

THE WORLD PREMIERE

MARCH 7 - APRIL 15, 2018

Written by NOVID PARSI | Directed by CARIN SILKAITIS



THROUGH THE ELEVATED LINE

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THE WORLD PREMIERE

Written by Novid Parsi Directed by Carin Silkaitis

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Silk Road Rising is proudly affiliated with:

















CAST LIST

Philip Winston* | Sean

Salar Ardebili | Razi

Christian Castro | Cesar and others

Catherine Dildilian | Soraya

Alison Plott | Beth

Scott Shimizu | Ben

Joshua J. Volkers | Chuck

Ninos Baba | Understudy for Razi

Bobby Bowman | Understudy for Chuck

Tina El Gamal | Understudy for Soraya

Amy Gray | Understudy for Beth

Armando Reyes | Understudy for Cesar and others

Reed Willard | Understudy for Sean

Tim Yong | Understudy for Ben

PRODUCTION TEAM

Malik Gillani | Producer

Jamil Khoury | Producer

Corey Pond | Associate Producer

Novid Parsi | Playwright

Carin Silkaitis | Director

Joshua Baggett* | Stage Manager

Joe Schermoly** | Set Designer

Elsa Hiltner | Costume Designer

Lindsey Lyddan | Lighting Designer

Jeffrey Levin | Sound Designer and Original Music

Abigail Cain | Props Designer

Gaby Labotka | Fight and Intimacy Choreographer

Kate Cuellar | Dramaturg

Kelly Butler | Production Manager

Kathryn McNall | Production Manager

Harrison Ornelas | Technical Director

Kristin Osborn | Assistant Director

Stephen Kossack | Assistant Stage Manager

Salar Ardebili | Farsi Coach

David Trudeau | Master Electrician

Colin Smith | Marketing Coordinator

Al Gillani | Box Office Manager

Nick Johnson | House Manager

Sarah Ibis | Program Editor

Deann Baker | Video Coordinator and Editor

- * Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.
- ** Denotes member of United Scenic Artists, the union of professional designers, artists, and craftspeople.

CAST BIOS



Philip Winston (Sean) is thrilled to be working with Silk Road Rising on this beautiful play. He was an ensemble member of the now disbanded Signal Ensemble Theatre where his credits included *The Ballad*

of the Sad Café, The Birthday Party, and 1776 (which earned him a Joseph Jefferson Award nomination.) Most recently, he was seen in Steppenwolf Theatre's production of The Crucible as Putnam and Willard. Other Chicago credits include As You Like It (First Folio Theatre), You Can't Take it With You (Northlight Theatre), Romeo and Juliet (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre Short Shakespeare!), Romeo and Juliet (Teatro Vista), The Realm (The Other Theatre Company), and Dancing at Lughnasa (Irish Theatre of Chicago). Philip holds an MFA in acting from The Shakespeare Theatre's Academy for Classical Acting at George Washington University and is a graduate of the School at Steppenwolf.



Salar Ardebili (Razi) is a Chicago based actor. His most notable Chicago credits include *Yasmina's Necklace* at the Goodman Theatre and *The North Pool* at Interrobang Theatre Project, for which he

received a Jeff Award nomination for Best Actor in a Principal Role. Recent regional theatre credits include *Disgraced* (Portland Stage Company and Hangar Theatre) and *I Call My Brothers* (Cleveland Public Theatre). Television credits include NBC's *Chicago PD* and Amazon's *Patriot*. Salar is an ensemble member with Interrobang Theatre Project. He is represented by Shirley Hamilton Inc. For more, visit www.salarardebili.com.



Christian Castro (Cesar and others) is very excited to be making his Silk Road Rising debut for this world premiere production of *Through The Elevated Line*. He was last seen on stage in the Eclipse Theatre world pre-

miere of Megastasis. He began his professional career

as an ensemble member for Chicago Dance Crash in 2002, and has worked at Steppenwolf, Chicago Shakespeare, Goodman Theatre, Victory Gardens, Lifeline Theatre, About Face Theatre, Eclipse Theatre, The Den, TimeLine, Artistic Home, Teatro Vista, Urban Theatre Company, THEMASSIVE, Tympanic Theatre Company, and Illinois Theatre Center (with the late Etel Billig). His SAG/AFTRA television credits include *Chicago Code, Mob Doctor, Chicago Fire, Crisis, Chicago PD*, and *Empire*.



Catherine Dildilian (Soraya) is pleased to return to Silk Road Rising after performing in several of their staged readings, and as an understudy in *Mosque Alert* and *Night Over Erzinga*. Recently, she performed in the

solo piece *Avenge Our Blood*, originating the roles of a young woman and her family members escaping persecution during the Armenian Genocide. The play was written for her by David Finney and produced by Three Cat Productions. In Chicago, Catherine has worked with Court Theatre, Broken Nose Theatre, and with several other companies, and has performed with the International Voices Project at Victory Gardens. Catherine holds a BA in theatre performance from Western Michigan University.



