

About the Playwright - Zahida Rahemtulla



Zahida Rahemtulla grew up in Burnaby on the unceded territories of the hən̓q̓əmi̓n̓əm̓ and Skwx-wú7mesh-speaking peoples, and later spent years in Metchosis, Abu Dhabi, and Toronto.

Her first play, *The Wrong Bashir*—an intergenerational family comedy about the Ismaili community—premiered to sold-out, critically acclaimed runs in Vancouver and Toronto (Touchstone Theatre, 2023; Crow's Theatre, 2024). An audio version of the play will be released by CBC's PlayME in May 2025.

Her work has been recognized with multiple awards, including a Playwrights Guild of Canada Tom Hendry

Award, Theatre BC's Play of Special Merit Award, the Fringe New Play Prize, and runner-up for the national Voaden Prize in Playwriting. Her short stories have been shortlisted for the Alice Munro Short Story Festival Award and longlisted for the CBC Short Story Prize.

Zahida is very happy to be teaching in the Community Development and Outreach Department at Capilano University and in access at Blind Tiger Comedy. She is also developing new acting training programs to support community actors of colour over 55—many of whom have spent their lives working outside the arts—in pursuing professional training, most recently with Nightswimming Theatre and Talk Is Free Theatre.

Zahida loves comedy, teaching, spending time with family and friends, and exploring how theatre can be a home for humour and dialogue.

Zahida Rahemtulla is a member of the Playwrights Guild of Canada.

DEREK CHAN | Director & Panel Facilitator



Derek Chan 陳嘉昊 grew up in colonial Hong Kong, lived in Norway, and now lives and works on the unceded, stolen, and ancestral lands of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, colonially known as Vancouver. A playwright, director, performer, translator, and producer, Derek is the Managing Artistic Director of Vancouver Asian Canadian Theatre. Before that, he was a founding co-artistic director of rice & beans theatre from 2010 to 2021.

In 2015, Derek was awarded the Vancouver Fringe New Play Prize with *Starstuff: per aspera ad astra*. At the 2016 Glassco Translation Residency hosted by Playwrights' Workshop Montréal, Derek translated *Jovanni Sy's A Taste of Empire* (Cantonese title: 食盡天下/Sik Zeon Tin Haa). The play was subsequently nominated for a Dora Award (Best Touring Production) in 2018. His play, *Chicken Girl* (2019/20), won the Sydney Risk Award for Outstanding Original Play by an Emerging Playwright, and was nominated for Outstanding Original Script at the Jessies. Derek was part of the 2021 and 2024 Banff Playwrights Labs, and has been a National Arts Centre English Theatre Artist in Residence (19/20) with *yellow objects*, a new installation-exhibition in support of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. *yellow objects* won an Innovation Award at the Jessies. His follow up solo show, *Happy Valley* (2023) was selected for the Spotlight Canada pitch sessions at the Edinburgh Fringe. Derek was the co-recipient of the 2021 Simon Fraser University FCAT Young Alumni Award for his work at rice & beans theatre.

FAROUK ALSAJEE | Original Composer & Cultural Consultant



Born amidst the chaos of war in Baghdad, Iraq, Farouk Alsajee's journey is a testament to unbreakable spirit. Forced to flee his homeland at just 15, he embarked on a path of courage, seeking solace and a new beginning. In Damascus, Syria, he discovered a profound connection to music. Immersed in the enchanting melodies of the Oud, he began writing and performing his own songs, shaping his unique voice as a singer-songwriter.

As war once again disrupted his sanctuary, Farouk embarked on an arduous journey to Canada. Vancouver became his refuge, where he refined his artistry and built a career as a recording artist.

Farouk's artistry shines a light on the depth and soul of Iraqi and Arabic music, bridging past and present. His evocative songwriting and soulful recordings have reached audiences worldwide, earning recognition on platforms like CTV and The Early Edition Radio. With every song, He weaves cultures, narrates his journey, and pushes the limits of artistic possibility.

OUSSAYMA CANBARIEH | Cultural Consultant



Oussayma Canbarieh is an award-winning Syrian-Canadian journalist and documentary producer. Her production company, Symage Media, has largely produced stories about Canada's immigrant and refugee experience. In addition to her media work, Oussayma works as a cultural and language interpreter and consultant. She is fluent in English, French, Arabic, and Spanish.

Oussayma's media work has been featured on national and international media outlets, including CBC/Radio-Canada, Al Jazeera, AP, Deutsche Welle Radio, Huffington Post, AJ+, Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development and SNTV. Oussayma holds a Bachelor's degree in Business and Journalism and a Masters in Educational Technology from Concordia University. She has also trained and mentored journalism students and aspiring media makers.

MAJD AGHA | Cultural Consultant



Syrian Canadian, been living in Canada for 12 years, currently working as a sales manager in signage industry.

AKSAM ALYOUSEF | Cultural Consultant



Aksam Al Yousef is a playwright, director, and producer working across theatre and television and is currently pursuing a PhD in Drama at the University of Alberta. He began his career as a journalist and drama educator in Syria and Qatar, later moving into screenwriting and production with Al Jazeera Children's Channel.

Since immigrating to Canada in 2016, Al Yousef has written and directed several original plays, including Honey and Nuts, Souls, Hagar, F.O.B., and Adeeb. His play, Adeeb, received the Arab Theatre Foundation's Best Play Award in 2022, while grants from the Edmonton Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts supported Hagar and Adeeb. Al Yousef's creative and scholarly work is increasingly focused on political comedy. His MA thesis explored political humour in Syria and Lebanon, and his current doctoral research extends this inquiry into the techniques and aesthetics of contemporary political satire across theatre, television, and digital media.

AYA ADRA | Cultural Consultant



Aya Adra is a Syrian artist and animator, who graduated from the University of Damascus, Faculty of Fine Arts, with Visual Communication as a specialisation. She currently works as an animator and has produced two short animated films.