CONTACT: Denise Schneider and Ata Younan **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

312.443.5151 or [Press@GoodmanTheatre.org](mailto:Press@GoodmanTheatre.org) **January 25, 2023**

**ATRA ASDOU LEADS THE CAST OF MARTIN YOUSIF ZEBARI’S *LAYALINA*,**

**A WORLD PREMIERE DIRECTED BY SIVAN BATTAT, MARCH 3 – APRIL 2 IN THE OWEN THEATRE**

**\*\*\*MARCH 8 “SWANASA COMMUNITY NIGHT” INCLUDES PRE- AND POST-SHOW RECEPTIONS WITH THE ARTISTS\*\*\***

(Chicago, IL) Goodman Theatre ushers in spring with its first world premiere production by a SWANA (South West Asian and North African) playwright: **Martin Yousif Zebari**’s *Layalina*, a surprising new play about how multi-generational families fall apart—and find each other again—amidst turbulent global and social change. **Sivan Battat** directs the cast of five, featuring **Waseem Alzer** (Sahir/Amin), **Atra Asdou** (Karima/Layal), **Ali Louis Bourzgui** (Young Mazin/Yousif), **Mattico David** (Yasir/Mazin) and **Becca Khalil** (Young Layal/Marwa). Originally developed in the Goodman’s *New Stages* Festival, *Layalina* appears March 3 – April 2, 2023 in the 350-seat flexible Owen Theatre; opening night is Monday, March 13. Tickets ($15 –$45, subject to change) are available at GoodmanTheatre.org/Layalina or by phone at 312-443-3800. The Goodman is grateful for the support of The Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust (Lead Funder of IDEAA Programming) and ITW (Corporate Sponsor Partner).

“This story is inspired broadly by my own family's journey of immigrating from Baghdad to Skokie,” said playwright **Martin Yousif Zebari**. “I've always been in awe of the ways in which displacement followed by assimilation has shaped my family's future. Their need to simultaneously fit in *and* stand out. I've weaved in real events, exaggerated truths and fictional resolutions to show not what my own family is like but what any family *can* look like.”

Director **Sivan Battat** adds, “I am delighted and honored to be collaborating with Martin to realize this story at Goodman Theatre. By grounding in the particular specificity of this family and their journey, Martin invites us into a story with many universal sites of resonance: from how to live in a relationship to parental expectations, to navigating sibling rivalries, yearning for someone you can't have, wrestling with how to define yourself in your family and in the world, or even figuring out how to hit a joint for the first time. These characters, like my family, so often talk around the thing they truly mean, and find a way to say it with their hands, through food, or sewing, or touch. In rehearsal, I am excited to work with this brilliant cast to excavate the truths, fears, yearnings, shames and joys that hover inside of the words Martin has penned.”

Special events include a “SWANASA Community Night”—where South West Asian, North African and South Asian community members are invited to gather for food and conversation ahead of the evening performance of *Layalina*. The event takes place on March 8 from 6 – 7:30pm at the Goodman. Following the 7:30pm performance, playwright Martin Yousif Zebari and director Sivan Battat will answer questions from audience members; tickets are available at [GoodmanTheatre.org/SWANASA](https://www.goodmantheatre.org/swanasa).

In *Layalina,* it’s 2003 in Baghdad, and newly-wed Layal and her family prepare to immigrate to a Chicago suburb. Seventeen years later, Layal’s life looks unimaginably different from what she had envisioned two decades prior, as she and her siblings explore queerness, face their grief and discover what it takes to make home in a new place. *Layalina* was cultivated as a developmental production during Goodman’s 17th annual *New Stages* Festival—a free celebration and discovery of new works by some of the country’s finest established and emerging playwrights, under the leadership of Director of New Works **Jonathan L. Green**.

The creative team includes **casaboyce studio** (Set Design); **Dina El-Aziz** (Costume Design); **Jason Lynch** (Lighting Design); **Eric Backus** and **Ronnie Malley** (Sound Design). Casting is by **Rachael Jimenez**, CSA and **Lauren Port**, CSA. Dramaturgy by **Jonathan L. Green** and **Yasmin Zacaria Mikhaiel**.

**Jaci Entwisle** is the Production Stage Manager and **Abigail Medrano** is the Stage Manager.

Martin Yousif Zebari is an Iraqi-born, Assyrian-American actor and playwright based in Los Angeles. Their play *Layalina* received two workshops and staged readings as part of Goodman Theatre's *Future Labs* and National Queer Theatre's *Criminal Queerness Festival*and most recently received a workshop production in Goodman Theatre’s New Stages Festival. As an actor, their credits include *Yasmina’s Necklace* and *The Winter’s Tale*(Goodman Theatre); *Drowning in Cairo*(Golden Thread Productions*); For the Right Reasons*(Atlantic Theatre Company)*;* *Mosque4Mosque* (National Queer Theatre); *Guards at the Taj* (Steppenwolf Theatre); *Mary Stuart* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *The Hard Problem* (Court Theatre); *Human Terrain*  (Broken Nose Theatre); *A Christmas Carol* (Milwaukee Repertory Theatre); *Macbeth*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Failure: A Love Story* and *The Magical Mind of Billy Shakespeare* (Illinois Shakespeare Festival); and they have appeared on NBC’s *Chicago Med*. They hold a BFA in Acting from the Arts University of Bournemouth, England and is represented by Stewart Talent Chicago.

