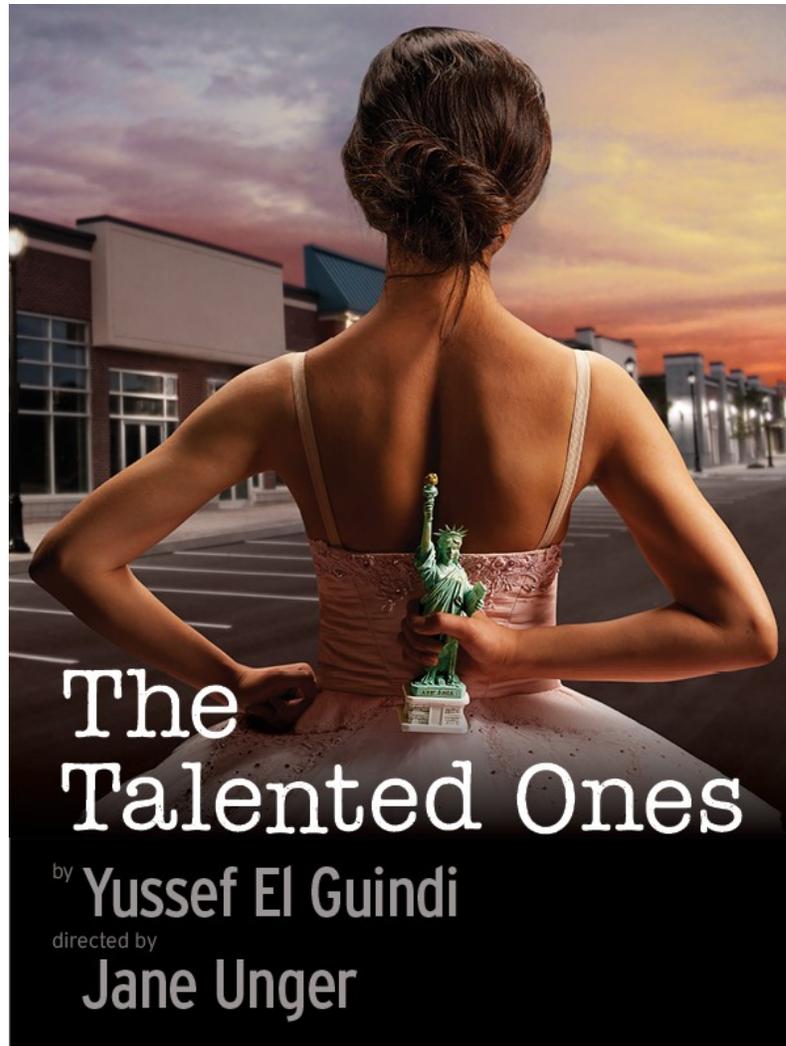


ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE



April 25—May 21

Time & Place: Modern day; kitchen & living room in a home in America  
Runtime is approximately 2 hours. There is a 15 minute intermission.

# Study Guide

Spoilers ahead!

Study guide prepared by Maddie Odegaard, Marketing & PR  
Department Intern

# Cast

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Omar ... John San Nicolas\*^  
 Cindy ... Khanh Doan\*  
 Patrick ... Heath Koerschgen+  
 Young Omar ... Michél Castillo+  
 Dancer Cindy ... Madeleine Tran



# Creative Team

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Director ..... Jane Unger\*\*\*  
 Dramaturg ..... Luan Schooler  
 Scenic Designer..... Daniel Meeker#  
 Costume Designer ..... Darrin J. Pufall  
 Lighting Designer ..... Kristeen Willis Crosser#  
 Sound Designer ..... Rodolfo Ortega^  
 Choreographer ..... Sarah Jane Hardy  
 Fight Choreographer ..... Jonathan Cole\*\*\*  
 Props Master ..... Kaye Blankenship  
 Voice & Text Director ..... Mary McDonald-Lewis^  
 Stage Manager ..... Michelle Jazuk\*^  
 Production Assistant ..... Esther McFaden+  
 Assistant Choreographer ..... Camille Trinkka  
 Board Operator ..... Jason Coffey

\* Member of Actors Equity Association, the union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States. Actors Equity Association, founded in 1913, represents more than 49,000 actors and stage managers in the U.S. Equity negotiates wages and working conditions, providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. Equity seeks to foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society. [www.actorsequity.org](http://www.actorsequity.org)

^ Artists Repertory Theatre Resident Artist

# The scenic, costume, lighting, projection and sound designers are represented by United Scenic Artists

+ Equity membership candidate

\*\*\* The Director and/or Choreographer is a member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers, Inc., an independent national labor union. This Theatre operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatre and Actor's Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

