

Boston **PLAYWRIGHTS'** Theatre



THE FIG TREE, AND THE PHOENIX, AND THE DESIRE TO BE REBORN

BY ISABELLE FERESHTEH SANATDAR STEVENS

DIRECTED BY NIKTA SABOURI

"I like being alive with you..."

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THE FIG TREE, AND THE PHOENIX, **AND THE DESIRE** TO BE REBORN

BY **ISABELLE FERESHTEH SANATDAR STEVENS**

DIRECTED BY NIKTA SABOURI

Scenic Design	Cleo Brooks
Lighting Design	Grant Powicki
Original Music and Sound Design	Arshan Gailust†
Costume Design	Jez Insalaco†
Properties Design	Courtney Licata†
Production Stage Manager	Jenna Worden*
Scenic Charge and Fig Tree tapestry	Courtney Licata†
Tapestry Calligrapher	Amir Tabatabaei
Asst. Lighting Design/Programmer	Darius Knight Evans
Production Assistant	Gabby Franklin
Wardrobe Assistant	Carly Stegall
Line Notes	Sara Gorelkin
Production Electrician	Zachary Connell
Electricians	Rachel Harned, Nathan McWilliams, India Silverman, Noah Wrafter
Carpenter	Carly Stegall
House Managers	Maggie Kearnan, Matt Leal, Elliott Purcell
Front of House Staff	Fintan Bracken, Rachel Greene, Liala Jama, Ria Slater

CAST

Mandana	Minou Pourshariati
Javeed	Danny Bryck*

***The Fig Tree...* runs approximately 80 minutes with no intermission.**

*Appearing through an Agreement between Boston Playwrights' Theatre and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

†Member, United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829

The video and/or audio recording of this performance by any means whatsoever is strictly prohibited.

FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

The world doesn't have to be how it is or how it has been.

But how do we change it? How do we create a world where being alive is like living in a good dream for everyone?

Kids who survive horrible things, like genocide, when asked to share their dreams, say many things: Eating sugar, or schwarma. Returning home. Living in safety. Reuniting with loved ones. For their dead to come back to life. For things, and homes, and people, to return to how they once were. They all dream of a world wherein their dreams might come true.

This play is for people who survive traumatic things and are left to deal with the aftermath of their worlds being shattered, their loved ones being killed, their homes being stolen and made unrecognizable or destroyed.

This play is for Iran.

This play is for Afghanistan.

This play is for Palestine.

Zan, Zendegi, Azadi.
(Woman, Life, Freedom.)

Free Palestine.

Special thanks to Jasmine Cyrus, my light in this world. To my mom, for her bravery and magic. To my baba for his humor and storytelling. To Nikta, the most thoughtful and expansive collaborator I could've wished for. To Yeganeh, for her dramaturgy and fire. To my sisters in the MFA program—Brandon Zang, Maggie Kearnan, Tina Esper—for their support and care. To Nathan, for everything these past three years. To Cleo, Grant, Darius, Arshan, Jez, Courtney, Wesley, Jenna, Gabby, Danny, and Minou for making magic appear out of thin air.

For those who have passed through the darkness. My friend, can you hear me?

Va baraye babayam. Baba jan—Ghooghoolee ghooghoo.

—Isabelle Fereshteh Sanatdar Stevens

FROM THE DIRECTOR

In a world where children are robbed of their childhood, *The Fig Tree*, *The Phoenix*, and *The Desire to Be Reborn* celebrates the resilience of those who still long for the wonder of youth. Drawing on the rich traditions of Iranian storytelling, this play explores survival, myth, and memory, showing us that even in the darkest times, imagination and courage can spark hope.

Playwright Isabelle Fereshteh draws on centuries-old Iranian theatrical heritage, weaving together history and mythology so seamlessly that the past resonates urgently with our present. In directing this production, we've embraced those storytelling roots—particularly the ancient *pardeh khani* tradition, where a storyteller uses a painted curtain or tapestry to depict epic tales—reminding us that sharing a story can be both an act of resistance and a living force that shapes culture and identity.

It has been an honor to bring this script to life alongside a remarkable team of artists who have poured their hearts into every moment on stage. My hope is that *Fig Tree* reminds us of the fragile beauty of childhood, the lasting power of stories, and our shared human drive to seek light—even in the darkest of times.

—Nikta Sabouri

BRIEF HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Iran-Iraq war spanned from 1980 to 1988, ending officially on August 20, 1988 because of pressure from the UN for both nations to accept a ceasefire. There was no clear “victor.” (Is there ever such a thing in a war?)

During this eight-year long period (which immediately followed the revolution in Iran), bombing, chemical warfare, and environmental devastation threatened Iranian civilians' lives. As the war progressed, younger and younger children were recruited to be soldiers. The majority of them died and were revered/mourning as martyrs, but those who survived the terrors lost any connection they once might have had to a “childhood.” For the children not on the official “battlefield,” bombs were a daily threat. In Zanzan a school was bombed; 15 children were killed, and countless more were injured.