Alison Plott (Beth) is elated to be working with Silk Road Rising for the first time. Chicago credits include *Home* (Piven Theatre Lab Series), *In the Wake* (The Comrades), *Wit* (Aston Rep), *Much Ado About Nothing*

and Mortal Audit (The Arc), Le Switch (About Face), The Vandal (Steep), The Hamlet Project (Los Angeles and Chicago companies), Unbearable Lightness of Being and The Odyssey (Creative Wellness). Regional credits include Or What You Will (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), Comedy of Errors (New Swan Shakespeare Festival), The Learned Ladies and As You Like It (Texas Shakespeare Festival), Little Dog Laughed (Theatre Out), The Wedding Singer and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (Santa Rosa Rep). Alison has an MFA in acting form the University of California, Irvine.



Scott Shimizu (Ben) is excited to perform again with Silk Road Rising after previously appearing in *Wild Boar* and *Paulus*. After graduating from Northwestern University with a BA degree in theatre and musi-

cal theatre, Scott has been fortunate enough to work with a myriad of companies around the city, including The Marriott Theatre in Lincolnshire, The Lyric Opera of Chicago, Greenhouse Theatre Center, and Griffin Theatre, among others. Scott would like to thank his family, especially Chad, for their love and support. Scott is proud to be represented by Paonessa Talent Agency.



Joshua J. Volkers (Chuck) is making his Silk Road Rising debut. Other acting credits include Not About Nightingales at Raven Theatre, Watch on the Rhine at The Artistic Home, Chapter Two at Windy City Playhouse, Rolling

at Jackalope Theatre, *Rites and Sacrifices* at Idle Muse Theatre, *Changes of Heart* at Remy Bumppo Theatre, *Black Diamond* at Lookingglass Theatre, *As Told by The Vivian Girls* at Dog and Pony Theatre, and *Julius Caesar* at Muse of Fire.



Ninos Baba (Understudy for Razi) is so excited to be joining Silk Road Rising for the first time! Previous credits include *Miranda* (Indiana Repertory Theatre); *Significant Other* and *I Am My Own Wife* (About

Face Theatre); King Lear, Death of a Salesman, and The Comedy of Errors (American Players Theatre). He holds a BFA from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. While at school he performed in The Grapes of Wrath, 1984, Oh! What a Lovely War, Not About Nightingales, and Much Ado About Nothing. He'd like to thank the family and friends that have supported his journey so far.



Bobby Bowman (Understudy for Chuck) is making his Silk Road Rising debut. Chicago credits include *Shakespeare in Love* (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre), *Fair Maid of the West* (Oak Park Festival Theatre),

Hand to God (Victory Gardens Theatre), Richard III (The Gift Theatre), and A Loss of Roses (Raven Theater). Regional credits include Death of a Salesman and King Lear (American Players Theatre); Cyrano de Bergerac, Taming of the Shrew, Romeo and Juliet, As You Like It, and Two Gentlemen of Verona (Montana Shakespeare in the Parks); and two seasons with Notre Dame Shakespeare Festival. Bobby received a BFA in acting from Oklahoma City University. He would like to thank his mom and Ninos.



Tina El Gamal (Understudy for Soraya) is a Chicago based actress and theatre artist. She is thrilled and honored to be making her professional debut at Silk Road Rising in the world premiere of *Through the Elevated*

Line. Tina is currently completing her BA in acting at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her recent credits include roles in an all-female rendition of Glengarry Glen Ross, Passing Strange, and The Last Days of Judas Iscariot at UIC Theatre. With her graduation just around the corner, expect to see her out and about in the Chicago theatre scene!



Amy Gray (Understudy for Beth) is grateful to be making her Silk Road Rising debut. She recently understudied *Pillars of the Community* for Strawdog Theatre Company. She trained at The School at Steppenwolf

(Chicago), Oxford University (England), Accademia dell'Arte (Italy), and Rhodes College (Memphis). As a teenager, she toured throughout the country as the lead role in *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*. Amy was honored by the Memphis Arts Council with two Ostrander Awards and five nominations for excellence in acting, and has recorded vocals on four original cast albums. In Chicago, she directed *Twelfth Night* and performed in *Fame*, *Barefoot in the Park*, *Chapter Two*, *The Last Cyclist*, *Jim & Dave's Blood Meets Jupiter*, *Zelda at the Oasis*, *Holiday*, *The Seagull*, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Secret Garden*. This is always for my Dad.



Armando Reyes (Understudy for Cesar and others) is excited to make his Silk Road Rising debut. Chicago credits include *Perfect Arrangement* at Pride Film and Plays, *Nautilina* and *At The Center* for the Agen-

cy Theater Collective, Adoration of the Old Woman at Urban Theatre Company, Romeo and Juliet with Teatro Vista, and Yellow Eyes at Vision Latino. Film and television credits include Chicago Med, Nowhere Mind, The Origins of Wit and Humor, and Icarus.



