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IN AVAAZ, EMMY NOMINEE MICHAEL SHAYAN PORTRAYS HIS IRANIAN MOTHER IN A STUNNING SOLO PERFORMANCE THAT JOURNEYS FROM TEHRAN TO LOS ANGELES WITH HUMOR AND WARMTH

Tony Award-nominee Moritz von Stuelpnagel directs the production at Olney Theatre Center that will tour US theatres starting next fall

OLNEY, MD — February 5, 2024 — *Avaaz*, a solo show about an Iranian mother’s flight from Tehran and her new life as a single mom in “Tehran-geles,” California, written and performed by her son, Michael Shayan, begins its run in Olney Theatre Center’s intimate 150-seat Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab on March 6, 2024. The production will have three preview performances with **press invited to attend either Saturday, March 9 at 8:00 pm or Sunday, March 10 at 1:30 pm.** Interested critics should email sstraub@olneytheatre.org to request **2 press tickets along with their preferred performance date and time.** The production is **scheduled to run through Sunday, April 7.** Tickets are \$54 - \$90 and are available online at olneytheatre.org/avaaz or at 301-924-3400. Venues for the national tour beginning in the fall will be announced soon.

Shayan is a Harvard-trained writer, performer, and illusionist who was recently **named to the prestigious OUT100**, Out Magazine’s list of the year’s most impactful and influential LGBTQ+ people. In 2023 **he received an Emmy nomination** for his writing on the Emmy-winning Max series *The Book of Queer*, where he also served as a Consulting Producer. He worked on the Emmy-winning *We’re Here* as well. In addition to *Avaaz* and his TV work, his new play for **Audible**, about a group of addicts stuck on a gay cruise from hell called *Cruising*, will premiere this year. At 13, he was the youngest performer in the history of the **Hollywood Magic Castle.**

On debuting his solo show in the DC-area, Shayan said, “It feels powerful and surreal to be embodying my mother’s story near our nation’s capital, particularly at a time of overwhelming anti-immigrant sentiment. *Avaaz* offers a different narrative and grapples with complex truths in a fabulous, decadent, larger-than-life party on stage. I can’t wait to share the magic of ‘Tehran-geles’ with audiences everywhere.”

Avaaz is supported by an award-winning creative team, starting with **Tony-nominated** director **Moritz von Stuelpnagel** (*Hand to God*) and the **Tony Award-winning set designer Beowulf Borritt** (*New York, New York* and *Flying Over Sunset*). **Amith Chandrashaker** (Broadway's *Merrily We Roll Along* and *A Prayer for the French Republic*) is the lighting designer, and **UptownSound**, a collaborative design team of **Noel Nichols**, **Daniela Hart**, and **Bailey Trierweiler**, creates the sound design. **Joshua "Domino" Schwartz**, who has received two Emmy Awards for his work on the Max series *We're Here*, is the costume designer.

Olney Theatre's Artistic Director, Jason Loewith, says, "Introducing Michael and his mother's story to this community - and then communities across the country next season - is the kind of producing I love to do. The heart, humor, and formal inventiveness you'll see in *Avaaz* celebrates not only Roya's journey from Tehran to "Tehran-geles" but the power of intimate theatrical experiences to inspire, engage, and delight."

Director Moritz von Stuelpnagel says, "Michael's mother's story echoes the immigrant experience shared by so many, but the play's real urgency stems from her having grown up as a young woman in Iran -- a parallel to the tensions brought to light by the women-led protests we've seen in the last several years. And yet, the play is awash in comedy. Rarely have I ever met someone as feverishly funny as Michael, whose inventiveness for storytelling is matched only by his vulnerability"

Production photos available on request.

