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**The Wilma Theater presents the World Premiere of**  
***Language Rooms***  
**by Yusef El Guindi**  
**directed by Blanka Zizka**  
**March 3 – April 4, 2010**

PHILADELPHIA – **The Wilma Theater** continues its 2009 – 2010 season with the World Premiere production of ***Language Rooms***, a black comedy that exposes the divided loyalties among today's immigrants, discovering the rising cost of the American Dream. The play, from rising Arab-American playwright **Yusef El Guindi**, is directed by the Wilma's co-Artistic Director **Blanka Zizka**.

A recipient of the Edgerton Foundation's prestigious New American Play award, *Language Rooms* begins previews on **March 3**, opens on **March 10** (press night), and closes on **April 4, 2010**. Tickets range from \$36 to \$65, and are available at the Wilma's Box Office by calling **(215) 546-7842**, visiting **[www.wilmatheater.org](http://www.wilmatheater.org)**, or coming to the theater, located at 265 South Broad Street in Philadelphia. Student tickets are available for as little as \$10, depending on date and time, made possible through a grant from PNC Arts Alive.

Ahmed is a shining example of the American Dream, successfully landing a big-time position as a translator at a top-secret detainment facility. But things are not what they seem in this twisted workplace, as he soon finds himself dodging shifty video cameras and absurd interoffice mind games. Brilliantly shifting between comedy and political suspense with surprising twists along the way, *Language Rooms* is a riveting dark comedy about the abuses of patriotism and loyalty.

Director Blanka Zizka says, "What I like so much about the play is that it deals with the world we live in right now, without suffering from ideological or political agendas or predictability. Just the opposite: the play is fresh, inventive, darkly funny, and fiercely original. It explores the absurd reality that can ensue from pursuing a dream without noticing that the dream has lost its moral standing, leaving merely insistence on loyalty."

*Language Rooms* tells an updated immigrant story, pinned down in the glare of an interrogator's lamp and through the lens of the Arab-American experience. El Guindi's script highlights the tension between first- and second-generation immigrants, as their personal desires get caught in the machinery of the outside world. As Egyptian-born playwright El Guindi says, "the price for a better life is always a little higher than you think it will be."

As El Guindi tells Wilma Dramaturg Walter Bilderback, "The wonderful optimism of this country, the propulsion to keep going, to reinvent, that weightlessness, the acceptance that you can change your name, your history, kick your past to the curb as you gun for a new beginning, I think all those good things end up gutting you of a center, a wholeness. What becomes of your touchstones, your anchor, your *story*, after you leave so much behind? Who are you when you're always in flux?"

The Wilma's World Premiere of *Language Rooms* grows out of an intensive development process, which began with a reading on the Wilma stage a year ago, in addition to workshops at Vassar & New York Stage and Film's Powerhouse Theater and at the Wilma this summer. The Wilma welcomes back Yussef El Guindi – who *The Philadelphia Inquirer* calls "laugh-out-loud funny" – for an extended residency during rehearsals.

#### **About the Playwright**

**Yussef El Guindi**, the Egyptian-born, Seattle-based playwright of *Language Rooms*, has seen significant regional and international success. He has had 15 plays produced since 2001 in regional theaters from Philadelphia to Anchorage, Alaska. He was recently recognized by the American Theatre Critics Association with the 2009 Osborn New Play Award for an emerging playwright. His recent *Jihad Jones and the Kalashnikov Babes* enjoyed a three-city National New Play Network world premiere in San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Dallas, and his play *Back of the Throat* has been produced in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and London. *Back of the Throat*, and two related one-acts *Such a Beautiful Voice is Sayeda's* and *Karima's City*, have been published by Dramatists Play Service, and were included in *The Best American Short Plays: 2004 – 2005*. His *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* has just been published in TCG's new collection *Salaam. Peace: An Anthology of Middle-Eastern American Drama*.

#### **About the Director**

**Blanka Zizka** has been co-Artistic Director of The Wilma Theater since 1981. Her most recent production was Athol Fugard's *Coming Home*; her productions of Wajdi Mouawad's *Scorched* and Tom Stoppard's *Rock 'n' Roll* garnered 17 Barrymore nominations last season. She recently directed Leoš Janáček's opera *Kát'a Kabanová* for the Academy of Vocal Arts, as well as Ariel Dorfman's *The Other Side*, starring Rosemary Harris and John Cullum at Manhattan Theatre Club. At the Wilma, her credits include the U.S. premiere of Linda Griffiths's *Age of Arousal*, Athol Fugard's *My Children! My Africa!*, Doug Wright's *I Am My Own Wife*, the World Premiere of *Raw Boys* by Dael Orlandersmith, *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train* by Stephen Adly Guirgis (Barrymore Winner, Best Overall Production and Best Director), the World Premiere of *Embarrassments* by

Laurence Klavan and Polly Pen, and the Philadelphia Premieres of Lillian Groag's *The Magic Fire* and Chay Yew's *Red*. In 2002 she directed the World Premiere of Dael Orlandersmith's *Yellowman* at Manhattan Theatre Club, McCarter Theatre Center, Long Wharf Theatre, ACT in Seattle, and at The Wilma Theater. She was awarded the first Barrymore Award for Best Direction of a Play for Cartwright's *Road*.

