

Hello Friend, storytelling -and story listening- can be viable routes for bridging divides.
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All the World Really is a Stage

At Silk Road Rising, cultural diplomacy comes first nature to us. Artists and teachers, travelers and explorers, we are all cultural diplomats. And although the term “cultural diplomacy” is relatively new, the idea has deep roots in the historic Silk Road. The establishment of trade routes connecting East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, facilitated a dynamic exchange of stories and ideas. We believe that we continue that tradition in full 21st Century style, extending the Silk Road all the way to Chicago!

As we end the year, and usher in what promises to be a glorious 2015, we look to our 2013/2014 programming and **highlight two examples of Silk Road Rising’s active contributions to cultural diplomacy.**



Motti Lerner’s PAULUS. Silk Road Rising commissioned the translation of Lerner’s daring new play from Hebrew into English and produced the World Premiere of PAULUS in November-December, 2013. Playwright Lerner writes, “Paul of Tarsus envisioned a new civilization in which universalism replaces nationalism. I believe that struggling for such a civilization is a worthwhile goal for every playwright and every theater. Jamil and

Malik were the pioneers who understood the importance of telling Paulus’ story and were committed to my idea from its inception with all their hearts.” **As a result of bringing this celebrated Israeli playwright to Chicago, we not only enriched Chicago theatre, we also played a role in advancing Lerner’s career.** In 2014, Lerner was awarded the 2014 Landau Prize for performing arts – it’s the highest award for an artist in Israel. In an email, Lerner wrote, “I’m so surprised and so happy. And you know that you have been a part in it. Our collaboration over the past 7 years has been very significant in my artistic struggle.”



Saadallah Wannous’ RITUALS OF SIGNS AND TRANSFORMATION. Silk Road Rising commissioned the translation of the late great Syrian playwright’s boldly courageous work from Arabic into English and shared it with Chicago audiences in March, 2014. Wannous remains Syria’s most renowned playwright and an important critical voice against the tyrannies of dictatorship, religious fundamentalism, and patriarchy.

As a result of Silk Road Rising’s commission, the play received a highly successful English language production in Beirut, and was published in an anthology of Wannous’ plays by City University of New York’s Martin E. Segal Theatre Center. We hosted the play’s translators, Roberts Myers of the American University of Beirut and Nada Saab of the Lebanese American University, along with Lebanese director Sahar Assaf, to produce concert stagings of the play. Of his experience, **translator Myers writes, “it was one of the high points of my three-decade career as a playwright and scholar.”** The production was capped with an extraordinary panel on political theatre in the Arab world.

Not to pat ourselves on the back too much (but hey, what’s wrong with a little self-congratulation?) we managed to bring an Israeli story and a Syrian story to our stage all within the span of a few months. **We helped these stories travel from their native Hebrew and Arabic into English.** We built bridges of empathy between international artists, Chicago-based artists, and you, our beloved patrons. These collaborations grew out of years of planning and workshopping and conversations, and continue to this day.

Think about it: as these plays now live in English, they have an opportunity to be produced throughout the English speaking world. Today, as many of us watch all that is happening in the Middle East with horror and shock, **Silk Road Rising demonstrates once again that storytelling -and story listening- can be viable routes for bridging seemingly insurmountable divides.**

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