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DAVID WROE MUSIC DIRECTOR
presents
INVITATION TO THE Waltz

featuring
JIAPENG NIE



SATURDAY, October 5, 2019 at 7pm
First United Methodist Church, Westfield, NJ
SUNDAY, October 6, 2019 at 3pm
The Concert Hall, Drew University, Madison, NJ
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Arts & Entertainment

Yasmina's Necklace Celebrates Diversity and Understanding

By **SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY**
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

UNION — Kean University's Premiere Stages presented the New Jersey Premiere of Rohina Malik's Joseph Jefferson Award-Nominated play *Yasmina's Necklace* in its Bauer Boucher Theatre Center last weekend, with the show continuing through Sunday, September 22.

Ms. Malik has written an intriguing play that speaks to issues that face us in today's world. The story of Abdul Samee (Cesar J. Rosado) might be one of thousands of people

in 2019 who don't feel they fit in. His background is diverse: Abdul's father is an Iraqi Muslim and his mother is Puerto Rican Catholic. He refers to himself as a salad. He's felt bigotry and racism when he submits his resume for jobs. As soon as he hides his true heritage, changes his name to Sam and tells people he is Italian, he lands a job easily. Not only has he changed his name, but he marries an American, all the while seemingly turning his back on his culture.

His mother Sara (Socorro Stantiago) and father Ali (Eliud

Kauffman) tell Sam, their only child, that he has disgraced the family. Not only did Abdul change his name, but also married an American girl in a secret Las Vegas wedding, was cuckolded by her and then divorced. His life is a mess. Nursing his hurt and humiliation, Sam doesn't want to be set up on a date by anyone, much less his parents.

But grudgingly, Sam is dragged by his family, along with matchmaker Imam Kareem (Robert Manning, Jr.) to the apartment of an Iraqi refugee, Musa, (Haythem Noor) the father of a headstrong, young, unmarried woman named Yasmina (played passionately by Layan Elwazani). Yasmina's mother was killed brutally in war and the memories haunt her. The young woman's only peace comes through her artwork. She sees herself as a broken woman and wants to assist other young female refugees by offering classes for help with language, getting jobs and becoming whole. Sam and Yasmina develop a friendship in working on her not-for-profit organization, she tells him she feels damaged because of what she has seen in her life in Iraq.

"I'm not normal," she tells Sam, but doesn't reveal to him exactly what all she has been through. She's seen her city ravaged and the cultural riches in museums and art galleries looted. Her country and heritage mean everything to her. That loyalty to her culture is juxtaposed to Sam's lack of pride in his. She explains to Sam that a tree without roots cannot stand for long. A weak



FINDING HOPE...Peter Romano as Amir and Layan Elwazani as Yasmina in the Premiere Stages fascinating production of *Yasmina's Necklace* by Rohina Malik, continuing at Kean University's Premiere Stages through Sunday, September 22.

Photo courtesy of Mike Peters



FAMILY MATTERS...Robert Manning, Jr. as Imam Kareem, Socorro Santiago as Sara, Haythem Noor as Musa, Layan Elwazani as Yasmina, Eliud Kauffman as Ali, and Cesar J. Rosado as Sam in the Premiere Stages production of *Yasmina's Necklace* by Rohina Malik.

tree has weak roots that can't withstand storms whereas a "goodly tree no storm can uproot."

The necklace she wears constantly has a touching backstory involving Amir (Peter Romano), a boyhood friend who appears in mysterious flashbacks. Through that relationship the message is conveyed simply, we are all human beings and we all want peace.

The functional, ingenious set by David M. Barber consists of a suggestion of a mosque, the apartment and a home. Behind a scrim, upstage walls of black and white photographed streets are dimly lit to great effect. During flashback scenes, fantastic lighting (Cha See)

lends to the mysterious atmosphere.

Director Kareem Fahmy has brought Ms. Malik's vision to life in the most remarkable way through spot-on casting, great pacing of the realistic dialogue and smart staging. The playwright's tackling of contemporary issues is vital to understanding the world which we share.