# ABOUT THE THEATRE

## ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE



**Artists Repertory Theatre's mission is to produce intimate, provocative theatre and provide a home for artists of varied backgrounds to take creative risks. Artists Rep is Portland's premiere mid-size regional theatre company and is led by Artistic Director Dámaso Rodríguez and Managing Director Sarah Horton. Founded in 1982, Artists Repertory Theatre is the longest-running professional theatre company in Portland. Artist Rep became the 72nd member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) in May 2016 and is an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN).**

## SHOW DESCRIPTION

The American Dream teeters on the edge of the abyss as immigrants Cindy and Omar face their thwarted dreams and unraveling marriage while Omar's buddy Patrick connives to push them over the edge. In this surprisingly funny dark comedy, trouble erupts one night when bad choices are followed by *verrrrrry* bad choices. The stakes become lethal as these characters manipulate the truth and do anything to justify their desires.

*The Talented Ones* is Artists Rep's first new play development commission for Table | Room | Stage as part of the Oregon Community Foundation's "Creative Heights Initiative."

## Critics Corner

"*The Talented Ones* brings the political and the personal together in a dramatic interpretation of the immigrant experience in America, represented by one couple's failing marriage." - *Broadway World*

"With another of his recent plays, *Threesome*, already booked in Seattle and New York City, El Guindi is one of the country's hottest playwrights." - *The Santa Barbara Independent*



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## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

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YUSSEF EL GUINDI

Yussef El Guindi's productions include *Our Enemies: Lively Scenes of Love and Combat* at Golden Thread Productions; *An Evening with Activists* at Cutting Ball Theater; *Collaborator* at Macha Monkey Productions; *Threesome* at Portland Center Stage, ACT, and at 59E59 (winner of a Portland Drammy for Best Original Script); *The Ramayana* (co-adaptor with Stephanie Timm) at ACT; *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (winner of the Steinberg/ American Theater Critics Association's New Play Award in 2012; Gregory Award 2011; Seattle Times' "Footlight Award" for Best World Premiere Play, 2011) also at ACT, and at Center Repertory Company (Walnut Creek, CA); and *Language Rooms* (Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award, as well as ACT's New Play Award), co-produced by Golden Thread Productions and Asian American Theater Company in San Francisco; at the Wilma Theater in Philadelphia (premiere), and at the Los Angeles Theater Center.

Other past productions: *Jihad Jones and The Kalashnikov Babes*, produced at Golden Thread Productions, at InterAct Theater, and at Kitchen Dog Theater, as part of the National New Play Network. His play *Our Enemies: Lively Scenes of Love and Combat*, also produced by Silk Road Theater Project, won the M. Elizabeth Osborn award. His plays, *Back of the Throat* (winner of L.A. Weekly's Excellence in Playwriting Award for 2006), as well as *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World*, *Jihad Jones and The Kalashnikov Babes*, *Such a Beautiful Voice is Sayeda's* and *Karima's City*, have been published by Dramatists Play Service. The latter one-acts have also been included in *The Best American Short Plays: 2004-2005*, published by Applause Books. *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* (winner of Chicago's "After Dark/John W. Schmid Award" for Best New Play in 2006) is included in "Salaam/ Peace: An Anthology of Middle-Eastern American Playwrights," published by TCG, 2009. *Our Enemies: Lively Scenes of Love and Combat* is included in the anthology "Four Arab American Plays" published by McFarland Books. *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* was included in the September, 2012 issue of "American Theatre Magazine." *Threesome* was published by Broadway Play Publishing Inc. and *Language Rooms* was published in Rain City Projects' anthology "Manifesto Series Volume 3." Yussef is the recipient of the 2010 Middle East America Distinguished Playwright Award, and Seattle's 2015 Stranger's Genius Award. He holds an MFA from Carnegie-Mellon University and was playwright-in-residence at Duke University.

# Playwright Interview

With Yussef El Guindi

Yussef El Guindi is an Egyptian-American playwright, whose work consistently explores the immigrant experience with fierce intelligence, compassion and humor. Because of these qualities, we selected him to inaugurate Artists Rep's new play development program, Table | Room | Stage. *The Talented Ones* was workshopped here in Spring 2016, and we are very pleased to share this first fruit of T | R | S with you now.

El Guindi's plays are widely produced in the U.S. and have garnered many awards. He is the recipient of the 2010 Middle East America Distinguished Playwright Award, and Seattle's 2015 Stranger's Genius Award. Recently, his play *Threesome* was produced by Portland Center Stage, ACT in Seattle, and at 59E59 in New York. In addition to *The Talented Ones*, his current projects include a co-adaptation with Philip Kan Gotanda of the Japanese epic *The Tale of the Heike*, slated for production at ACT in Seattle in 2018.

