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## **ARI ROTH, A. LORRAINE ROBINSON COLLABORATE TO CREATE VOICES FESTIVAL PRODUCTIONS**

**While continuing Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival**

***First Show Robbie Gringras' THE GATE July 21-24 in Georgetown***

Washington, D.C. – **Ari Roth**, the theater producer, playwright, director and educator, returns to the Washington DC theater scene this month, offering the first of five new-to-DC plays, along with his long-running “Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival,” as part of a new creative partnership with **A. Lorraine Robinson**, the veteran director, producer and educator.

Under the new banner **Voices Festival Productions (VFP)**, the two promise to develop and produce plays (and the occasional musical) that stimulate debate and discourse, introspection and awareness, informed by revelation of our underlying humanity in all its color and complexity, finding resonance between those living with conflict in the Middle East and closer to home, in our nation’s capital, along the seams of our nation and its very real and perceived divides.



***Voices From a Changing Middle East at Fringe: Losing/Finding Home, Part I***

The first of VFP’s shows, in association with **Capital Fringe Festival**, is **THE GATE**, written and performed by **Robbie Gringras**, the British born and bred Jewish playwright/performer/writer/educator living and creating in Israel since 1996. His work theatrical and educational bridges the

Israel-Diaspora connection with empathy and insight, and relations with his Arab-Palestinian neighbors in the adjacent village to his is of utmost concern.

Gringras lives in the secular world, while his knowledge base and research specialties – especially after his many years studying in Jerusalem – are deeply religious. As a world-renowned solo theatre performer, he is also an inspirational speaker and teacher. As a prolific playwright, he is also a challenging and original educator. His theater creations are educational treasure chests. And his solo shows have performed throughout Europe, Hong Kong, Australia, Russia, and North and Central America, in English, Spanish, and Hebrew.

**THE GATE runs July 21–24, 2022 at W. Washington Theatre, 3222 M Street NW in Washington, DC (formerly Forever 21 Georgetown.) For Tickets:**  
[www.capitalfringe.org/events/the-gate](http://www.capitalfringe.org/events/the-gate)

**Show Blurb:** Do iron fences make good neighbors? Or resentful enemies? Should the gate that faces the local Arab village be locked shut, or should it remain open? Udi, who lost his brother in the War of Independence, fights for the gate to be closed. Yiftach, an aging peacenik, must do all he can to signal openness to his Palestinian cousins. And Amal, the caterer from the Arab village, just wants someone to open the gate so she can get home after a long day.

THE GATE runs 45 minutes with a 15-minute Q&A talk back.

Robbie Gringras presents this compelling new show with a lightness of touch and depth of emotion that have been the hallmark of his displays of physical story theater over two decades of international performance.

How can we remain open? When must we close? And what does a thought-provoking story about a gate tell us about our world today?

THE GATE is Gringras' ninth physical story theater show to tour internationally, as he continues to explore the potential of solo story theater to stretch the heart of the social self. After performing THE MAHABHARATA in the UK with Gregory Thompson's AANDBC Theater Company many years ago, he co-founded his own physical story theater company called Besht Tellers – performing Jewish-themed story theater on London's West End and throughout the world. Since emigrating to Israel, he has taught at Israel's main theater schools, directed numerous plays, and created many solo pieces, including ABOUT THE ORANGES, THAT'S WHY I'M (STILL) HERE, THE GIFT, and SHABBES! At Theater J, his short play THE EIGHTH JEWISH CHILD was presented in 2009 as a response piece to Caryl Churchill's controversial SEVEN JEWISH CHILDREN: A PLAY FOR GAZA, and his Makom-commissioned, interactive play PAUL HAS A BAD DAY (OR THE BIG BLUE TENT & JEWISH DISSENT) was presented at Theater J as part of its 2011 Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival. During the pandemic, he created "Stories for Lockdown! Tales from the Hill."

Gringras is co-author of a new book, “Stories for the Sake of Argument,” co-written with Abi Dauber Sterne.

Of his returning to perform in Washington, Gringras remarks: “*The Gate* explores our deep need to take a fixed response to threats on who we are, and in so doing we get stuck in a dogmatism that can make matters worse. In that sense, the show is about all of us, stuck in a polarized world full of fear, violence, and hatred, convinced of our righteousness yet paralyzed to break free of our boxes. All solo story theater asks the question: To what extent can I step into someone else’s shoes? And can this journey of ‘going to visit’ another worldview leave me changed when I ‘come home?’”