About the Play

Avaaz invites you to meet Roya, our fabulous hostess, as she welcomes you into her home to celebrate Nowruz, the Iranian New Year. She's preparing dinner, but the true feast is the story of her life: beginning in Iran as part of that country's small but ancient Jewish community, her epic journey out of Tehran after the revolution, and the challenges she faces as an immigrant and the single mother of a queer son in "Tehran-geles" (formerly known as Westwood). As a Jew in Iran and an Iranian in America, Roya relies on a heavy dose of humor, both in her storytelling and her survival. Most significantly, Roya is portrayed by her adult son and the author of *Avaaz*, Michael Shayan, in a solo performance that combines masterful storytelling with a loving tribute.

DETAILS

Avaaz

Written and performed by Michael Shayan

Directed by Moritz von Stuelpnagel

Previews March 6, 7, and 8 at 7:30 pm

Invited Press opening Saturday, March 9 at 8:00 pm or Sunday, March 10 at 1:30 pm

Email sstraub@olneytheatre.org to reserve

Runs until: Sunday, April 7, 2024 in Olney Theatre Center's Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab

Tickets \$55 - \$90. Discounts are available for groups, seniors, active military, first-responders, and students. Visit olneytheatre.org/discounts for details.

Purchase via olneytheatre.org/avaaz or 301-924-3400

Performance Times

Regular performances are Wednesday-Saturday at 7:30 pm;

Matinees on Saturday and Sunday at 1:30 pm.

No Saturday matinee on March 9.

On Wednesday, March 13, there will be a matinee performance at 1:30 pm. However, there are no Wednesday evening performances on March 13 or 20.

There will be an additional performance on Sunday evening, March 24 at 7:00 pm.

For the 2023-2024 Season, Olney Theatre Center will be offering programs for purchase rather than as a complimentary item at performances. For more information visit: olneytheatre.org/programs

ACCESSIBILITY

Audio described performance on Wednesday, April 3 at 7:30 pm

Sign interpreted performance on Thursday, April 4 at 7:30 pm

Behind the Scenes and Beyond the Stage

ABOUT OLNEY THEATRE CENTER

Mission

Olney Theatre Center for the Arts produces and curates theatrical performance for the diverse audiences in our community, and educates, learns from, supports and inspires a more inclusive generation of theater-makers.

Vision

We strive to become an arts and culture powerhouse, redefining the American regional theater movement by cultivating and sharing the creativity of our community.

History

Founded in 1938 as a summer playhouse, Olney Theatre Center (OTC) now produces year-round world and American premieres of plays and musicals, and reimaginings of familiar titles; presents the work of leading companies; tours nationally and locally; teaches students of all ages; and mentors the next generation of theatremakers. For more than 8 decades, OTC has brought impactful theater performance and education to our community, helping to grow the vibrancy and vitality of our home in central Maryland. Over the years, some of the biggest names in theater and film have appeared on our stages, including Tallulah Bankhead, Helen Hayes, Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn, Bob Fosse, Phillip Bosco, Eve Arden, Eva Gabor, Burl Ives, Jose Ferrer, Carol Channing, Olivia d'Havilland, Tony Randall, Paulette Goddard, Dorothy and Lillian Gish, Jane Seymour, Anne Revere, Frances Sternhagen, Arthur Treacher, James Broderick, Olympia Dukakis, Sir Ian McKellen, Marica Gay Harden, John Colicos, Uzo Aduba, Alan Cumming, Cheyenne Jackson, Robin de Jesus, Wilson Jermaine Heredia, among many, many others. Olney Theatre is now the cultural anchor of a rapidly changing region and serves one of the most diverse, best educated, and wealthiest counties in the country. Situated on the unceded land of the Picataway-Conoy people, the Olney area was once a rural farming community with a unique Quaker heritage. Now the area is occupied by every kind of family that makes up 21st Century America, along

with major corporations, shopping districts, civic associations, non profit organizations and a diverse collection of houses of worship. Montgomery County's 1 million residents play a dynamic role in the Baltimore-Washington corridor, and is a driving force behind the region's creative economy.

As of September 2021, Olney Theatre Center employed 40 full time staff, 20 part-time positions, 26 early career apprentices and players, and more than 400 professional artists. The Theatre intends to continue expanding to better meet the needs of our community.

For more information, please visit olneytheatre.org.

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