

National Queer Theater's



CRIMINAL QUEERNESS

FESTIVAL 2026

OFFICIAL THEATER
EVENT OF



June 10-27



COMMUNITY
PARTNERS

NYC
Mayor's Office of
Immigrant Affairs

Queer
theatre

ARTISTIC
FREEDOM
INITIATIVE

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HERE

DIGITAL PROGRAM

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

HERE Arts Center acknowledges that the land beneath us, this place, this community, owes its vitality to generations who have come before. Some were brought forcibly to this land, some came here in search of ownership or simply a better life, and some have lived and stewarded this land for countless generations. In a spirit of making erased histories visible, we acknowledge that we are standing on the ancestral and occupied lands of the Munsee Lenape peoples.

The Shinnecock, Matinecock, Canarsie, and Haudenosaunee peoples have also cared for this land. The peoples are not relics of the past, but they continue to steward this land today with care, vitality, and tradition. Their relations are numerous throughout Turtle Island, and they are continuing to grow. We pay respects to their elders' past, present, and future. Please take a moment to consider the many legacies of violence, displacement, migration, and settlement that bring us together here today. And please join us in uncovering such truths at any and all public events.

A Call to Action

This Pride Month, we remember the call of NYC activist Toni Cade Bambara- for artists to make revolution irresistible. As Iran, Gaza, and Lebanon continue to face American and Israeli bombardment, and the US continues to descend into authoritarianism, we must meet the need for international queer solidarity.

While the US government invests in war and destruction, we are investing in art and creation.

For the past eight years, National Queer Theater has produced the Criminal Queerness Festival with storytellers from countries that criminalize or censor queer artists. This year we are celebrating brilliant LGBTQ+ artists from Egypt, Iran, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Palestine - together sharing powerful, satirical, and urgent stories from around the SWANA (Southwest Asia North African) region. Here, LGBTQ+ rights are so often placed on the back burner because of war and imperialism. How can you organize for queer liberation while your home is being bombed? At the same time, pinkwashing efforts weaponize queerness against Palestinian activists and civilians trying to survive. It's a catch-22 that invisibilizes queer communities in the region, and yet these artists are sharing their stories in spite of geopolitical erasure.

Last year National Queer Theater teamed up with the ACLU to file a lawsuit against Trump's changes to the National Endowment for the Arts. We argued that the prohibitions against funding "gender ideology" were a violation of our first amendment rights - and we won! But now the NEA is *appealing* the court's decision, which means we might be heading to the Supreme Court imminently.

The fight continues from the courtroom to the theater. Thank you for joining us in the struggle.

We deeply appreciate your solidarity.

National Queer Theater

AREA D

Written by LOUR

Directed by Osh Ashruf

Music Direction by Déa Thatcher

Choreography by Nikhil Saboo

CAST

Abubakr Ali* - Samir

Nick Abouzeid - Rami

Nadia Dandashi* - Lara

Amelia Prochaska* - Dina

John-Andrew Morrison* - Avery Kent

Stage Manager: Fuyuan Zheng

SYNOPSIS

A Palestinian pop band lands an unexpected shot on the Eurovision stage. What starts as a lucky break for Lara and her feisty bandmates spirals into a glitter-drenched spectacle, forcing them to wrestle with how far they will go to get their voices heard and save one of their own. AREA D is a bold, genre-smashing musical fusing Arab pop and electronic sounds. This workshop presentation of Area D is part of National Queer Theater's 2026 Criminal Queerness Festival.

Show Dates:

Wednesday, June 10 @ 9PM

Thursday, June 11 @ 9PM (OPENING NIGHT)

Friday, June 12 @ 9PM

Saturday, June 13 @ 5PM

Saturday, June 13 @ 9PM

Runtime: 90 Minutes (No Intermission)

**Appearing courtesy of the Actor's Equity Association*

A Note from the Playwright:

AREA D is a love letter to the Palestinian community - and to all communities that fight tooth and nail for the people they love and for the chance to be seen and heard. It is for those who refuse to accept the status quo as inevitable, who believe things can be better, and who strive for change every day.

Over the past three years, I have watched pop culture shift in ways that increasingly push ordinary people to perform their identities in order to be visible. When I think about “Criminal Queerness,” I think about the weaponization of queer identity within pop culture and the pressure placed on queer communities to perform versions of themselves that fit external agendas.

Eurovision, to me, became an example of that. I saw the language and imagery of queer liberation used to pinkwash and obscure colonial histories and political realities connected to participating countries and host nations. At the same time, I witnessed queer communities standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Palestinians at protests around the world, reminding us that our struggles are not separate but deeply interconnected. The love, solidarity, and support the queer community has shown Palestine - and the shared reality of living through these times - is what keeps many of us moving forward, and it is a love I deeply cherish.

For me, queerness is not a marketing strategy or political shield - it is part of a broader struggle for dignity, freedom, and self-determination that moves forward collectively.

-LOUR

Area D

Biographies

Nick Abouzeid (Rami) is ecstatic to be making his New York City debut in Area D. His regional credits include Grease (Danny Zuko), The Rocky Horror Show (Usher), Bright Star (Billy Cane) and he will be headed to Short North Stage later this summer (U.S. Pippin/Ensemble). After graduating from Otterbein University a month ago, Nick is so proud to be jumping into such important material. Shoutout to my family in Lebanon. Nick would like to thank his family, beautiful girlfriend, and the entire creative team behind this show! Special thanks to Peter Dunn for the continued support! Enjoy the show!
@nick.abouzeid

Abubakr Ali (Samir) Theater: Dakar 2000 (MTC); Toros (2nd Stage); Inherit The Wind (Pasadena Playhouse). Film: Deep Cuts (A24; D. Sean Durkin); Your Mother, Your Mother, Your Mother (Amazon MGM; D. Bassam Tariq); A House Of Dynamite (Netflix; D. Kathryn Bigelow); Anything's Possible (Orion Pictures; D. Billy Porter). Television: Grendel (Netflix); Law & Order: Organized Crime (NBC); Power Book II: Ghost (Starz); The Walking Dead: World Beyond (AMC); Katy Keene (CW). MFA: Yale School of Drama.

