and historicity have a way of getting entangled. Motti Lerner embarked on a personal journey to understand Jesus and Paul, two radical Jewish visionaries each with a message of redemption and salvation. Lerner’s lens was psychological and artistic, not faith based. Along the way he found himself fascinated with Paul, and set out to translate, not archive, Paul’s intentions. It can be argued that no one shaped Western Civilization and the course of Jewish history more so than Paul, whose mission was to universalize monotheism. Was he fulfilling or completing Judaism, as some have claimed, or creating an entirely new religion? That’s for others to sort out. *Paulus* is artistic because it helps us imagine and helps us ponder big questions, facts notwithstanding and truth be told.

Jamil Khoury



Malik Gillani



## LETTER FROM OUR HOST: HOW LONG, RABBI?

Dear Patrons,

For ten years the United Methodist congregation at the Chicago Temple has provided performance space in the Loop’s Theater District for Silk Road Rising. During that time the theater company consistently has produced thoughtful, challenging, and revelatory dramas by and about people from the historic Silk Road. This is the fulfillment of the extraordinary response of Malik Gillani and Jamil Khoury to the attacks of 9/11: encouraging people to tell each other their stories in order to understand one another.

Motti Lerner’s new play, *Paulus*, is a wonderful addition to the theater’s vision and a gift to the city. Mr. Lerner does not recreate history or exegete the biblical texts, but rather he uses his imagination to raise crucial questions about the emergence of Christianity from its Jewish context. Earnestly and intelligently he focuses on the question, “What was Paul thinking?”

To dramatize this, Mr. Lerner brings the resurrected Jesus on stage to challenge some of Paul’s perceptions. Paul is in a hurry. “The day is nigh, Rabbi,” he says to Jesus. But Jesus tells him to slow down. “I’ve had to realize that one man’s suffering, no matter how holy he is, and one man’s resurrection, no matter how miraculous it seems, cannot bring redemption to the world. It will not come overnight with fanfare and trumpets, but with a thousand silent whispers, with the rustling of the grass. Not by power but by grace. Not by zealotry, but by tolerance.” Paul replies, “And keep these people waiting? How long, Rabbi?”

In that one exchange Motti Lerner sets out the conflicting visions of Paul and Jesus, and at the same time he identifies the tensions that define so much of today’s worldly events.

The purpose of serious theater is to provoke thought and discussion. *Paulus* will do that, as Motti Lerner creatively reimagines a pivotal moment in human history that calls us to assess our own beliefs about power and grace, redemption and condemnation, zealotry and tolerance. The congregation at the Chicago Temple is honored to be your host.

Peace,

**Reverend Philip Blackwell**

Senior Minister





## DRAMATURGICAL NOTES

### A ZEALOUS MAN: PAULUS AND ZEALOT IN DIALOGUE

By Neal Ryan Shaw

Playwright Motti Lerner and author Reza Aslan may not have been aware of what the other was doing, but it's oddly serendipitous that this year they should each debut new works about Paul and Jesus, respectively, that offer fresh and forthright depictions of these men.

If being at the top of the New York Times Bestsellers List (Hardcover Nonfiction) wasn't enough marketing oomph for Reza Aslan's biography of Jesus entitled *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*, his now infamous interview on Fox News following its publication certainly put it over the top. Already fast becoming a national phenomenon, Aslan came under fire for having the sheer audacity to be a Muslim man who authoritatively writes about a Christian subject—correction, *the* Christian subject. Never mind his twenty years' worth of academic research and scholarship, including three advanced degrees, not to mention the rights afforded him by the First Amendment. Never mind that Jesus is a central figure in Islam. The Fox News video went viral, and while Aslan's detractors have slinked away with their tails between their legs, he and his work have stood strong.

Oftentimes a writer's background will come into play in establishing whether he has the authority to take on a particular subject. Not only is Reza Aslan a Muslim, he is an Iranian American, born in Tehran in the early seventies. He was raised Muslim but became a teenaged convert to Christianity and adopted Islam again as an adult. More important than his personal religious background is his career as a scholar of religion as well as a professor of creative writing at the University of California, Riverside. Motti Lerner, who wrote *Paulus*, studied math and physics before discovering theater in the mid-seventies. Born in Israel, he now works as a playwright and teaches playwriting at the Kibbutz College in Tel Aviv. He identifies as both a Jew and an atheist. Some may think that a contradiction in terms, and perhaps insufficient credentials for writing a play about the Apostle Paul, and yet here we are.