“I’m delighted to ask these questions together with the DC audiences,” Gringras writes. “*The Gate* asks crucial questions gently, and in these extreme times I hope to offer a gentleness to our righteous rage.”

On his blog, Gringras writes “Presenting the show to mainly progressive-leaning audiences has been, in a sense, too ‘easy,’ because they have already made up their minds about the characters. Yiftach, the guy who believes in keeping the gate open (his name in Hebrew is literally ‘he will open’), is always received more easily than the guy who believes in keeping the gate shut... [But] I think we are now beginning to reach a more instinctive appreciation of the difference between physical separation and emotional separation. As we avoid physical proximity with elderly loved ones, we do not avoid emotional connection. Putting a physical barrier in the way of our coming together does not necessarily imply emotional rejection.

“...We have no choice but to begin to value timely, discriminate, barriers. Tragically, opening or closing borders is now not only about immigration policy, but also about national and global health,” Gringras writes. “*The Gate* doesn’t address Corona, and the gate in the story is not about quarantine. But the words ‘open’ and ‘closed’ may well gain different associations, reverberating in additional directions. In some hearts, in some connotations, perhaps the opposite of ‘open’ might also be ‘safe.’”

### ***VFP In Residence at The Corner at Whitman-Walker, September 29–November 13***

In the fall, Voices Festival Productions takes up residency at the new, not previously seen venue, The Corner at Whitman-Walker, 1701 14th St NW, Washington, D.C.. Part II of its Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival offers three new plays in production, and an additional workshop reading of a provocative, new, award-winning drama inaugurating its **Voices From a Changing Nation** series. VFP’s The Corner at Whitman-Walker Residency will include the World Premiere staging of:

**MY BRIEF BUT CALAMITOUS AFFAIR WITH THE MINISTER OF CULTURE & CENSORSHIP OR DEATH OF THE DIALOGIC IN THE AMERICAN THEATER** by VFP founder **Ari Roth** and directed by **John Vreeke** (September 29–October 23, 2022). It’s followed by the American premiere of:

**I, DAREEN T** by Israeli actress/playwright **Einat Weizman** and Palestinian poet **Dareen Tatour**, directed by **Nitzan Cohen** (October 20-30, 2022). Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival programming concludes with the workshop production of:

**HOME?** by New York-based, Palestinian-Israeli actress, **Hend Ayoub**, directed by **Carey Perloff** (October 29–November 13, 2022). VFP Artistic Producing Partner **A. Lorraine Robinson** directs a reading of the 2021 Yale Prize-winning play:

**APOLOGIES TO LORRAINE HANSBERRY (YOU TOO, AUGUST WILSON)** by Rachel Lynett, October 10 & 11th.

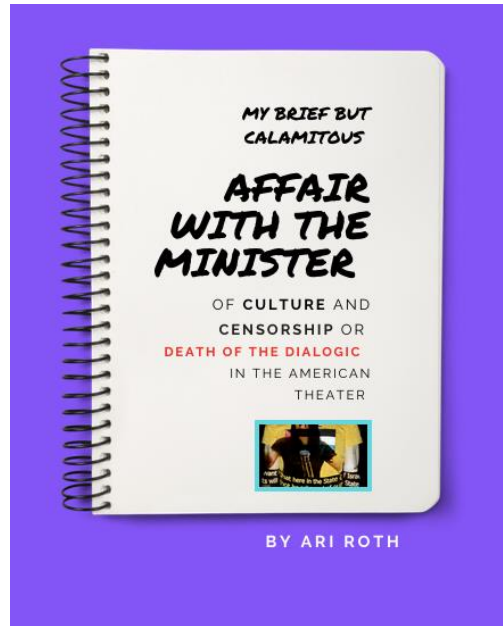
### ***VFP at The Corner at Whitman-Walker: The Plays***

Part II of “Voices From a Changing Middle East: Losing/Finding Home” begins with a close-to-the-bone, cutting-and-comic *roman a clef* about artistic dispossession, and the cost of riding-the-third-rail while making mission-driven theater.

