

Press Release *Silken Veils* –

Called “Magical and Enchanting” by *The Scotsmen* and “...captures the true essence of the Fringe at its very best..” *Three weeks*, Leila Ghaznavi and Pantea Productions, proudly presents ***SILKEN VEILS***, a theatrical exploration of women and family in the Middle East, conceived by Leila Ghaznavi with music by Hamed Nikpay and Houman Pourmedhi.

SILKEN VEILS combines Rumi poetry, marionettes, shadow images and table top puppetry with animation to examine the impact of political turmoil on society and family. As a performer, playwright Leila Ghaznavi, leads an ensemble of four through this turbulent, sometimes humorous, tale of the strength and weaknesses of love in a political revolutionary landscape. In this Fifty-five minute piece, Darya, an Iranian-born American citizen, struggles with love in the United States while reliving her childhood in Iran during the Revolution of 1979. The set design of the show is comprised entirely of suitcases and veils from which all characters emerge—a literal illustration of Darya’s struggle to unpack the baggage that we all carry.

When asked about her inspirations for the piece, Ms. Ghaznavi responded: “I was inspired to create this piece because of my own Iranian heritage and because I saw a newspaper clipping about the Revolution of 1979 in Iran. In it was this photograph of a sea of men protesting but in the middle of the picture was one lone woman holding onto a man from behind, her cheek pressed against his back as he raised his fist in protest. It started me thinking about what it means to try and hold onto love during revolution.”

Leila Ghaznavi’s, playwright/actor/puppeteer, work has been seen both domestically and abroad in Los Angeles, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Bali, Indonesia and Kristiansand, Norway. She is a graduate of the Dell’Arte International School of Physical Theater and holds a M.F.A. in Acting from the California Institute of the Arts and a B.A. in music composition from Bryn Mawr College.

SILKEN VEILS features the performing talents of Evan Hyde, Chase Woolner, Cady Zuckerman and Warren St. George, II. Designers include Patrick Jansen (Sound Design), Tanin Kosol (Animation), Susanna Battin (Costume) and Zachary Moore (Lighting). Technical support provided by Lisa Maywell (Stage Manager).

For more information please e-mail Leila Ghaznavi (leilag@gmail.com).

Bio and Artist Statement

Leila Ghaznavi is an actor, playwright, puppeteer currently residing in Los Angeles, California. The majority of her work is composed of original multi-disciplinary projects that use poetic texts, classical fairy tales, current political issues and a broad spectrum of performance mediums. She uses these tools to create dynamic theatrical pieces that simultaneously examine the predicaments of an individual and the political landscape that surrounds them. Ms. Ghaznavi also has an extensive background in ensemble created physical theater, classical theatre and film. Her diverse range of performance experience has fostered her belief that an artist must challenge social perceptions of what is “holy” and that any subject, issue or text can be used as a source for art.

In her drive to create work that defies gravity in both a metaphorical and literal sense, Ms. Ghaznavi has actively pursued tools for story telling ranging from clown to classical acting to film work to mask work to puppetry to stunt falls and aerial acrobatics. She’s performed in venues at the Edinburgh, Chicago and Hollywood Fringe Festivals, Bali, Indonesia, and Kristiansand, Norway. She received her M.F.A. in acting from the California Institute of the Arts and B.A. in music composition from Bryn Mawr College. She has also trained with the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre, Helikos International and Shakespeare and Company.

Her understanding of the US-Iran political and cultural conflict is informed by her childhood experiences of the conflicts between her Iranian father, a man who immigrated to the US when he was nineteen with thirty dollars and a prayer rug, and her American mother, a Daughter of the American Revolution. This insight drives her to create work that fosters forums for debate and understanding of the rifts that exist between the American people and the world around them. Sensitive to the restrictions placed on women in the Middle East, Ms. Ghaznavi seeks to generate work that gives voice to women across the globe. She has created original work on such varied topics as the Iranian Revolution of 1979, female suicide bombers in Iraq, the biases against homosexuality in Middle Eastern Culture and the Mothers de La Plaza de Mayo-- also known as the mothers of the "Disappeared" of the Argentinean Dirty War. Currently she is in development of two new projects. One that examines how western good intentions go wrong in the Middle East and a study in combining aerial acrobatics and puppetry for unrestrained airborne story telling.

Ms. Ghaznavi strongly believes in the creative potential of artists to generate social change and that art has a moral responsibility to stand as a bulwark against fear. Art must dare to say what is forbidden, love the undesirable, speak for those who have no voice, mourn those who have been forgotten, challenge what is sacred and dance in the clouds to reveal undiscovered planes of imagination. In short, to defy gravity.

