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Victory Gardens Theater announces its 2016-2017 Season

Chicago, IL– Victory Gardens Theater, under the continued leadership of Artistic Director Chay Yew, announces the lineup for its 2016-2017 Season. Victory Gardens’ 42nd Season will include the Chicago Premieres of *Hand to God* by Robert Askins, directed by Gary Griffin; *Native Gardens* by Karen Zacarias, directed by Marti Lyons; and the World Premieres of *Roz and Ray* by Karen Hartman, directed by Artistic Director Chay Yew: *A Wonder in My Soul* by Ensemble Playwright Marcus Gardley, directed by Artistic Director Chay Yew; and *Queen* by Madhuri Shekar, directed by Artistic Associate Joanie Schultz. The 42nd Season will also include a Bonus Series featuring the Chicago Premieres of *Wrestling Jerusalem* written and performed by Aaron Davidman, directed by Michael John García; *St. Jude* written and performed by Ensemble Playwright Luis Alfaro; and *A Little Bit Not Normal* written and performed by Arlene Malinowski.

"It is with tremendous excitement that we welcome friends, old and new, to be a part of our 42nd season at Victory Gardens Theater," notes artistic director Chay Yew. "We continue to be a home for the boldest and most electrifying voices in the American theater. And these new plays and comedies will entertain as well as create essential dialogue with our Chicago audiences on our nation’s most pressing issues of faith, environment, race and citizenship."

The 2016-17 Victory Gardens Theater Mainstage Season up close:

**Chicago Premiere**

*Hand to God*
By Robert Askins
Directed By Gary Griffin
September 16-October 16, 2016

The God-fearing children of Cypress, Texas spend their after-school hours practicing Christian Puppet Ministry at the local church. When one devout young boy discovers that his hand puppet has a life of its own, all hell breaks loose. Literally. In this sidesplitting and lightning-paced comedy, a satanic sock puppet named Tyrone shows the children, minister, and school bully who’s really in charge. Declared “flat-out hilarious” by *The New York Times* and described as "Sesame Street meets The Exorcist" by *The New Yorker,* *Hand to God* by Robert Askins and directed by Gary Griffin makes its Chicago premiere after thrilling audiences on Broadway last season and receiving a Tony Award nomination for Best Play.

**Co-World Premiere with Seattle Repertory Theatre**

*Roz and Ray*
By Karen Hartman
Directed by Artistic Director Chay Yew
November 11-December 11, 2016

In 1976, Ray, a newly single parent of twin hemophiliac boys, has only one goal: keep his sons alive. His days are filled with endless trips to the hospital, rigorous testing, and frequent blood transfusions. This all changes when Ray meets Roz, an optimistic and caring doctor with a miracle drug. Roz appears to be
Ray’s savior until the miracle turns into a nightmare. *Roz and Ray* tells the profound story of love, trust, sacrifice, and forgiveness between two friends. Victory Gardens Theater’s Artistic Director *Chay Yew* (*The Gospel of Lovingkindness, Death and the Maiden*) pairs with playwright *Karen Hartman* to unearth a tragic and little-known event in medical history.

World Premiere
*A Wonder in My Soul*
By *Ensemble Playwright Marcus Gardley*
Directed by *Artistic Director Chay Yew*
*February 10-March 12, 2017*

The artistic team that brought you *The Gospel of Lovingkindness* and *An Issue of Blood*, director Chay Yew and playwright Marcus Gardley, now explore the Great Migration from the Deep South to Chicago in the early 1900s. On a frigid winter’s night, a 90-year-old woman is admitted to an ICU in Bronzeville. Over the final hours of Queen’s life she teaches those around her lasting lessons of history, from the Jim Crow south to Chicago’s nightclub scene. Told through music, poetry and dance, *A Wonder in My Soul* is a beautiful story of one Queen’s journey home.