Numerous scholars and journalists have pointed out that Aslan is simply adding to a scholarly debate about Jesus that has raged for centuries, a charge with which he would agree. In an interview with the New York Times, he says, "Much of what I argue in the book has been argued by my predecessors and colleagues. ... To be perfectly frank, if you're a biblical scholar, you're not going to find much that's new in my book." What Aslan offers instead of new ideas is a new way of presenting ideas—one that is easily digestible for the average reader. Even so, to the average reader, much of what he says may be quite new. Lerner, too, prefers an accessible medium to present ideas: theatre. Conflict and drama are his chosen canvas. Both *Paulus* and *Zealot* embrace intellectual populism, one through an artistic lens, the other through an expository one.


Although *Zealot* focuses on the life and times of Jesus, Aslan's portrayal of Paul is worth some study as well. While our play undertakes a psychological examination of Paul, *Zealot* portrays him as a political figure. Aslan emphasizes Paul's near-total divorce from Judaism; his mission to spread Jesus's message to Jews and Gentiles alike is portrayed as being quite a large threat to the work that James (Jesus's brother and appointed successor) and the remaining original apostles were doing. Others insist instead that Paul was preaching a radical new form of Judaism. Still others reject the notion that Paul single-handedly invented Christology (a concept that attempts to understand the nature and work of Jesus, as depicted in the Bible), suggesting that the worship of Jesus not only predated Paul but also existed after Paul, independently of him.

*Paulus* allows us to examine Paul the way that *Zealot* allows us to examine Jesus. Far from insisting that our images of both men need be remade from whole cloth, each writer in turn invites us to place both men in the context of their times. Through this context we gain a richer understanding of each of them. Aslan's Jesus is a Jewish revolutionary fighting for the return of the Kingdom of God to earth in the face of Roman occupation. A zealot—lower case z, not to be confused with the later political party—Jesus is a young, energetic upstart ready to take on the mantle of prophecy. Reza Aslan's Jesus is more angry, rebellious, and outraged by all the injustice around him; he speaks truth to power. Motti Lerner's Jesus is a reluctant idol, misunderstood by Paulus. He is an elder sage, full of cautionary wisdom and has had a lot of time to reflect on his life. He is more resigned, cautious, careful, patient, mature, pragmatic, and shrewd; he is a tempered, calculated radical. Aslan's Paul is a deluded, self-aggrandizing radical—a rogue agent, answerable to no one but God. He is more ambitious, driven, egotistical, and power hungry. Lerner's Paulus is a sympathetic evangelist, constantly at the mercy of the earthly powers that be; he is introspective, anguished, tormented, tested, and conflicted. In both works, Jesus is a Jew. Paul makes him, needs him to be, The Christ.

Despite the differences, *Zealot* and *Paulus* seem very much, if not of a piece, then certainly resonant with each other. They share an equal fascination with the mythical and historical origins of their subjects that ultimately enlighten us. With *Paulus*, Motti Lerner adds his voice to the enduring discussion of these two figures, with the compassion of an artist as well as the inquisitiveness of a student. May the dialogue continue.



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## A CONVERSATION WITH MOTTI LERNER

**Silk Road Rising Artistic Director Jamil Khoury and playwright Motti Lerner have been in dialogue about *Paulus* since Lerner first shared with Khoury his idea for the play back in 2009. Their mutual fascination with Paul, Jesus, and the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, is excerpted here.**

**Jamil Khoury :** *Motti, when you first told me about your interest in the Apostle Paul, I was rather surprised. How did you become fascinated with Paul?*

**Motti Lerner:** Paul's idea of Universalism was rejected by the Jewish establishment of the first century. In the book of Galatians, Paul said, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." I believe that our civilization must re-embrace this principle in order to solve the many socio-political crises we're experiencing today, crises that are still rooted in tribalism, nationalism, and racism.

**JK:** *How did the legacy of Paul change the course of Jewish history?*

**ML:** It's hard to hypothesize about the history of the Jewish people had we embraced Paul and his theology. Had the Jews accepted Universalism, the Jewish people may have disappeared. That fear, expressed in my play, is both legitimate and real. On the other hand, had Paul's theology remained within Judaism, our world today would likely be a lot more Jewish.

**JK:** *You identify as an Israeli Jewish atheist. I'm curious how the historic Jesus informs your personal identity as a Jew.*

**ML:** Jesus was a Jewish spiritual and social revolutionary who struggled against the conformism and the corruption of the Jewish clergy in his time. His idea of redemption (which I see in non-religious terms) is still inspiring and strengthening for every human being who desires to live in a better world.