Area D

Biographies

Osh Ashruf (*Director, any pronouns*) is a director, Drama League-nominated writer, and Tony Award-winning producer. He recently directed George Abud's *The Ruins: a play through music* (The Guthrie Theater) and helmed an immersive presentation, *Jake Landau: A Musical Revue*, starring Tony Award-winner Maleah Joi Moon. Other directing credits include: *24 Hour Plays* (Broadway); *The Gaza Monologues* (Noor Theatre); Greg T. Nanni's *Love Among Dreamers* (The House). He co-produced *A Strange Loop* and the 2023 Broadway revival of *Merrily We Roll Along*. He is a co-creator of the interactive game-show play *American Dreams*, and is creative producer of Cesar Alvarez's musical *NOISE* (Northern Stage/Dartmouth) and Isabel Monk Cade's *morning-after-pill-retrospective-extravaganza, My Way* (PS109). A former Prince Fellow in Creative Producing at Columbia University and Presidential Fellow at Harvard, he holds degrees from Loyola University Chicago and an M.F.A. from Harvard University and the Moscow Art Theater. Ashruf is the founder of Broadway For All (BFA), the national arts training program which received the 2022 Tony Award Honors for Excellence in the Theatre.

Kasey Blezinger (Drums) is a musical theatre drummer and percussionist performing in New York City. Thrilled to be revisiting Area D; Kasey pulls from a wide breadth of musical backgrounds and technical expertise to bring creative collaboration to every project. Kasey Blezinger is currently a percussion sub at *Aladdin* and *TITANIQUE*.

Area D

Biographies

Danielle Breitstein (*Co-Orchestrator, she/they*) is a Brooklyn-based musical theater writer, dramaturg, violin/viola doubler, occasional performer, and perpetual jokester. Recent select credits include *The Thousand and One Nights* by Ghina Fawaz and Begum Inal at La Mama (Violin/Composer), *Plague Play* by Erin Proctor at Bechdel Project (Dramaturg) *Spelling Club* at Rogue Theater Fest (Writer) *Brace Yourself* by Hannah Z Morley and *Gabi Gibboney* at Theater on the Verge (Dramaturg).

Nadia Dandashi (Lara, she/her) is a proud Syrian American, honored to be part of this original new musical! Best known for originating the role of Doris Stevens in *Suffs* on Broadway, and Off-Broadway at The Public Theatre. She believes in the power of theatre to create change and hopes to do so one story at a time. Free Palestine! Repped by HCKR and Saks&.

LOUR (*Playwright, she/they*) is a Palestinian performer, composer-lyricist, and writer based in New York City. She was named one of Arab America's "30 Under 30" (2024), and received the Miranda Family Fellowship (2022) and MacDowell Fellowship (2026). Her work has been presented at Ars Nova, The Public Theater, La MaMa, the Dramatists Guild Foundation, the SheNYC Arts Festival, Barzakh, University Settlement, and the Lenfest Center for the Arts, among others.

Area D

Biographies

Margot Mae (*Sound Designer/A1*) is a musician, dancer, and audio producer based in Brooklyn. She loves her job(s) as a sound engineer at Here Arts, The Judson Church, and Roulette Intermedium. Margot also records, mixes, and masters from her home studio, and teaches music lessons. She fronts the band Lavender Tops, plays for Sophie Blue, and is developing a new experimental musical titled Sound Girls Gone Wild! She is not on social media but loves it when people say hi and introduce themselves in person and in emails :)

Ella Martin (*Associate Director*) is a graduate of Wagner College with a degree in Arts Administration. She is a director, singer/songwriter, producer, advocate, and enthusiastic theatre maker, dedicated to new work that centers women's stories. She recently directed a staged reading of Josh Romeo's A Postcard From Venice Beach at The PIT. Thank you to Lour, Osh, & the whole team for the experience with this vital piece!

Alan Mendez (*Orchestrator*) is a New York City-based music-maker and actor. Alan was the music director and arranger for frikiNation (NQT's Criminal Queerness Festival 2025), and he's currently the Music Department Associate and in the cast of Mexodus (Daryl Roth Theatre). Other Off-Broadway acting credits include Mexodus (Audible's Minetta Lane Theatre), Comedy of Errors (The Public Theater), and Socrates (The Public Theater). When not acting, Alan can often be found arranging and orchestrating music, music directing, and playing piano with his showtune-singing jazz band, the Shubert Alley Cats.

Area D

Biographies

John-Andrew Morrison (*Avery Kent*) Broadway: Oh Mary (Mary's Husband), A Strange Loop (Thought 4, TONY Nomination). Off Broadway: Strange Loop (Lucille Lortel and OBIE Awards), Blues for an Alabama Sky (Outer Critics Circle Honoree). John-Andrew is a member of the Experimentals (Medea of the Laundromat at La MaMa with The Lortel Theater). Regionally 3 Summers of Lincoln at La Jolla Playhouse, A Christmas Carol at Hartford Stage - 6 seasons). MFA from UC San Diego, BA from Brandeis University and member of the Actors Center. This and every show is for his Mom, Eunice.