World Premiere
*Queen*
By *Madhuri Shekar*
Directed by *Artistic Associate Joanie Schultz*
*April 14-May 14, 2017*

PhD candidates Sanam and Ariel have spent the better part of the last decade exhaustively researching vanishing bee populations across the globe. Just as these close friends are about to publish a career-defining paper, Sanam stumbles upon a miscalculation. What appears to be a small error could cause catastrophic damage to their reputations, careers, and friendship. Now, Sanam is confronted with an impossible choice: look the other way or stand by her principles and accept the consequences. Directed by *Joanie Schultz* (*Cocked, The Whale*) *Queen* by *Madhuri Shekar* returns to Victory Gardens Theater after enthralling audiences last summer at the 2015 IGNITION Festival of New Plays.

Chicago Premiere
*Native Gardens*
By *Karen Zacarias*
Directed by *Marti Lyons*
*June 2–July 2, 2017*

Pablo, a high-powered lawyer and his pregnant wife Tania, a doctoral candidate, think they have hit the jackpot with their new home. It seems to have everything they dreamed of: a nice neighborhood, plenty of bedrooms for their growing family, outdoor space, and friendly neighbors. When Pablo and Tania decide to upgrade the eyesore chain link fence in their backyard, neighbors Virginia and Frank couldn’t be happier. Happy until they think their new neighbors are taking more than they deserve. A disagreement over a property line quickly spirals into a war of taste, class and entitlement in *Native Gardens*, a hilarious new comedy by *Karen Zacarias* and directed by *Marti Lyons*.

The 2016-17 Victory Gardens Theater Bonus Series:

Chicago Premiere
*Wrestling Jerusalem*
Written and Performed by *Aaron Davidman*
Directed by *Michael John Garcés*
Set in America, Israel and Palestine, *Wrestling Jerusalem* follows one man’s journey to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Written and performed by Aaron Davidman, this *tour de force* solo performance is a personal story that grapples with the complexities of identity, history and social justice. Giving voice to over a dozen different characters, Davidman sheds light on one of the most entrenched conflicts of our time.

**Chicago Premiere**

*St. Jude*

Written and Performed by *Ensemble Playwright Luis Alfaro*

Award-winning Victory Gardens Theater Playwrights Ensemble member Luis Alfaro (*Mojada, Oedipus el Rey*) returns to Chicago to perform his emotionally charged solo work. *St. Jude* takes us on a personal and powerful journey with Luis as he learns of his father’s stroke and is summoned home to the California Central Valley of his childhood. As his family gathers, Alfaro conjures memories of his youth, from picking grapes to gospel-infused big tent revivals, from family celebrations to running away from home. In Alfaro’s words, *St. Jude* takes us from “who I am” to “who I was.”

**Chicago Premiere**

*A Little Bit Not Normal*

Written and Performed by *Arlene Malinowski*

The autobiographical solo performance *A Little Bit Not Normal* revolves around a family secret that was kept silent for over six decades. With her trademark humor, Arlene Malinowski confronts her personal demon - depression. She explores the shame and secrecy that comes from mental illness, and the stigma that is attached to it. *A Little Bit Not Normal* is a poignant life-affirming journey from mental illness to recovery, and the process of naming it, claiming it and standing to be counted.

**Subscriptions**

Subscriptions start at just $126 and include access to resident theater productions, many rental company productions, and all additional public programming at the theater. Subscriptions are on sale at [www.victorygardens.org](http://www.victorygardens.org) and by phone at the Victory Gardens Box Office at The Biograph, 2433 N. Lincoln, 773.871.3000. Bonus Series packages will be on sale June 1.

Victory Gardens Theater is located at 2433 N. Lincoln Avenue, in the heart of Chicago’s Lincoln Park neighborhood. Benefits of subscribing include convenient parking; easy access via CTA, ticket exchange privileges; invitations to special events; discounted series for seniors, educators, younger audiences and persons with disabilities and pre- and post-show deals at nearby restaurants and businesses.

**About Victory Gardens Theater**

Under the leadership of Artistic Director Chay Yew, Victory Gardens Theater 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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