

THE OFFICIAL NEWSMAGAZINE OF
WRITERS THEATRE

ISSUE EIGHTY-THREE
WINTER 2021/2022

THE BRIEF CHRONICLE

WELCOME
BACK

WT

WT
WRITERS
THEATRE

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Dear Friends,

It gives us immense joy to say the words we also have emblazoned on the windows at our theatre: Welcome Back! We are so happy to be hosting live audiences in our building for the first time since March 2020.

We've made a few changes to *The Brief Chronicle* that we're excited to share with you. The magazine will now arrive quarterly and cover everything coming up at WT in the next couple months. Most of this Winter edition will be dedicated to our first production of the season, *Dishwasher Dreams*.

Dishwasher Dreams is a show of many firsts for this theatre. The first time we've centered a narrative about South Asians and Muslims on our stage. Our first time working with the talented and accomplished director, Chay Yew. The first time we've performed a one-actor show in the Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols Theatre. And the first time we've featured a tabla percussionist in one of our productions. Even with all this new ground being broken, the play stays true to theatre at its most essential: a moving story, skilled performances, and a live audience eager to share in the experience.

In addition to this magazine, we've put together several other offerings to peak your interest in *Dishwasher Dreams*. Both Chay Yew and Alaudin Ullah were interviewed on *The Green Room*, WT's new podcast series; an Audience Guide with post-show discussion questions and resources for further exploration of the play and its themes; and an exciting line-up of special events, including a concert of South Asian music, a lecture on Bollywood and Bengali filmmaking, and a "learn the Tabla" workshop. More information about all of these is available on the Writers Theatre website.

What we have truly missed most is being with you and we are thrilled to be able to connect with you in person again. Your ongoing support during these challenging years has made it possible for us to survive and begin a new era at Writers Theatre. Thank you so much for your loyalty and trust – we can't wait to see you at the theatre soon!

Kate & Bobby

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CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF WRITERS THEATRE 1992-2002: THE FIRST TEN YEARS



Shawn Douglass and Celeste Williams in *Eastville* (1999)



Larry Yando, Kimberly Mellen and Steve Hinger in *Rocket to the Moon* (2002)



Michael Nanfria, Karen Janes Woditsch, Scott Parkinson, William Brown, Donald Brearley and Kristine Thatcher in *Candida* (1999)



Sean Fortunato, Mark Ulrich and Karen Janes Woditsch in *Spite for Spite* (2000)



Susan Hart and Scott Parkinson in *The Glass Menagerie* (1998)



Shannon Cochran and Michael Canavan in *The Father* (2001)

In Conversation: Alaudin Ullah

Writer and comedian Alaudin Ullah sat down with Interim Artistic Director Bobby Kennedy to discuss the inspiration for *Dishwasher Dreams* and how performing a monologue is different than stand-up comedy.



Bobby Kennedy (BK): What inspired you to write *Dishwasher Dreams*?

Alaudin Ullah (AU): I came back to New York in the early 2000s just disgusted and frustrated with stand-up comedy and show business in general. I had free tickets to the Public Theatre, they were doing a production of *Lackawanna Blues*. I saw Ruben Santiago-Hudson do a tour-de-force performance. What he did was incredible and I was so moved by what I saw. He was using all of these characters and he was connecting with a musician, a blues guitarist. After I saw that production, I went home on the subway and felt like I had seen something that was

I started to tell a story that American theater was missing

life-altering. This kind of work was moving the audience; it was deeper than just comedy. It was using issues of race, people who were marginalized, people who were outsiders, and being truthful. And I felt like I wanted to do that, I just didn't know how to. So with the help of Ruben Santiago-Hudson and with Chay Yew, I started to tell a story that American theater was missing, that was talking about the immigrants and how they arrived in America, this lost history of Bengalis who came to New York and formed a movement and changed the course of the culinary world. Indian restaurants in New York were a result of the Bengali restaurants that were opened by these dishwashers. As the child of an immigrant, I was fascinated by that. How does an entrepreneur open a restaurant when they're illiterate?

I thought when I initially started it was about my dad, but I realized more and more, it's about me and my mom and the ghost of my father, who passed away when I was younger. And going out to Hollywood to follow this

dream, not realizing how connected I was to a man in a village that I thought was so foreign to me. So the play is about finding the connections to your parents where you're least likely to think that you're a part of them. I want to take the audience on a journey of discovery and how I got to find out about who my parents were and that generation that is almost a lost history. I wasn't seeing that story being told.

BK: What inspired the addition of live tabla music to the performance?

AU: I really liked how Ruben was telling his story through the blues, so I wanted to tell my story through the tabla. It's a South Asian sound that tells a story in a unique way. I had seen Avirodh Sharma a couple times and he plays with a certain intensity and passion, and I wanted to bring that to the pieces we were writing. I thought it was a perfect marriage of mixing this music with the emotions and tones and textures in this play.

BK: How different is it to approach performing this play than one of your stand-up sets?

