

Electronic Press Kit



The cast of *We Live in Cairo* | Evgenia Eliseeva

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American Repertory Theater Announces Cast and Creative Team for *We Live in Cairo*

**World Premiere Musical by Daniel Lazour and Patrick Lazour
and Directed by Taibi Magar Begins Performances May 14**

[Images available for download here.](#)

Cambridge, MA—American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) at Harvard University, under the leadership of Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director Diane Paulus and Executive Producer Diane Borger, announces the cast and creative team for the world premiere of ***We Live in Cairo*** written by brothers **Daniel Lazour** and **Patrick Lazour**. Now in rehearsal under the direction of Obie Award winner **Taibi Magar**, ***We Live in Cairo*** begins previews Tuesday, May 14; opens Wednesday, May 22; and closes Sunday, June 23, 2019 at the Loeb Drama Center in Cambridge, MA.

Inspired by the young Egyptians who took to the streets in 2011 to overthrow President Hosni Mubarak, this new musical follows six revolutionary students armed with laptops and cameras, guitars and spray cans as they come of age in contemporary Cairo. Winner of the Richard Rodgers Award for Musical Theater, ***We Live in Cairo*** moves from the hope of Tahrir Square through the tumultuous years that followed. As escalating division and violence lead to a military crackdown, the young revolutionaries must confront the question of how—or even whether—to keep their dreams of change alive.

The ***We Live in Cairo*** cast features:

- **Sharif Afifi** as street artist Karim Farouk (*Hadestown* in London’s West End and the film *Mamma Mia!...Here We Go Again!*)
- **Abubakr Ali** as songwriter Hany Salib (*Twelfth Night* and *Kiss* at Yale Rep and *God Help Us* at Fierce Backbone)
- **Jakeim Hart** as songwriter Amir Salib (“Bluebloods” on CBS and “The Affair” on Showtime)
- **Dana Omar** as activist Fadwa Bassiouny (***Pirates of Penzance*** at the A.R.T. and elsewhere and *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* at People’s Light)
- **Gil Perez-Abraham** as street artist Hassan Ahmed (*The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* with barebones productions and “Pose” on FX)
- **Parisa Shahmir** as photographer Layla Hakim (UK tours of *The Last Ship* and *Mamma Mia!*)

Waseem Alzer (*Eh Dah?* at NYTW Next Door and *Up and Away* at Pittsburgh CLO) and **Layan Elwazani** (*The Band's Visit* on Broadway and *Romeo and Juliet* at Vixens En Garde) are in the ensemble.

Sharif Afifi and **Parisa Shahmir** are appearing with the permission of Actors' Equity Association. The A.R.T. gratefully acknowledges Actors' Equity Association for its assistance of this production.

The ***We Live in Cairo*** creative team includes:

- **Daniel Lazour**, Book, Music, and Lyrics; Orchestrations with Michael Starobin; Vocal Arrangements with Madeline Smith (joint bio below)
- **Patrick Lazour**, Book, Music, and Lyrics (joint bio below)
- **Taibi Magar**, Director (2018 Obie Award for *Is God Is* at Soho Rep, *Blue Ridge* and *The Great Leap* at Atlantic Theatre, *Underground Railroad Game* at ArsNova, and *Song of Summer* at Trinity Rep)
- **Samar Haddad King**, Choreography (Artistic/Founding Director of New York/Palestine-based Yaa Samar! Dance Theatre; commissions for the Ailey School, Configuration Dance, and Hubbard Street 2 in the US; Zakharef in Amman, Jordan, and Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival in Ramallah, Palestine)
- **Michael Starobin**, Music Supervision; Orchestrations with Daniel Lazour (Tony Awards for Orchestrations of *Next to Normal* and *Assassins*—2004 revival, Drama Desk Awards for Orchestrations for *Assassins*—2004 revival, and the original production of *Sunday in the Park with George* on Broadway)
- **Madeline Smith**, Music Direction; Vocal Arrangements with Daniel Lazour (***The Light Princess*** at the A.R.T. and New Victory Theater and *Rags Parkland Sings The Songs Of The Future* at ArsNova)
- **Tilly Grimes**, Scenic and Costume Design (*Thanksgiving Play* at Playwrights Horizons, *Sky on Swings* at Opera Philadelphia, and *Seared* at Williamstown Theater Festival)
- **Bradley King**, Lighting Design (***Endlings***; ***Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812***; and others at the A.R.T., and *Hadestown*, ***Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*** and others on Broadway)
- **Kai Harada**, Sound Design (***The Black Clown*** at the A.R.T., and *Head Over Heels* and *The Band's Visit*—Tony Award on Broadway)
- **David Bengali**, Projections Design (*Maestro* for Ensemble for the Romantic Century at The Duke on 42nd Street and *The Great Leap* at Atlantic Theater Company)
- **Stephen Kopel, C.S.A.**, Casting Direction (***Jagged Little Pill***, ***The White Card***, ***The Glass Menagerie***, and eight others at the A.R.T., and *Moulin Rouge*, *The Play that Goes Wrong*, ***The Glass Menagerie***, and others on Broadway)

"It is fitting that the Egyptian revolution and its aftermath should be made into a work of art, because it was itself a work of art," says Tarek Masoud, Professor of Public Policy at John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and an advisor on the project. "The eighteen days in Tahrir were a collective act of stunning creativity by a people few thought capable of such a feat."

"The impetus for our show was a photo I saw in an International Relations course at Boston College," explains Worcester area native Patrick Lazour. "It shows a group of Egyptian activists in Cairo during the uprising, uploading photos and videos onto a Mac seven floors above a packed Tahrir Square."

Daniel and I were inspired by the sight of kids younger than ourselves doing their part to overthrow a president who had held power for thirty years, and were prompted to consider the question, ‘How far are you willing to go for the love of your country?’”

“Far and away the most exciting theater we would see growing up would be at the A.R.T., so we’re thrilled that ***We Live in Cairo*** will make its premiere here,” says Daniel Lazour. “We’re all bringing our own cultural experiences to the rehearsal room, sharing what we’ve learned from our families, our research, and our travels, and we’ve been excited to explore the deep tradition of protest music, both in the Egyptian revolution and also in our country.”

