Victory Gardens Theater Announces
The 2016/17 Season Directors Inclusion Initiative Assistant Directors

Chicago, IL– Victory Gardens Theater is proud to announce the 2016/17 Season Directors Inclusion Initiative Assistant Directors include Kaiser Ahmed (Hand To God), Arianna Soloway (Roz and Ray), Ameenah Kaplan (A Wonder In My Soul), Charlotte Drover (Queen), and Alyssa Vera Ramos (Native Gardens).

This initiative, started last season, aims to encourage and develop talented and emerging Chicago stage directors identifying as people of color, disabled, women, transgender, and gender non-conforming. Victory Gardens Theater continues its commitment to cultivating a new generation of diverse stage directors who create dynamic theater work from their unique points of view.

"We are thrilled to welcome these exciting artists into the Victory Gardens Theater family. This year we focused on accepting participants who were at unique crossroads in their careers. Not only do they come from different styles, approaches, and training backgrounds, each is following their own unique artistic path proving there is not just one way to traverse the theatrical landscape. Over the course of the next season, these directors will be given the opportunity to assistant direct a production matched to their skills and interests. Beyond that, they will be mentored by the artistic staff, given resources to further their career, and become an integral part of the VG family tree," comments Laura Alcalá Baker, Artistic Programs Manager.

About the Directors
Kaiser Zaki Ahmed (Hand To God) was born in Bangladesh, raised in Michigan and has been working in Chicago Theater since 2004. After graduating from Columbia College Chicago with a B.A. in Theatre Directing, Kaiser went on to found the Jackalope Theatre Co. in 2008, serving as Artistic Director until 2012 and is currently Associate Artistic Director. Directing credits include The Raid, The Killing of Michael X, Long Way Go Down, Slaughter City, Last Exodus of American Men (Jackalope Theatre), The Late Henry Moss, House of Yes (Artistic Home Theatre), Washer/Dryer and the upcoming Vanya (Rasaka Theatre). Kaiser is also an Artistic Associate at The Artistic Home Theatre and a 2015-16 Eugene O'Neill National Directors Fellowship Finalist. Kaiser also believes acting makes him a better director; he can be seen on various stages, proudly represented by Gray Talent.

Arianna Soloway (Roz and Ray) is a director and dramaturg from Chicago. She graduated from Columbia College Chicago in 2013 with a BFA in directing for theater. She recently directed Carrie & Francine with Haven Theatre Company and Guardians at Mary Arrchie Theatre as well as short plays for Bechdel Fest at Broken Nose Theatre, Paragon Play Festival at Otherworld Theatre Company, and Ripped: The Living Newspaper Festival at American Blues Theater. She assistant directed Red Handed Otter at A Red Orchid Theatre, A Small Fire at Steep Theatre and Seminar at Haven Theatre Company. Dramaturgy credits include Once in A Lifetime at Strawdog Theatre and Yankee Tavern at American Blues Theatre where she also served as Outreach Manager from 2013-2015. When not doing theater, Arianna works as a real estate agent and enjoys playing guitar and ukulele, knitting, and DIY projects.

Ameenah Kaplan (A Wonder In My Soul) is a graduate of the Academy of Art University Film School. She attended New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts for Acting. She will be directing The Royale by Marco Ramirez (Daredevil) at Seattle’s ACT this summer. She most recently directed Molodi: Up Close
And Personal starring Las Vegas’ premiere body percussion troupe at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino. Her most recent short, Man With a Movie Camera premiered at Hollyshorts Film Festival in 2014. She directed the short film The American Failure to multiple festivals and awards. She directed the multi-award nominated show: Bash’d: A Rap Opera. She also recently directed Black Sheep & Other People’s Organs in Noah Wylie’s Young Playwright’s Festival. She was in the original cast of Stomp and serves as a drum coach for Blueman Group. Choreography credits include: Dancing With The Stars (ABC); The Brother’s Size, In the Red & Brown Water (Fountain Theatre), The Women of Brewster Place, Altar Boyz, Title of Show (Celebration Theatre); The Royale (CTG); Frosty the Snow Maniolow, A Christmas Carol King, Santa Claus is Coming to Motown, The Comedy of Aerosmith, Jackson Frost, Alice in One Hit Wonderland II, It’s a Stevie Wonderful Life (Troubadour Theatre Co). Awards and Honors: 2007 NAACP Award: Best Choreography; 2007 LA Weekly Award: Best Fight Choreography. 2007 Richard E. Sherwood Award for Emerging Director. 2009 LA Weekly Award: Best Choreography, Altar Boyz, 2010 NAACP Award: Best Choreography, The Women of Brewster Place; 2013 Ovation Award: Best Choreography, The Royale; 2012 LA Weekly Queen Of Angels Award.