AU: Acting is nothing like stand-up. When you do characters that are on an emotional rollercoaster, you have to really prepare before the show. It is emotionally draining to do a show like this because you're living through a lot of profound moments, these characters are going through so much. I have to be in a space where I'm really prepared. In stand-up I can be the goofball. But in this show, I have to be physically ready. This is the most

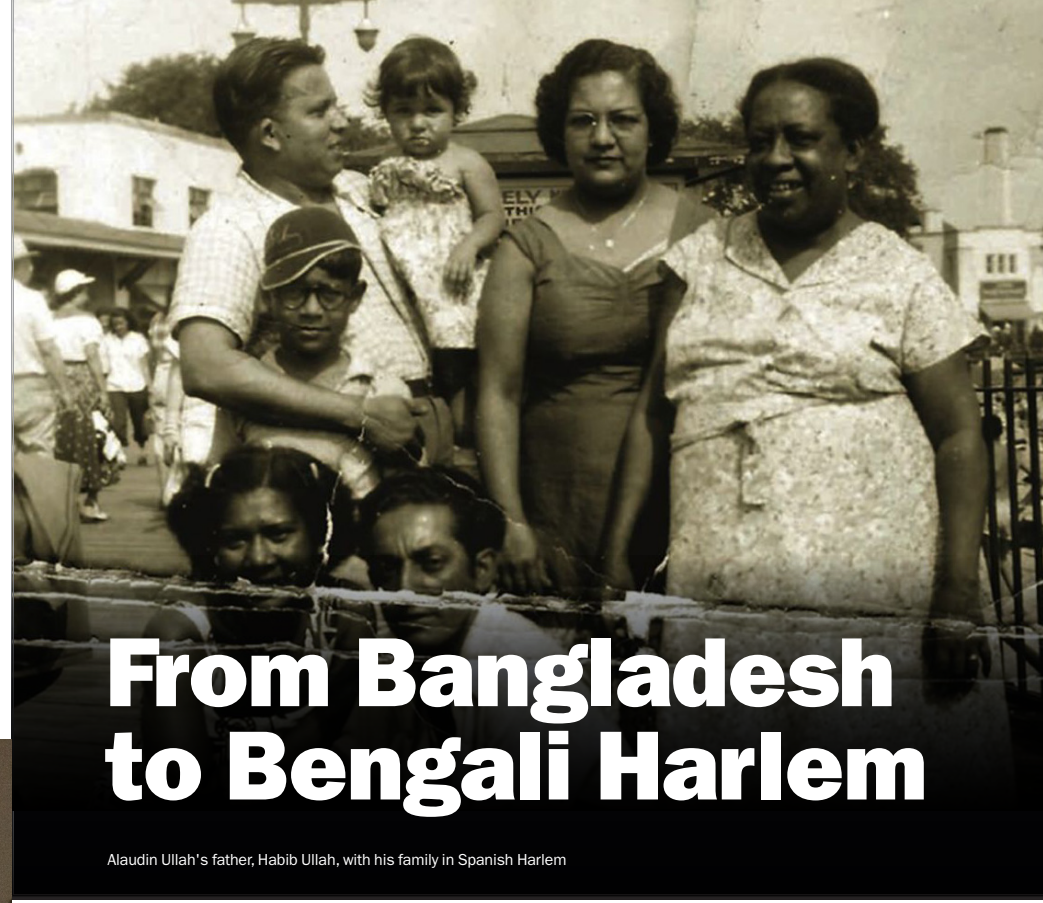
In stand-up it's great, but it's a laugh, you're at a club, there's a 2-drink minimum. But in a theatre, everyone is invested.

Chicago is the best theatre town in the country

exhilarating, it's the most fun in the sense that you really feel you're connecting with an audience. For me it's the most rewarding. And live performance, there's nothing like it. When you feel a moment, the audience is there, you're connected. In stand-up it's great, but it's a laugh, you're at a club, there's a 2-drink minimum. But in a theatre, everyone is invested. There's nothing that matches that. You feel you're in this community of people who are all saying "tonight we're going to share this, and we're going to go where you're going to go. If it's emotional, we'll get on this ride with you." I don't think there's anywhere in the world you can find that but in the theatre.

BK: What excites you about performing in Chicago?

AU: I've always loved Chicago. When I was in my early 20s, we used to always come out to Chicago to do comedy. It feels a lot like New York but a lot colder. I don't like to blow-dry my hair and when I went outside my hair got frozen, it was so cold. Chicago is the best sports town. I know people from New York will get mad, but I think Chicago is the best sports town in the world. And I do believe Chicago is the best theatre town in the country. Every community has a theatre and they are really invested in live performance. I think in general Chicago has this love for live performance. You've got Buddy Guy's blues club, sports, theatre. There's this passion for live anything. I know we've been in Zoom and indoors, but it's nice to see a flower blossoming. You can feel that energy coming back in Chicago. ■



From Bangladesh to Bengali Harlem

Alaudin Ullah's father, Habib Ullah, with his family in Spanish Harlem

When Alaudin Ullah's father, Habib, arrived in New York in 1947, there was not yet a nation of Bangladesh. Bengal (a region in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent) and the Bengalis (the ethnolinguistic group who lived there) had been ruled by the British for almost 200 years. The Indian independence movement, which Bengalis played a major role in, led to the Partition of India in 1947. As part of this, Bengal was also partitioned. The Hindu-majority West Bengal became a state of India, and the Muslim-majority East Bengal became a province of the newly created Pakistan. After the province was renamed East Pakistan in 1955, the union between East and West Pakistan started to collapse due to an unequal balance of power between the Pakistanis and the Bengalis. Bengali nationalism eventually led to the Bangladesh