**Show blurb:** Ari Roth’s new play, **MY BRIEF BUT CALAMITOUS AFFAIR WITH THE MINISTER OF CULTURE & CENSORSHIP OR DEATH OF THE DIALOGIC IN THE AMERICAN THEATER** is the chronicle of a collaborative fracture and cross-cultural crack-up. As directed by longtime Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company member John Vreeke, a brand-new Executive Director and her former boss return to the scene of a rehearsal room revolt that set the stage for an Artistic Director’s departure from the theater he launched with high purpose and blind spots. Restorative Justice is on the agenda but hard to find, as a fictionalized, right-wing Israeli Cabinet Minister materializes uninvited to spar with Eilat and Samad, Israeli and Palestinian theater artists/activists, while their American hosts, Virginia and the unnamed AD, get caught in different parts of the middle, navigating treacherous terrain. They try to mend the unmendable, in a journey of personal loss and learning, reckoning and renewal, pushback, contrition, boycotts and cancel culture – on both sides – all hanging in precarious balance.

Information on casting and other artistic personnel, with full bios, will be available in August for this work that’s been in intensive development throughout VFP’s first year, with in-person and virtual 29-hour workshops, and a stage reading most recently in Philadelphia at InterAct Theatre.

**CRITICS’ OPENING FOR “MY BRIEF BUT CALAMITOUS AFFAIR” WILL BE THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6 AT 7:30 PM AT THE CORNER AT WHITMAN-WALKER, 1701 14th St NW, Washington DC.**



Running in modified rep with MY BRIEF BUT CALAMITOUS AFFAIR... the American premiere of **I, DAREEN T**, opens at The Corner at Whitman-Walker on October 20 and performs through October 30.

**Show blurb:** Dovetailing with the source material of MY BRIEF BUT CALAMITOUS AFFAIR..., Israeli theatre creator, actor and activist Einat Weizman's solo documentary theatre piece is based on the story of Palestinian poet Dareen Tatour, convicted by Israeli authorities for "incitement to violence" over a poem and two posts she published on YouTube and Facebook. A long legal battle (during which she was under house arrest) ensues, as Tatour argues that her poem and posts constitute legitimate protest against the crimes of Occupation. Weizman meets Tatour during her legal struggle and accompanies her to hearings. The encounters create a friendship that gives birth to a play.



**CRITIC'S OPENING FOR "I, DAREEN T" WILL BE MONDAY, OCTOBER 24 AT 7:30 PM AT THE CORNER AT WHITMAN-WALKER, 1701 14th St NW, WASHINGTON DC.**

The final offering in the Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival is **HOME?**, a workshop production written and performed by Hend Ayoub and directed by American Conservatory Theatre Artistic Director Emerita, Carey Perloff. The play will be presented as a work-in-progress and will not be open for review, but both performer and director will be available for interview.

**Show blurb:** In Israel, she's Palestinian. In the Arab world, she's Israeli. In America, she's an "Other." From the extraordinary lead actress and director of Arena Stage's 2020 production of *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS* comes an electric one-woman show about a young woman's journey to retrieve and imagine a new sense of home. On the way she learns: *Why would you need to complete military service just to wait tables? Can you pass as an Israeli if you delete your Arab accent?* Through a panoply of vivid characters – from a five-year-old who just wants to join the neighborhood Purim party, to an Egyptian casting director who can't forget where she comes from, to her dying mother who longs for her daughter to find a place in the world – Hend shares a deeply personal, true story about a search for the place that many of us take for granted: Home.



In addition to its Middle East offerings, VFP will be presenting a two-night reading of **APOLOGIES TO LORRAINE HANSBERRY (YOU TOO, AUGUST WILSON)** by Rachel Lynett, **directed by A. Lorraine Robinson.**

Show blurb: Winner of the 2021 Yale Drama Series Prize (selected by Pulitzer Prize winning playwright, Paula Vogel), Rachel Lynett's futuristic comedy is set in the fictional world of a post-

second Civil War, in Bronx Bay, an all-Black state and neighborhood established to protect "Blackness." As Jules' new partner, Yael, moves to town, community members argue over if Yael, who is Dominican, can stay. Questions of safety and protection surround both Jules and Yael as the utopia of Bronx Bay confronts within itself where the line is when it comes to defining who is Black and who gets left out in the process.

### ***VFP Leadership***

**A. Lorraine Robinson** (Artistic Producing Partner) is returning home to her theatre festival producing roots by joining Founding Producing Partner **Ari Roth** in developing Voices Festival Productions.