The A.R.T. will be collaborating with the Middle East Initiative and the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government on a post-performance speaker series. Speakers and dates will be announced shortly.

Production Support of ***We Live in Cairo*** is provided by **Serena and Bill Lese**. Additional Production Support is provided by **Janet and Irv Plotkin**. Education and engagement support is provided by **Marcia Head**.

TICKETING INFORMATION

Tickets start at \$25 and are available now online at americanrepertorytheater.org, by phone at 617.547.8300, and in person at the Loeb Drama Center Ticket Services Offices (64 Brattle Street, Cambridge). Discounts are available to Subscribers, Members, groups, students, seniors, Blue Star families, EBT card holders, and others.

PERFORMANCE DATES

7:30PM

May 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31

June 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

2PM

May 18, 25*, 26

June 1*, 2, 5*, 8*, 9, 12, 15, 16

11AM

May 29*

*Post-performance discussion

Press Performance: Wednesday, May 22 at 7:30PM

Open Captioned performances: Saturday, June 8 at 2PM and Thursday, June 13 at 7:30PM

Audio Described performances: Saturday, June 8 at 2PM and Friday, June 14 at 7:30PM

ASL Interpreted performances: Sunday, June 9 at 2PM and Wednesday, June 12 at 7:30PM

ABOUT DANIEL LAZOUR AND PATRICK LAZOUR

Daniel Lazour and **Patrick Lazour** (Book, Music, and Lyrics) are brothers and collaborators of Lebanese descent. They workshopped ***We Live in Cairo*** at the O'Neill National Music Theater Conference and at New York Theatre Workshop under the 2016 Richard Rodgers Award. They have developed their work during residencies at the O'Neill, SPACE on Ryder Farm, and the MacDowell Colony, and most recently, collaborated with playwright Ismail Khalidi and Noor Theatre on a development production of *Dead Are My People*. Their new musical about the first chemotherapy trials in the 1950s and 60s was workshopped at the Johnny Mercer Writers Colony at Goodspeed Theatre and Rhinebeck Writers Retreat. Patrick and Daniel were 2015-16 Dramatists Guild Fellows and are New York Theatre Workshop Usual Suspects. They were artists-in-residence at the American University in Cairo.

ABOUT AMERICAN REPERTORY THEATER

American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) at Harvard University is a leading force in the American theater, producing groundbreaking work in Cambridge and beyond. A.R.T. was founded in 1980 by Robert Brustein, who served as Artistic Director until 2002, when he was succeeded by Robert Woodruff. Diane Paulus began her tenure as Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director in 2008. Under the leadership of Paulus and Executive Producer Diane Borger, A.R.T. seeks to expand the boundaries of theater by producing transformative theatrical experiences, always including the audience as a central partner.

Throughout its history, A.R.T. has been honored with many distinguished awards including the Tony Award for Best New Play for ***All the Way*** (2014); consecutive Tony Awards for Best Revival of a Musical for ***Pippin*** (2013) and ***The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*** (2012), both of which Paulus directed, and sixteen other Tony Awards since 2012; a Pulitzer Prize; a Jujamcyn Prize for outstanding contribution to the development of creative talent; the Regional Theater Tony Award; and more than 100 Elliot Norton and IRNE Awards.

A.R.T. collaborates with artists around the world to develop and create work in new ways. It is currently engaged in a number of multi-year projects, including a collaboration with Harvard University's Center for the Environment that will result in the development of new work over several years. Under Paulus' leadership, the A.R.T.'s club theater, OBERON, has been an incubator for local and emerging artists and has attracted national attention for its innovative programming and business models.

As the professional theater on the campus of Harvard University, the A.R.T. catalyzes discourse, interdisciplinary collaboration, and creative exchange among a wide range of academic departments, institutions, students, and faculty members, acting as a conduit between its community of artists and the university. The A.R.T. has trained generations of theater artists through its Institute for Advanced Theater Training, and also plays a central role in Harvard's undergraduate concentration in Theater, Dance & Media.

Dedicated to making great theater accessible, A.R.T. actively engages more than 5,000 community members and local students annually in project-based partnerships, workshops, conversations with artists, and other enrichment activities both at the theater and across the Greater Boston area.

Through all of these initiatives, A.R.T. is dedicated to producing world-class performances in which the audience is central to the theatrical experience.

#WeLiveinCairoART @americanrep

#

***We Live in Cairo* Production Photos | Credit: Evgenia Eliseeva**

Available for download at americanrepertorytheater.org/media/we-live-in-cairo-production-photos/



Jakeim Hart and Parisa Shahmir in *We Live in Cairo* | Evgenia Eliseeva



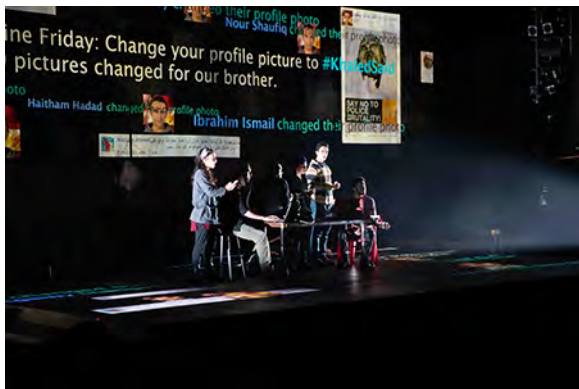
The cast of *We Live in Cairo*. | Evgenia Eliseeva



Jakeim Hart and Abubakr Ali in *We Live in Cairo* | Evgenia Eliseeva



Parisa Shahmir and Dana Saleh Omar in *We Live in Cairo* | Evgenia Eliseeva



The cast of *We Live in Cairo* | Evgenia Eliseeva



Parisa Shahmir, Dana Aaleh Omar, and Abubakr Ali in *We Live in Cairo* | Evgenia Eliseeva