Amelia Prochaska (*Dina, she/her*) is an actor, intimacy coordinator, and violence prevention professional excited to make her NY theatre debut! When she's not on stage, she works at Right To Be, a harassment prevention non-profit based here in the city, and is passionate about finding ways to connect her advocacy and her artistry. Favorite credits include swinging 9 to 5 (Musical Theatre West), the Edinburgh Fringe festival, and singing backup for Journey (Hollywood Bowl). Donate to the Lebanese Red Cross:

<https://www.redcross.org.lb/>. Love to family, friends, and Lebanon <3 @ameliaprochaska, ameliaprochaska.com

Déa Thatcher (*Music Director*) writes songs in opposition to war, in favor of life. She is a working class Transfemme singer and multi-instrumentalist based in NYC, with performance experience ranging from DIY basement shows to national tours to Broadway. Her band, The Drips, dropped a debut album called Transvolution, in March of 2026, to very little acclaim, and for that she is very proud. She is a member of The Dramatists Guild, ASCAP, and AFM Local 802. Graduate of Berklee College of Music

Area D

Biographies

Alex Wakim (*Co-Orchestrator*) Music, for Alex Wakim, is an astrolabe — a way of orienting yourself in a world that doesn't always make sense. That instinct drives everything: the blending of Arabic instruments with electronic textures, the pull toward stories that are subtly heartbreaking, the belief that sound can map what language can't. That sensibility has found a home in cinema. Wakim has scored documentaries with Oscar-nominated Shine Global and Milkhaus, and a new narrative film produced by Adam Pearson, with work screened at SXSW, Tribeca, and Sundance — and syncs on Netflix. The 2025 recipient of Opera America's IDEA Grant, he is developing *The B!tchelorette*, an opera about mental health and family. His album *Sounds of Claire* — a tribute to his grandmother's Levantine childhood — is out now on Bright Shiny Things. Based in NYC.

Fuyuan Zheng 郑富元 (*Stage Manager*) is a New York-based stage manager, director, and educator originally from Tianjin, China. Her work centers on multidisciplinary storytelling and collaborative creation. She has worked on projects ranging from developmental workshops to a variety of productions in New York and internationally. Fuyuan is also an active researcher and advocate for intimacy direction in theatre, with a focus on building safe, thoughtful, and dynamic spaces for artistic collaboration across cultures. Select credits include *Into the Woods* (immersive production, Camp Pouch), *Destination Undefined*, *The Z Team*, *The RASA Project*, and *Murder Ballad* (Shanghai). Concert: Lincoln Center. MFA: Columbia University.

faggy faafi Cairo boy

By Bazeed

Directed by Shadi Ghaheri

Stage Manager

Nat Kelley DiMario

Dramaturg

Dezi Tibbs

CAST

Hassan Nazari-Robati – Yasser

Anton Obeid – Baba

Jakeem Powell – Jacob

Jae W.B. – Angel G.

George Shakkour – Mo

SYNOPSIS

In the space between living and whatever the hell comes next, between daddy issues and Daddy issues, between the city that never sleeps and the city that never even blinks... Mohammad, the prodigal, closeted son returns to Cairo, and to his father's rapidly failing, irrevocable body. Distanced from his NYC boyfriend, Mohammad reunites with an old Cairo flame who now has a life of his own. And who's to judge him, besides that angry little angel in the corner of the hospital room?

Show Dates:

Wednesday, June 17 @ 8:30PM

Thursday, June 18 @ 8:30

Saturday, June 20 @ 5PM

Saturday, June 20 @ 8:30PM

Runtime: 90 Minutes (No Intermission)

A Note from the Playwright:

I wrote the first version of **faggy faafi Cairo boy** in 2019. If the play were a human child, it would've leached the calcium from my bones, and would today be in second grade, learning multi-digit math. Which is to say, it's changed, as I've changed, as my reasons for telling this story have changed over the course of seven years.

Praise be to Allah nobody produced that first version! What began life as an emotionally volatile revenge play, something between screed and screech against God & altars & graves & Dad & dads, six drafts later asks:

-How can capital-F freedom, capital-V visibility, be both shackle and key?

-How big, actually, is the Atlantic, if on one of its banks sits your future, and on the other, the past in its entirety?

-For the queer, Muslim, Global South immigrant child living in the wild wild West, what are the wages of native informancy?

-What **is** actually up with dad?

And, finally,

-Can homophobia survive the grave?

continued

A Note from the Playwright (cont):

From my native Egypt, since I began writing this in 2019, much inspiration on the themes of criminal queerness. In 2020, months after the first public sharing of any piece of ffCb, Sarah Hegazy died by despair, in exile: a direct consequence of lifting a rainbow flag at a concert in Cairo years earlier. In 2022, the Egyptian Ministry of Education began a public awareness campaign against the threat of homosexuality; my government's response to the relative ease, for the average Egyptian child, of discovering and accessing queer content on social media. For years in Cairo, it's been known, Grindr is a honeybear trap, undercover cops hiding behind some unlucky lustful swipe.

On May 11th, 2026, well underway with work on this production, we observed the 15th anniversary of the Queen Boat police raid, referenced in the play. I'd left Egypt to start college in New York a few months after the raid and the media frenzy, not knowing back then that I was immigrating. I remember those newspaper images as a wind at my back. Men behind bars in white cloth masks, holes cut out for eyes. I knew I was them.

All of this and more are part of the world of faggy faafi Cairo boy.

-Bazeed

faggy faafi Cairo boy

Biographies

Bazeed (*Playwright/Associate Director, they/them*) an Egyptian immigrant, writer, performance artist, editor, curator, stage actor, and cook living in a rent-stabilized apartment in Brooklyn. An alliteration-leaning writer of prose, poetry, plays, and pantry lists, their work across genres has been published in print and online, and their multi award-winning plays performed in festivals in the United States and abroad.

Nat Kelley DiMario (*Stage Manager, they/them*) is a queer & trans multidisciplinary theatre artist, stage manager, and storyteller. Broadway: *Into the Woods*. Off-Broadway: *On the Evolutionary Function of Shame* (Second Stage), *Isabel* (NAATCO), *Orlando* (Signature Theatre), *The Christine Jorgensen Show* (HERE Arts Center). Other favorites include: *Thelma & Louise & the Time Machine* (Breaking the Binary), *Hildegard* (PROTOTYPE), *The Counterfeit Opera* (Little Island). Nat is the co-creator of *Shadowlight*, an original queer dance-theater piece, which will be premiering this summer in Vermont. Nat is an alum of Fordham University and the Juilliard Professional Apprenticeship Program. Proud member of AEA. natkelleydimario.com @natdimario.