Liberation War, which ended with an independent nation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Alaudin has worked closely with documentarian and historian Vivek Bald, collecting the stories and piecing together the histories of men like his father and their history in America at a time when Asian immigration was heavily restricted. During the British occupation of India, lower class, Muslim, Bengali men like Habib Ullah were employed on ships bound for the United States as furnace fillers for the vessels' massive engines: "Many of the workers were also very young, with some only being about 14 or 15, according to [Vivek] Bald's research. The thankless conditions lead many of them to jump ship whenever possible and New York offered them a chance to 'disappear' into the



Alaudin Ullah at first rehearsal for *Dishwasher Dreams*. Photo by Joe Mazza—Brave Lux.

existing social fabric. [Bald] estimates that between 700 and 1,000 South Asian ship workers settled in the United States between the 1920s and 1950s.” This miniscule number was largely due to the US’s intensely strict anti-Asian Immigration Act of 1917 (the roots of which were in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882) making it difficult for anyone of Asian descent to move to America.

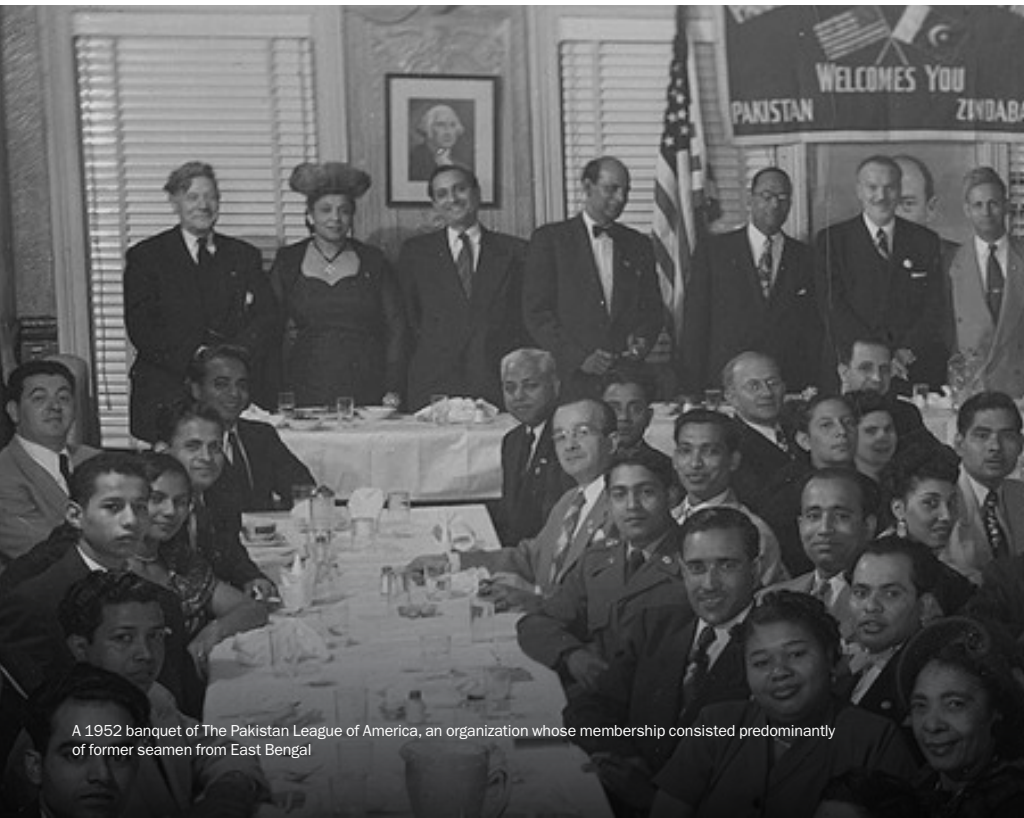
Once they beat the odds and settled in the U.S., Bengali immigrants then had to contend with another racist American institution: Jim Crow laws. The highly enforced segregation of neighborhoods and regions in New York and beyond forced the new arrivals into other communities of color, such as those of African Americans and Puerto-Ricans in neighborhoods like Harlem. This segregation continued even as Bengalis spread westward in search of work in places like Detroit and its auto industry. As Bald said in an interview

with NBC, “because the ship jumpers almost always lived in African American and Puerto Rican neighborhoods, their homes and communities were often impacted by gentrification and displacement.” Because there were so few of them, these early 20th century Bengali immigrants integrated with the African-American and Caribbean communities in which they lived. Vivek Bald documents this integration extensively in his book, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America*.