### **About the Cast and Production Team**

The Wilma's cast for *Language Rooms* is led by **Sevan Greene** as Ahmed. Greene has appeared Off-Broadway in the Lortel Award-winning *Betrayed*, which was also televised on PBS. He recently appeared in the New York Theater Workshop's production of *Aftermath*, by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen.

**J. Paul Nicholas** returns to the Wilma in the role of Nasser. Nicholas was a member of the Wilma's Barrymore Award-winning ensemble of *Scorched* last season, and has worked extensively at regional theaters like Washington DC's Woolly Mammoth and Seattle Rep. Nicholas can be seen in his recurring role as attorney Linden Delroy on "Law & Order: SVU".

**Peter Jay Fernandez** plays Kevin. Fernandez has been seen on Broadway in *Cyrano De Bergerac*, *Julius Caesar*, *Henry IV*, *Jelly's Last Jam*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, and he has appeared in films including *Deception*, starring Ewan McGregor and Hugh Jackman, and on television in "Fringe", "Damages", "Law & Order", and "Hack".

Esther is played by **Julienne Hanzelka Kim**, who has appeared on Broadway in David Henry Hwang's *Golden Child*, directed by James Lapine; she also appeared in productions of that play at The Kennedy Center, San Francisco's American Conservatory Theater, Singapore Repertory, and Seattle Rep. Other theater credits include Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*, *The Intelligent Design of Jenny Chow* at The Atlantic Theater Company, and Chay Yew's *The House of Bernarda Alba*. Kim has also appeared on film and in television shows including *Rescue Me* and "Law & Order: Criminal Intent".

**Nasser Faris** completes the cast in the role of Samir. Faris starred alongside Tony Shalhoub and Sarah Shahi in *American East*, which won the Best Picture Award at both the 2008 Madrid International Film Festival and the First Time Film Festival in Los Angeles. He has appeared in a recurring role on "24", as well as guest star roles on "The Unit", "Brothers and Sisters", "The Shield", "Sleeper Cell", "JAG", "NYPD Blue", and "Malcolm in the Middle". He has also appeared in major motion pictures including David Mamet's *Spartan*; Vadim Perelman's *House of Sand and Fog*; *Jarhead*, directed by Sam Mendes; and *Ocean's Twelve*, directed by Steven Soderbergh. Most recently, Faris appeared in the World Premiere of Michele Lowe's *Inana* at the Denver Center Theatre.

The design team for *Language Rooms* includes set designer **Ola Maslik**, whose design for last season's *Scorched* earned a Barrymore nomination, and lighting designer **Russell H. Champa**, winner of the 2002 Barrymore for his design for *Red*, who returns to the Wilma for the first time since 2005's Barrymore-nominated *Raw Boys*. Costume designer **Janus Stefanowicz** and sound and video designer **Jorge Cousineau** have also worked on numerous Wilma productions; they last worked together under Blanka Zizka's direction in 2007's *Age of Arousal*.

## **Symposium Series**

### **Good Vibrations and Stress Positions: The Legacy of "Enhanced Interrogation"** **Sunday, March 14, 4:30 pm**

A distinguished group of writers and thinkers will examine the profound effect America's War on Terror has had on the country's values and standing in the world, and the way it has changed our perceptions of our enemies. Wilma Dramaturg and Literary Manager **Walter Bilderback** will moderate a panel including **Ian Lustick** (author of *Trapped in the War on Terror*), **Fathali M. Moghaddam** (author of *How Globalization Spurs Terrorism*), and **Jonathan Moreno** (author of *Mind Wars: Brain Research and National Defense*).

### **A Land of Sour Milk and Honey: the (Arab-) American Dream Today** **Sunday, March 28, 4:30 pm**

**John Timpane** of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* moderates a discussion of the state of the American Dream for Arab-Americans in the post 9/11 world among panelists including **Toufic El Rassi**, author of the graphic novel *Arab in America*, and **Mustapha Tlili**, founder and director of NYU's Center for Dialogues.

The Wilma Theater will conclude its 2009-2010 Season with the U.S. Premiere of *Leaving*, by former Czech President and renowned playwright **Václav Havel** (May 19 - June 20, 2010).