Shadi Ghaheri (*Director, she/her*) is a New York City based theatre, opera, and film director whose work spans classical texts, contemporary plays, and interdisciplinary performance. She is a graduate of Yale School of Drama. Her directing credits include *Dido and Aeneas* (University of Notre Dame), *Tosca and Extinctionist* (Heartbeat Opera), *Selling Kabul* (Signature Theatre), *English* (Alliance Theatre), *Glimpse* (Rattlestick Theater), *In the Stillness of Night* (The Tank), *Whispers of the Flesh* (Emruz Festival), *Sweat* (Queens College), *Threshold of Brightness* (BMP), *Lucretia* (HERE Arts Center), *Untitled* (Rattlestick). She is the co-founder and co-curator of Emruz Festival, a biennial festival of theatre, music, and film by Iranian artists, and later co-curated Immigrant MixFest at Atlantic Theater Company, where her play *Tosca Tehran* was featured for the first time. Shadi has directed the short films *Swimming* (2019) and *Eros* (2020) and performed in *Kisses and Bullets* (Tribeca Festival). She is currently an Adjunct professor at NYU Tisch School of the Arts, teaching acting and directing.

faggy faafi Cairo boy

Biographies

Hassan Nazari-Robati (Yasser) is super excited to be back on stage in NY! National Tour: *The Kite Runner* (Ali/Farid), *Beauty and the Beast* (Lumiere); Regional: *Sweeney Todd*, *Oklahoma!*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Oliver!*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*; TV: *The Chosen*. A graduate of Oklahoma City University. Love to James and my family, the Aperture team, and the entire CQF team!

Anton Obeid (Baba) From the bank to the plank. ----- Since 2010 (following a 20-year career in the investment banking industry in New York, London and Hong Kong), Anton has been pursuing his passion through a more honest means of expression: on stage and in front of the camera. Anton studied acting at both HB Studio and Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute in New York City. Anton also has Ivy-League education from Columbia University with Masters in Computer Science and Chemistry. He is tri-lingual English/Arabic/French. Myriad TV series appearances. Film credits: *Last Night* (Toronto International Film Festival Official Selection), *36 Saints*, *The Dictator*, *Front of House*, *Good Days*, *Bad Days*, *Happiness*. Theater credits: *10,000 Balconies*, *Le Problème*. *The American Wife*, *The Blue Room*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Play Is the Thing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Seagull*, *The Three Cuckolds*, *In between* all, Anton climbed Kilimanjaro, hiked the Arctic Circle, ran the Milford Track to the Tasman Sea, sailed the Magellan Strait in Patagonia/Tierra Del Fuego, bungee-jumped 300 ft into Skippers Canyon and skied the French, Austrian, and Italian Alps. Oh yes! He also survived a civil war in his home country of Lebanon.

Jakeem Powell (Jacob) In film, Jakeem Dante Powell can be seen in a supporting role in George C. Wolfe's Netflix feature *RUSTIN* and in the short film *VERONA* (w/d Robby M Miller). On stage, he starred in Shayok Misha Chowdhury's *PUBLIC OBSCENITIES* at the Soho Rep (Drama Desk for Best Ensemble). Previously, he understudied the roles of 'Gary' and 'Philip' in *SLAVE PLAY* on Broadway and starred as 'Gary' in the Center Theatre Group production. Additionally, he starred in the streaming play *THIS AMERICAN WIFE* alongside Pulitzer Prize finalists Michael Breslin and Patrick Foley. He is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama.

faggy faafi Cairo boy

Biographies

George Shakkour (Mo) is a Syrian-American actor, born and raised in Aleppo and now based in New York City. His work spans independent films and international productions. He is drawn to both comedy and stories that explore displacement, identity, and resilience particularly those that center underrepresented voices. George discovered his passion for acting at an early age, performing in school plays and local theater before continuing his training at the William Esper Studio in New York City. This production marks his theatrical debut.

Gavin Strawnato (Projection Designer) is a Brooklyn-based lighting and projection designer and is delighted to be returning to the Criminal Queerness Festival this year. They are a queer artist who is passionate about new works and underground art. When not designing, they are often found tending to their orchid collection or at a museum. Previous credits include: FrikiNation (National Queer Theatre, 2025), Creature/Comfort (Exponential Festival, 2026), and Mountain Lights (Cohen New Works Festival 2025). They also assist on a variety of productions around off-broadway.

Dezi Tibbs (*Dramaturg, they/them*) is a writer and dramaturg living in New York City. As a Black, genderqueer theater artist, they're fascinated by intersectional identities, representation onstage, and the sociopolitical implications of the stories we choose to tell and how we tell them. "Dezi is the absolute real deal - inquisitive, direct, relentless in their pursuit of specificity and truth, expansive in their thinking, and absolutely bullshit-free." - Sam Pinkleton.

faggy faafi Cairo boy

Biographies

Dezi Tibbs (*Dramaturg, they/them*) is a writer and dramaturg living in New York City. As a Black, genderqueer theater artist, they're fascinated by intersectional identities, representation onstage, and the sociopolitical implications of the stories we choose to tell and how we tell them. "Dezi is the absolute real deal - inquisitive, direct, relentless in their pursuit of specificity and truth, expansive in their thinking, and absolutely bullshit-free." - Sam Pinkleton.

Jae W.B. (*Angel G, she/they*) is a theater artist, singer, and night life performer based in New York City. Jae made her off Broadway debut in the titular role of Thorn in Bruise & Thorn. Most recently seen performing "Unremarkable" at the Jonathan Larson Awards for The American Theater Wing and as the headlining Cabarets at the historic Cherry Grove Community House and Pangea. Other credits include Luna in Millennials are Killing Musicals, Luna and the Starbodies at Joe's Pub and Lincoln Center, Broadway for Racial Justice Sings! The Misseducation of Lauryn Hill at Little Island Amph and as Xavii for New Light Theater Project's Pastel Color Ripples. Jae has been a featured performer in NYC nightlife spaces such as Joe's Pub, Birdland, Club Cumming, and 54 Below. Jae was an honorary mention finalist for The New Visions Fellowship with National Queer Theater & Dramatists Guild of America, is a GLAM Award nominee for Best Vocalist, and a board member of Pipeline Theater Company.