There's no real fairy-tale ending with this fascinating two-act play, but that's what makes it beautiful. Through complexity and chaos, there is hope for peace and understanding that ends with the main characters' just holding hands.

The show runs in the Bauer Boucher Theatre Center in Vaughn

Eames Hall, located at 1000 Morris Avenue, Union, Thursdays through Sundays, through September 22. Some performances offer discussions, see the website for dates.

Ticket prices are \$30 standard, \$20 for seniors, and \$15 for students and handicapped accessible. For tickets, go to www.premierestagesatkean.com or call (908) 737-7469.

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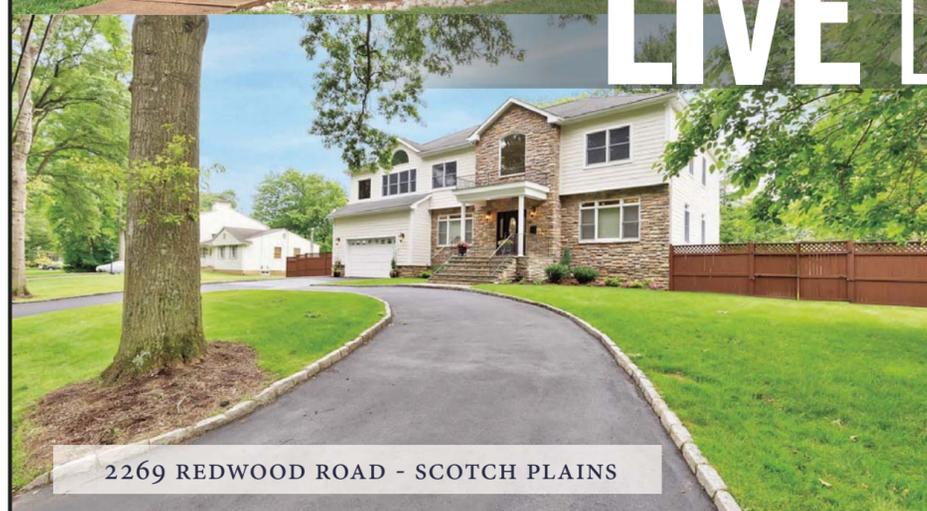


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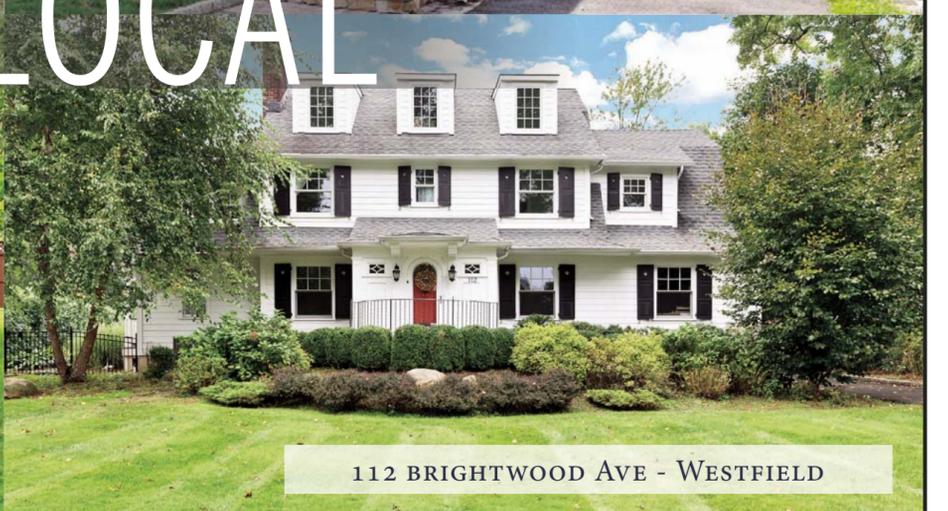


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