Gil Perez-Abraham and Sharif Afifi in *We Live in Cairo* | Evgenia Eliseeva



Jakeim Hart and the Band of *We Live in Cairo* | Evgenia Eliseeva



The cast of *We Live in Cairo*. | Evgenia Eliseeva



Parisa Shahmir in *We Live in Cairo* | Evgenia Eliseeva



Parisa Shahmir, Sharif Afifi, Jakeim Hart, and Abubakr Ali in *We Live in Cairo* | Evgenia Eliseeva



Gil Perez-Abraham and Sharif Afifi in *We Live in Cairo* | Evgenia Eliseeva

American Repertory Theater
presents

We Live in Cairo

Book, Music and Lyrics by
DANIEL LAZOUR & PATRICK LAZOUR

Scenic &
Costume Design
TILLY GRIMES

Lighting Design
**BRADLEY
KING**

Sound Design
**KAI
HARADA**

Projection &
Video Design
DAVID BENGALI

Vocal Arrangements
**DANIEL LAZOUR &
MADELINE SMITH**

Orchestrations
**DANIEL LAZOUR &
MICHAEL STAROBIN**

Casting
**STEPHEN
KOPEL, CSA**

Production Stage
Manager
TAYLOR BRENNAN

Music Supervision
MICHAEL STAROBIN

Music Director
MADELINE SMITH

Choreography
SAMAR HADDAD KING

Directed by
TAIBI MAGAR

Production Sponsor
SERENA AND BILL LESE

Additional Production Support
JANET AND IRV PLOTKIN
THE ASH CENTER FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND INNOVATION
AT HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL

Education Sponsor
MARCIA HEAD

First performance at the Loeb Drama Center on May 14, 2019.

We Live In Cairo was presented at the National Alliance for Musical Theatre's
Festival of New Musicals in 2016. www.namt.org

We Live In Cairo was developed during a residency at the Eugene O'Neill
Theater Center's National Music Theatre Conference in 2015.
Preston Whiteway Paulette Haupt
Executive Director Artistic Director

We Live In Cairo was developed, in part, at SPACE on Ryder Farm.

A.R.T. Season Support



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The A.R.T. 2018/19 Season is supported in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which receives support from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

CAST

(in alphabetical order)

Karim.....	SHARIF AFIFI
Hany.....	ABUBAKR ALI
Amir.....	JAKEIM HART
Fadwa.....	DANA SALEH OMAR
Hassan.....	GIL PEREZ-ABRAHAM
Layla.....	PARISA SHAHMIR
Ensemble.....	WASEEM ALZER
	LAYAN ELWAZANI

UNDERSTUDIES

For Karim, Hany, Amir, Hassan: **WASEEM ALZER**

For Fadwa, Layla: **LAYAN ELWAZANI**

Understudies never substitute for listed players unless a specific announcement for the appearance is made at the time of performance.

DANCE CAPTAIN

SHARIF AFIFI

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

ALEX EBERLE

Sharif Afifi is appearing with the permission of Actors' Equity Association.
Parisa Shahmir is appearing with the permission of Actors' Equity Association pursuant to an exchange program between American Equity and UK Equity.

BAND

Music Director/Keyboard: **MADELINE SMITH**
Cello: **NASEEM ALATRASH**
Bass: **KATE FOSS**
Violin: **BENGISU GÖKÇE**
Guitar: **NACHO GONZÁLEZ NAPPA**
Oud: **GHASSAN SAWALHI**
Percussion: **JEREMY SMITH**

Keyboard Programmer: **RANDY COHEN**
Contractor: **JASON FISHER**

**This show runs approximately two hours and thirty minutes,
with one fifteen-minute intermission.**

— ADDITIONAL STAFF —

Assistant Director.....	ADDIE GORLIN
Associate Choreographer.....	ZOE RABINOWITZ
Voice and Text.....	ERIKA BAILEY
Assistant Scenic Designer.....	YOU-SHIN CHEN
Assistant Costume Designer.....	CAITY MULKEARNS
Associate Lighting Designer.....	JESSICA CREAGER
Assistant Sound Designer.....	HALEY PARCHER
Sound Console Facilitator.....	JOHN KAUBLE
Associate Keyboard Programmer.....	SAM STAROBIN
Assistant Keyboard Programmer.....	TIM CROOK
Associate Projection Designer.....	LACEY ERB
Projection Programmer.....	CHET MILLER
Casting Assistant.....	MIKE MILLER
Production Dramaturgy.....	ROBERT DUFFLEY
Research Assistants.....	KAREEM EMARA, LAMA EL HOMAÏSSI
Copyists.....	LEONOR RINKE DE WIT, NOAH TEPLIN
Music Assistants.....	COLTON CARTER, JOY NESBITT
Rehearsal Accompanists.....	DAVID COLEMAN, MATEO LINCOLN, ELIZABETH TERRY-KANTOR
Production Assistant.....	BRADLEY COSTA

Additional Lighting Equipment provided by Christie Lites.
 Additional Sound Equipment provided by Sound Associates, Inc.
 Additional Sound Equipment provided by Shure Microphones.
 Additional Projections Equipment provided by Sound Associates, Inc.

— SPECIAL THANKS —

Tarek Masoud, The Middle East Initiative
 Melissa D'Anello, Christopher Mawhorter, Roba Khorshid
 The Richard Rodgers Awards for Musical Theater
 New York Theatre Workshop,
 Department of Theater and the Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College
 Pippa Ailion Casting
 Ganzeer, Sultan Sooud al-Qassemi, Ezzedine Fishere,
 Soha Bayoumi, Ahmed Ragab, Nermin Allam, Vickie Langhor, Leila Fadel
 Sherien Sobhy, Sharaf Al-Hourani, Rana Elkahwagy, Nourhan Shaaban
 Dina Amer, Frank Bradley, Omar Robert Hamilton, Paul & Nel Lazour,
 Rick Miramontez, Noor Theatre, Or Matias, Anne Morgan,
 Omar El Okdah, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Jeanine Tesori
 The students of the American University in Cairo
 Harvard Dance Center
 Shure Microphones
 Adam Morrison, Richard Dean Associates, Bill Ostry,
 Ben Escabedo, Frank Conway

A NOTE FROM THE CREATIVE TEAM

Writers Daniel Lazour and Patrick Lazour and Director Taibi Magar reflect on the process of bringing *We Live in Cairo* to the stage.