Syrian Soap

By E. Zaalán

Directed by Tallie Medel

Stage Manager

Mars Neri

Original Direction and Co-Devising, Dramaturgy

Natasha Mercado

CAST

E. Zaalán - Ancestor

Runtime: 60 Minutes (No Intermission)

SYNOPSIS

Eat, pray, bathe with your ancestors in an intergalactic bathhouse in the afterlife and find out if you are your ancestor's wildest dreams—or worst nightmare! Receive channeled advice, poetry, and a surprise visit from a traditional Syrian bathroom slipper (which may or may not be a metaphor for life under fascism). Underneath the silliness and suds, Syrian Soap is a love letter to revolution and unlocking joy and self-expression in a world on fire. And a reminder... your healing goes back 7 generations—but so do your fuck-ups!

Show Dates:

Wednesday, June 24 @ 8:30PM

Thursday, June 25 @ 8:30PM

Friday, June 26 @ 8:30PM

Saturday, June 27 @ 4PM

A Note from the Playwright:

Syrian Soap is a love letter to the Syrian Revolution and to the inextricable struggle for liberation in Palestine.

In 2011, millions of Syrians rose up to demand freedom, dignity, and an end to state repression. Raed Fares was a revolutionary journalist who ran a free radio station in Kafranbel, organizing weekly protests with banners that would go viral because of their satire and savvy. He carried his own coffin during protests to show how little he feared death. In 2018, when he was killed, I felt like the revolution died with him. So I asked his spirit what I could do to honor his legacy, and what I heard was: *use your voice to tell the truth.*

How does shaking my bubble-wrapped boobs while dressed as a draggy version of my ancient desert ancestor honor the legacy of the Syrian revolution, you might wonder? My dad wonders too. Our relationship was deeply strained by this show, and my family on his side stopped speaking to me because of it. He himself was exiled from Syria for refusing to be silenced. Ironically, I am risking the same thing. Not because I want to risk exile, but because I live in a world where existing in this body puts me at the front line of a bigger battle, one shaped in great part by the trauma of colonialism and dictatorship.

I thought that my oath to Raed would lead me to something dignified, like writing poetic personal essays. Instead it led me to clown. I believe the role of the clown is to channel something for the tribe that the tribe needs. It's not always pleasant, but it's necessary. And through the process, something can be seen, healed, or made sense of, that couldn't be before.

And so Raed, Halla, Ghiyath, Yahya-this show is for you, and for all the martyrs in Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon and beyond.

-E. Zaalan

Syrian Soap

Biographies

Tallie Medel (*Director, they/them*) is an educator, clown, director, and award-winning actor based in New York City. Screen credits include EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE (A24) and BROAD CITY (Comedy Central). They founded the ever-popular clown program at Brooklyn Comedy Collective. Tallie has taught at NYU, Harvard University, Emerson College, the School of Visual Arts, and at theaters and schools across the country. Stage time includes Upright Citizens Brigade NY & LA, Second City NY, Caroline's on Broadway, MoMA PS 1, Brooklyn Academy of Music, and London's SoHo Theatre. Tallie has been featured in IndieWire, the LA Times and the Boston Globe.

Natasha Mercado (*Original Direction and Co-devising, Dramaturgy, she/her*) is a mixed-Latina performer, writer, director, and dramaturg whose work lives at the intersection of vulnerability, absurdity, and embodied intelligence. Her internationally touring solo shows *Tree* and *#1 Son* have earned sold-out runs and critical acclaim from Hollywood to Edinburgh. Her practice spans solo performance, immersive theater, and film, blending physical comedy with emotional risk. She is the creator of *Soft Clown*, a performance philosophy centered on sensitivity, pleasure, and audience relationship. As a director and collaborator, she brings a sharp, intuitive dramaturgical eye to new work, shaping pieces that are intimate, alive, and formally daring.

Syrian Soap

Biographies

Mars Juno Bartolome Neri (*Stage Manager, they/them*) is an artist and stage manager dedicated to supporting those who want to tell their personal stories and creating community through social justice oriented art through new plays or devised works. Their passion lies in community care and the joy that can be found through these collaborative storytelling processes. They're devoted to doing work that brings unheard voices and untold stories to light. Previous collaborators include Leviathan Lab, NAATCO, Breaking the Binary Theatre, National Queer Theater, JACK, and Signature Theatre DC. marsjbneri.com.

E. Zaalán (Playwright/Ancessor, they/them) is a Syrian standup, clown, and conflict mediator. They made a promise to the martyrs of the Syrian Revolution that they would use their voice to tell the truth--so they had no choice but to become a comedian. They have studied comedy with the Idiot Workshop, Groundlings, Upright Citizen's Brigade, and iO Theater. Syrian Soap is the winner of the 2026 Hollywood Fringe Scholarship, and Zaalán's co-created sketch and standup show won "Best of SF Fringe Festival" and "Best Box Office" at San Francisco Fringe Festival 2024.

Criminal Queerness Festival Creative Team

(alphabetical by last name)

Dmitri Barcomi — Production Manager

Lola Basiliere — Associate Sound Designer

Danielle Breitstein — Co-Orchestrator, Area D

Jasmine Canjura — Costume Designer

Nat Kelley DiMario — Stage Manager, faggy faafi Cairo boy

Peter Dunn — Casting Director

Forest Entsminger — Props/Scenic Designer

Sean Griffin — Fight/Intimacy Coordinator, faggy faafi Cairo boy

Jeremy Kadetsky — Sound Designer

Nikhil Saboo — Movement Director, Area D

Jaz Koft — Associate Music Director / Copyist, Area D

Ella Martin — Associate Director, Area D

Alan Mendez — Orchestrator, Area D

Maryam Sweirki — Lighting Designer

Déa Thatcher — Music Director, Area D

Steven Tran — Electronic Music Producer/Synth Programming, Area D

Mireya Velasquez — Costume Assistant

Alex Wakim — Co-Orchestrator, Area D

Dena Igusti and Jedidiah Mugarura - Curators

Criminal Queerness Festival Crew

(alphabetical by last name)