Sivan Battat is a director whose New York credits include assistant directing *Trouble in Mind*on Broadway, *Who the Fuck is Ahmed* (Lincoln Performing Arts Centre); *She He Me* (National Queer Theater); *Baba Karam*&*McArabia* (Atlantic Middle Eastern Mixfest); *Pie Shop Play* (Corkscrew Theater Festival); and *East o’, West o’!,* (ANTFest, Ars Nova). Regional credits include *Edessa of Baghdad*(B-Street Theatre); *His Majesty, Herself*(Adventure Theatre MTC); *The Night Traveller*(Cutting Ball Theater); *Close to Home* (Uprising Theatre); and *Coexistence My Ass*(Harvard University/Tour). They are the Associate Artistic Director of Noor Theatre, the Roundabout Directing Fellow, the Musical Directing Fellow with the Drama League and a member of Theatre Communications Group’s Rising Leaders of Color.

**THE COMPANY OF *Layalina* (in alphabetical order)**

***For images, bios and additional information about the artists, visit the*** [***Play Detail Page***](https://www.goodmantheatre.org/layalina)***.***

Sahir/Amin…Waseem Alzer  
Karima/Layal………Atra Asdou   
Young Mazin/Yousif……Ali Louis Bourzgui

Yasir/Mazin…………Mattico David

Young Layal/Marwa……..Becca Khalil

Understudies for this production include Angel Alzeidan (Young Layal/Marwa), Chris Khoshaba (Young Mazin/Yousif/Sahir/Amin), Jonathan Shaboo (Yasir/Mazin) and Shadee Vossoughi (Karima/Layal)

Set Design by casaboyce studio

Costume Design by Dina El-Aziz

Lighting Design by Jason Lynch

Sound Design by Eric Backus and Ronnie Malley

Casting is by Rachael Jimenez, CSA and Lauren Port, CSA.   
Dramaturgy by Jonathan L. Green and Yasmin Zacaria Mikhaiel.

Jaci Entwisle is the Production Stage Manager and Abigail Medrano is the Stage Manager.

**ENHANCED AND ACCESSIBLE PERFORMANCES**

*Visit Goodman theatre.org/Access for more information about Goodman Theatre’s accessibility efforts.*

Touch Tour and Audio-Described Performance: Sunday, March 26, 12:30pm Touch Tour; 2pm performance – The action/text is audibly enhanced for patrons via headset. *NOTE: Touch Tours for the 2022/2023 Season will not have access to the stage due to current health and safety protocols, but will feature alternate pre-show sensory introductions.*

ASL-Interpreted: Saturday, April 1 at 2pm – An American Sign Language interpreter signs the action/text as played.

Spanish Subtitles: Saturday April 1 at 8pm.

Open-Captioned: Sunday, April 2 at 2pm – An LED sign presents dialogue in sync with the performance.

**ABOUT GOODMAN THEATRE**

Chicago’s theater since 1925, **Goodman Theatre** is a not-for-profit arts and community organization in the heart of the Loop, distinguished by the excellence and scope of its artistic programming and community engagement. The theater’s artistic priorities include new play development (more than 150 world or American premieres), large scale musical theater works and reimagined classics. Artists and productions have earner two Pulitzer Prizes, 22 Tony Awards and more than 160 Jeff Awards, among other accolades. The Goodman is the first theater in the world to produce all 10 plays in August Wilson’s “American Century Cycle.” Its longtime annual holiday tradition *A Christmas Carol*, now in its fifth decade, has created a new generation of theatergoers in Chicago. The Goodman also frequently serves as a production and program partner with national and international companies and Chicago’s Off-Loop theaters.

Using the tools of the theatrical profession, the Goodman’s Education and Engagement programs aim to develop generations of citizens who understand the cultures and stories of diverse voices. The Goodman’s Alice Rapoport Center for Education and Engagement is the home of these programs, which are offered free of charge for Chicago youth—85% of whom come from underserved communities—schools and life-long learners.

Goodman Theatre was founded by William O. Goodman and his family in honor of their son Kenneth, an important figure in Chicago’s cultural renaissance in the early 1900s. The Goodman family’s legacy lives on through the continued work and dedication of Kenneth’s family, including Albert Ivar Goodman, who with his late mother, Edith-Marie Appleton, contributed the necessary funds for the creation on the new Goodman center in 2000.

Today, Goodman Theatre is led by Artistic Director **Susan Booth** and Executive Director/CEO **Roche Schulfer**. Theater leadership also includes the distinguished members of the Artistic Collective: **Rebecca Gilman**, **Dael Orlandersmith**, **Henry Godinez**, **Steve Scott**, **Kimberly Senior**, **Chuck Smith** and **Mary Zimmerman**. **Jeff Hesse** is Chairman of Goodman Theatre’s Board of Trustees, **Fran Del Boca** is Women’s Board President and **Craig McCaw** is President of the Scenemakers Board for young professionals.

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