After arriving in New York, Habib Ullah settled in East Harlem and began working as a dishwasher and line cook in American restaurants. He married his first wife, a Puerto Rican woman named Victoria, and had two kids. Together, Habib and Victoria opened a restaurant, Bengal Garden, in 1948, a few blocks from Times Square. Several Indian restaurants had opened in Midtown over the



A meeting of Muslim Bengali immigrants in Harlem



A 1952 banquet of The Pakistan League of America, an organization whose membership consisted predominantly of former seamen from East Bengal

previous ten years in an attempt to attract adventurous theatregoers, leading *The New York Times* to state in 1939: “right now there is a mild scramble for the growing curry trade.” Bengal Garden only lasted a couple years, but Ullah’s experience and knowledge allowed him to become an advisor to other Bengalis interested in opening their own restaurants.

Ullah also helped found the Pakistan League of America in 1947 and the organization held many of their public events at his restaurant. The League, which had over 100 members at the time, advocated for the naturalization of Bengalis who had been living in America for over four years and to allow more immigration from the newly created East Pakistan. In

1965, the US passed a new Immigration and Nationality Act that opened up the country to a more diverse group of peoples. It would also soon spell the end of Bengali Harlem. Because so many more South Asians were entering the country, they were able to settle and found their own communities separate from the pre-existing African-American and Caribbean ones. “Habib Ullah Sr. and his contemporaries may have sought to ‘get lost’ after leaving their ships and entering the chaos and possibility of New York City eight decades ago, but the stories that their lives open up—along with the contradictions they reveal, the questions they raise, and the possibilities they suggest—should not be lost to history.” ■

Dramaturgy Digest: Dishwasher Dreams

In this new section of *The Brief Chronicle*, the WT Dramaturgy team breaks down a handful of the references and elements of upcoming productions.



Reggie Jackson

Reggie Jackson was a Major League Baseball player between the years of 1968-1987, playing 21 drama filled seasons with the Angels, Athletics, Orioles, and most notably, the New York Yankees. Jackson was the son of Afro-Puerto Rican Negro League player, Martinez Jackson, and was an All-American athlete throughout high school in track, football, basketball, and baseball. He received a scholarship to Arizona State University for football but negotiated with the school that he could also play baseball if he maintained a B-average in school.¹ After a sensational season his sophomore year, he was drafted by the Kansas City Athletics and joined the major leagues with their move to Oakland in 1968. Despite struggling as a right fielder, his phenomenal scoring record made him a quick fan favorite. He led the Athletics to three World Series over his nine-year tenure with the team.²

After playing a season with the Orioles, Jackson wanted to play for the best of the best (and the richest) team in baseball, signing a five year contract with the New York Yankees—with the largest salary on the team.³ It was in 1977 wearing pinstripes that he earned the moniker “Mr. October,” tying the record for most World Series homeruns in a single game at three and setting a new record for most homeruns in the World Series at five.⁴ Jackson and the Yankees won two consecutive World Series titles in 1977 and 1978. He also made a name for himself as particularly hot-headed, especially when it came to televised spats between him and his manager, Billy Martin.⁵ Jackson left the Yankees for the California Angels in 1982 and retired in 1987 after returning to the Athletics for one last season. His iconic career was sealed into history with his induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1993. ■

¹ Ted Leavengood, “Reggie Jackson.” *Society for American Baseball Research*, 7 Mar. 2021, <https://sabr.org/bioproj/person/reggie-jackson/>.

² “Reggie Jackson Biography.” *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, <https://www.notablebiographies.com/Ho-Jo/Jackson-Reggie.html>.

³ Leavengood

⁴ “Reggie Jackson Biography”

⁵ Leavengood

Tabla

Tabla refers to a set of two hand drums traditionally used in the music of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. The two drums have different pitches: the *daya* (right) is higher pitched than the *baya* (left), which tends to be tuned either a fifth or an octave lower than its counterpart.¹ In the center of each drum is a small circle of tuning paste called *syahi*, which generates overtones and affects the frequencies of the drums by adding weight to sections of the stretched drumhead. The black paste is typically made of flour, water, iron filings, and other ingredients that is then applied in layers and rubbed with stone until cracks form that allow the drum to resonate beneath it.² The tabla appears in Indian writings and histories as early as the 13th century and has roots in indigenous drumming as well as Arabic, Persian, and Turkish influence including its name, coming from the Arabic word for drum: “*tabl*.”³ There are six traditions, or *gharanas*, of tabla playing, though two tend to dominate the conversation: *Purbi Baj* and *Dilli Baj*. The identities of these styles can be identified by unique styles of strikes, hand placement, and position of the drums.

In Writers Theatre’s production of *Dishwasher Dreams*, the tabla will be played by the illustrious Avirodh Sharma, who has been playing the tabla since he was 10 years old. His father taught him and over 20,000 other students the instrument over almost 30 years

at his New York music school, the East Indian Music Academy. In a brief interview with Avi, we asked him share his experience with this unique, deeply personal music:

“Growing up I was studying Delhi, Benares, and Lucknow and eventually started studying Punjab and a bit of Ajrara. So I have taken the inspiration from all the *gharanas* and now making it my own, coming up with my own style due to my Caribbean background and world music influences. It’s a privilege and honor to share my love and passion for tabla with the masses: To share how I feel with others through rhythm is rewarding and fulfilling, to share the art that’s deeply rooted in a 5000-year-old tradition is humbling and with it comes a responsibility to represent it in the proper manner. I play tabla because it brings me closer to the grand architect (aka God). Through the Indian arts, one can achieve spirituality. So everything I play has the thought of the Divine behind it. It’s a way of life. Alladin and I are children of immigrants. The story of *Dishwasher Dreams* resonates with immigrants no matter what background you come from. For the immigrants that came, they didn’t have choices. They made the sacrifices so their children can have the choices they never had. That shouldn’t be forgotten. And so, I play for all of them.”⁴ ■

¹ Tabla.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 9 Jan. 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/art/tabla>.

