

WEST COAST PREMIERE OF ***GUARDS AT THE TAJ***
BY **RAJIV JOSEPH**
DIRECTED BY **GIOVANNA SARDELLI**
STARRING **RAFFI BARSOUMIAN AND RAMIZ MONSEF**

OCTOBER 6 TO NOVEMBER 15 (OPENING NIGHT IS OCTOBER 14)
IN THE AUDREY SKIRBALL KENIS THEATER AT THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

LOS ANGELES (August 18, 2015) Geffen Playhouse announces the cast for the West Coast premiere of *Guards at the Taj* by Pulitzer Prize finalist and Steinberg Award recipient Rajiv Joseph. The cast stars Raffi Barsoumian as Humayun and Ramiz Monsef as Babur. It is directed by Giovanna Sardelli, who directed world premieres of Joseph's *The North Pool*, *Animals Out of Paper* and *All This Intimacy*. *Guards at the Taj* runs October 6 through November 15, 2015 (opening night is October 14) in the Audrey Skirball Kenis Theater at the Geffen Playhouse.

Ambition, philosophy and absurdity spill-over in Rajiv Joseph's violently beautiful and surprising new play about two lowly guards handed the grueling task of protecting the Taj Mahal. Wildly comic and astoundingly tragic, the story begs bold philosophical questions. How do we define beauty and perfection and when do these elusive qualities come at too great a cost? Artistic Director Randall Arney said, "This play challenges the traditional boundaries of theater – provoking questions about beauty. It examines the power of those who can simply buy it and the powerlessness of those who frequently create it. Joseph does this in the most human of terms, introducing us to two likable, funny guys, who think if they do a good job of guarding the Taj Mahal, they will be promoted to guarding the harem."

Charles Isherwood said in *The New York Times*, "Mr. Joseph dramatizes a dark myth about its building that stands as a grim allegory of the supreme divide between the powerful and the powerless in 17th-century India and, perhaps by extension, many places today. *Guards* raises potent questions about the human price paid throughout history for the caprices of the mighty, even when they result in architectural wonders that ultimately give pleasure to the masses."

David Rooney said in *The Hollywood Reporter* that *Guards at the Taj* is, "a haunting consideration of loyalty and betrayal between friends, of duty and blind adherence to barbaric command, and of the ownership of beauty ... moving from pitch-black absurdist comedy to horrific brutality, from philosophical reflection to surreal observation. It is thrashed out on a stage literally awash in the physical evidence of cruelty as the tone morphs from gallows humor through searing poignancy to devastating conflict. Joseph's writing has similarities to Martin McDonagh's [*The Lieutenant of Inishmore*] with its livewire dialogue, spiky character interplay, wicked humor and blunt cynicism. If Joseph is perhaps less focused on story, his attention to philosophical, existential and spiritual questions makes *Guards at the Taj* a strange but unexpectedly moving experience."

Rajiv Joseph's other works include *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, *Animals Out of Paper* and *Grotesque Playground Injuries*, as well as seasons three and four of the Showtime series, *Nurse Jackie*. *Guards at the Taj* recently received the Laurents/Hatcher Foundation Award. *New York Magazine* said Rajiv Joseph is, "a real stage poet ... not afraid to debate the cosmos. His voice is a major one," and the *Los Angeles Times* called him, "one of the most provocatively talented American playwrights." Giovanna Sardelli, who has helmed over a half-dozen of Joseph's plays, will direct.

In addition to the opening night, the run of *Guards at the Taj* will feature pre-show and post-show Signature Series events. Ranging from the cerebral to the celebratory these include TGIF at the Geffen, Talk Back Tuesdays (Audience Q+A with artists), Lounge Fridays and Wine Down Sundays. Thanks to the support of Geffen Playhouse partners and sponsors, all elements of Signature Series evenings are complimentary as part of the ticket price. Signature Series events include:

- Talk Back Tuesdays give theater lovers a chance for a deeper conversation to discuss plot, character, themes or any other questions directly with the artists with a post-show Q+A from the stage. Complimentary coffee and tea provided pre-show at the concessions bar.
- Happy hour Lounge Fridays turns the Geffen Playhouse into a haven to help fast-paced Angelenos ease into their weekend and unwind at this cultural happy hour. Complimentary sparkling joins other enticing refreshments starting at 7:00 pm. Sponsored by LAArtsOnline.com
- Wine Down Sundays provides the perfect pairing - pre-performance wine sampling courtesy of Dievole followed by a 7pm curtain time to close out the week. The winery's objective is to recover the character of the historically indigenous Tuscan grapes and transfer them into the glass with the utmost respect for the authenticity of the terroir and varietal identity.
- TGIF at the Geffen takes place on Friday of preview week and is the ideal cultural meet up and hot-spot on the west side. Enjoy classic to contemporary tunes from DJ Mike pre-show on the Simms Courtyard patio, photo booth keepsakes in the main lobby plus drink specials at the concessions bar.