We Live in Cairo writers Patrick Lazour and Daniel Lazour (left, right), and director Taibi Magar (center).

We Live in Cairo started with a photograph: eight Cairenes, aged sixteen to twenty-two, gathered around a table in a flat seven floors above Tahrir Square. The students were activists, taking a moment from the protests below to upload testimonials, download images, and post tweets, all in service of overthrowing President Hosni Mubarak, whose regime had been in power in Egypt for thirty years. It is a dynamic tableau, with laptops and cameras and Coke cans. One student sits in the middle of the group, his face aglow with the light of his MacBook; another, whose forehead is bandaged, lights his friend's cigarette. The photo inspired us with its optimism and courage and youth.

This image began a six-year journey of writing, reading, and discussing. Initial drafts of *We Live in Cairo* were fueled by the inspiring stories of overthrowing a dictatorship and forging a



The *We Live in Cairo* ensemble in rehearsal.

new democracy.

The West shut the book on the “Arab Spring” with glossy images of jubilant squares across the region, but Egypt was dealing with a transitional period coming out of 2011. This included further protests, the election of Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, and the military coup that followed. These events are so important to the history of this revolution, and we felt it critical to include them in our piece.

We delved into the research. Daniel learned guitar, after being inspired by the work of Ramy Essam, deemed the “singer of the 2011 revolution.” We were influenced by the social justice-driven poetry of Ahmed Fouad Negm. We looked to the texts of Egyptian writers including Omar Robert Hamilton and Wael Ghonim, and had long conversations with scholars and artists, including Professor Tarek Masoud and Ganzeer (who created the poster art for this production).

We workshoped a draft of our piece with the students at the American University in Cairo and met young people who had a keen awareness of their country’s political situation, and

who were eager to tell their personal stories of the revolution. We befriended an activist who created new IP addresses to thwart a surveilling regime during the 2011 protests. Another student recalled his father guarding their building when the police abandoned the city.

Every day that we work on this musical, we are inspired by the revolutionaries of Egypt—those men and women who broke the wall of fear and risked their lives for their beautiful home. Together, with this cast of Arab, Arab-American, and Middle Eastern performers, we have immersed ourselves in the many stories of the revolution, all the while considering the question that lies, for us, at the heart of this piece: how far does one go for the love of one’s country?

Thank you for coming to ***We Live in Cairo.***



Artwork: Ganzeer

RELIVING TAHRIR

by Tarek Masoud

On January 25th, 2011, hundreds, then thousands, of Egyptians descended upon Tahrir Square in Cairo and upon the squares and streets of other cities to call for “bread, freedom, and social justice (*‘aysh, hurriya, ‘adala ijtimaiyya*),” and to demand an end to the brutality of their country’s police. Eighteen days later, those thousands had grown to millions, and together they compelled their country’s long-ruling dictator, Hosni Mubarak, to resign his office and flee to his seaside retreat (eventually to face trial for his misdeeds). But today, almost a decade from that event, it is hard to believe that any of those things actually happened. Bread, freedom, and social justice remain distant imaginings. Mubarak, though a little worse for wear, walks free. And the democracy for which so many Egyptians fought and died has been excised from the national agenda by a regime that is by many accounts more repressive than the one against which Egyptians rose up those eight long years ago. So decisively has the revolution of 2011 been rolled back that it is easy to wonder whether it happened at all. Was Tahrir Square just a dream?

Article continues on next page 13

We Live in Cairo, a new musical by Daniel and Patrick Lazour, comes to remind us that it was not, that what happened during those eighteen days in Egypt was real. The play introduces us to six young friends who throw themselves into their country's glorious revolt against dictatorship, and who then must struggle to find their way in the chaos and discord that follow. Driven by an acoustic guitar that recalls the melodies of revolutionary Egyptian musicians such as Yasser al-Manawahly or Ramy Essam, and with a sometimes wicked sense of humor that seems borrowed from the great musical satirical duo of Ahmed Fouad Negm (d. 2013) and Sayyid Imam (d. 1995), ***We Live in Cairo*** is a remarkable work of art that will infect American audiences with the spirit and drama of a revolution now routinely declared dead by most Western interpreters of the Middle East.

And what drama there is. It is fitting that the Egyptian revolution and its aftermath should be made into a work of art, because it was itself a work of art. Those eighteen days in Tahrir were a collective act of stunning creativity by a people few thought capable of such a feat. The decade prior to Mubarak's overthrow had been filled with sober, sometimes regretful, but always certain, pronouncements on the enervation and apathy of the Egyptian public. This was a people whose silent assent to the untender ministrations of the powerful was taken for granted. And so, when they confounded expectations, awoke from their supposed slumber, and began to demand to be heard, it was not just of their leaders that they made the plea, but of all of us. And when they finally got our attention, what they showed us was indescribably beautiful. It is impossible to view scenes and photographs of the Egyptian revolution—whether taken by professionals or by amateurs clicking away on cellular phones—and not find

“It is fitting that the Egyptian revolution and its aftermath should be made into a work of art, because it was itself a work of art.”

them bewitching. In almost all of them, almost every Egyptian seems young and heroic and impossibly photogenic.

But the beauty of the revolution is only part of what makes it such fertile terrain for artistic interpretation. For the aftermath of those eighteen days was one of incredible turmoil and tragedy. No sooner had the “kids” in the Square chased away the strongman than were they too chased away, this time by dueling zealots—religious and militaristic—who captured the country's politics and spent two years tussling over who would ultimately get to monopolize it. The democratic elections that people had dreamt of brought to power not the photogenic young revolutionaries of Tahrir, but religious conservatives. The lion's share of these (including the country's president) were associated with the Muslim

Brotherhood—a ninety-year old pietistic and political movement that recalls nothing so much as Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority—but a healthy contingent of them included ultra-orthodox Islamic politicians who wished to hold the line against expanding personal freedoms, keep women at home, and turn their Christian compatriots into second-class citizens. Some of us argued that the results of democratic procedures had to be respected, that the triumph of Islamists was only temporary, and that repeated elections would generate new possibilities. But such assurances were cold comfort to people reeling from the gap between their dreams of revolution and the reality of what it had wrought.