Reed Willard (Understudy for Sean) is still somewhat new to town. He recently made his Chicago theatre debut playing the lead role in Oil Lamp Theatre's *A Love Affair*, followed by *The Making of a Modern*

Folk Hero with Other Theatre, and Puff: Believe It or Not with Remy Bumppo Theatre. His southern California credits include The Car Plays (La Jolla Playhouse); The Aliens, The Lieutenant of Inishmore (Ion Theatre); Edward II and Dooley (Diversionary Theatre); Romeo and Juliet (Intrepid Shakespeare Co.); The Rocky Horror Show (OnStage Playhouse); and I'm Not Rappaport (Scripps Ranch Theatre). His TV credits include The Fugitive Chronicles (A&E), Monk (USA), Deadly Obsession (Discovery), and American Horror Story (FX). Reed would like to extend his thanks and appreciation to the talented cast and crew of this wonderful production. Reed is represented by Grossman & Jack Talent.



Tim Yong (Understudy for Benjamin) is excited to be working with all of these talented people! He recently graduated from Loyola University Chicago where he was the Strongman in *Elephant's Graveyard* and Lord

Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*. This past summer, he was Kerchak in *Tarzan* at Spotlight Studio in Monroe, Michigan. Recently, he was Bishop Baldwin and Servant in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* at The Raven Theatre. He would like to thank his friends and family for their continued support.

PRODUCTION TEAM BIOS



Malik Gillani (Producer) is Founding Executive Director of Silk Road Rising, a position to which he brings extensive experience in production, management, and business development. Malik is a recognized

leader in the creation of innovative arts programming that expands artistic access. Most notably, he conceived of and developed SRR's model for creating online video plays which are now being accessed across the globe. He 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 developed and piloted a new arts education program for high school and middle school students in partnership with San Diego's Playwrights Project, called Empathic Playwriting Intensive Course (EPIC). Malik earned a BA degree 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). Malik received an MA degree in nonprofit administration from North Park University. Malik has been a grant panelist for CityArts, Illinois Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, Shakespeare in American Communities, and Chicago Community Trust's Fellowship Program. Malik is the recipient of the IBM Business and Technology Leadership Award, Changing Worlds Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Arts, and the Chicago Community Trust Fellowship Award.



Jamil Khoury (Producer) is Chief Programming Officer & Mission Trustee at Silk Road Rising. As a theatre producer, playwright, essayist, and filmmaker, Jamil's work focuses on Middle Eastern themes and

questions of Diaspora. He is particularly interested in the intersections of culture, national identity, and citizenship, and has emerged as a national leader in the Middle Eastern American theatre movement. Jamil has been Playwright-in-Residence at Tufts University (Boston, Massachusetts), Benedictine University (Lisle, Illinois), North Central College (Naperville, Illinois), Valparaiso University (Valparaiso, Indiana), and Knox College (Galesburg, Illinois), His most recent play, Mosque Alert, received its world premiere at Silk Road Rising in the spring of 2016. It has since been translated into German, Russian, and Arabic and performed in Hamburg, Germany. Jamil holds an MA degree in religious studies from The University of Chicago Divinity School and a BS degree in international relations from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. He is a Kellogg Executive Scholar (Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University) and has been awarded a Certificate of Professional Achievement in Nonprofit Management. Jamil is the 2017 recipient of The University of Chicago Diversity Leadership Alumni Award, the 2015 recipient of the Community Leader Award from the Association for Asian American Studies. the 2013 recipient of the Kathryn V. Lamkey Award from Actor's Equity Association for promoting diversity and inclusion in theatre, the 2013 recipient of the ChangeMaker Award from South Asian Americans Leading Together, the 2010 recipient of the 3Arts Artist Award for Playwriting, and the 2003 recipient of the After Dark Award for Outstanding New Work (Precious Stones).



Corey Pond (Associate Producer) has been with Silk Road Rising since *Yellow Face* in 2011 and is thrilled to take on the role of associate producer for SRR's 15th Anniversary Season and beyond. Previous work at

SRR includes co-curator of *Semitic Commonwealth*, production manager for everything since *Night Over Erzinga*, director for *Yasmina's Necklace*, and assistant director for *Re-Spiced* and *The Lake Effect*. He holds a BA in theatre from Illinois State University where his studies concentrated on directing but also explored theater management and dramaturgy.



Novid Parsi (Playwright) has authored plays that have been produced or developed by Golden Thread Productions, The New Group, Paines Plough, Playwrights Foundation, Silk Road Rising, Stephen Joseph Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, and The Young Vic, among others. His plays have been recognized by the Playwrights Foundation's Bay Area Playwrights Festival (finalist and semifinalist) and the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's National Playwrights Conference (semifinalist). A son of Iranian immigrants, he was born in New York, grew up in Texas, and earned degrees in literature from Swarthmore College and Duke University. Also a freelance writer, Novid regularly covers the arts in Chicago. Novid lives in Chicago with his husband.