For Signature Series dates associated with the run of *Guards at the Taj* visit www.GeffenPlayhouse.com/tajevents.

Tickets are currently priced from \$60 - \$82 and are available in-person at the Geffen Playhouse box office, via phone at 310.208.5454 or online at www.geffenplayhouse.com. Fees may apply.

West Coast Premiere

GUARDS AT THE TAJ

Written by **Rajiv Joseph**

Directed by **Giovanna Sardelli**

Previews: Tuesday, October 6 – Tuesday, October 13, 2015

Opening Night: Wednesday, October 14, 2015

Closing Night: Sunday, November 15, 2015

CAST

Raffi Barsoumian as Humayun

Ramiz Monsef as Babur

PRODUCTION TEAM

Scenic Design by **Tom Buderwitz**

Costume Design by **Denitsa Bliznakova**

Lighting Design by **Lap Chi Chu**

Sound Design by **Vincent Olivieri**

Production Stage Manager **Maggie Swing**

Casting by **Phyllis Schuringa, CSA**

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

Monday	No performance
Tuesday – Friday	8:00pm
Saturday	3:00pm and 8:00pm
Sunday	2:00pm and 7:00pm

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets are currently priced from \$60 - \$82 and are available in-person at the Geffen Playhouse box office, via phone at 310.208.5454 or online at www.geffenplayhouse.com. Fees may apply.

LOCATION

Audrey Skirball Kenis Theater at the Geffen Playhouse
10886 Le Conte Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024

BIOGRAPHIES

RAFFI BARSOUMIAN

New York: *Pericles* (The Public Theater); *King Lear*, *Arok of Java* (Exit, Pursued By a Bear). Regional: *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Henry V* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival); *Red Noses* (The Actor's Gang); *Sedimenti* (Compagnie Du Faubourg); *Zoo Story*, *Counting the Ways* (Luna Playhouse); *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice* (American Shakespeare Center); *As You Like It*, *King John* (Actor's Shakespeare Company); *Restoration Comedy*, *Don Juan* (Stanford Theater). TV: *The Vampire Diaries*, *NCIS*. Training: École Jacques Lecoq, Carnegie Mellon University.

RAMIZ MONSEF

Ramiz is honored to be making his Geffen debut. New York credits include: Second Stage, New York Theatre Workshop, Culture Project and more. Regionally, Ramiz has worked with The Oregon Shakespeare Festival (*The Unfortunates*, *Measure for Measure* and many others), ACT (*The Time of Your Life*), Berkeley Rep (*Eurydice*), Actors Theatre of Louisville (*Glory of the World*, *Chad Deity*), Steppenwolf, Yale Rep, Lookingglass (*Mary Zimmerman's Arabian Nights*) and The Studio Theatre (*Guantanamo*). Ramiz has appeared on *Law and Order* and *The Watchlist* on Comedy Central as well as various College Humor videos. He is a co-creator of the hit musical *The Unfortunates* which will run at ACT this spring.

ABOUT GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

Geffen Playhouse has been a hub of the Los Angeles theater scene since opening its doors in 1995. Noted for its intimacy and celebrated for its world-renowned mix of classic and contemporary plays, provocative new works and second productions, the not-for-profit organization continues to present a body of work that has garnered national recognition. Named in honor of entertainment mogul and philanthropist David Geffen, who made the initial donation to the theater, the company was founded by Gilbert Cates, and is currently helmed by Artistic Director Randall Arney, Executive Director Gil Cates, Jr., and Co-Chairs of the Board Martha Henderson and Pamela Robinson Hollander. Proudly associated with UCLA, the Geffen welcomes an audience of more than 130,000 each year, and maintains an extensive education and outreach program, designed to engage young people and the community at large in the arts. Following a strong 2014/2015 season during which five productions extended, the company's 20th anniversary season features eight productions (two world and three West Coast premieres) featuring some of the nation's leading playwrights and directors. www.geffenplayhouse.com.