**A. LORRAINE ROBINSON**

ARTISTIC PRODUCING PARTNER

(She/Her/Hers)

With 29 years of professional theatre directing, dramaturgy, and producing experience (including a regional theatre directing award, and 17 years of Community Arts Education theatrical production experience developing emerging artists of color that garnered three Honorable Mention Awards from the Tony Awards, and a fourth nomination for Theatre Education Excellence), Lorraine is ecstatically happy to pitch a new tent, and develop new auspices under which to produce and present works which champion storytelling, artistry, and humanity – in all its colors. “I look forward to creating a new platform for compelling and diverse voices.”

In a personal statement, Robinson writes, “Working in theatre festivals, developing new works, exploring multimedia, and works by stylistically challenging artists, especially the voices of artists of color and those of women, has been a through line for me since the very beginnings of my directing, dramaturgy and producing career – from the Big D Festival of the Unexpected at the Dallas Theater Center to Rites and Reason Theatre’s George Houston Bass Play Festival, to works cultivated and produced through MuseFire Productions (a multimedia theatre and film production company which I co-founded with Michelle T. Hall and ran as Artistic Producing

Director for seven years,) that included our Summer Sizzles Festival which produced a different work within each of the four quadrants of DC.”

She continues, “In Ari, I’ve found both an experienced, knowledgeable producer, as well as an insightful, empathetic, and creative artist with whom to partner. We’re going to champion each other’s work and make space for other artists to join us as producing collaborators as well. I’m excited for this new endeavor and what we stir up next!”

Writing together in a post, Voices partners Ari Roth and A. Lorraine Robinson offer a vision for creating a mutually supportive working environment. “As a new company, we are building out our shared values and protocols,” they say. “In addition to our mission, we have iterated Company Safety Documents, including our VFP Anti-Harassment Policy, Rehearsal Room Standards (based on the work of our colleagues at Not in Our House: Chicago), an Intimacy Pillars Reference Guide, Concern Resolution Form, COVID Safety Plan, and more. We have been following and reviewing these guidelines during our workshop rehearsals thus far, soliciting feedback from artists in support of an effective rehearsal, performance, and workspace culture.”

**Ari Roth** (Founding Producing Partner) created Voices Festival Productions as an LLC in June, 2021, eight months after stepping down from Mosaic Theater Company of DC after founding the troupe in December of 2014. The pandemic occasioned both a rupture, and a retreat, and then significant opportunity to reflect, regenerate and reboot with new intentionality and a more cohesive collaborative partnership. Roth has served as an Artistic Director in Washington DC since 1997 when he became Theater J’s third artistic leader, inheriting a staff of one and a \$90,000 budget. Over 18 seasons, in partnership with the DC Jewish Community Center (the agency at which the theater remains one of 20 programs), he helped Theater J grow into the largest, most progressive and respected Jewish theater in North America.



**ARI ROTH**  
FOUNDING PRODUCING PARTNER  
(He/Him/His)



While seven of his own plays were staged at Theater J over the course of 129 productions (including 44 world premieres, earning the troupe the label, “The Premier Theatre For Premieres” from *The New York Times* in 2006), none of his playwriting made it onto a Mosaic platform. After Roth’s much publicized dismissal from the JCC (protested by an unprecedented 120 artistic directors from across the county writing in support of Roth’s programming), he hit the ground running at Mosaic, producing with intensified purpose – some 36 productions over five-and-a-half seasons (with multiple Helen Hayes Awards and Nominations, including the 2017 HHA John Aniello Award for Outstanding Emerging Theatre Company).

In hindsight, however, the pace, and pressure all took a toll on staff, on board, on leadership relations, and on the artistic director as artist. Following his difficult departure from Mosaic, amid staff complaints during a time of great turbulence in the field, Roth’s grappling – both with personal short-comings, while observing the growing fractiousness in the cultural arena – compelled him to create from a deeper, more patient place that’s been part of the transformative process that Roth has rigorously worked through. Much of it, he says with hope, will show up in the play.

