

Serving Our Theatre Siblings  
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## Arts Service In Action



Throughout the 2022-2023 theatre season, we have been witnessing a wave of Silk Road stories on Chicago's stages. When our company was founded twenty years ago, there was a glaring absence of Pan-Asian, North African, and Muslim voices in the American theatre. Needless to say, that has not been the case as of late. And to sweeten the pot, we have heard from countless artists, audiences, and theatre companies crediting Silk Road Rising for our important role in this extraordinary shift.

Our work involves supporting Chicagoland theatre companies as they broaden their repertoires, showcase Silk Road playwrights, and hire Silk Road artists. We promote their mission-aligned stories and co-produce dramaturgical and community outreach content that speaks to our communities.

We're proud to share that this season alone, we've partnered with colleagues from the following companies:

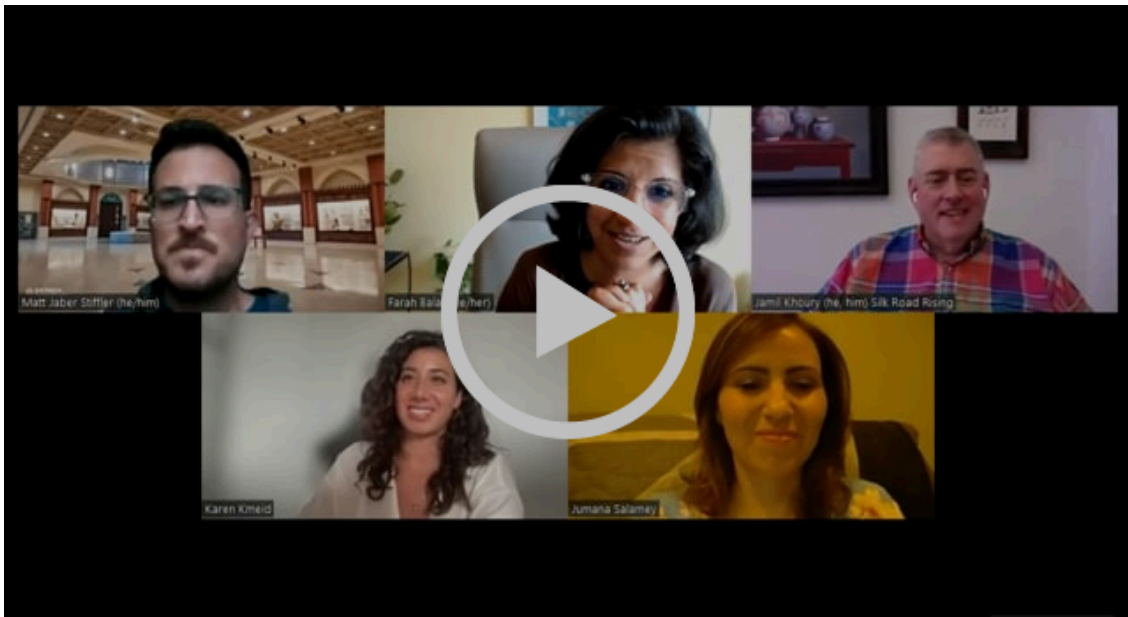
- **About Face Theatre**
- **Art2Action**
- **Avalanche Theatre**
- **First Floor Theater**
- **Goodman Theatre**
- **International Voices Project**
- **Lookingglass Theatre**
- **Old Town School of Folk Music**
- **PrideArts**
- **Shattered Globe Theatre**
- **Uprising Theater**
- **Writers Theatre**

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## **In Case You Missed It**

On June 16th, Silk Road Rising's Jamil Khoury participated in Farsight Agency's June episode of #FARSIGHTFRIDAY, along with moderator Farah Bala, and panelists Karen Kmeid of Airbnb, Jumana Salamey of the Arab American National Museum and ACCESS, and Matthew Jaber Stiffler of the Center for Arab Narratives.

Check out this engaging conversation on Arab heritage in the Western world!



Top Row: Matthew Jaber Stiffler, Farah Bala, Jamil Khoury  
Bottom Row: Karen Kmeid, Jumana Salamey

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## From Venice, Italy to L.A.'s Venice Boulevard



(From left to right) Gerardo Cardenas, Andy Nagraj, and Marvin Quihada in Silk Road Rising's 2007 World Premiere of Shishir Kurup's *Merchant on Venice*, directed by Stuart Carden.

In 2007, we produced the World Premiere of Shishir Kurup's *Merchant on Venice*, directed by Stuart Carden. Venice, Italy intersects with L.A.'s Venice Boulevard in a wickedly funny, wildly inventive, and politically provocative re-imagining of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Written in iambic pentameter and vividly colored by pop references from India, the US, and South America, Kurup fuses Shakespeare with Bollywood, L.A. Punk, Hindu-Muslim tensions, and a distinctly American landscape.



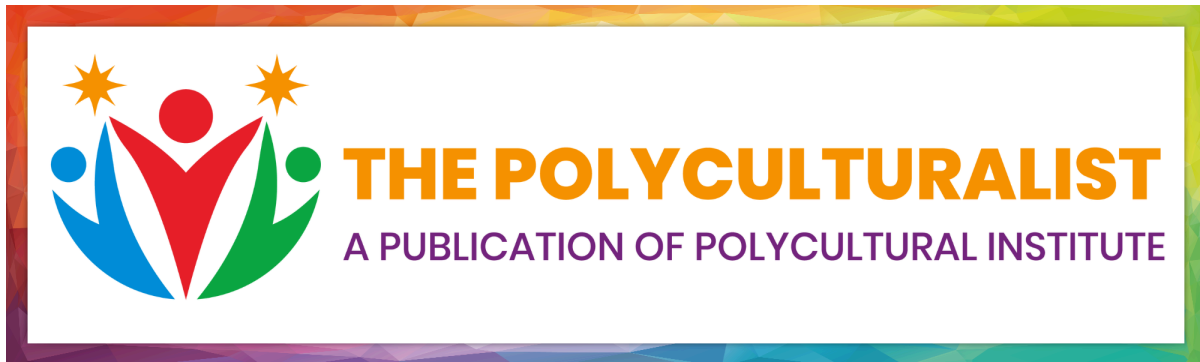
Featured in the video: Actors Pranidhi Varshney, Amira Sabbagh, Andy Nagraj, and Marvin Eduardo Quihada