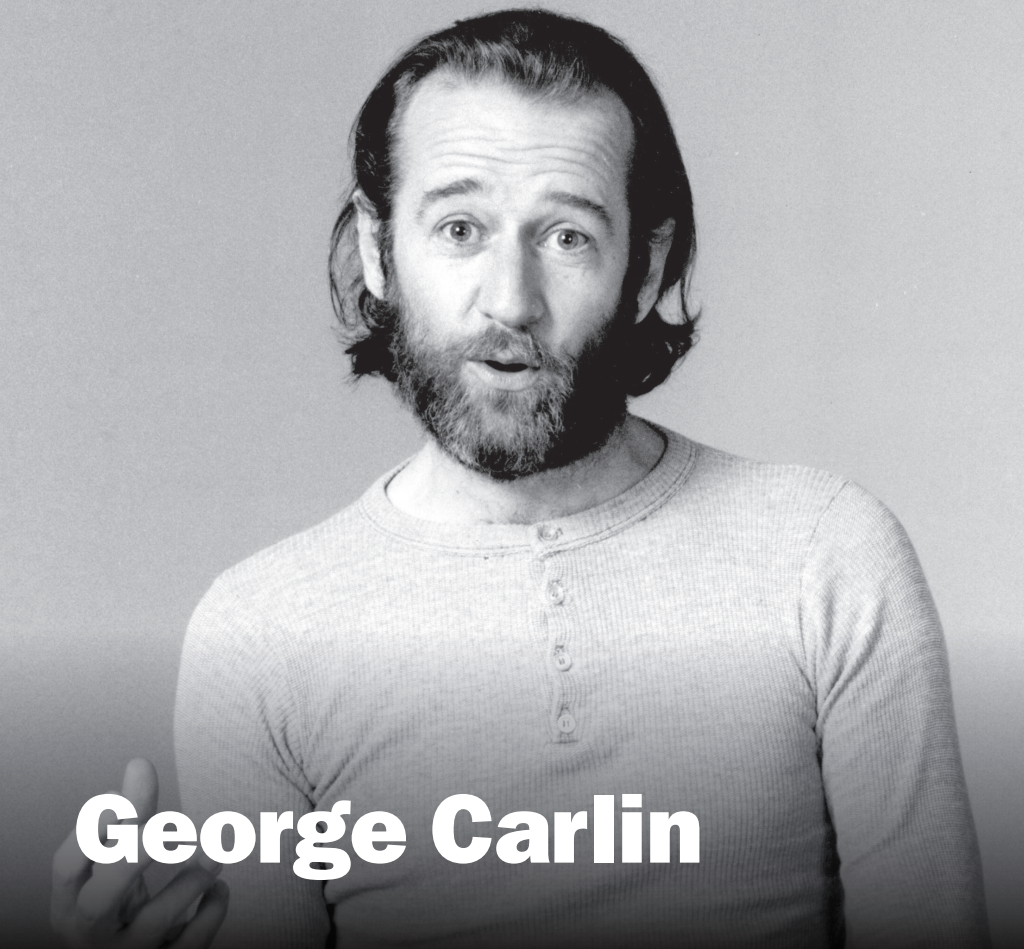
² “Syahi.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 3 May 2021, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syahi>.

³ Mandaiker, Arjun. “The History of the Tabla.” *DESIBlitz*, 18 June 2016, <https://www.desiblit.com/content/history-tabla>.

⁴ Sharma, Avirodh. 19 Oct. 2021.



Avirodh Sharma playing the tabla.



George Carlin

George Carlin was a comedian whose career spanned from the 1960s-90s and who was most notorious for his scathing social commentaries and humorous, often vulgar, analyses of American institutions, religion, the Vietnam war, cocaine, and free speech. Between his early career on the radio with partner Jack Burns, his live and televised stand-up routines, and several books, Carlin became a household name despite his family unfriendly comedy acts. Famously, he was arrested after doing a live performance in Milwaukee in which he described “7 Words You Can Never Say on Television,” horrifying parents in the audience

but delighting the courtroom who subsequently heard his trial, a saga which ended in dismissal of the case. His fame and infamy awarded him roles in movies from cameos to dramatic turns. He was awarded a Hollywood Walk of Fame star in 1987, as well as two Grammy awards for his recorded comedy albums in 1990 and 1992. He died in 2008, but not before learning five days earlier that he was being awarded the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor. Despite his shock value and dirty language, America rewarded Carlin’s legacy with admiration and adoration for his countercultural values and honest critiques.¹ ■

¹ “George Carlin Biography.” *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, 24 July 2020, <https://www.biography.com/performer/george-carlin>.



Dhoom (2004) a Bollywood film referenced in *Dishwasher Dreams*.