Carin Silkaitis (Director) is thrilled to be working with Novid Parsi and Silk Road Rising on this gorgeous play. Carin previously directed two readings of *Mosque Alert* for SRR, as well as a full production of the play

at North Central College. Carin is the Founding Artistic Director of Other Theatre where her acting credits include I Do Today, The Realm, and Other Letters; and her directing credits include OTHERS: A 24 Hour Play Festival, Daughters of Ire, and Barney the Elf. Other notable directing credits include La Boheme, La Traviata, Die Fledermaus, Madama Butterfly, Cosi Fan Tutte, The Student Prince, Pirates of Penzance, The Merry Widow, The New Moon, and Music in the Air (Music By The Lake); In Her Footsteps (Greenhouse Theater Center – Trellis Project); *Envoy*, *Stop...Look...Listen* (Roosevelt University); The Laramie Project, Distracted, Romeo & Juliet, Merry Wives of Windsor, Twelfth Night, and Women and Wallace (North Central College). Notable acting credits include Chicago Fire (NBC), Unexpected (SAG feature film), Machinal (Greenhouse Theater Center), Visiting (Artemisia Theatre), Lips Together, Teeth Apart (Eclipse Theatre), Sons of the Prophet (American Theatre Company), Richard III (Oak Park Festival Theatre), Seven Homeless Mammoths Wander New England (Theater Wit), and Rabbit Hole (Goodman Theatre). Carin is a graduate of the School at Steppenwolf. She received her MFA in acting from the Theatre Conservatory at Roosevelt University. Carin is proud to be represented by Gray Talent Group, and equally proud to be a member of Actors Equity Association.

Joshua Baggett (Stage Manager) is thrilled to return to Silk Road Rising after serving as the stage manager for *Wild Boar*. As a Chicago based director

and stage manager, local credits include productions with Definition Theatre Company, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Porchlight Music Theatre, and Williams Street Repertory. Regionally, Josh has worked with Little Theatre on the Square, Apple and Oranges Arts, Tennessee Shakespeare Company, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, The Shakespeare Theatre Company, and Orlando Shakespeare Theatre. Selected event credits include *Invictus Games, Pop Warner Cheerleading Competitions*, and numerous projects with Disney Parks Live Entertainment. He also served as a regional casting assistant with Disney Theatrical Group, coordinating annual auditions for Disney's *The Lion King* and *Mary Poppins*. For more, visit www.jbbcreative.com.

Joe Schermoly (Set Designer) is happy to be designing his first show for Silk Road Rising, working on this world premiere play. Previous credits include Yasmina's Necklace (Goodman Theatre); Constellations (Steppenwolf Theatre); Hand to God and Samsara (Victory Gardens); Naperville, The Watson Intelligence, Mr Burns, Seven Homeless Mammoths Wander New England, Completeness (Theatre Wit); Puff: Believe it or Not, Pirandello's Henry IV, Travesties (Remy Bumppo); American Idiot (The Hypocrites); Pocatello, Titanic, Spelling Bee, Flare Path, Punk Rock, Port, Constant Wife (Griffin); Lela & Co, Wastwater (Steep); Stupid Fucking Bird, Idomeneus, The Ugly One (Sideshow); The Seafarer, Lay Me Down Softly (Irish Theatre of Chicago). Joe studied scenic design at Northwestern University. He has received one Equity Jeff Award, two After Dark Awards and five Jeff Nominations. For more, visit www. joeschermoly.com.

Elsa Hiltner (Costume Designer) is honored to return to Silk Road Rising after designing for *Great Expectations, Mosque Alert, Paulus*, and *Night Over Erzinga*. Elsa is based in Chicago; her work includes designs for Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Signal Ensemble, Collaboraction, Remy Bumppo Theatre, Eclipse Theater, LifeLine Theatre, American Blues Theater, Walkabout Theatre, The Right Brain Project, Teatro Vista, and First Folio Theatre, among others. Notable regional credits include Next Act Theatre, SecondStory Repertory, Balagan Theatre, and Book-It Repertory Theatre. Elsa is a company member of Collaboraction and an artistic associ-

ate of First Folio Theatre. For more, visit www. elsahiltner.com.

Lindsey Lyddan (Lighting Designer) is excited to be back with Silk Road Rising. She has worked with theatres all over the city including Haymarket Opera Company, Steppenwolf, Lookingglass Theatre, Drury Lane Oakbrook, Roosevelt University's Opera Program, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago Dramatists, Adventure Stage Chicago, and the Cherub program at Northwestern University. This fall she was privileged to travel to Charleville, France for the World Puppet Theatre Festival, where she was the associate lighting designer for *Moby* Dick. She received her MFA in lighting and scenic design from Northwestern University. She would love to thank her husband, Bill, for his support in all her endeavors. For more, visit www.Lindseylyddandesign.com

Jeffrey Levin (Sound Designer and Original Music) is a composer, sound designer, and musician based in Chicago. He is thrilled to be collaborating for the first time with Silk Road Rising. Jeffrey has contributed original music and sound designs for nearly 100 productions at dozens of theatre companies in Chicago and elsewhere. Awards and recognitions include five Joseph Jefferson Award Nominations for Sound Design and Original Music (with one win, for The Hairy Ape, Oracle Productions), the Edes Award for Emerging Artists, the Michael Philippi prize (2016), two Broadway World nominations, and a Wilde Award Nomination. Jeffrey holds an MA in music from DePaul University and a BA in music from Columbia College, Chicago. For more, visit www.jeffreylevinmusic.com.