Shafiq Akena — Scenic Crew

Juan Coronado — LX Crew

Megan Hayward — Audio Crew

Willem Hinternhoff — LX Crew/Programmer

Kaileykielle Hoga — Audio Lead

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Manuel

Creative Team

Biographies

Dmitri Victor Barcomi (*Production Manager*) is a transsexual transdisciplinary theatermaker from New York City. His artistic interests include working with unusual source materials, technological experimentation, international theatrical collaborations, and honoring queer icons. Dmitri's work has been seen throughout New York at Lincoln Center, PAC NYC, Target Margin, many weird spots downtown, and internationally at the Edinburgh Fringe, the Teatr Słowackiego in Kraków, and Queer Zagreb theater festival in Croatia. Dmitri has been a part of the Criminal Queerness Festival since 2021, and an artistic collaborator with National Queer Theater since 2018. Dmitri is also the founder of the first ever Museum of Drag! BA: The New School, MFA: Columbia University. Keep up with Dmitri at mxbarcomi.com.

Lola Basiliere (*Associate Sound Designer*) is a sound designer for live performance based in New York City. Recent: Scarecrow (The Tank), Elephant Woman (Rutgers Church), The Cherry Tortured (NYU), Cassandra (Teatro LATEA), Shell (Edinburgh Fringe Festival), Steve Burns: Alive (La MaMa), Romeo & Juliet (Catskill Mountain Shakespeare), Seagullmachine (GreenSpace), Stop Kiss (The Chain), Where Women Go (HERE Arts), Weasel Festival (The Brick). Associate/Assistant: Watch Me Walk (Soho Rep), The Burning Cauldron of Fiery Fire (The Vineyard), Friday Night Rat Catchers (NYLA), I'm Repeating Myself (The Brick), Radio Downtown (59E59), Joan of Arc in a Supermarket in California (The Tank). BFA: NYU lolabasiliere.com

Creative Team

Biographies

Jasmine Canjura (*Costume Designer, she/her*) is a Latina artist and costume designer based in New York who works in theater, opera, and film. She graduated from New York University with a BFA in Costume & Scenic Design. Recent credits include Assistant Costume Manager at The Public Theater, Assistant Costume Designer for Hamlet at Free Shakespeare in the Park(The Public), Costume Design Assistant for Tina - The Tina Turner Musical US Tour, Assistant Costume Designer for Angelique(Manhattan School of Music), Associate Costume Designer for Amahl & the Night Visitors(Onsite Opera), and Assistant Costume Design for The Passion of Mary Cardwell Dawson(Glimmerglass).

Peter Dunn (*Casting Director*) is a former child actor turned NYC-based producer, writer, director, educator and casting professional. As a casting director his current work includes Hadestown (Broadway/National Tour), Moulin Rouge! (star casting), Blood/Love (Off-Bway) and the sold-out RENT In Concert series with symphony orchestras nationwide. He has also served as associate casting director on Drag: The Musical, Titanique, TINA!, Freestyle Love Supreme, various productions at The Mundy, and the National Tours and Broadway production of world phenomenon, HAMILTON. A multi-hyphenate artist, Peter is passionate about cultivating safe spaces, advocacy and letting children be children. Endless gratitude to my mother. Lead with kindness.

Forest Entsminger (Props/Scenic Designer) Credits include Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen (Torn Page);Time Passes (Target Margin, IRT, Mabou Mines); Two Girls, The Monkeypox Gospel (Ars Nova); Faust (Heartbeat Opera); Sweet Bird of Youth (Barn at Lee, Provincetown TWF); The Iguana Becomes Marco (La MaMa); Cankersore Paradise,The Threepenny Opera (Lenfest Center); Meow! (Loading Dock); Meaghan Robichaud is the Greatest Show on Earth, I want to hold onto something beautiful and empty, u are the dream, Horsefacts.gov/, Babies on the Street, Goldhaven, Sleeping Car Porters (The Brick); The Salvagers (Yale Repertory Theatre). M.F.A. - Yale School of Drama.

Creative Team

Biographies

Sean Fletcher Griffin (Fight/Intimacy Coordinator) Member of UnkleDave's Fight-House. Broadway: Death of a Salesman, Fear of 13, Proof, Appropriate, Merrily We Roll Along, Uncle Vanya, The Great Society. NY: Tomorrow Never Came, frikiNation (Nat'l Queer Theater); Five Models in Ruins 1981 (LCT); Seagull/Woodstock NY, Seven Year Disappear (New Group); Jordans, Comedy of Errors, Midsummer Night's Dream (Public); Light in the Piazza (Encores); Good Enemy (Minetta Lane); NERO (KPB); The Secret Life of Bees (Atlantic); Lockdown (Rattlestick); Leap and the Net Will Appear (New Georges); Manhood (NBT). Regional: View From The Bridge (Long Wharf); Living and Breathing, (Two River); Wait Until Dark (Dorset); Billy Elliot (Goodspeed). Member of AEA.

Jeremy Kadetsky (Sound Designer, they/them) is a multimedia artist, writer, performer, and technologist working in live performance based in Brooklyn, NY. They are one half the post-theater duo "doxies," whose original work has been presented by The Brick at the 2026 ?!: New Works Festival (April 2026) and by Catch 80 at Life World (December 2025). Jeremy's collaborative video and sound design work in theater, dance, interdisciplinary performance, and opera has been featured in New York City's downtown scene, Off-Broadway, and Internationally. Education: Johns Hopkins University (BA), Sarah Lawrence College (MFA). @kadetskyj www.kadetskyj.com.

Nikhil Saboo (Movement Director, he/him) is an Indian-Nepalese actor, creative, filmmaker, and Chita Rivera Award-nominated dancer. He made his Broadway debut in the original cast of Mean Girls: The Musical before joining the Angelica Company of Hamilton. He went on to play Connor Murphy in the national tour of Dear Evan Hansen, becoming the first POC to take on the Tony-nominated role. He extends his deepest gratitude to Osh Ashruf, the entire creative team, and the incredible company of Area D. @nikhil.saboo.