Charlotte Drover (Queen) is a Chicago-based freelance director and choreographer, specializing in physical work. She moved to Chicago in 2013 to intern for Lookingglass Theatre’s education department, after graduating with a BA in Theatre from Drew University. She now works with Lookingglass as a teaching artist. Charlotte has assisted directors at Collaboraction, Something Marvelous, the Hypocrites, and the Goodman. In 2014, Charlotte adapted and directed an original adaptation of The Pit and The Pendulum for the Chicago Mammals, said by the Chicago Reader to “get under your skin in a terrifying and sensory-adding way.” This past year, she choreographed for Profiles’ last production Jerusalem, attended Director’s Lab Toronto, and directed the original piece The After, written by Samantha Dedian for Collaboraction’s final Sketchbook Festival. Charlotte Drover is currently Associate Director for Tara Branham on Jackalope Theatre’s octagon, and will be directing Venus in Fur for Circle Theatre in 2017.

Alyssa Vera Ramos (Native Gardens) is a director, actor, and theatre maker, and a founding member of women of color performance collective FEMelanin. Directing credits include Lively Stones (20% Theatre Company); the 6th Annual 1-Minute Play Festival; I am the Rat (The Scarlet S’ Project; Artist-in-Residence at Free Street Theater); Out of Silence (Chicago Home Theater Festival); The Barrio Project (Center Theatre); Can I Hit It? and Project Us (FYI); The Naked People Play (20%'s Snapshots Festival); Generation Sex (Teatro Luna at Chicago Fringe); and The Liberation of Carmela Lopez (Northwestern University). Alyssa teaches creative sexual health at the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health (ICAH) with the FYI Performance Company, where she also collaboratively devises participatory theatre experiences. Upcoming Director-Developer projects include plays about the forced sterilization of Puerto Rican women (with her novelist mother Marisel Vera) and about replacing stigma with support of pregnant and parenting youth (with FYI). Alyssa holds a Bachelor's Degree in Theatre from Northwestern University.
www.alyssaveraramos.com

About Victory Gardens Theater
Under the leadership of Artistic Director Chay Yew, Victory Gardens is dedicated to artistic excellence while creating a vital, contemporary American Theater that is accessible and relevant to all people through productions of challenging new plays and musicals. Victory Gardens Theater is committed to the development, production and support of new plays that has been the mission of the theater since its founding, set forth by Dennis Začek, Marcelle McVay, and the original founders of Victory Gardens Theater.

Victory Gardens Theater is a leader in developing and producing new theater work and cultivating an inclusive Chicago theater community. Victory Gardens' core strengths are nurturing and producing dynamic and inspiring new plays, reflecting the diversity of our city’s and nation’s culture through engaging diverse communities, and in partnership with Chicago Public Schools, bringing art and culture to our city’s active student population.

Since its founding in 1974, the company has produced more world premieres than any other Chicago theater, a commitment recognized nationally when Victory Gardens received the 2001 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre. Located in the Lincoln Park neighborhood, Victory Gardens Biograph Theater includes the Začek-McVay Theater, a state-of-the-art 259-seat mainstage and the 109-seat studio theater on the second floor, named the Richard Christiansen Theater.
Victory Gardens Ensemble Playwrights include Luis Alfaro, Philip Dawkins, Marcus Gardley, Ike Holter, Samuel D. Hunter, Naomi Iizuka, Tanya Saracho and Laura Schellhardt. Each playwright has a seven-year residency at Victory Gardens Theater.

The Playwrights Ensemble Alumni includes Claudia Allen, Lonnie Carter, Steve Carter, Gloria Bond Clunie, Dean Corrin, Nilo Cruz, Joel Drake Johnson, John Logan, Nicholas Patricca, Douglas Post, James Sherman, Charles Smith, Jeffrey Sweet and Kristine Thatcher.

For more information about Victory Gardens, visit www.victorygardens.org. Follow us on Facebook at Facebook.com/victorygardens, Twitter @VictoryGardens and Instagram at instagram.com/victorygardenstheater/


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