Abigail Cain (Props Designer) is very excited to be working with Silk Road Rising again. She previously worked on their co-production with Remy Bumppo, *Great Expectations*. Abigail is a freelance prop master/designer and prop artisan. Her Chicago credits include *A Hedda Gabbler* (Red Tape Theatre), *American Hwangap* (A-Squared/Halcyon), *The Nether* (A Red Orchid Theatre), *Picnic* (American Theatre Company), and *Anna Karenina* (Lifeline Theatre), among others. This past summer, she was the prop master at the Cape Playhouse for their 2017 season. Abigail is a graduate of Viterbo University where she earned a BFA in theatre. For more, visit www.abbiecain.wixsite.com/props.

Gaby Labotka (Fight and Intimacy Choreographer) is an actor, director, storyteller, and choreographer living and working in Chicago. Recent choreography credits include A Story Told in Seven Fights (The Neo-Futurists), The Good Fight (Babes with Blades), A Swell in the Ground (The Gift), 'Twas the Night Before Christmas (Emerald City Theatre), Hamlet (Repertory Theatre of St. Louis), Night in Alachua County (WildClaw Theatre), Romeo and Juliet (Teatro Vista), and Battleaxe Betty (ATC CORE Series). Next up, she will be the fight choreographer for Hamlet at The Gift. Gaby is an advanced actor combatant with the Society of American Fight Directors and is proud to have trained with Intimacy Directors International. For more, visit www.facebook.com/GabyLabotka.Theatre/

Kate Cuellar (Dramaturg) is thrilled to be embarking on her first collaboration with Silk Road Rising. A San Antonio native, Kate has a BA in theatre from Trinity University. She was also a member of the 2015/2016 professional training company at Actors Theatre of Louisville, where she provided dramaturgical support to over a dozen new works, including three world premieres in the Humana Festival of New American Plays. Since moving to Chicago, she can be found at Greenhouse Theater Center where she currently serves as dramaturg on the Trellis Residency Initiative for playwrights and, recently, the winter Solo Performance Lab for new plays.

Kelly Butler (Production Manager) is excited to continue her work with Silk Road Rising after joining the organization for Wild Boar. Previous production management credits include the 65th Season of Theater on the Lake (Chicago Park District); Shakin the Mess Outta Misery and the 30th and 31st Young Playwright's Festivals (Pegasus Theatre Chicago); 2017 Peacebook Festival, Gender Breakdown, The Mars Assignment (Collaboraction); and Cat in Heat (Nothing Special Productions). Kelly has also worked in various capacities with New Moon Chicago, the Chicago Humanities Festival, Redmoon, Step Up Productions, American Theater Company, and more.

Kathryn McNall (Production Manager) is thrilled to be rejoining the Silk Road Rising team. Since moving to Chicago, Kathryn has had the pleasure of working on a variety of festivals and full productions with the Agency Theater Collective and the Raven Theatre, including the Raven's Jeff-Nominated production of *Choir Boy.* Special thanks to Corey Pond for the opportunity to work with this fabulous company, and to Jake Engram for his tireless love and support.

Harrison Ornelas (Technical Director) was born and raised in Chicago. He graduated from Columbia College Chicago where he focused on production design and set construction. Harrison has worked as technical director for theaters all over the city including Theater on the Lake, Strawdog Theater Co., and A Red Orchid Theatre. He is very excited and grateful to be working with Silk Road Rising on this production. Harrison would like to thank Manny Ortiz and Linda Wyatt.

Kristen Osborn (Assistant Director) is a Chicago based director who is passionate about sparking compassion through storytelling. Directing credits include Eugene O'Neill's Fog, JoyistLA's First Embrace, and an original adaptation of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, Lift. Assistant director credits include The Scene (Writers Theatre), Sex With Strangers (Geffen Playhouse), Relativity (Northlight Theatre), Threesome (Other Theatre Company), Choir Boy (Geffen Playhouse), and Fighting Shadows (Inner-City Arts). Kristen was the associate director of Intersection: Across the Divide at the 2016 Ojai Playwrights Conference, and artistic associate at the 2017 Ojai Playwrights Conference where she co-directed Intersection: Truth Will Out. Kristen is the artistic assistant at Northlight Theatre. She is a graduate of UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television.

Stephen Kossak (Assistant Stage Manager) is a Chicago-based stage manager and casting director. Stage management credits include *In Her Footsteps* (Greenhouse Theater Center), *Machinal* (Greenhouse Theater Center), *Gefilte Fish Chronicles* (Chicago Musical Theatre Festival), *Sweet Charity* (North Central College), and *9 to 5: The Musical* (North Central College). Casting credits include work with Other Theatre, Haven Theatre, Pursuit Productions, ATHE, and Chicago Musical Theatre Festival. Stephen is a North Central College graduate. For more, visit stephenkossak.com.



AMONG OUR OWN By Novid Parsi, Playwright

Tust over two years ago, when I began writing *Through the Elevated Line*, the waves of our nation's latest anti-foreigner fervor had only begun to rise.

The play started with the idea of two siblings—one on either side of our distinction between the good immigrant and the bad. We sanctify immigrants or vilify them. We see them as the hard worker or the freeloader. I wanted to complicate that easy distinction by exploring two immigrant characters not as types, but as individuals. They would not exist on separate sides of some imagined divide. As siblings, they would be intimately bound together.

