



Jamil Khoury
Artistic Director

Malik Gillani
Executive Director

proudly presents

Precious Stones

By Jamil Khoury

Directed by Michael Najjar

Starring

Roxane Assaf and Nicole Pitman

<i>Producers</i>	Malik Gillani and Jamil Khoury
<i>Stage Manager</i>	Mary Cotter
<i>Assistant Stage Manager</i>	Misty Funk
<i>Projection/Set Designer</i>	Sim Ramirez
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Brian Piatek
<i>Sound Designer</i>	William D. Carey
<i>Costume Designer</i>	Livia O'Coin
<i>Tech Director</i>	David Lowenthal
<i>Light/Sound/Projection Technician</i>	Silas Dameron
<i>Box Office/House Manager</i>	Aaron Burns

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Cast *in speaking order*

Leila, Rachel, EstherRoxane Assaf

Andrea, Samir, BassimaNicole Pitman

There will be one ten-minute intermission.

PRODUCTION STAFF

Producers.....Malik Gillani and Jamil Khoury
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Notes *on the intifadah*

Precious Stones is set during the summer of 1989 in Chicago. At that time, the first Palestinian intifadah (uprising or "shaking off") was underway in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. The intifadah began on December 9, 1987 and officially ended on September 13, 1993, when Israel and the PLO signed the Declaration of Principles, which began the Oslo Peace Process. A second intifadah, known as "Al-Aqsa" Intifadah (named after Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem) began on September 28, 2000 and continues to the present day.

Whereas the current intifadah is characterized by gun battles, tanks, suicide bombers, and F-16's, the first intifadah was characterized by stone throwers, beatings, Molotov cocktails and gun-fire. According to B'Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights, over 3,300 Palestinians and over 1,100 Israelis have been killed in this conflict since December 9, 1987.

Profiles



ROXANE ASSAF (Leila, Rachel, and Esther) is an actor, singer, journalist, teacher, and activist. Her acting credits include *Listen Up! Voices of Three Arab American Women* at Chicago Humanities Festival, *Rapunzel* at the Playwrights' Center (Chicago), *Condominium of Love* at the New Orleans Contemporary Arts Center, *La Vida Breve* with the Opera Factory (Chicago), *The Count of Luxembourg* with Light Opera Works (Evanston), *Evita* with Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré (New Orleans), and a principal role in the videotaped play, *The Longing*. Her professional singing, as both a soloist and ensemble member, has taken her from the church to the nightclub and from classical to jazz and back, with a brief stint in Western swing. She also produced a cable television talk show entitled *Illinois Law: Legal News You Can Use*. Assaf earned her BA degree in Journalism and Broadcasting from Loyola University in New Orleans, and has studied writing at both Northwestern University and the University of Chicago. She lived in both Jerusalem and Bethlehem in 1999, where she began writing for The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs.



NICOLE PITMAN (Andrea, Samir, Bassima) hails from Southern California but has made Chicago her home for the past eleven years. Chicago theatre credits include *Two By Harry*, *Tattoo Girl*, *Raised in Captivity*, and *Significants and Others*, all with cobalt ensemble theatre; *Chamber Music* and *More O. Henry Stories* at Transient Theatre; *Independence and Voices* with Spiral Productions; *The Ballad of Love Canal* at Raven Theatre. Nicole has also appeared in the independent films *The Longing* and *A Failure of Nerves*. She received her B.F.A. in theatre from United States International University and has also completed conservatory training at South Coast Repertory Theatre and studied at Stella Adler Academy West and with Shakespeare & Company. In addition to acting, Nicole has also worked as a drama teacher, director, and has written numerous children's plays.

MICHAEL NAJJAR (Director) hails from Albuquerque, NM, and is currently living and working in Los Angeles. He received a MFA in Directing from York University (Toronto); a BA in Theatre from the University of New Mexico; and has studied with the British/American Drama Academy (Oxford, UK). He was the Founding Artistic Director of Riverside Repertory Theatre of New Mexico from 1992-1997 and is the current Associate Artistic Director of Bend Theatre for Young People in Oregon where he has been an instructor for the past four summers. While in Toronto he directed the North American premiere of Trevor Griffiths' *Piano* and was assistant director of the world premiere of Todd Hammond's drama *Starker*. Los Angeles credits include the world premiere of Eric Erickson's drama *Voices on the Wind* at the American Renegade Theatre; assistant director of the U.S. premiere of *Marilyn's Murder* at the Stella Adler Theatre; and assistant director for the American/Russian Theatrical Alliance world premiere production of *Chekhov's Shorts*. He is currently adjunct professor of theatre at Mt. San Antonio College where he has directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *You Can't Take It With You*, and *USA*.

JAMIL KHOURY (Playwright/Producer) is co-founder and Artistic Director of Silk Road Theatre Project. *Precious Stones* is the second play he has written, and the first to be produced professionally. His first play, *Fitna*, was produced at University Theatre of the University of Chicago and received a staged reading at Chicago's Bailiwick Theatre. He has studied playwriting with playwright Claudia Allen at The Theatre School of Victory Garden Theater. When not involved with Silk Road, Khoury teaches courses in Middle East studies at The University of Chicago Graham School for General Studies and works as an international relocations/cross-cultural and diversity consultant. Khoury wishes to thank his life partner Malik for his continued love, encouragement, and support.