*Reduced ticket pricing for students is made possible by PNC Arts Alive, a five-year, \$5 million investment from The PNC Foundation with the goal to increase engagement in the arts, develop new audiences and make the arts more accessible to diverse communities in the Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey region. In advance, students can save 50% off full-priced tickets (excludes Opening and Saturday nights) and purchase \$10 tickets for Sunday evening performances. Tickets for same day performances can be purchased for \$10 at the Box Office. Tickets are subject to availability; valid student ID is required; limit one ticket per ID.*

*The Sporting Club at the Bellevue is the Season Sponsor for The Wilma Theater's 2009 – 2010 season.*

*Language Rooms is supported by DoubleTree Hotel Philadelphia as Artistic Lead Sponsor and the National Endowment for the Arts as Production Sponsor. Language Rooms is a recipient of an Edgerton Foundation New American Plays Award.*

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# Language Rooms

## FACTS

<p><b>Performances:</b></p> <p>Wed 3/3                      7:30pm          Thu 3/4                      7:30pm          Fri 3/5                        8:00pm          Sat 3/6                       8:00pm          Sun 3/7                      2:00pm</p> <p>Tue 3/9                       6:30pm  <b>Wed 3/10*</b>                    <b>7:30pm</b>          Thu 3/11+                    7:30pm          Fri 3/12                      8:00pm          Sat 3/13                      2:00pm          Sat 3/13                      8:00pm          Sun 3/14                     2:00pm          Sun 3/14                     7:30pm</p> <p>Tue 3/16                      6:30pm          Wed 3/17                      7:30pm          Thu 3/18+                    7:30pm          Fri 3/19                      8:00pm          Sat 3/20                      2:00pm          Sat 3/20                      8:00pm          Sun 3/21                     2:00pm          Sun 3/21                     7:30pm</p> <p>Wed 3/24                      7:30pm          Thu 3/25                      7:30pm          Fri 3/26                      8:00pm          Sat 3/27                      2:00pm          Sat 3/27                      8:00pm          Sun 3/28                     2:00pm          Sun 3/28                     7:30pm</p> <p>Tue 3/30                      6:30pm          Wed 3/31+                    2:00pm          Wed 3/31                      7:30pm          Thu 4/1                        7:30pm          Fri 4/2 #                      8:00pm          Sat 4/3                        2:00pm          Sat 4/3                        8:00pm          Sun 4/4                       2:00pm</p>	<p><b>Dates:</b> March 3 – April 4, 2010          Previews run March 3 – March 9  <b>Opening night is Wednesday March 10</b></p> <p><b>Theater:</b> The Wilma Theater          265 S. Broad Street (Broad and Spruce)          Philadelphia, PA 19107</p> <p><b>Prices:</b> Tickets range from \$36 - \$65          Rush tickets are:          \$25 (Sun. – Thu. &amp; Sat. matinees)          \$30 (Fri. &amp; Sat. evenings)</p> <p>Student tickets are available for \$10, depending on date and time, made possible through a grant from PNC Arts Alive.</p> <p>Special discounts are available for seniors, those in their 20s, students, and groups of 10 or more.</p> <p><b>Tickets:</b> <b>Phone:</b> (215) 546-7824,  <b>Fax:</b> (215) 893-0895  <b>Online:</b> <a href="http://www.wilmatheater.org">www.wilmatheater.org</a>  <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:tickets@wilmatheater.org">tickets@wilmatheater.org</a>  <b>In person:</b> 265 South Broad Street          The Box Office is open Monday-Friday from 10:30 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. During production, the box office is also open Saturdays and Sundays from 12:00 p.m. to curtain.</p> <hr/> <p><b>Language Rooms</b>          by <b>Yussef El Guindi</b>          directed by <b>Blanka Zizka</b></p> <p><b>Cast</b> (<i>in alphabetical order</i>)</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 60%;"><b>Nasser Faris</b></td> <td>Samir</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Peter Jay Fernandez</b></td> <td>Kevin</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Sevan Greene</b></td> <td>Ahmed</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Julienne Hanzelka Kim</b></td> <td>Esther</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>J. Paul Nicholas</b></td> <td>Nasser</td> </tr> </table> <p><b>Production Team</b></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 60%;"><b>Ola Maslik</b></td> <td>Set Designer</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Russell H. Champa</b></td> <td>Lighting Designer</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Janus Stefanowicz</b></td> <td>Costume Designer</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Jorge Cousineau</b></td> <td>Sound and Video Designer</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Patreshettarlini Adams</b></td> <td>Stage Manager</td> </tr> </table>	<b>Nasser Faris</b>	Samir	<b>Peter Jay Fernandez</b>	Kevin	<b>Sevan Greene</b>	Ahmed	<b>Julienne Hanzelka Kim</b>	Esther	<b>J. Paul Nicholas</b>	Nasser	<b>Ola Maslik</b>	Set Designer	<b>Russell H. Champa</b>	Lighting Designer	<b>Janus Stefanowicz</b>	Costume Designer	<b>Jorge Cousineau</b>	Sound and Video Designer	<b>Patreshettarlini Adams</b>	Stage Manager
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\***Opening Night**    ^Captioned Performance    +Post-show chats  
 #Pre-show wine tasting with Tria, 7–8pm

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