Soraya left her homeland, Iran, for the United States when she was a teenager. For over a decade, she has dutifully ticked off all the boxes of the good immigrant: education, profession (a doctor, no less), marriage, family. Her husband, Chuck, who proudly claims his Irish heritage, and his friend, Benjamin, the grandchild of Japanese immigrants, represent the successful transition that Soraya has begun to make. That transition is also echoed in the three Latino characters, each increasingly American.

Yet this path is not so accessible to Soraya's brother, Razi. As a young gay man, he has been scarred by a repressive regime. Arriving at his sister's Chicago doorstep without money or work, he proceeds to shake the foundation upon which his sister and her husband have built their lives.

Razi Gol is an unwanted traveller: caught between two worlds, accepted by neither.

When I saw Razi in that light, when I understood the triangle joining him, his sister, and her husband, I realized that I was conjuring *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Blanche DuBois is likewise caught between two worlds: the old (or her fantasy of it) and the modern. I decided to embrace that influence by reimagining *Streetcar*, a play whose passion and poetry I've always admired. Like any contemporary spin on a classic text, *Through the Elevated Line* shows the past living in the present. Attitudes toward our own Blanches, our own others, have progressed...and haven't.

Through the Elevated Line looks at our idea of ourselves as inherently different from others, and above them. It considers the effects of believing ourselves not only exceptional but superior—elevated. We ride the elevated line, or we strive to. And not just we Americans: witness Razi's defensive sense of Iran's cultural superiority.

But what if we don't group other peoples into either allies aspiring to be like us, or villains aiming to destroy us? For one thing, it becomes less easy to think of ourselves as elevated. It becomes less easy to condemn any of these characters—Razi, Soraya, Chuck, Sean, Beth—for the terrible and even impossible choices they make.

Is Razi Gol deserving of our empathy? Our sanctuary? Where is his home? I think, in the end, *Through the Elevated Line* poses this question: who do we count among our own?

A STAR IS RISING

By Jamil Khoury, Founding Artistic Director of Silk Road Rising



In the next few years, we'll be hearing a lot about playwright Novid Parsi. He'll be championed as an exciting new voice in the American theatre and his plays will be produced nationally. He'll be in the company of playwrights being lauded for bringing new energy and new consciousness to theatrical storytelling. And I say this knowing just two of Novid's plays, both profound in how they negotiate vulnerability and courage: *Our Mother's Meal* and *Through the Elevated Line*.

Whether or not I'm a reliable prognosticator, only time will tell. But I believe my predictions are more than just wishful thinking. On American stages, the complicated, the questioning, and the curious, are enjoying newfound currency. Novid Parsi, with his impressive capacity to create characters that are charming, prickly, compromised, and resilient, understands that one can be challenged by adversity without being defined by adversity.

Through the Elevated Line honors Tennessee Williams and A Streetcar Named Desire, and yet it was never intended to be an adaptation. As Novid notes, the contours of his story emerged first, before he recognized some distinct parallels with Streetcar. His steadfast admiration for Williams' classic permitted him to explore those parallels organically—albeit with caveats, qualifiers, and a contemporary reboot. The play is equally at home amidst immigrant narratives, queer narratives, Chicago narratives, and the narratives of Middle Eastern Diasporas. That said, it is neither a genre play, nor an issues play, nor an identity play. Rather, it inhabits a fluid space all its own. It is, at once, wildly relational, cunningly political, and deliciously subtextual, and yet never manipulative.

From its Uptown two-flat to its Iranian memories to its Chicago Cubs fandom, *Through the Elevated Line* constructs a world that is remarkably inviting. Novid's writing manages to be hospitable and unnerving at the same time. The interior worlds of his characters are never easy. They're neither predictable nor stereotypical. Theirs are worlds shaped by loss, trauma, and expectations of future gain. Materialism, superficiality, and crude measures of success go toe-to-toe with tradition, heritage, and Old World romanticism. Cosmetic surgery and furtive sexuality coexist alongside Persian poetry and immigration law. The breakneck speed at which the world around them changes forces each character to re-calibrate norms and redefine hopes, with scant time for reflection.

We first met Novid in the early days of Silk Road Rising. Back then, we knew him as a theatre critic and journalist. Today we see him first and foremost as an artist of great merit. Thus, it is a source of much pride that our production of *Through the Elevated Line* marks both the play's world premiere and Novid's first-ever full-length professional production. May it be the spark that ignites a brilliant and luminous career.



THE MANY QUESTIONS OF THROUGH THE ELEVATED LINE

By Carin Silkaitis, Director

With *Through The Elevated Line*, Novid Parsi has crafted a script that's timely, necessary, powerful, and unapologetic. The play asks us to parse questions of inclusion, identity, power, privilege, and sexuality.

Jamil Khoury sent me this play back in March of 2017. When I finished reading I was both completely devastated and buzzing with ideas. Our country was in turmoil over Donald Trump's immigration reform and the "extreme vetting" of immigrants, travelers, and asylum seekers coming into the United States. Here in Chicago, lawyers were flocking to O'Hare to assist Middle Eastern travelers detained at the airport. This play couldn't be more relevant. Two things were very clear: I wanted to direct *Through The Elevated Line*, and I needed to meet Novid Parsi as soon as possible!