Into this gap came the men with guns and uniforms. Egypt's military had long been the hegemonic power of Egyptian politics, and the democratic interlude that set in after Tahrir was one in which the gendarmes had begun to feel squeezed. Although Islamist politicians often made great shows of respect to the armed forces, the power that had passed into the hands of this assorted religious rabble could not have been viewed with equanimity by those long used to hogging it. And with every show of arrogance by Islamist politicians, every high-handed act of the country's Muslim Brotherhood president, the number of Egyptians who were willing to turn their backs on the revolution and throw their lot in with the generals grew. When the president was finally overthrown in July 2013, it was after popular protests that by many credible accounts were larger than the ones that had preceded the overthrow of Mubarak. The revolution had come full circle, except this time, the images were not of heroic young people hoisted aloft on the shoulders of a grateful nation, but of faces contorted by fear and anger, of bodies mangled by the implements of those sworn to protect them, and of a

nation at war with itself.

Audiences of *We Live in Cairo* will experience all of this anew. The result is not just a bit of entertainment, but hopefully something more transformative. Shortly after Mubarak laid down his mantle, the American president, Barack Obama, declared that "The people of Egypt have spoken, their voices have been heard, and Egypt will never be the same." It is a line that has not aged well—given Egypt's dramatic return to authoritarianism in the summer of 2013—and I have often quoted it ironically. What *We Live in Cairo* teaches me was that President Obama was right. The Egypt of today is not the same as the Egypt that existed before the revolution, if only because its people carry in their heads and their hearts the memory of that event and of what they almost achieved. And, after *We Live in Cairo*, so will you.



Tarek Masoud is the Sultan of Oman Professor at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

This article was originally published in the A.R.T. Guide, available for free in the theater's lobbies and online at AmericanRepertoryTheater.org

THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION

We Live in Cairo follows six young people through the 2011 Egyptian revolution and its aftermath, including a military coup and violent crackdown.

The following timeline includes a brief version of these events.



JUNE 2010: PRESIDENT HOSNI MUBARAK

President Hosni Mubarak approaches thirty years in power. Egypt's political status quo is rife with corruption and contradictions; police harassment is especially pervasive. Small street protests are common, but larger demonstrations are quickly broken up.

On June 6, 2010, police brutally beat twenty-eight-year-old Khaled Said to death outside an internet café in Alexandria. Official police reports say that Said choked to death on a bag of hashish. This account is disproved, however, when images of Said's shattered face surface online. By the end of June, the "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook group amasses thousands of members. Protests break out across Alexandria and Cairo.

JUL 2010 - JAN 2011: MOUNTING ANGER

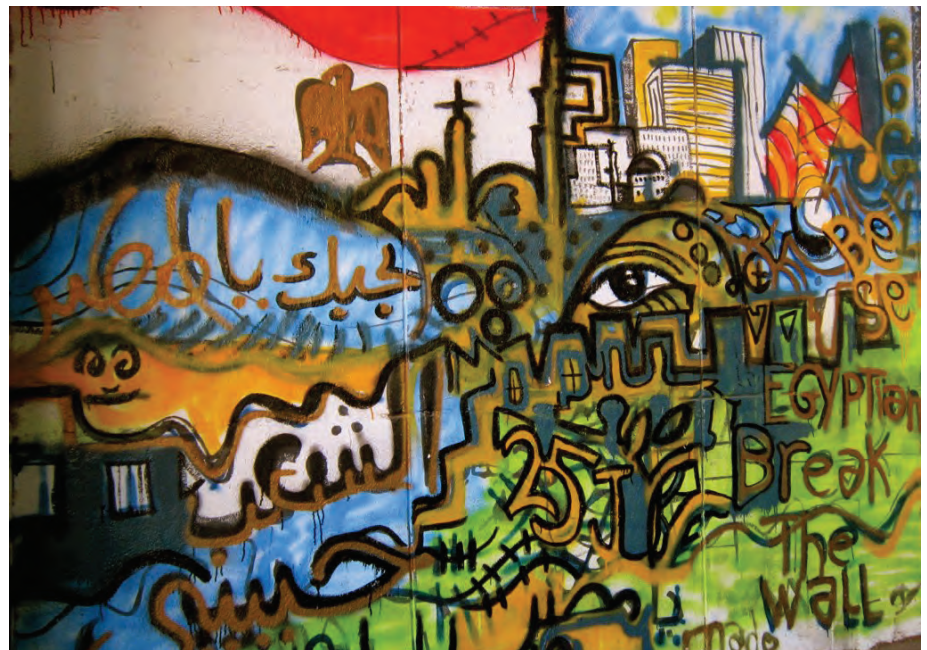
In November 2010 elections—largely considered fraudulent—Mubarak sweeps the Muslim Brotherhood (an Islamist political organization with a long history of opposition to and repression by the government) out of parliament.

Islamist and secular leaders react to the elections with anger—sporadic protests continue throughout Egypt. Meanwhile, in Tunisia, produce vendor Mohamed Bouazizi sets himself on fire to protest police harassment, sparking massive protests which, within a month, force Tunisian dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali to flee the country. These events encourage other protestors across the Middle East, igniting a wave of demonstrations termed the "Arab Spring" (primarily by Western observers).

In Egypt, a group of activists have organized small protests on Police Day (a national holiday) every year in Cairo's Tahrir Square. In January 2011, their protest plans gain new attention (90,000 "attending" RSVPs) via the "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook group.

JAN 25 - FEB 11, 2011: EIGHTEEN DAYS

National anger at years of corruption and abuse pours onto the streets of Egypt. An unprecedented coalition of groups—youth, liberals, Islamists, Christians, middle class, poor—stage massive protests in Tahrir Square. Fighting off assaults by the police and pro-Mubarak thugs (which claim almost 900 lives), demonstrators construct and share a massive tent city in the square. After eighteen days of protests, President Hosni Mubarak steps down. Power is transferred to the army as an interim measure; plans are made to hold free elections and write a new constitution (under the supervision of the army and the courts).