A significant aspect of the professional rebooting has involved the development of an increasingly collaborative and supportive relationship with A. Lorraine Robinson. “As Lorraine notes, we were fixed up by a Mosaic subscriber and supporter (Sylvia Zwi) who also happened to be a co-worker of Lorraine’s and a revered Teaching Artist at Wolf Trap. This mutual friend has always had great taste and a good eye for things that fit well together. And she was right about Lorraine and me! We offered complementing attributes to each other at just the right moment. We gave each other a sense of discovery during a time in the pandemic when opportunities and partnerships were closing down. Friends and colleagues were leaving the field in droves. We were leaving the institutional world with weariness and war wounds (at least I was), while still harboring a great deal of love for the art, and a desire to practice it ourselves, in collaboration with others, more than we had before. We grew increasingly curious and ever more supportive of each other’s interests and dream projects. Lorraine took to the new play I was writing (*My Brief But Calamitous Affair...*) – not just its content, but its form; its humor; its stylistic playfulness. “I should be directing this!” she exclaimed, even while allowing that Roth longtime-collaborator John Vreeke (six times nominated for a Helen Hayes Award for Best Director) had been attached to the project (and to the earlier play upon which the new play was based) for years. “Lorraine’s enthusiasm was a big deal, and a turning point in our conversations,” Roth notes. “It became clear that we might have fun and get things done in a new producing context. Along with great synergy, Lorraine also has complementing but different curatorial interests from mine and that is an additional part of the excitement in collaborating.”

The size and structure of Voices Festival Productions – both by design and limitation – is necessarily leaner than previous Roth ventures. It lacks both a full-time staff and Board of Directors, but works closely with the nationally-recognized Fractured Atlas as its Fiscal Sponsor, which requires full financial accountability as it disperses funds raised by VFP as tax deductible contributions from supporters only after VFP submits documentation in line with its approved,

charitable-worthy proposals. VFP has raised over a quarter-million dollars since August, 2021 from some 75 donors, many of whom were previously supportive of Roth's efforts at Mosaic and Theater J.

"It's wonderful to be able to still call DC an artistic home. And it's rewarding to have people here – artists and arts supporters – friends, family, and neighbors too – eager for a returning to healthy, urgently-honest, thought-provoking theater producing," Roth notes.

"I'm glad to be writing and glad to be jointly curating; making artistic choices in partnership with Lorraine, and in creative conversations with director John Vreeke and a cohort of dramaturgs, most especially journalist and playwright **Debbie Minter Jackson**, dramaturg **Salma S. Zohdi** and dramaturgical cultural consultant **Adam Ashraf el-Sayigh**, and over a dozen theater artists who've joined us for exploratory workshops. To be accepted at established venues like Capital Fringe Fest and Woolly Mammoth – to be invited in and offered this opportunity to stage Act III in my Producer's Journey here in DC, now in tandem with a new partnership – is very moving, humbling, and restorative."

The author of over 20 full-length and one-act plays, five of which have been nominated for Helen Hayes Awards, Roth is the author of the triptych, "The Born Guilty Cycle," first produced as BORN GUILTY at Arena Stage, directed by **Zelda Fichandler** in 1991 and later at Theater J directed by John Vreeke along with its sequel. His comedy OH, THE INNOCENTS, winner of the Clifford M. Davy Award at GeVa Theatre, was directed by **Joe Mantello** and his play PRIVATE LESSONS was directed by **Michael Grief** at the Circle Rep Lab. His Helen Hayes nominated LIFE IN REFUSAL was directed by **Wendy C. Goldberg** at Theater J, and his most recent DC production, ANDY AND THE SHADOWS was directed at Theater J by **Daniella Topol** in 2013. In 2010, Roth was named as one of "The Forward 50," honoring nationally prominent "men and women who are leading the American Jewish community into the 21st century, and in 2017 he was given the **DC Mayor's Arts Award for Visionary Leadership**.

Roth continues to teach his signature course, "A Theater of Politics and The Politics of Theater" for the University of Michigan's "Michigan in Washington" Program, where he and A. Lorraine Robinson (serving as official Guest Artist for the class) taught plays emerging from the Racial Reckoning on Broadway and in DC, as well as offering a comprehensive look at a half dozen plays emerging from the controversy-generating programming of the Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival (documented in Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Shipler's 2015 book, "Freedom of Speech: Mightier Than The Sword," a work that served as a text book for the course). Ari and Lorraine's partnership in the classroom mirrors their partnership as co-producers for Voices Festival Productions, and sets the stage for this year's robust opening, with much more in store.

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