



MIDDLE EAST AMERICA ANNOUNCES 1ST DISTINGUISHED PLAYWRIGHT AWARD

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NEW YORK, NY – The three theater organizations from across the nation, **Golden Thread Productions** in San Francisco, the **Lark Play Development Center** in New York, and **Silk Road Theatre Project** in Chicago, who formed **Middle East America (MEA): A National New Plays Initiative** have awarded the **2008 Middle East America Distinguished Playwright Award** to **Adriana Sevan**. Additionally, due to the outstanding pool of applicants, MEA has honored both **Leila Buck** and **Sinan Unel** with the **2008 Middle East America Special Jury Prize**.

The first of its kind, this prize provides a \$10,000 commission for Sevan to write a new play, intensive developmental support from the Lark, possible productions at Golden Thread and Silk Road, and travel funds to be present at all stages of the process. According to Lark Producing Director **John Clinton Eisner**, "Our nation's energy and innovation has often sprung from immigrant's stories and global perspectives, and this commission represents a new path for cultural institutions learning to collaborate on building new repertoire that more accurately mirrors and celebrates America's ever-evolving cultural landscape."

During the commissioned play's development and production arc, representatives of each partner organization will travel to each city—Chicago, New York, and San Francisco—to observe the process and to engage in public conversations and panel events about Middle Eastern voices. Jury Prize awardees Buck and Unel will both receive \$1,000 in recognition of the high quality of their writing and potential contribution to the American theater.

Sevan is an American artist of Armenian, Dominican, and Basque ancestry; her one-woman show *Taking Flight*, has been

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workshopped and performed at **The Goodman Theatre, Center Theatre Group, San Diego Repertory, South Coast Repertory, and The Sundance Theatre Lab.** About the award, Adriana says, "What a blessing to have a trinity of theatres so committed to the heart of my unwritten play, eager to share their wisdom and resources, provide a nurturing community, and help the seeds of my story to grow."

About Sevan's proposed new work, the Artistic Director of Silk Road Theatre Project **Jamil Khoury** says, "This exciting first commission promises to enrich the canon of American theatre and our understanding of Middle Eastern Americans. Adriana plans to conduct research exploring themes of family, atrocity, migration, and memory, including the untold stories of the Turkish Schindlers who helped Armenians survive their Ottoman tormentors. The play is inspired by Adriana's grandparents who survived the Armenian genocide before fleeing to the shores of New England."

Playwrights of Middle Eastern American heritage applied from all over the U.S. and, according to **Torange Yeghiazarian**, Golden Thread Artistic Director, "The quality of the proposals far exceeded our expectations. The pool of readers highly recommended, to the final selection committee, more playwrights than the Initiative can possibly support in its first round. We hope that in the future we will be able to award more than one commission."

The chosen playwrights were selected by: **John Clinton Eisner** (*Lark Producing Director*), **Jamil Khoury**, and **Torange Yeghiazarian**. The reading committee included a wide range of theatre artists and managers: **Suzy Fay, Malik Gillani, Kristin Horton, Isis Saratial Misdary, Sonia Pabley, Jennifer Shook, Shilarna Stokes, Lloyd Suh, Daniella Topol, and Tamilla Woodard.**

For more information and application guidelines on Middle East America: A National New Plays Initiative, visit: www.middleeastamerica.org.

Adriana Sevan, a native New Yorker, is an award winning actress and playwright. Her critically acclaimed one woman show, **TAKING FLIGHT**, has been thrilling audiences across the country. It was recently awarded a 2007 San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Award and is a finalist for a 2008 Audie Award for Best Solo Narrative.

As a playwright, she has created, developed, and performed her work at the Sundance Theatre Lab, South Coast Repertory, The Mark Taper Forum, The Lark Play Development Center, INTAR, and Dixon Place. In 2006, **TAKING FLIGHT**, had its world premiere at The Kirk Douglas Theatre, produced by Michael Ritchie and Diane Rodriguez/Center Theatre Group. The play was then recorded live with LA Theatre Works for a nationwide broadcast, on Public Radio, for the series, "The Play's The Thing." **TAKING FLIGHT** has continued to have sold out runs at San Diego Rep, The Fountain Theatre, and the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. Sevan is about to begin a nine month playwrighting residency, led by Pier Carlo Talenti, at The Mark Taper Forum.

As an actress, she has just completed a film called **HARVEST**, opposite Barbara Barrie and Robert Loggia. She has appeared in multiple guest-starring roles on TV, including "The Unit," "Law & Order," "Sex & the City," "Deadline," "Dellaventura," and "Law & Order: Criminal Intent." Onstage, her theatre credits include work at South Coast Repertory, Yale Rep, Coconut Grove Playhouse, LA Theatre Works, The Public Theater, Classic Stage Company, Shakespeare & Company, ACT, and HERE.

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She currently guest teaches at CAL ARTS, and leads transformational workshops for at risk adolescent girls using creative writing, improvisation, and personal myth-making as tools for girls to discover and express their vibrant, vital, and unique voices.

GOLDEN THREAD PRODUCTIONS is dedicated to theatre that explores Middle Eastern cultures and identities as represented throughout the globe. Our mission is to build an organization that consistently produces the highest quality theatre about Middle Eastern culture and to establish a dynamic artistic community and an expanding audience. And to make the Middle East a regular part of the American Theatre Experience and make theatre a regular part of the Middle Eastern community's cultural experience. Golden Thread Productions is led by Artistic Director, Torange Yeghiazarian. For more information: www.goldenthread.org.

A laboratory for new voices and new ideas, the **LARK PLAY DEVELOPMENT CENTER** provides playwrights with indispensable resources to develop their work. The Lark brings together actors, directors, playwrights and the community to allow writers to learn about their own work by seeing and hearing it, and by receiving feedback from a dedicated and supportive community. The company reaches into untapped local populations and across international boundaries to seek out and embrace unheard voices and diverse perspectives, celebrating differences in language and worldviews. The Lark also plays a leading role in advancing unknown writers and their works to audiences through carefully stewarded partnerships with a host of theaters, universities, community-based organizations, and NGOs, locally, nationally and globally. The Lark is led by Producing Director, John Clinton Eisner and Managing Director, Michael Robertson. For more information: www.larktheatre.org.

SILK ROAD THEATRE PROJECT showcases playwrights of Asian, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean backgrounds, whose works address themes relevant to the peoples of the Silk Road and their Diaspora communities. Through the creation and presentation of outstanding theatre, we aim to promote discourse and dialogue among multi-cultural audiences in Chicago. Silk Road Theatre Project is led by Artistic Director, Jamil Khoury and Executive Director, Malik Gillani. For more information: www.srtp.org.

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