MALIK GILLANI (Producer) is co-founder and Executive Director of Silk Road Theatre Project, a capacity to which he brings extensive experience in management, development, and fundraising. He is thrilled to be promoting both the rich cultural legacy of the Silk Road and greater visibility for "silk road" artists. When not focused on theatre, Gillani is Director of Marketing for Micro-Tech USA, a technology service firm. Gillani wishes to thank his life partner Jamil for opening up such an exciting new world to him.

MARY COTTER (Stage Manager) is a recent graduate of Saint Mary's University, where she studied all technical aspects of theatre. Some of her favorite experiences include stage managing *Our Country's Good* and *Gypsy*. She recently returns from working at The Peninsula Players Theatre in Door County, WI. She is very excited about pursuing a career in stage management.

LIVIA O'COIN (Costume Designer) was born in Hungary, lived in Rome, Italy and now resides in Oakville, Canada. She studied Fine Arts at York University, Toronto, focusing on painting and costume design. She has been involved in numerous media and art projects throughout her career. One of her major sources of inspiration is her travels and multi-national background.

SIM J. RAMIREZ (Projection and Scenic Design) is one of New Mexico's renowned lighting and set designers, best known for his work with New Mexico Ballet Company, Riverside Repertory Theatre, Bill Evans Dance Company, Nora Reynolds Dance Company and the South Broadway Cultural Center. He has also created many of his own multi-media productions, including *Neruda: Amor y Dolor*. He currently lives in Albuquerque with his wife Karen and their two children, Janie and Dante, and is an avid baseball fan.

Profiles

BRIAN PIATEK (Lighting Designer) is based in Los Angeles and has designed the lighting for over 300 productions in the past 25 years. His favorites to design for are musicals, as they are a true American art form synthesizing all the theatrical arts, and New Play productions. He is particularly proud of executing the lighting for the first productions of *Love, Valour, Compassion* and *Terminal Café* west of the Mississippi. Brian and his wife Tracy, an actress in LA, are very happy Michael invited Brian's participation in this new play.

WILLIAM D. CAREY (Sound Designer) has worked extensively throughout the country including such theatres as Hartford Stage, Missouri Repertory, Peninsula Players, American Players Theatre, and many Chicago area theatres. He is happy to be working with Silk Road Theatre Project. Enjoy the performance!

DAVID LOWENTHAL (Tech Director) has been working with cobalt ensemble theatre as the Production Manager for the last 2 years. He is mainly an actor here in Chicago, but has the ability to chameleon himself into other roles within theatre production. He is very appreciative for the chance to work with Silk Road Theatre Project.

SILAS DAMERON (Light/Sound/Projection Technician) is a graduate of Roosevelt University's Theatre School. He has extensive experience working various facets of technical theatre throughout Chicago and is excited to be a part of *Precious Stones*.

Special Thanks

Silk Road Theatre Project would like to thank the following: Claire Geall, Marta Juaniza, and Dylan Rice of the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, and the entire staff of the Chicago Cultural Center, for their continued support and encouragement; Micro-Tech U.S.A. for their generosity, tech savvy, and use of resources; Cheryl Cooper, Heidi Farris, Jeff Kaufman, and Becky Laipple of Cooper Marketing Solutions for their vision, talent, and endless creativity; Johnny Knight of Johnny Knight Photo for working magic with a camera and a computer; and Norm Sloan for his encyclopedic knowledge of theatre, meticulous research, and the gift of his friendship. A very special thanks to Widad AlBassam for her tireless advocacy, indefatigable spirit, gracious friendship, and constant belief in us.



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Letter from the executive director



Welcome to Silk Road Theatre Project!

It is with great pride that I introduce you to our exciting new theatre company. Silk Road Theatre Project is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to showcasing playwrights of Asian, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean backgrounds. The term "Silk Road" refers to the great trade routes that originated in China and stretched across Central and South Asia, the Middle East, and into Europe (2nd century B.C.E. — 16th century C.E.). These transcontinental caravans resulted not only in trade, of which silk was an important commodity, but in tremendous cross-cultural interaction between the diverse peoples of the regions.

Our objective is to foster understanding and cultural exchange through the medium of theatre. We hope to build bridges and eliminate barriers between Americans and the peoples of the Silk Road; an imperative that is both timely

and necessary. Maintaining that art should entertain as well as educate and promote critical thinking, Silk Road Theatre Project is committed to theatre that elevates human consciousness, expands representation, and challenges prevailing stereotypes. The plays we present will be relevant to the countries and peoples of the Silk Road and/or their Diaspora communities.

We have a host of ambitious plans. We are currently building a network of Silk Road playwrights throughout the US and beyond. In addition to producing new works and Chicago premieres, we will establish an ongoing staged reading series that will expose Chicago audiences and theatre professionals alike to the rich creativity of "Silk Road artists."