I connect with this play on a number of levels. As an activist and an ally, I am interested in telling stories about inequality and injustice. As a queer woman, I am interested in telling stories about the experience of queer folks both locally and globally. That fight has yet to be won. From recent anti-queer legislation in Russia and the rumors of gay men in Chechnya being thrown into concentration camps, to Indiana's recent legalization of bigotry under the guise of religious freedom, attempts to suppress queer identity and practice still abound, in the U.S. and in many places around the world. And so we ask: what are the challenges of living queer today? What are the responsibilities of bystanders and allies to queer-identifying people?

And why flash back to A Streetcar Named Desire? Tennessee Williams and Novid Parsi both ask us to consider what it means to be an American. What does it mean, and what is sacrificed, when we are accepted into the ruling class? Given the atrocities that surround us, Through The Elevated Line might be the mirror we hold up to reflect these questions. My hope is that our audiences will examine their own internal biases and ask even more questions. Are we willing to elevate ourselves to the peril of those around us? As "others" begin to face struggles we cannot even predict, what will we do with our power as bystanders and as allies? Will we watch helplessly as dreamers are dragged off? Will we continue to shut our eyes to the asylum seekers? Or will we use our bodies and our voices to stop the seemingly never-ending madness that flows out of our nation's capital? How can we as citizens respond to the reality that not everyone views the police as protectors? How do people react when they feel like their lives don't matter? How do people make sense of violence they have witnessed firsthand? How can we force systemic change where change is so urgently needed? What kind of future do we wish for ourselves and for our children? Give me your tired, your poor...

Really...?

In the Chicago of today our questions are many, and *Through The Elevated Line* helps us explore many of them. There aren't any easy answers to these questions, but Novid Parsi is asking. And it's up to us to respond.

Thank you for watching! I look forward to hearing from you.

HOW'S THE WATER?

By Kate Cuellar, Dramaturg

In his now famous 2005 commencement address at Kenyon College, David Foster Wallace opens with a story about two young fish who, while swimming one morning, happen to meet an older fish who greets them with a friendly "how's the water?" After the young fish have swum on a while, one of them turns to the other and asks, "what the hell is water?" I've thought about this story many times while serving as dramaturg on *Through the Elevated Line*.

It's easy to feel at home in the narrative of *Elevated Line*. In form it recalls *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and there is pleasure and comfort in recognizing the familiar notes of that play in harmony with the rhythms and sounds of Chicago. As the characters onstage name neighborhoods, foods, or train lines, the Chicago audience member can establish a satisfying sense of location. Chuck, Soraya, Ben, and Beth—they're nearby neighbors. And in the 24-hour cycle of information, even far-reaching words like "sanctions" and "asylum" have become domestic. This is our living room with the news turned on, reconstructed for us and illuminated by stage lights.

Enter Razi Gol.

Razi is a stranger in our backyard, and everything about Chicago is as alien to him as it is banal to us. For better or worse, his outsider's perspective allows him to see things about us we take for granted. Through Razi's eyes the existence of Boystown, American beauty standards, and baseball culture are all rendered anew, and Razi's view has the power to convert, to move, or to threaten us. Likewise, as we spend time looking out from Razi's eyes and slowly uncovering the intimate details of his life, what is at first strange to us begins to become familiar. If we don't know the poems of Hafez, we can see their significance, and we understand. If we cannot relate to the exact circumstances of Razi's life in Iran, we can still empathize with the lingering scars of suffering.

The interloper who disrupts an established order is a well-known and effective player in the theatrical canon, but rarely does the disruption feel so local or well-timed. With its alchemy of strange, familiar, mystical, and mundane, *Through the Elevated Line* reminds us that our values and habits are not self-evident. They are as worthy of examination and as firmly situated within a broader context as any we don't readily recognize. *Elevated Line* doesn't ask its audience to come with detailed knowledge of modern Iranian history or the American immigration system or the poet Hafez. Neither is it a polemic. It doesn't ask us to condemn or condone any of its deeply human characters. Rather, it encourages us simply to look around and see the world with fresh eyes. It gestures out over us and says, "This is the water."

TIMELINE OF U.S.-IRANIAN RELATIONS

By Kate Cuellar, Dramaturg

Iranian History

| The state of the s | CIA orchestrates a coup to overthrow Prime Minister Mossadegh and restore power to the Shah. |
|--|--|
| | Iran's Islamic Revolution forces the Shah to flee. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini becomes the supreme religious leader in Iran. |
| Iraq, controlled by Saddaı | m Hussein, invades Iran. |
| | |
| | |
| Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is elected the sixth president of Iran. | |
| | |
| Pragmatist Hassan Rouhani is elected Iran's president on a platform of improving relations with the world and easing sanctions | |
| | |
| | |
| | hich began in December 2017, carry on into the satisfied with the state of Iran's economy, rising rruption. |
| | Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi Iraq, controlled by Saddar Mahmoud Ahmadinejad Pragmatist Hassan Rouha of improving relations with Wide-ranging protests, we new year. Iranians are dis |

U.S.-Iranian Relations

Supreme Leader Khamenei asserts that protests

have been brought on by Iran's "enemies," shorthand for the U.S. and its allies.