MAR 2011 - JUNE 2012: ELECTIONS

Egypt holds the first free and fair elections in its citizens' lifetimes. People wait outdoors in long lines for hours, voting in multiple elections, from a March 2011 constitutional referendum to a two-round presidential election held in May and June of 2012. To the surprise of secularists, liberals, and international observers, voters grant a plurality of parliamentary seats to the Muslim Brotherhood in January 2012. Fearing an Islamist takeover, Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court disqualifies the Muslim Brotherhood's preferred presidential candidate, Khairat el-Shater. In June 2012 presidential elections, Mohamed Morsi—Khairat el-Shater's last-minute replacement and a relatively obscure engineering professor—is sworn in as Egypt's president, taking 51.7% of the vote. During the month-long election process, the Court intervenes again to trim Islamist sails and dissolves the parliament, setting in motion a season of intense political struggle.

JUNE 2012 - JUNE 2013: PRESIDENT MOHAMED MORSI

In the months following Morsi's election, the new president struggles for power with the army and the courts. Protests grow in tandem with an escalating economic crisis,



fuel shortages, electricity blackouts, sexual assaults in public spaces, and violence against Christians. Parliament remains disbanded, while the drafting process for a new constitution begins. Opposition leaders, including liberals and Christians, fear a conservative Islamist betrayal of the revolution. The grassroots *Tamarod* (Arabic for "rebellion") movement collects millions of signatures calling for Morsi's resignation and for new elections.

JUNE 30, 2013: MILITARY COUP

Protests and counter-protests marking the one-year anniversary of Morsi's election grow massive. On July 1, the army gives Morsi a 48-hour ultimatum to restore order or step down. Morsi defies the ultimatum, and protests continue to swell. On July 3, the army suspends the constitution and takes Morsi into custody. Protestors in Tahrir Square jubilantly welcome the army, led by army general Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, into power.

AUG 14, 2013: RABAA MASSACRE

After the coup, Morsi's supporters occupy the square outside Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque in central Cairo, protesting for his reinstatement. On the morning of August 16, police move to clear the protests. For twelve hours, protestors battle police forces, who use helicopters, rooftop snipers, bulldozers, tear gas, and live ammunition against demonstrators. The government cites approximately 600 casualties from this attack; human rights groups estimate up to 2,600 fatalities, with approximately 4,000 injured.

2013-PRESENT: CRACKDOWN

Following the 2013 crackdown, the army imposes strict curfews and restrictions on protests, media, and art. Many leaders of the 2011 revolution leave Egypt; others, including Muslim Brotherhood members, are jailed and tortured. In 2014, army general Abdel Fattah el-Sisi is sworn in as President. Parliament remains dissolved until 2015, when the army declares (and oversees) new elections. In March 2017, Hosni Mubarak is acquitted of responsibility for the deaths of protestors in 2011 and freed from detention. Mohamed Morsi remains jailed to this day.

LEARN MORE

To learn more about the events which inspired this production, A.R.T. recommends the following books and media.

Nermin Allam,
Women and the Egyptian Revolution
Cambridge University Press, 2018

Jason Brownlee,
Tarek Masoud, and
Andrew Reynolds,
The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform
Oxford University Press, 2015

Bieke Depoorter,
As It May Be
Aperture, 2018

David Kirkpatrick,
Into the Hands of the Soldiers: Freedom and Chaos in Egypt and the Middle East
Viking, 2018

The Square
Directed by
Jehane Noujaim
Noujaim Films, Worldview Entertainment, 2013

Wendell Steavenson,
Circling the Square: Stories from the Egyptian Revolution
HarperCollins, 2015

PROTEST MUSIC

A.R.T. Artistic Director Diane Paulus in conversation
with the creators of ***We Live in Cairo***

*At the 2018/19 Season Preview, A.R.T. Artistic Director Diane Paulus spoke with Daniel and Patrick Lazour, the authors of **We Live in Cairo**, and Director Taibi Magar. In this conversation, they discuss their inspiration and writing process for this world-premiere musical.*

The A.R.T. 18/19 Season closes with *We Live in Cairo*. This new musical follows a group of young people through the events of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, when millions rose up to overthrow the president of thirty years. Could you tell us about your initial inspiration for this piece?

PATRICK LAZOUR: The impetus for the show was actually an incredible photo [at right] that I saw when I was in a course at Boston College called International Relations of the Middle East. It shows a group of young activists in 2011, during the eighteen days of protests, in a flat above Tahrir Square.

DANIEL LAZOUR: *The New York Times* termed it the “Facebook flat,” because it was a crash pad in a central location where these revolutionaries could come together with internet access to

have a free exchange of ideas. We were inspired by the collection of stories evident in that photo and that place. Also, Patrick and I are of Lebanese descent, and we’ve always wanted to create a show incorporating Arabic musical influences.

Taibi, how did you get involved as the director of this production? What about the subject matter interested you?

TAIBI MAGAR: When I first read the script and listened to the music, I fell deeply in love with the show for a few reasons. First of all, it is closely tied to my Egyptian-American heritage. Secondly, I read the piece shortly after the current US administration had moved into Washington, DC. It felt exciting to work on a piece asking deep questions such as, “What do you do when you’re unsatisfied with your government, even finding it to be dangerous?” It was also great to dive into the stories of the revolution and realize the magnitude of what they accomplished: amid a thirty-year dictatorship, a bunch of twenty-year-olds started a Facebook group, which sparked demonstrations by millions of people.

Can you tell us about the characters we meet in this show?