CAST & CREW

CLEO BROOKS (Scenic Design) is a current Boston University senior. She has designed shows at BU such as *Alice Tierney* (2023), and *Julius Caesar* (2024), which she also painted. She has also produced a number of BU productions such as *Mankind* (2022), and *Sunday in the Park with George* (2024). Cleo also works as a graphic designer, notably as the designer on the documentary *Brief Tender Light* (2023), and currently at a custom athletic wear company called Breakmark.

DANNY BRYCK* (Javeed) is an actor, playwright, dialect coach, and cultural worker based in New York. Recent NYC theatre credits include *Remember this Trick* (Target Margin Theater), *Iphigenia Point Blank* (In Parentheses/ Lailou Productions), *Only Place I Belong* (The What Co.), *The Magic Bullet* (LubDub Theatre Co.), *Be the Death of Me* (The Civilians). Favorite New England credits include *Chill* (Merrimack Repertory Theatre), *The Cherry Orchard* (Actors' Shakespeare Project), *RENT* (New Repertory Theatre), *The Donkey Show* (American Repertory Theater), *Tales from Ovid* (Whistler in the Dark Theatre/ ArtsEmerson), and *No Room for Wishing*, his documentary solo show written from interviews during the Occupy movement. His work has been presented by Company One, Underground Railway Theatre, Boston Playwrights' Theatre, Radial Theater Project, the United Story Project, American Repertory Theater, New Repertory Theatre, and Noor Theatre Company, among others. Danny holds a BFA from Boston University and is excited to be back in his old stomping grounds. www.dannybryck.com

DARIUS KNIGHT EVANS (Assistant Lighting Design/Programmer) is a sophomore lighting design major at Boston University. His previous production credits include Assistant Production Electrician for *Cendrillon*, Lead Spot op for *La Clemenza di Tito*, Assistant Lighting Designer for *Dark Sisters*, Production Electrician for *Julius Caesar*, and Follow Spot Assistant for *The Rink* at Boston University. As well as Assistant Master Electrician at the Forestburgh Playhouse. He would like to thank his family, friends, and mentors who have helped him along the way.

GABBY FRANKLIN (Production Assistant) is a first-year MFA Playwriting student at Boston University. Her past plays include *My Boss is the Dinosaur!* and *Pandora*, both produced at Rice University. Gabby is very excited to join Boston Playwrights' Theatre for her first professional production! [@fgabrielle1445](https://twitter.com/fgabrielle1445)

ARSHAN GAILUST† (Original Music and Sound Design) is an interdisciplinary artist who has worked extensively creating soundscapes and original music for the theater. Arshan has worked with theater companies including Shakespeare & Company, ArtsEmerson, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, California Shakespeare Theater, The Huntington Theatre Company, Capital Repertory Theatre, Contemporary American Theater Festival, Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, Plays in Place, A.R.T Institute, The Lyric Stage Company, Company One,

and many more. In addition to their theater design work, Arshan creates works combining performance art, storytelling, video, music, and written and spoken words, exploring and reimagining questions of identity, alienation, belonging, and culture. Arshan previously taught theatrical sound design for Emerson College. They hold a BS in Music from MIT and an MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts from Goddard College. www.arshangailus.com

JEZ INSALACO† (Costume Design) is a proud Costume Design member of United Scenic Artists 829 and costumer of Local 481 Studio Mechanics. Costume design credits include: *The Light* at Lyric Stage Company, *This is Treatment* at Northeastern University, *How We Got On* at Emerson College, *The Samuel Slater Experience* by Boston Productions Inc, and *The Diary of Anne Frank* at Boston Children's Theatre. Film and Television credits include *Sorry, Baby* (Key Costumer), *The Walking Dead: Dead City S2* (BG Set Costumer), *Good Burger 2* (Set Costumer), *Instigators* (Boston Unit BG Set Costumer), and *Don't Look Up* (Costume Fitter). She is a queer Japanese-American artist who is passionate about creating with color and designing work that is for and by people of color. She hopes to create images through her design that are diverse and expansive and to empower those who see themselves in her work. jezdes.com

COURTNEY LICATA† (Properties Design/Scenic Charge and Fig Tree tapestry) is a Boston University alum (CFA '14, '16) delighted to have found her way back in a new role as Props Designer and scenic charge, combining the skills she's learned as both a stage carpenter and a film scenic artist. She returns to BPT after doing props for both *Soft Star* and *How to -Not- Save the World with Mr. Bezos* (2024). Other credits include *Beetlejuice*, *Beetlejuice* (2024), *Salem's Lot* (2024), *Dexter: New Blood* (2021), *The Hound of Baskervilles* at Central Square Theater, and a hand in the construction of a number of shows at American Repertory Theater.