**JK:** *For me, Jesus's Sermon on the Mount beautifully articulates the values and responsibilities that characterize authentic Christianity. You approach the text from within traditions of Jewish humanism and Jewish social activism. Can you address that?*

**ML:** The Sermon on the Mount as delivered by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew is one of the most moving texts I know. It is full of compassion and love for all human beings. In challenging the social orders that create poverty and exploitation, it is both deeply spiritual and of this world. It is rooted directly in the books of our Old Testament prophets. Every Jew who reads the Sermon on the Mount will immediately recognize the influences of our prophets Amos, Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah. I would say it is a profoundly humanistic text. It strengthens the weak, the poor, and the suffering. It gives hope to those whom society has not welcomed with open arms. It is modern in that it emphasizes the Jewish commandments that deal with human relationships, and not with the relationship between man and God. It suggests that Redemption will arrive not when we pray louder, but when we are better human beings. I cannot avoid wishing that the Sermon on the Mount had been included in the Jewish Bible, to be studied and recited as part of our Jewish tradition, as it represents the core values of my Jewish identity.

**JK:** *Do you believe that Paul fundamentally altered our understanding of the ministry of Jesus?*

**ML:** I do believe that Paul altered our understanding of Jesus in one fundamental aspect: Jesus believed his teachings to be primarily for Jews. Paul expanded upon Jesus's idea of redemption and ultimately created a new religion, one that could be spread to all the nations of the world, whereas Jesus's ministry was more specifically focused on the Jews of Galilee and Judea.

**JK:** *What would you say to those Christians who believe that the Jews are the villains in the stories of Jesus and Paul?*

**ML:** Jesus and Paul each faced very real conflicts with the Jewish religious establishment of the first century. They were two radical Jews challenging Judaism with new ideas. In every society such conflicts inevitably arise between revolutionaries and the guardians of the status quo. The Jewish religious establishment, first and foremost, was trying to protect itself.

**JK:** *You have said that the majority of Jews, both in Israel and in diaspora, are largely unaware of the events portrayed in Paulus. Why do you believe it important for Jews to know this story?*

**ML:** I think that in many circles in Israel there is an inborn hostility towards Christian symbols because of Christian anti-Semitism. But Christian anti-Semitism developed a long time after Jesus and Paul lived and taught. It wasn't a part of their teachings. I think it is important that we Jews learn about Paul not only because he was born Jewish and died Jewish, but because his ideas present an important theological and existential option which is as valid today as it was in the first century.

**JK:** *How does the tension between Jewish tribalism and Jewish Universalism inspire you as an artist and an activist?*

**ML:** I believe in the idea of an independent and sovereign state for Jews within safe and recognized borders in Israel. I also believe that it can be liberal and progressive, a state that guarantees equality for each and every one of its inhabitants. I have dedicated most of my writing in the last thirty years to making Israel a better place. I strongly believe that modern redemption will emerge from the development of a more humane world, not from the worship of God. Somehow our search for sacredness has become more important than our search for humanism, a fact that I regret.

**JK:** *How does Paulus reflect contemporary conflicts within both Israeli politics and Israeli culture?*

**ML:** Although the teachings of Paul are not part of mainstream Israeli discourse, we do struggle with similar questions and dilemmas. There are ultra-Orthodox and nationalist circles in Israel that reject the idea of Universalism. This rejection shapes their position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on current crises affecting our whole region. On the other hand, progressive circles in Israel could easily embrace the idea of Universalism as the spiritual inspiration for creating a more open, pluralistic, tolerant, and hopefully more equal society.

**JK:** *What would you like Chicago audiences to take from Paulus?*

**ML:** I hope that they will embrace the idea that we are one civilization. We should recognize and accept the religious and ethnic differences between us and understand that the struggle to redeem ourselves, within our respective traditions and values, is a struggle we all share. We must work together to create a better planet. It is the only one we have.



## ABOUT SILK ROAD

Silk Road Rising (formerly known as Silk Road Theatre Project) creates live theatre and online videos that tell stories through primarily Asian American and Middle Eastern American lenses. In representing communities that intersect and overlap, we advance a polycultural worldview. Silk Road Rising understands that cultures are inherently linked. We seek the intersection of cultures without denying the specificities of cultures. And we strive to create a world that values art over ideology and inquiry over dogma.

Contact Silk Road Rising for information on how to get involved:

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