In order to realize all our plans, we need your support, both in the form of contributions and volunteering your time. We look forward to hearing from you. To stay in touch with us, please sign up for our E-Newsletter or "snail mail" announcement list (see our program insert).

Once again, welcome to Silk Road Theatre Project.

Yours,

Malik Gillani

Executive Director

Silk Road Theatre Project

Letter from the playwright



Precious Stones is set in Chicago in 1989. At the time, I was living in Jerusalem and working as a Refugee Affairs Officer for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. Our mandate was to investigate and report human rights abuses in the refugee camps, towns and villages of the West Bank, serve as intermediaries between the Palestinian civilian population and the Israeli army, and act as trouble-shooters during periods of escalating tension and violent confrontation. My work with the UN brought me face-to-face with the first intifadah (Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation), and exposed me to a plethora of experiences and opinions on both sides. And yes, I was literally caught between stones and bullets on several occasions. The insights garnered then have greatly influenced the writing of this play, as has my involvement within Arab-American, queer and feminist communities. I draw deeply from my mixed Syrian and Polish/Slovak heritage as well as years of political activism.

There is a concern, expressed by some, that by "adding" a "lesbian storyline,"

I am somehow "complicating" a conflict that is already "complex" and "confusing" enough. They go on to suggest that "the homosexuality" "diminishes," "dilutes," and "distracts," from the "central issues." I couldn't disagree more. When I first set out to write a play addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I envisioned a relationship between a Palestinian from the Middle East and an American Jew. It never occurred to me the relationship would be anything but lesbian. Later, when I began to contemplate other configurations, Arab man with Jewish man, Jewish man with Arab woman, Arab man with Jewish woman, I kept hitting the same wall. The relationships simply didn't work for me. They didn't feel right. Suffice to say, *Precious Stones* is an intrinsically lesbian story. Its lesbian origins can be traced to the daring and courageous work of countless Arab and Jewish women who have reached across the divide in the struggle for peace and justice. The rich tradition of Jewish lesbian writings and the emerging body of Arab lesbian writings have inspired me throughout. I believe the masculinist, militarist discourses that surround this conflict have the dual affect of marginalizing, disempowering, and oppressing women. Therefore it should come as no surprise when some women form a front line of a different kind. And, as one of the actors reminds us, "We typically refer to nations using feminine pronouns."

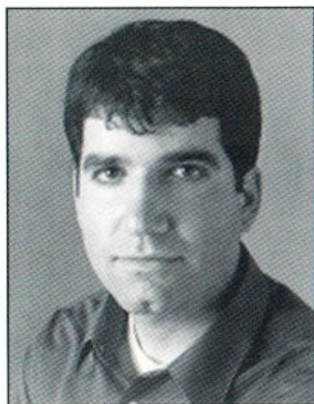
Back in 1989, there was a strong belief that resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was within a few years' grasp. None of us ever imagined that 14 years later, the situation would in fact be far worse. Let us hope these dark days are soon behind us and that a new, hopeful chapter unfolds.

Salaam and Shalom,

Jamil Khoury

Playwright

Letter from the director



"Sacred Heart o' Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone, and give us hearts o' flesh! Take away this murderin' hate, an give us Thine own eternal love!"

—Sean O'Casey

Juno and the Paycock

This production of *Precious Stones* is the culmination of my year and a half collaboration with Jamil Khoury, and is born of our shared frustration with the tragedy that is the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. I see Jamil's play as a cry for peace amid the constant clamor for war. What attracted me to this work was the passion with which he, through the two brave characters Leila and Andrea, attempts to seek some kind of solution to this ongoing crisis. I've always believed the theatre to be an agora where we, as a community, come together

to discuss the problems that we all face in order to seek a solution. It is with that spirit we present this play to you.

Precious Stones touches on many sensitive issues: the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, sexuality and class differences in America, and the overcoming of personal fears and prejudices. Andrea and Leila pursue their dialogue group because *the status quo is no longer acceptable*. They cannot sit idly by as the people they love destroy themselves and one another. They courageously face their fears, biases and prejudices in an attempt to change their world. Andrea tells Leila, "I'm not giving up on this idea. It's too important." Leila tells her cousin Bassima, "I feel a lot of hatred in my heart...but I am not going to let that hatred defeat me." These are noble souls because they reject the inner voice that tells them to give in to hate and to give up on peace. We should all be so brave.

Andrea tells Leila that "dialogue is never easy...We're all going to hear things we'd rather not. Some of us may get hurt. We'll get angry. We'll get offended." This is a message not only to the character in the play, but to all of us in the audience as well. This is not an easy play. It asks big questions and requires our attention. This play may hurt, anger or offend you, but I propose that we *should* feel this way because this conflict can no longer be ignored by any of us. We must strive for peace no matter the cost. This production is meant to be a prayer; an attempt to turn all of our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh.

Peace to you all,

Michael Najjar

Director