GRANT POWICKI (Lighting Design) is a New England-based lighting designer currently finishing his BFA at Boston University. He has worked across many different areas of the entertainment industry and hopes to continue illuminating performances of all types in his career. He has worked with The Boston Symphony Orchestra, The Boston Bruins, Opera North, The Nantucket Dance Festival, and more! Grantpowicki.com

MINOU POURSHARIATI (Mandana) is an actor and Philadelphia native of Iranian/American ancestry. She has performed with Delaware Shakespeare (*The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* community tours in non-traditional locations like homeless shelters, prisons, and community centers), Shakespeare in Clark Park (*Comedy of Errors: Real Housewives of Ephesus*, *The Taming!*), Opera Philadelphia/Obvious Agency (Toshio Hosokawa's *The Raven*), Inis Nua (*The Night Alive*), EgoPo, Revolution Shakespeare, Philadelphia Artists Collective, and others, as well as at the National Constitution Center (*Living News*). Film: *Tonight, We Eat Flowers* (BlackStar Filmmakers Lab/All Ages Productions, Bettina Escauriza). Minou trained at the British American Drama Academy (LTP '13) and is a proud

member of Philadelphia Asian Performing Artists. With love for Dad, for Mom, and for Steve. minoupourshariati.com

NIKTA SABOURI (Director) is a Boston-based director, dramaturg, and translator dedicated to illuminating diverse narratives on stage. She is delighted to join BPT's Spring Rep Festival, bringing her unique vision and storytelling expertise. Sabouri has translated and directed Bahram Beyzaie's *Naqqali Trilogy*, published by Harvard University Press, featuring *Arash*, *Azhdahak*, and *The Testament of Bondar Bidakhsh*—a translation that earned the 2024 ASTR Award. She also directed another of Beyzaie's plays, *Death of Yazdgerd*. Balancing traditional and contemporary forms, Sabouri embraces culturally rich projects that spark conversation and resonate with wide-ranging audiences.

ISABELLE FERESHTEH SANATDAR STEVENS (Playwright) is a mixed Iranian and Irish-American writer, performer, and artist whose work tends to center love and loss and responds to questions that don't have concrete answers. She and her work have been supported and recognized by New Repertory Theatre, The Kennedy Center (Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival), Boston Playwrights' Theatre, Fresh Ink Theatre Company, Smith College, New York Stage and Film, and Boston University. Isabelle is grateful to be Boston University's 2024-25 Whitney Young, Jr. Fellow, as they complete their third and final year in MFA Playwriting Program at Boston University. #ZanZendegiAzadi [@isabellesanatdarstevens](https://www.instagram.com/isabellesanatdarstevens)

JENNA WORDEN* (Production Stage Manager) is a stage manager, producer, and director, with a passion for storytelling, education, and access to the arts. Regional credits include Boston Playwrights' Theatre, Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, SpeakEasy Stage, The Gamm, New Rep Theatre, Gloucester Stage Company, Central Square Theater, Phoenix Theatre, and Childsplay AZ. She was the artistic director and producer of Brian O'Donovan's *A Celtic Sojourn, Live* for the last three years of its run, including the 20th Anniversary production in 2022. She earned both her BA in Theatre Studies and BSEd in History from Northern Arizona University and is constantly looking for new ways to teach and be in conversation with the past. Proud member of Actors' Equity



*Actors' Equity Association (AEA) was founded in 1913 as the first of the American actor unions. Equity's mission is to advance, promote and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society. Today, Equity represents more than 49,000 actors, singers, dancers and stage managers working in hundreds of theatres across the United States.



†United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829, is a labor union and professional association of Designers, Artists and Craftspeople, many who are world famous, organized to protect craft standards, working conditions and wages for the entertainment and decorative arts industries.

SPECIAL THANKS

Joel Brandwine, Jacob Desousa, Butch Foley, Ben Lieberman, Penney Pinette,
Ruby, Becky Smick, Naomi Smick, Tasha Vogt



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?The ?Great ?Reveal

BY
DAVID VALDES

DIRECTORS
BRIDGET KATHLEEN O'LEARY & CHARLOTTE SNOW



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 Boston PLAYWRIGHTS' Theatre

Boston Playwrights' Theatre is an award-winning professional theatre dedicated to new works. Founded in 1981 by Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott and located on the campus of Boston University, BPT produces a season of new work, an annual "marathon" of 10-minute plays, and a festival of new plays by teenage writers. At the core of all of our work is our partnership with BU's renowned English Department, in close collaboration with BU's School of Theatre, as we educate and nurture the writers of the MFA Playwriting Program. The Program's alumni have had their work produced in regional and New York houses as well as in London's West End, and have garnered national, regional and local awards.

From class workshops to our Season of New Plays, BPT employs the best of New England's professional actors, directors, and designers to bring each playwright's vision to its first audiences.

Each spring we produce a festival of student-written ten-minute plays, New Noises, the culminating event of the Massachusetts Young Playwrights' Project. In this program, area high schools work with professional playwrights, directors, and actors to see student works on stage for the first time.

Fifty local theatre companies join us annually for the Boston Theater Marathon, a showcase of new ten-minute plays by New England playwrights chosen each year from hundreds of entrants. Each selected play is produced by a different New England theatre company in a single ten-hour event with all proceeds going to charity.

When we are not producing our own plays, we continue BPT's mission by making theatre space available at deeply subsidized rates to other New England theatre companies and playwrights for new-play related events including readings, classes, auditions, rehearsals, conferences, and full productions.

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We are proud of our mission.
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