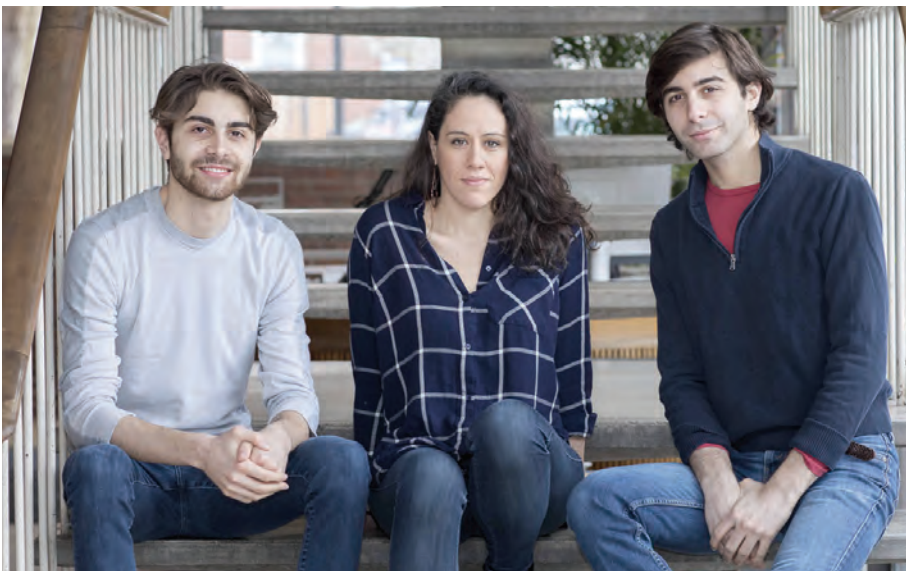
PL: *We Live in Cairo* follows six young people through the revolution and its aftermath. In scenes set in 2011, we tell the story of the community and the activism that it took to overthrow Mubarak. Then, we examine the disillusionment that followed elections in 2012, and the danger and violence following the military coup in 2013.

TM: The revolution was extraordinary—but as extraordinary as it was, it has failed, at least for now. We traveled to Egypt in preparation for the production, and it was hard to look at these activists’ faces, knowing how many friends and family members they had lost. It was hard to hear people say that, in many ways, the country is in a worse state now that it was before 2011. The play navigates between these moments of extreme hope and extreme loss, asking “how do you keep moving forward?” It reminds me of a Samuel Beckett quote: “you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on.” In moments of despair in protest and revolution, how do we get to the point of “I’ll go on”?

You mentioned an impulse to explore Arabic music. What were some of your specific influences for this piece, and how are they incorporated into the show?

DL: In our early work on the show, we thought about the incredible beats and rhythms in the Arab world that we aren’t exposed to in the West, and we thought that it could be exciting and theatrical to bring those to the stage. We experimented with layering Western chord progressions on top of Arabic rhythms—which is a mixture happening extensively in contemporary Arabic pop music, too. We’re trying to offer something new to American theater and also reflect a conversation that’s already taking place.

PL: I would also say that what—maybe surprisingly—screamed “musical” about this topic is the deep tradition of protest music both in the Egyptian revolution and also in our country. Especially during the eighteen days in 2011, there



Written by Daniel Lazour and Patrick Lazour (left, right) and directed by Taibi Magar (center), ***We Live in Cairo*** follows six young people through Egypt’s 2011 revolution and its aftermath.



Part of the Lazours' inspiration for *We Live in Cairo* came from a photo (above) by Ed Ou, depicting a group of activists in 2011 in a flat above Cairo's Tahrir Square.

was a serious communication between Western protest music and the music of the Arab World. While we were in Egypt, a lot of the students we interviewed mentioned that they loved bands like Rage Against the Machine or the Pixies. And if you look at the student in the back of the photo (above), he's wearing a Johnny Cash T-shirt. It's all to say that there's a dialogue going on within the new generation, and contemporary Arab music really reflects that.

Can you say a bit about how your experience of this photo came to life on that trip to Egypt and in those conversations with students?

PL: The trip was profound in so many ways. First of all, the students we worked with knew all of the kids in the photo. Now—even more than when Mubarak was in power—there's a lot of censorship of art in Egypt, so we were concerned. But we did a private reading at the American University in Cairo, and afterwards, it was incredible to hear how much the students wanted this story to be told, and how they saw this show as one opportunity for that to happen.

What has it been like to develop the piece in the US in relation to everything that's currently happening here?

DL: One thing that's been really exciting for me is that the creation of the show has brought Middle Eastern people together and fostered conversations about our perspectives. There's not one singular Middle Eastern experience, so the more we can participate in those conversations in honest and thoughtful ways, the better the piece will be.

PL: The contemporary US context has made the show feel more urgent for me. This country is facing many challenges today, but I think it's important to be aware of the freedoms we have here that the Egyptian people continue to fight for. It's never a one-to-one with these things, but I think bringing the story of the Egyptian revolution to people in the US at this point in time will help to broaden and illuminate the innate human desire for progress and change.

TM: In Egypt, it really felt like they're dealing with a gaping wound, compared to the bruise that we

have here in the US. It was frightening to be there and to understand how the tortured relationships between the people, the government, and the media feeds fear and destabilization. I feel that every day now.

Second, I've been so inspired by moments led by youth here in the US, such as the students from Parkland, Florida. It has been great to follow their stories and see videos of them, because they remind me of the Egyptian students in our story. After a reading of the play in the US, I got a note from a friend who left the show thinking how great young people are. I think that's a very valuable takeaway from this production, because they're the generation that's going to help us get out of the current situation.

Interview by Diane Paulus, Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director of the American Repertory Theater.



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American Repertory Theater Unveils *We Live in Cairo* Show Art Created by Egyptian Artist Ganzeer

World Premiere Musical Plays May 14 – June 23, 2019

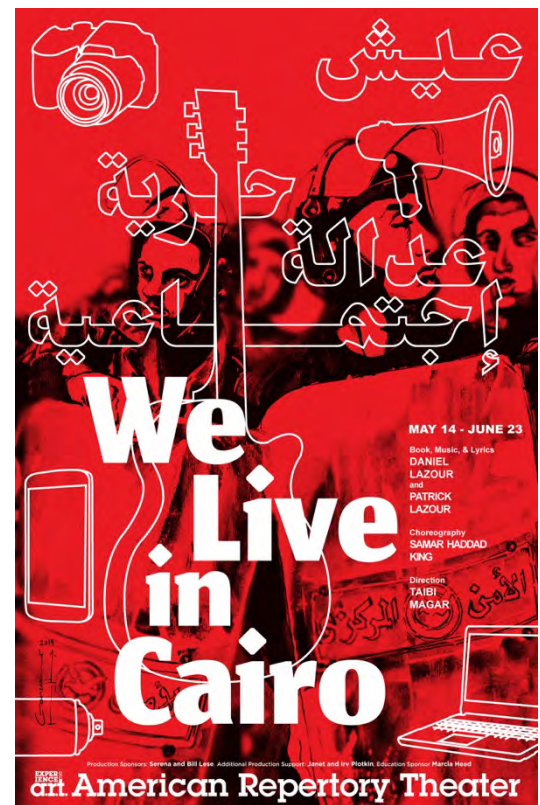
[Images available for download here.](#)