Creative Team

Biographies

Maryam Sweirki (*Lighting Designer, Mary as her friends call her*) is a NYC based Lighting Designer and Programmer. She is the Resident Lighting Designer of Born Dancing. In 2023 she toured with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre as their Assistant Lighting Director. Four Go Wild in Wellies at The New Victory Theater (Designer) We Don't Need the Sea to Drown at National Sawdust (Designer and Programmer) Trash PAC NYC (Programmer) Mary spends her time around NYC Freelancing with PT work at Bric Arts, National Sawdust, Alvin Ailey and New 42nd. She resides in Brooklyn with her dog, Henry.

Steven Tran (Electronic Music Producer/Synth Programming) makes really fun cool music for the stage and dancefloor through his work as a music producer, composer, MD, orchestrator, and DJ. Yaddo Fellow 2025, VCCA Fellow 2026. Co-composer/music producer for Lydia and the Troll (Seattle Rep), Midsummer Night's Dream (OSF). Music for Marvel's Squirrel Girl: The Unbeatable Radio Show. MD, arranger/orchestrator - The Mortification of Fovea Munson (The Kennedy Center), And So That Happened... (5th Avenue Theatre), The Tempest (Seattle Rep Public Works). Composer, Stars Between (Seattle Opera Creation Lab). MD, Lizard Boy: OSF, Prospect Theatre Company. Ableton programmer: The Lost Boys, Dead Outlaw, Saturday Church.

Mireya Velasquez (*Costume Assistant*) is a New York based costume designer, actor, and performer. Though from Texas originally, she made her way to New York, first, through The Minskoff Stage as a nominee for The 2019 Jimmy Awards and second, as a bachelor's graduate from NYU Tisch School of the Arts. Some of her credits include building puppets for The Jim Henson Company, starring as Sally Bowles in Cabaret at The West End Theatre, and, most recently, designing for CO_LAB's There Used To Be A Forest Here. Mireya thanks her friends and family for their endless support in all of her endeavors!

ABOUT NATIONAL QUEER THEATER

National Queer Theater harnesses the power of live performance to imagine a more just and joyful future. Working alongside social justice movements, we uplift queer community through visionary theater productions and education programs that celebrate free expression in the U.S. and around the world. Follow us on Instagram at @nationalqueertheater Sign up for our e-newsletters at www.nationalqueertheater.org.

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Teaching Artists: Khadija Bangoura, Achiro P. Olwoch
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SPECIAL THANKS

Dramatists Guild of America for a generous rehearsal space donation, producing support from Brooklyn Art Haus, ART/NY, NYC Pride, Artistic Freedom Initiative, Noor Theater, NYC Mayors Office of Immigrant Affairs.

CRIMINAL QUEERNESS FESTIVAL SUPPORT

The 2026 festival is supported by the Distracted Globe Foundation, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and individual donors. We are so grateful for your support.

National Queer Theater would also like to thank our generous funders who support our programming and general operations: A.R.T./NY, Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Find Your Light Foundation, Civis Foundation, David Geffen Foundation, Ford Foundation, Gilead Foundation, Hilda D. Glenn Fund of the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation, the New York State Council on the Arts, and Stonewall Community Foundation.

Community Partners

Artistic Freedom Initiative's mission is to protect, promote, and foster freedom of artistic expression. Our programs are designed to directly assist artists whose freedom of expression has been restricted, support artists who have demonstrated a commitment to advancing positive social change and fundamental human rights, and improve the laws, policies, and systems that shape artists' lives and work.

<https://artisticfreedominitiative.org/>

The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) promotes the well-being of immigrant communities in New York City. Among other activities, MOIA works with other City government agencies and community partners to advance language access to information, services, and engagement. MOIA supports, but is not responsible for Citywide service procurement.

<https://www.nyc.gov/site/immigrants/index.page>

Founded in 2010, **Noor Theatre** is an Obie-winning company dedicated to supporting, developing and producing the work of theater artists of Middle Eastern, Southwest Asian and North African descent. In doing so, we reflect the unique perspectives of our artists, and ensure that our communities are represented and celebrated in the larger theatre ecosystem. To learn more about our work, visit us at noortheatre.org. To receive updates on our work and invitations to our events and performances, please sign up for our e-newsletter at

<https://www.noortheatre.org/contact>.

NYC Pride is the nonprofit that has produced NYC's official Pride Month events since 1984, including the NYC Pride March - one of the largest, oldest LGBTQIA+ demonstrations in the world. Additional marquee events include PrideFest, the largest LGBTQ+ street festival in the U.S.; and Youth Pride, an affirming celebration of LGBTQ+ youth, their families and allies. NYC Pride works toward a future without discrimination where all people have equal rights under the law. We do this by producing LGBTQIA+ Pride events that inspire, educate, commemorate, and celebrate our diverse community year-round.

<https://www.nycpride.org/>

Donate to National Queer Theater

Support Queer Artists!

National Queer Theater works tirelessly to support queer communities through social justice-based performing arts programming, but we cannot operate without the kindness of people like you. **Make a donation to NQT today to support LGBTQ artists, youth programming, and community outreach to build a more equitable future for queer people everywhere.**

We are a 501(c)(3), which means all of your contributions are tax-deductible.

WHAT YOUR MONEY CAN DO

- \$55 pays for an hour of classroom time for a teaching artist to inspire queer and trans youth.
- \$100-\$300 helps pay for costumes, props, and production materials to create a new work by an LGBTQ artist.
- \$500 helps pay a professional performer for rehearsing and performing with NQT at approximately \$20/hour.
- \$1000 goes a long way at NQT! Gifts of this size enable us to produce major public events like the Criminal Queerness Festival.

[DONATE HERE!](#)

ABOUT HERE

From our home in Lower Manhattan, HERE builds an inclusive community that nurtures artists of all backgrounds as they disrupt conventional expectations to create innovative performances in theatre, dance, music, puppetry, media, and visual art. By providing these genre-blending artists with an adaptive, flexible home for developing and producing their work, we share a range of perspectives reflective of the complexity of our city. HERE welcomes curious audiences to witness groundbreaking performances, responsive to the world in which we live, at free and affordable prices.