Bollywood

Bollywood refers to the massive film industry that has thrived in the Indian subcontinent since the early 20th century—its name a portmanteau of “Bombay” (the former name of the city now called Mumbai) and “Hollywood”.¹ Bollywood, the films of which are all in the Hindi language, is now the largest producer of films in the world.

In *Dishwasher Dreams*, Ullah talks about seeing Bollywood films weekly as a child—and the special occurrence of seeing *Pather Panchali* (transl. *Song of the Little Road*), a film by Satyajit Ray that was entirely spoken in Bengali. The film was impactful to Alaudin, his parents, and his community because this 1950s-70s New Wave filmmaker was one of the first big names in Indian cinema to center his stories around

lower caste families and more grounded realism than the “colorful escapism” of his predecessors.² Ray held audiences captive by working around the usual song and dance and avoiding superfluous embellishments that distract from the humanness of the story he was telling.³ Though critics at the time argued that the film’s pace deemed it boring, the filmmaker responded saying, “The cinematic material dictated a style to me, a very slow rhythm determined by nature, the landscape, the country. The script had to retain some of the rambling quality of the novel because that in itself contained a clue to the authenticity: life in a poor Bengali village does ramble.”⁴ It was this authenticity that held even a young Alaudin rapt in the theater. ■

¹ Grant, Andrew. “What Is Bollywood? A Brief History of Indian Cinema.” *LiveAbout*, LiveAbout, 19 July 2018, <https://www.liveabout.com/what-is-bollywood-3549901>.

³ “Filmmaking of Satyajit Ray.” *Satyajit Ray Org*, <https://satyajitray.org/filmmaking/>.

⁴ “*Pather Panchali* (Song of the Little Road).” *Satyajit Ray Org*, <https://satyajitray.org/pather-panchali-song-of-the-little-road/>.

² *Ibid*

Lean Forward and Engage!

Join us for these exciting events, tailored to enhance your WT experience!

Gaoner Ashor: A Celebration of South Asian Music

Tuesday, December 28th at 7:30pm

This concert will feature Avirodh Sharma (the composer and musician for *Dishwasher Dreams*), **Lyon Leifer** (member of the South Asian Classical Music Society), **Palbasha Siddique** (Bengali vocalist and founder of the group MOYNA), and **Durjoy Siddique** (Bengali guitarist and member of MOYNA). These international artists will be presenting classical, folk, and popular Bengali music with traditional instruments, including the Tabla and Bansuri.

South Asian Cinema and the films of Satyajit Ray

Saturday, January 15th at 1pm

Rochona Majumdar, an Associate Professor at the University of Chicago, will lead this lecture on the history of Indian Cinema from art cinema to Bollywood, including the Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray whose film *Pather Panchali* is memorably mentioned in *Dishwasher Dreams*.

Tabla Workshops with Avirodh Sharma

Saturday, January 8th 11am (Youth) & Tuesday, January 11th 7pm (Adult)

Explore the art of drumming! WT is excited to offer two workshops on the tabla, the drum from the Indian subcontinent featured in our current production of *Dishwasher Dreams*. Both adults and young people will have the opportunity to learn about the history of this 800-year-old instrument and try their hand at playing under the guidance of **Avirodh Sharma**, renowned tabla player and *Dishwasher Dreams* composer and musician.

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For more information on sponsorship, please contact Claire Mangan, Manager of Major Gifts, at **847-786-3501** or cmangan@writerstheatre.org.

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Writers Theatre is thrilled to have support from ComEd as Corporate Education Sponsor for the 2021/22 Season. ComEd is a longtime supporter of the arts in Chicagoland, and Writers Theatre is honored to partner with a company that acknowledges the power of theatre education, as it emphasizes collaboration, cultivates self-expression, encourages imaginative inquiry and promotes civic responsibility and social justice. The 2021/22 Season marks ComEd's seventh season as part of our family of supporters, and Writers Theatre is extremely grateful to once again have ComEd's partnership.

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The Green Room LIVE!

A new podcast at Writers Theatre

The Green Room LIVE not only kicked off our first events back in our space after nearly two years but also welcomed a new endeavor to WT: a podcast! Donors were invited to hear these conversations recorded live with Chay Yew, director of *Dishwasher Dreams*, as well as

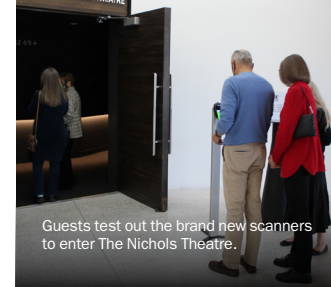
comedian, playwright and performer, Alaudin Ullah on Sunday, November 7, 2021 and Tuesday, December 7, 2021 in the Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols Theatre and Green Family Rehearsal Room, respectively. Each led by Interim Artistic Director, Bobby Kennedy, guests enjoyed immersive discussions about the play as well as Chay and Alaudin's artistic journey and participated in a thoughtful Q&A afterwards. We are thrilled to offer this reinvented series that takes you behind the scenes of the work and amplifies the word and the artist in a new, engaging way. Join us as a donor today and receive invitations all year for *The Green Room LIVE* taping events as well as other exciting opportunities to dive deeper into groundbreaking theatre.