Cambridge, MA—American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) at Harvard University unveils its show art for the new musical *We Live in Cairo*. The art is created by **Ganzeer**, a multifaceted visual artist and experimenter pivotal to the visual identity of the Egyptian Revolution. Written by brothers **Daniel Lazour** and **Patrick Lazour**, *We Live in Cairo* is inspired by the young Egyptians who took to the streets in 2011 to overthrow President Hosni Mubarak. It follows six revolutionary students armed with laptops and cameras, guitars, and spray cans from the jubilation of Cairo's Tahrir Square where the Egyptian revolution unfolded through the tumultuous years that followed.

The show art design (right) features the image of a riot layered beneath the outlines of the revolutionaries' tools of resistance: a bullhorn, a camera, a can of spray paint, a cellphone, a laptop, and a guitar. It also incorporates the text of the chant commonly heard in Tahrir Square during the 18-day revolution: *Aish, Horreya, Adala Egtema'eya*, which translates to Bread, Freedom, Social Justice.

The artist uses the pseudonym Ganzeer, which means “bicycle chain,” to signify the role he believes artists play in affecting change. He explained to [The New York Times in 2014](#), “We are not the driving force. We are not the people pedaling, but we can connect ideas and by doing this we allow the thing to move.”

Described as a “chameleon” by Carlo McCormick in *The New York Times*, **Ganzeer** is considered one of the most enigmatic artists of his generation, having been compared



to everyone from Ai Weiwei to Banksy to Alan Moore to Jaime Hayon. Ganzeer operates seamlessly between art, design, and storytelling, creating what he has coined: *Concept Pop*, a brand of cultural insurgency that utilizes the aesthetics birthed by Pop Art in tackling the subject matter typically ascribed to Conceptual Art. His medium of choice as described by Kaelen Wilson-Goldie in *Artforum* is “a little bit of everything: stencils, murals, paintings, pamphlets, comics, installations, graphic design,” and more.

With over 40 exhibitions to his name, Ganzeer’s work has been seen in a wide variety of art galleries, impromptu spaces, alleyways, and major museums around the world, such as the Brooklyn Museum (New York), The Palace of the Arts (Cairo, Egypt), Greek State Museum (Thessaloniki, Greece), the Victoria and Albert Museum (London, England), and the Edith Russ Haus (Oldenburg, Germany). His current projects include the short story collection [*Times New Human*](#) and the graphic novel [*The Solar Grid*](#) (2016 Global Thinker Award from *Foreign Policy*). He has been an artist-in-residence in Germany, Poland, Jordan, Holland, and Finland, and has lived extensively in Cairo, New York, Los Angeles, and now Denver.

We Live in Cairo plays at the Loeb Drama Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts from May 14 through June 23, 2019. The run includes one week of added performances due to popular demand. Obie Award winner **Taibi Magar** directs.

Production Support of ***We Live in Cairo*** is provided by **Serena and Bill Lese**. Additional Production Support is provided by **Janet and Irv Plotkin**. Education and engagement support is provided by **Marcia Head**.

TICKETING INFORMATION

Tickets start at \$25 and are available now online at AmericanRepertoryTheater.org, by phone at 617.547.8300, and in person at the Loeb Drama Center Ticket Services Offices (64 Brattle Street, Cambridge). Discounts are available to A.R.T. Subscribers, Members, groups, students, seniors, Blue Star families, EBT card holders, and others.

ABOUT AMERICAN REPERTORY THEATER

American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) at Harvard University is a leading force in the American theater, producing groundbreaking work that is driven by risk-taking, artistic inquiry and passionate inquiry. A.R.T. was founded in 1980 by Robert Brustein, who served as Artistic Director until 2002, when he was succeeded by Robert Woodruff. Diane Paulus began her tenure as Artistic Director in 2008. Under the leadership of Paulus as the Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director and Executive Producer Diane Borger, A.R.T. seeks to expand the boundaries of theater by programming transformative theatrical experiences, always including the audience as a central partner.

Throughout its history, A.R.T. has been honored with many distinguished awards including the Tony Award for Best New Play for ***All the Way*** (2014); consecutive Tony Awards for Best Revival of a Musical for ***Pippin*** (2013) and ***The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*** (2012), both of which Paulus directed, and sixteen other Tony Awards since 2012; a Pulitzer Prize; a Jujamcyn Prize for outstanding contribution to the development of creative talent; the Regional Theater Tony Award; and more than 100 Elliot Norton and IRNE Awards. Under Paulus’s leadership, A.R.T.’s club theater, OBERON, has been recognized

annually as a top performance venue in the Boston area, and has attracted national attention for its innovative programming and business models.

As the professional theater on the campus of Harvard University, A.R.T. is committed to playing a central role in the cognitive life of the University, catalyzing discourse, interdisciplinary collaboration, and creative exchange among a wide range of academic departments, institutions, students, and faculty members. A.R.T. is engaged in a number of multi-year initiatives with partners at Harvard that explore some of the most pressing issues of our day, including a collaboration with the Harvard University Center for the Environment to develop new work that addresses climate change. A.R.T. plays a central role in Harvard's undergraduate Theater, Dance & Media concentration, teaching courses in directing, dramatic literature, acting, voice, design, and dramaturgy. A.R.T. staff also mentors students in the Harvard Radcliffe Dramatic Club working at the Loeb Drama Center and OBERON.

Dedicated to making great theater accessible, A.R.T. actively engages more than 5,000 community members and local students annually in project-based partnerships, workshops, conversations with artists, and other enrichment activities both at the theater and across the Greater Boston area.

#WeLiveInCairoART

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