Under the leadership of Co-Directors Jesse Cameron Alick, Annalisa Dias, Lanxing Fu, and Lauren Miller, HERE continues to evolve as a home for artists and audiences alike. Appointed by the Board in 2024, the Co-Directors collaboratively lead the artistic and executive functions of the organization, shaping its vision, programming, and community engagement.

HERE strives to create an equitable, diverse, and inclusive home in which all people have fair access to the resources they need to realize their visions. We acknowledge structural inequities that exclude individuals and communities from opportunities based on race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, class, age, and geography, and seek to counter those inequities in our work. Through mindful actions on sustainability and regenerative practices, we work toward climate justice, and a safe, livable planet for present and future artmakers and audiences.

Founded in 1993 by four artists — Kristin Marting, Tim Maner, Barbara Busackino, and Randy Rollison — HERE was envisioned as a welcoming, safe environment that could attract and launch a variety of artists. Since its inception, HERE has been home to such acclaimed artists and works as V's *The Vagina Monologues*, Taylor Mac's *The Lily's Revenge*, Trey Lyford & Geoff Sobelle's *all wear bowlers*, Young Jean Lee's *Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven*, James Scroggs' *Disposable Men*, Corey Dargel's *Removable Parts*, Robin Frohardt's *The Pigeoning*, Basil Twist's *Symphonie Fantastique*, and *Looking at You* by Rob Handel, Kristin Marting and Kamala Sankaram. We have produced and presented over 1,200 original works; served over 15,000 artists; and welcomed over 1,000,000 audience members. HERE's work and artists have received 16 OBIE Awards, two OBIE Grants and a CUNY Booth Award for artistic achievement, two Berilla Kerr Awards, four NY Innovative Theatre Awards, two Bessie Awards, two Pulitzer Prizes, one Pulitzer nomination, six Drama Desk nominations, two MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowships and most recently, seven Tony nominations. HERE remains on "Best Off-Off Broadway" theatre lists across New York City. In 2005, with the support of the City of New York and the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, HERE purchased its 9,000-square-foot longtime home with two performance spaces, a lounge, and gallery. With full-scale renovations completed in 2008 and 2011, thanks to significant support from the City of New York, HERE continues to stand as a pillar of the now burgeoning Hudson Square neighborhood.

HERE's core annual audience consists of approximately 30,000 20-40 somethings. We produce work that is affordable, challenging and alternative—offering our audiences the opportunity to feel that they are part of something new and fresh. Key elements of our performance programming are designed to allow the public to have as many access points to the development of original art as possible through work-in-progress showings, workshop productions, post-show artist talkbacks, informal discussions in our café and full productions.

HERE SUPPORT

OUR SUPPORTERS

We are deeply grateful to all of the following, who support the work of our artists. We would not be HERE without you!

PUBLIC SUPPORT

HERE's programming is made possible with Public Funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of Governor Kathleen Hochul and the New York State Legislature; New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in Partnership with the City Council; and the Office of New York State Assemblymember Deborah J. Glick.

We are grateful for the support and advocacy of all of our dedicated elected officials: Senator Charles E. Schumer, Senator Kirsten R. Gillibrand, Representative Daniel Goldman, Governor Kathleen Hochul, State Senator Brian Kavanagh and Assemblymember Deborah J. Glick, Mayor Eric Adams, Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine, Council Member Christopher Marte, and the Cultural Affairs Committee of the City Council.

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All Memberships are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by the law.

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\$100 Annually (\$9/month)

- 2 discounted tickets (15% off) to every performance in HERE's 2025-2026 season
- 2 complimentary drinks
- 1 year subscription to HERE Member Newsletter
- 3 Months of Unlimited Access to URHERE
- Waived ticket fees and free exchanges

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500 Annually (\$42/month)

- 4 Complimentary tickets to the performance of your choice in HERE's 2025-2026 season
- 2 discounted tickets (15% off) to every performance in HERE's 2025-2026 season
- 4 complimentary drinks
- Invitations to HERE Patron Nights and other Insider Events
- 1 year subscription to HERE Member Newsletter
- 6 Months of Unlimited Access to URHERE
- Waived ticket fees and free exchanges

TOAST OF SOHO

\$1000 Annually (\$84/month)

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- 4 complimentary drinks
- Invitations to HERE Patron Nights and other Insider Events
- 1 year subscription to HERE Member Newsletter with
- Advanced access and special access to HERE productions, events, and openings
- 1 Year of Unlimited Access to URHERE
- Waived ticket fees and free exchanges
- A HERE Tote Bag

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\$5000 Annually (\$417/month)

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- 4 complimentary drinks
- Exclusive access to HERE Opening Nights (subject to availability)
- Insider access to special invited rehearsals and meet and greets with HERE artists
- Invitations to HERE Patron Nights and other Insider Events
- Listing in HERE Heroes League in production playbills, website, and annual report
- 1 year subscription to HERE Member Newsletter
- Advanced access and special access to HERE productions, events, and openings
- 1 Year of Access to URHERE
- Waived ticket fees and free exchanges
- A HERE Tote Bag

HERE PROGRAMS



HERE Develops

HERE Develops genre-defying new work from the spark of an idea to a full production and beyond. We have multiple pathways for multidisciplinary creators.

HERE Produces

HERE supports the creation of new performance works through commissioning, residency, co-productions, and original productions. Full productions of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary performance works at HERE that emerge from our HARP program, Performance Lab, and other pathways rooted in relationship with our community.

HERE Hosts

An annual performance series of new work from extraordinary artists, ensembles, and independent companies working in multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary forms. We engage artists with whom we share values alignment and demonstrate high creative kinship. We offer a range of options that include different levels of technical and marketing support, space rental fees, presenting fees, and box office splits - tailored to the needs of each group.

[Learn more about our programs here.](#)

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