Samantha Aguilar, Director of Audience Services, assists guests at the Box Office.



Mary Pat Studdert, Board Chair, and Melissa Rosenberg, Manager of Individual Giving & Donor Relations.



Guests test out the brand new scanners to enter The Nichols Theatre.



Guests begin to fill The Nichols for the first time since March 2020



Alaudin Ullah and Bobby Kennedy, Interim Artistic Director



Guests learn how Alaudin got his start from stand-up to playwrighting.



Chay Yew and Bobby Kennedy, Interim Artistic Director



In Conversation: Chay Yew

Director Chay Yew sat down with Interim Artistic Director Bobby Kennedy to discuss his Writers Theatre debut with – *Dishwasher Dreams*

Don't miss the highly anticipated return of the in-person
Writers Theatre WordPlay Gala 2022

Save the Date
Saturday, April 23, 2022

Four Seasons Hotel Chicago
120 East Delaware Place

Celebrating 30 years of intimate theatrical experiences
and a future of unlimited potential with The Word and
The Artist at the center of it all!

For more information about purchasing a table or tickets to the event,
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or rpotter@writerstheatre.org.



Bobby Kennedy (BK): What made you interested in a life in the theatre?

Chay Yew (CY): There's always gonna be a fire, and there's always gonna be people who gather around the fire to tell stories. And when we tell stories, we learn more about who we are, and we learn about what we need to be, and also to celebrate where we come from. So to some extent, telling stories has always been a very big part of what I wanted to do. I was brought up in Singapore, and everyone had the idea to aspire to be a mathematician, a doctor, a dentist. And I realized very quickly that my passions weren't figuring out the left

In my culture, “the nail that sticks out gets hammered first.”

margin and the right margin, it was something more controversial—how to tell stories. My parents realized that quite quickly and sent me off to the States to actually figure out what I can do with a life in the theatre. But the most important thing is probably, for me, living in a culture where you can't express yourself. In my culture, “the nail that sticks out gets hammered first.” So we were always taught never to speak out. When I see an American in particularly western theatre and film, I see them express themselves. And that was something that, as a child, I could never understand but yet wanted. So it wasn't a big stretch to realize that the American theatre was a place that I could best speak what I wanted to say.

(BK): Is that interest in being able to express yourself why you're drawn so primarily to new plays?

(CY): I think it's twofold. When I started in the American theatre, I was a playwright. I love new plays. Also, I was only given one classic play to direct in my entire career. And

that was *Our Town* at Oregon Shakespeare Festival years ago. So usually, I don't get to do classical work, I only get to do new work. Right? And what I'd done as a playwright and a director is basically to adapt some of these stories which are classical in nature so that I can actually go back to the classics. And I think it's a little easier these days, but when I started out, there weren't those opportunities. So new work was one of the only places I could actually be a director. And also, ultimately, I feel passionately that new plays need to occur because we need to foster, nurture and grow our Shakespeares, our Caryl Churchills, our Tennessee Williams's, and our Lorraine Hansberrys. That's why we do new work—as a document of our lives, and our time, for future generations to come. So new work to me has always been exciting. And also, it's a thrill! Because no one's done this play before, it's a brand-new play, how do we give this gift to the rest of the people who come to the theater? So that's always been a joy for me to do.

(BK): How did you come to know Alaudin Ullah and his play *Dishwasher Dreams*? What about the story resonated with you?

(CY): I met Alaudin actually at New York Theatre Workshop in a retreat. I was working on a separate project and he was working with *Dishwasher Dreams*. We got to talking and at some point we decided to work together. The Public Theatre was hosting Alaudin in this thing called the Emerging Writers Group. We developed the piece and that's how we became friends and we've been working on it since. Being an immigrant to this country, immigration stories are always very meaningful to me because I think it's always been the foundation of this country. One genre we should be very proud of in American theatre, or American literature, is the immigrant story because we all have come at some point from some other shore because of what this country promises. Immigrants come here for one reason: to give their

children a better life. Their children become Americans and contribute to the country. So all these stories are very meaningful to me because I think that's how this country was built. And we must never forget that. There has always been the opportunity for people to come and build this country, and the fact that we can sit together and look at how diverse

we all have come at some point from some other shore because of what this country

our country is, it's a wonderment. Because that is the great American Experiment. Other countries are going through the same similar process and are struggling with it. We're not completely done, but I think we were one of the first few countries that went ahead with this experiment and look what we've come to: the diversity, the joys, and the riches... not to say that there aren't things that we still need to deal with, but we're ahead of the curve and we should be proud of that.

(BK): What do you enjoy about solo works and what is the role of a director on one of them?