Composer/Musician Bios

HOUMAN POURMEHDI is a master percussionist, well known for his diverse abilities as a musician, composer, and multi-instrumentalist. Performing and recording in numerous ensembles and at a variety of venues. He was introduced to Persian music by his father, and received his first Tonbak at the age of three from his grandfather. He was privileged to study Tonbak under guidance of the late Grand Master Amir Nasser Efteta. At sixteen he continued his studies at the Center for Preservation and Propagation of National Music, where he completed the techniques of playing Tonbak under supervision of Master Morteza Ayan. His interest in the spiritual path of Sufis introduced him to the Ghaderi Sufi order's virtuoso Daf players, such as Haj Agha Sadeghi, Mirza Agha Ghosi, and Darvish Karim, with whom he studied the heart-to-heart traditional techniques of playing Daf.

Pourmehdi moved to Chicago in 1988, where he founded the Society for the Advancement and Preservation of Traditional Persian Music, it was here that he first fathomed the exciting possibilities of introducing the unique sounds of Persian instruments to American audiences. He also preserved the ancient Persian Percussive instrument called Kurekeh. The Society also facilitated his meeting the eminent Mohammad Ali Kianey-Nejad, who taught him the Ney (Persian Reed Pipe). Pourmehdi designed the tuneable Dayereh which is part of the cooperman's Artist Innovation Series of instruments. Houman is both a recording artist and concert musician. He has appeared at many radio and TV interviews with live performance. He has performed widely throughout Europe, North America and North Africa. Pourmehdi composed music for a short educational film in 1999. His knowledge of traditional repertoire and intimacy with Sufi world are made to serve a very personal style of interpretation in his compositions. Along with several colleagues he founded The Lian Ensemble.

HAMED NIKPAY- Vocalist, Multi- Instrumentalist, Song Writer

At the forefront of experimental music, Hamed Nikpay's passion for his innovative genre is embedded in his solid knowledge of fundamentals of Persian music, his ability to perform numerous Persian instruments masterfully, and his incisive interpretation and selection of Persian poetry for his songs. These artistic proclivities have enabled him to create musical paragons, which are gripping and much admired by enthusiasts of Persian and world music alike.

He learned to sing at a very young age, studying under the tutorship of some of the Masters of classical Persian music. His love of Persian Music motivated him to learn and play many musical instruments revered in the Persian culture -- Tar & Setar, Tanbour, Oud, and Daf, which he plays expertly and soulfully. He has recorded two albums in Iran, performing as a fusion vocalist, and has produced two albums "Solo Passage", and "All Is Calm" in US.

Hamed has performed in numerous concerts before enthusiastic audiences throughout Iran, Asia, Europe and U.S. His mesmerizing voice has earned him the reputation of being 'One of Iran's Best Young Vocalists' among both American and Iranian audiences. He was one of the first and few artists who showed his solidarity with the Iranian men and women who have put their lives in the harms way for freedom and democracy. The song entitled "The Owner of this Land—Maaleke een Khaak" written and performed by him for this occasion, has received much popularity for its originality and its soulful rendition.

Cast Bios

CADY ZUCKERMAN-

was born and raised in the Mid- Hudson Valley region of New York. Favorite NYC credits include Under the Sign of the Hourglass (Ontological- Hysteric), Phaedre, A Triptych (Downstairs Series), Forget Me Not (PS 122), By Rote (Chashama Oasis Festival). CalArts credits include World Premeire of Forgotten World by Debra Assimwe, Farm Noir: Justine, Floozy: Vee, Jack: Faith. She holds an MFA from CalArts and BA from SUNY New Paltz.

WARREN ST. GEORGE II-

Hellzapoppin' (CalArts), Jesus Christ Superstar (CalArts CoffeeHouse, Warrior Poet Prod.), The Death of Hector (Sadler's Wells Theatre, London), The American Clock (Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama), Hedda Gabler (Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama), Untitled Drew Taylor (Hotel Brunswicke, Glasgow). Currently Executive Producer, Manager and Performer Aegis Productions Theatre Company, Canary Wharf, London.

CHASE WOOLNER-

has been puppeteering since the age of five when he started performing with Red Moon Puppet Theater in Chicago. Chase soon after joined the San Francisco Bay Area Puppet Guild, becoming its youngest member. In high school he founded one of the nations few high school puppetry clubs, which is still going strong today with 137 alumni. Chase is a member of the Puppeteers of America, UNIMA-USA and has been a participant at several of the Eugene O'Neill National Puppetry Conferences. Chase is currently pursuing his degree in puppetry at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts.)