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## The Thank You Corner

Your support enables Silk Road Rising to grow the canon of Pan-Asian, North African, and Muslim stories throughout the American theatre from our home base here in Chicago.

thank you  
thank you  
thank you



Our latest offering of *The Polyculturalist* features Lanna Joffrey, actor, spoken word performer, writer, and a member of Polycultural Institute's Advisory Council.

## Multi-Migrant Artmaking with Lanna Joffrey

*This interview was conducted on February 22, 2023, by Silk Road Rising's Dr. Tasneem Mandviwala.*

**Tasneem:** You recently founded the Hyphen Artist Collective in the UK. How does polyculturalism relate to this endeavor?



**Lanna:** As an artist, you do a lot of self-reflection because people constantly expect you to be able to define yourself. What I have enjoyed embracing is all the things I am rather than trying to be one thing. I wanted to start a collective that celebrated that, not only in terms of people's cultural backgrounds, but also in terms of their artistic backgrounds. In our industry you often feel the pressure to be one thing; for example, a writer, an actor, a producer. I've collected a beautiful group of artists who are stage managers and scientists and actors and producers and that's just one member of my collective. In terms of my own background, I've come from multiple places; I am from the world. It is important for us to highlight that, especially in the UK and the US, there are so many people who have come from somewhere else and who are more than one thing. They are from multiple homes. Instead of trying to diminish that, I want to celebrate it through this collective.



**Tasneem:** You describe yourself as a multi-migrant. What does that mean, and what insights have you garnered from being a multi-migrant?

**Lanna:** I was born in Tehran, Iran. We fled before the revolution and lived in the UK for about a year before moving to Albuquerque, New

Mexico. I grew up speaking Spanish, Farsi, and English, entrenched in multiple cultures. Then I moved to New York City and was there for 13 years before coming to London, where I have now been living almost 10 years. These migrations, some forced, some chosen, have created who I am. There are people who will challenge your identity: Are you Iranian? Are you not? How Iranian are you? I have realized through migration experiences that I don't need to prove my answers. I don't need to justify my Iranianness, or Americanness, or whatever—they are all part of me. Human beings are not percentages. I don't need to debate with Iranian people or with white people about whether I am something or not. The paperwork of migration has also really informed me as an artist and about how migration is not as easy as we think it is. There is a cost to it as much as there is a joy.



Lanna in Playwright Horizons 2017 World Premiere of Zayd Dohrn's *The Profane* in New York, NY.

**Tasneem:** You are an award-winning actor and writer from Iran who has trained and worked in the UK and US. What have been some of the most significant cultural influences on your work?

**Lanna:** A lot of the spoken word pieces that I perform are very much centered around the experience of migration as an Iranian, and the

impact of coming from one country to another and trying to adapt and understand how to live in different worlds; I especially center women's voices. My play, *Valiant*, is a verbatim play of 13 women's war stories from the twentieth century, from the US to Russia to Japan to El Salvador. To me, those are stories that we don't hear very often. In the narrative of war, we focus on the male voice, on the men deciding who goes to war, and the male soldiers who fight that war, but we rarely focus on the women. This writing is really important to me.



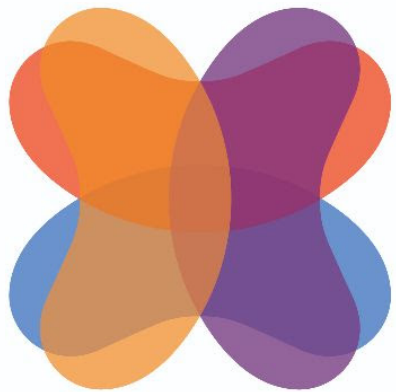
Lanna in Lyric Stage Company of Boston's 2006 production of Heather Raffo's *Nine Parts of Desire*, Boston, MA.

**Tasneem: Please tell us a story of a time when someone surprised you because they supported you or demonstrated compassion towards you even though you expected otherwise.**

**Lanna:** When Trump's travel ban started turning Iranians away even though they were citizens or had visas, it was a terrifying time for me. At the same time, a friend shared an article about senators who were trying to pass a bill that US citizenship holders who had been born in countries like Iran would be demoted to second-class citizens. I didn't know what that would entail, and the fear weighed down on me. At the time, I was in the UK—I had booked a job and I asked the lovely artistic director for a signed letter of employment that proved I was coming back to the US to perform this show. Even though I was a US citizen, I had to prepare because it felt I would be at the mercy of whichever customs agent I got. I was so nervous going up to the customs agent in New York. They just said, "Okay, cool," and let me through. I don't know if that was necessarily compassion, but they saw where I was from, and they just let me through. I remember that was a huge relief, and the worry that had been boring down on me since the travel ban had happened lifted a bit.



A passport collage poster for Lanna's upcoming spoken word show about multi-migration entitled "Who What Where When Why & How," London, England.



**Polycultural**  
Institute

**Connecting People, Cultures, and Communities**

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**Support a Vision of America that is  
Welcoming, Polycultural, and Dynamic.**

**Support a Vision of the World that is  
Open, Willing, and Creative.**

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