(CY): I realized at some point that I was actually doing quite a lot of solo work. I think I've probably directed at least 20. Solo shows are quite revolutionary: there is no fourth wall. I'm speaking my truth to you. There is no barrier. And I have to make sure that I take out my beating heart and present it to you every night. It has to cost me something to tell my story. And I love that because it's the purest form of speaking to someone else in the theatre. As the director, I think I am the Tiger Mom, as I like to say: “Yeah, I know you want to say that but...how about this?” “You're not being clear.” “I'm missing something today.” Alaudin started writing this piece 10 years

ago and today I asked, “How did your father become documented?” And he says, “Well, I don't want to say that because it's a long story.” And so I said, “Let's talk about it!” And today he found a monologue that he could put into this play. So it's about asking the right questions, asking the hard questions, and actually being the bouncing board for any solo performer or writer. I think I'm the worst audience possible because I ask the hardest questions. And I think I should so that the audience can actually engage on different level. So I ask hard questions: “What? I'm confused? Why is it...Something's missing? What is this part of the story that's not making sense?” That's my role.

(BK): You opened a play at New York Theatre Workshop before coming to WT. What was it like to be back making live theatre again?

(CY): I don't know if I'm cavalier, but it's like not biking for a while? You know when someone gives you a bicycle and you're like “uhhhh I'm not sure I can get on the bike again...” And after a few minutes you realize you're in your element, because that's what you do. And actually seeing the audiences again—and I'm surprisingly unsentimental, so forgive me—I know it's been emotional for a lot of people. I just felt like, “Great! We're bringing people back!” Like I said much earlier, coming back to the fire, sharing stories, we as human beings are communities. The theatre does that automatically. So for me, that was the ultimate joy of coming back to that experience with that work. There were some restrictions in place, but I think that overall when everyone was vaccinated and masked up, at some point it felt like it was coming back to some sense of normality again. So I think this is what is going to occur in this theatre and across all the other theatres in the world as we're slowly coming back from this pandemic. ■

COMING THIS SPRING TO WRITERS THEATRE:

Wife of a Salesman by Eleanor Burgess

An iconic drama.
An imagined meeting.
A recentering of where “attention must be paid.”

Opening March 3, 2022, is the world premiere production of *Wife of a Salesman* by **Eleanor Burgess**, directed by **Jo Bonney**.

Playwright Eleanor Burgess, whose work has been seen on the Writers Theatre stage before with *The Niceties* in 2019, brings her gift for sharp dialogue and spirited debate to *Wife of a Salesman*, influenced by interviews with her grandmothers in addition to the work of Arthur Miller. We are so excited to welcome director Jo Bonney in her directorial debut with Writers Theatre. This world premiere co-presented with Milwaukee Rep is sure to be the must-see theatrical event of the spring!



Writers Theatre Safety Guidelines



Vaccinations

All guests will need to be fully vaccinated with an FDA authorized vaccine. This vaccine requirement will also apply to Writers Theatre artists and staff. Proof of vaccination—displayed either on a smartphone or with a physical copy of the vaccination card—must be presented at time of entry into the theater. Together with the proof of vaccination, all guests 18 years or older must also present a government-issued photo ID. Guests younger than 18 may use a government-issued photo ID or school photo ID. Exceptions will be made for guests who need reasonable accommodations due to a medical exception, a sincerely held religious belief, or guests under 12 years old. In those cases, guests must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken within 72 hours of the performance start time, or a negative

COVID-19 antigen test taken within 6 hours of the performance start time. Over-the-counter “home” tests cannot be accepted. For your safety, as well as our artists and staff, Writers Theatre will not admit any guests who do not provide the documentation as required above.

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Regardless of vaccine status, patrons will be required to wear face coverings that cover the nose and mouth at all times and in all areas of Writers Theatre, including while seated during the performance. Patrons arriving without appropriate face coverings will be provided a disposable face mask.

Questions?

Call the box office at **847-242-6000** or email **boxoffice@writerstheatre.org**

Full Guidelines and Information can be found at writerstheatre.org/COVID-Safety

Accessibility Services

Writers Theatre is committed to making our Theatre accessible for everyone. We are proud to offer Access Subscriptions and the following services:



For People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

We are pleased to offer closed captioning. Patrons wishing to watch their videos with captions can do so with the click of a button. To turn on captions, open your selected video in your browser window. In the play bar, located at the bottom of the video, you can select the CC icon in the lower right corner of the bar. Writers Theatre's videos are captioned for English speakers. For further assistance and helpful images detailing how to turn on closed captioning, visit [writerstheatre.org/streaming](https://www.writerstheatre.org/streaming).



We are happy to connect you with scripts for our shows to read prior to your attendance. For details, review our Script Policy at [writerstheatre.org/script-policy](https://www.writerstheatre.org/script-policy) or contact the Box Office.



For People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

An audio described version of the performance will be available. Audio described versions of the performance can be purchased online and streamed on-demand. If you have already purchased a ticket or are a Season Package Holder, but do not have tickets for the audio described version, please contact the Box Office to gain access to the audio described version.



Braille programs are available by prior request through the Box Office. Contact the Box Office at least two weeks before when you plan to watch with this request.

For additional information on accessibility services and subscriptions, contact access@writerstheatre.org or **847-242-6005**.

The Accessibility Fund is a gift of Doris Conant and the Conant Family Foundation.

Box Office: **847-242-6000**

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WT Hoodie
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Enjoy a custom cocktail from the WT Bar—
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*All of our signature cocktail creations are designed by WT Cocktail Consultant
Cheryl Rich Heisler & Mixed metaPours.*

Head to linktr.ee/writerstheatre for more information.



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