LGBT/Human Rights in Iran

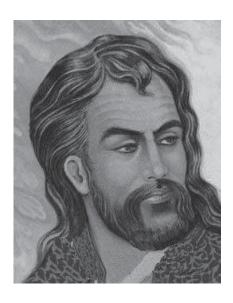
| After the installation of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the U.S. and Iran begin a close alliance. | |
|--|--|
| Students seize the U.S. embassy in Tehran and hold the staff hostage for 444 days. The United States imposes economic sanctions on Iran. | When asked if he condones the killing of homosexuals following the revolution, Imam Khomeini replies "the society that we want to build does not permit such things [as homosexuality]." |
| | Under the new penal code, homosexual acts are punishable by lashing or even death. |
| Throughout Iran-Iraq War, the U.S. provides Iraq with money, intelligence reports, and weapons. | |
| | Khomeini legally recognizes transgendered individuals. To this day, the Iranian government subsidizes sex reassignment surgeries. Those who do not wish to have the operation are treated as homosexuals with the risks therein. |
| U.S. Sanctions against Iran are expanded further. | |
| | Teenagers, Mahmoud Asgari and Ayaz Marhoni, |
| | are publicly executed after being convicted of assault against a thirteen-year-old boy. An international outcry followed the execution. |
| | of assault against a thirteen-year-old boy. An |
| Obama and Rouhani speak on the telephone, the highest level of contact between the U.S. and Iran in 30 years. | of assault against a thirteen-year-old boy. An international outcry followed the execution. While addressing students at Columbia University, President Ahmadinejad asserts that |
| the highest level of contact between the U.S. | of assault against a thirteen-year-old boy. An international outcry followed the execution. While addressing students at Columbia University, President Ahmadinejad asserts that |

President Hassan Rouhani

ON THE POET HAFEZ

By Kate Cuellar, Dramaturg

Hafez was a 14th century Sufi mystic and Persian poet, whose collected works are regarded as the pinnacle of Persian literature. He was born in Shiraz and though very little is known about his early life, it is thought that he memorized the Quran in his adolescence after listening to his father recite passages. (The word *hafez* denotes a person who has completely memorized the Quran). As a poet, he was patronized by successive local regimes—most notably in the time of Shah Shuja—and developed a personal style of lyric verse that dealt with themes of love, faith, wine, ecstasy, and exposing hypocrisy.



Once a Young Woman Said to Me

Once a young woman said to me, "[Hafez], what is the sign of someone who knows God?"

I became very quiet, and looked deep into her eyes, then replied,

"My dear, they have dropped the knife. Someone who knows God has dropped the cruel knife

that most so often use upon their tender self and others."

In *Through the Elevated Line*, Razi explains to Sean that looking to the poems of Hafez is a popular form of fortune telling in Iran. Holding a question or conflict in mind, tthe reader will open the collected works of Hafez and divine meaning from the poem that presents itself. This is one of the many ways the poet Hafez remains a part of daily life in Iran, hundreds of years after his death.

ABOUT SILK ROAD RISING

HISTORY

Malik Gillani (a Pakistani American Muslim) and Jamil Khoury (a mixed blood Arab American Christian) founded Silk Road Rising in 2002 as an artistic response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Harnessing the power of theatre, they set out to challenge the ignorance and hatred that fueled both the attacks and the anti-Muslim, anti-Middle Eastern, anti-South Asian backlash that soon followed.

As a result of incredible support from our donors, today Silk Road Rising is the only U.S. theatre company dedicated to commissioning and producing works of Asian American and Middle Eastern American playwrights, and, more broadly, to cultivating empathy and understanding toward Silk Road communities. Over the past 15 years, we have worked with 94 playwrights to produce 35 plays and 68 staged readings in our theatre space in the Historic Chicago Temple Building.

To support students who attend Chicago Public Schools in disinvested neighborhoods, we deliver Empathic Playwriting Intensive Course (EPIC). Guided by experienced teaching artists over the course of twenty classroom sessions, students learn to find and value their voice; and, to express complex social ideas through the art of playwriting.

Silk Road Rising is also a leader in digital storytelling. We create online video plays and documentary films, allowing us to transcend our brick and mortar venue and engage audiences online. We also tour our digital work into communities and corporate offices with our "Courageous Conversations" training program to generate understanding and build a more enlightened citizenry.

VISION

Silk Road Rising believes the human mind is fundamentally curious and that a well crafted story unleashes curiosity and reveals possibilities. We understand that cultures are inherently linked. We seek the intersections of cultures without denying the specificities of cultures. And we strive to create a world that values art over ideology and inquiry over dogma.

ARTISTIC GOALS

- $\begin{array}{c|c} 1 & \text{To advance the creation of and expand access to works of Asian American} \\ \text{and Middle Eastern American artists.} \end{array}$
- $2 \left| \begin{array}{c} \text{To deepen understanding of Silk Road cultures within the broader community.} \end{array} \right|$
- To provide resources and learning opportunities that allow individuals to explore, express, and embrace a more complex perspective.

CONTACT US

Silk Road Rising 150 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 1970 Chicago, Illinois 60601 Tel: 312-857-1234 Fax: 312-577-0849 info@silkroadrising.org www.SilkRoadRising.org

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