***The Talented Ones* was inspired at least in part by your personal experience. What was that and how does it inform the play?**

Personal experience-wise: born in Egypt, immigrant by the age of 3. Raised in England. Rendered less Egyptian but not quite English enough for the English. Not quite Egyptian enough in Egypt when I returned for my undergraduate studies. Hauled myself to America, where eventually I became a citizen.

And here's the thing about becoming an American citizen: in spite of the anti-immigrant flair-ups that periodically course through this country, the key ingredient in the U.S. is its self-renewal through the continuous blood transfusion of new immigrants. In Europe, even if you become a citizen, you will always remain a foreigner in the eyes of a lot of Europeans. Not so in the States — in theory. The naturalization ceremony is actually very moving and effective in initiating new-comers. In its ritual, in the oath you take, it basically says/promises that regardless of your origins you are all now part of a new family. And the fact that you were foreign born does not make you any less American than the native born.

And America, in theory (I stress in theory) is not a blood thing — as it is in Europe — but an idea thing. To be American is to try and aspire to an idea of citizenship and nationhood. I think that's why there's more flag-waiving and ostentatious shows of patriotism here than in Europe. While those flag-waiving rallies can feel a bit jingoistic, I think they are a sort of communal chant to try and remind ourselves of a shared idea that is supposed to cohere us all into citizens.



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**Many of your plays explore some aspect of the immigrant journey, and frequently, how that journey collides with the American Dream. Has that terrain changed since you began writing plays?**

That particular vein of exploration continues. I'm always startled by just how much more material there is to mine. What helps with the writing of these plays is that they're deeply personal, while at the same time allowing me to connect with a larger, collective journey experienced by other immigrants.

And at the end of the day, my feeling is that the immigrant state of mind can be glimpsed by anyone who feels displaced, foreign, or at odds with – and trying to fit into – new surroundings. Which basically covers everyone! Who doesn't at times feel slightly alien and separate from their environment, and the people that surround them? When we open our mouths and try to communicate with someone we are making an "immigrant" journey of sorts from our own familiar view of the world, to that stranger's point of view. When it comes to human relations, it's all terra incognita with unexpected borders, and much traveling to try and comprehend each other better.

**Is there something in particular that you wish Americans understood better about the immigrant experience?**

Uprooting yourself and trekking to a new land is psychologically and physically an arduous undertaking. You hopefully gain much in doing so, but there is also much loss as well. Uprooting means leaving behind that which has nurtured you (family, friends, culture, religion, smells, sounds, the familiar) and entering a world where you might not know the language, or the nuances of day-to-day interaction; nor understand the mainstream culture that's mainstream because it embodies the values and norms that give comfort to the populace, but not yet to you because it's all so unfamiliar. (And because you're a newcomer, and therefore somewhat suspect, that mainstream culture will probably be reflecting you back via negative images and stories — in films, TV shows, the news. So not only are you trying to find your place in the mainstream, that mainstream is blasting you from the rooftops with repeated negative portrayals and references).

In addition, you might have to emigrate, or flee as a refugee, without your family. You have no support system in place yet. Legally, because your rights are not the same as a U.S. citizen, you are walking on very thin ice all the time. The world you are trying to build might collapse at any moment. You walk around alternatively feeling like you're integrating into your surroundings, perhaps even doing financially well via these new found opportunities, or: you're feeling like someone with a neon sign blinking over their head that reads: "alien amongst you."

Even after 34 years, and citizenship gained, I still occasionally feel that neon sign blinking overhead. And when certain "nativist" political currents run through the mainstream, and darken the world you're trying to create, that neon sign shines even brighter.

**If there was one thing that you would like audiences to take away from seeing *The Talented Ones* or any of your plays, what would that be?**

My wish is always that audiences enjoy themselves. The bottom line of every one of my plays is simple enough: I hope you were stimulated, engaged and entertained by what you saw.



## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

JANE UNGER



Jane Unger is the founding Artistic Director of Profile Theatre Project in Portland whose mission celebrates the playwright by presenting a full season of plays by a single writer. In her 15 years helming Profile, she featured the following playwrights: Arthur Kopit, Tennessee Williams, Constance Congdon, Arthur Miller, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, Romulus Linney, Terrence McNally, Lanford Wilson, Wendy Wasserstein, John Guare, Neil Simon, Horton Foote, Lee Blessing and Athol Fugard. During that time, Jane produced 55 productions, (directed 35), 31 staged readings, (directed eight, acted in three), and 20 concert readings through the One Night Stand series she conceived and implemented. Jane worked directly with many of these writers on new play development, including the World Premiere of Romulus Linney's *Klonsky and Schwartz*, co-directed by Linney and Unger. During her tenure, Profile hosted every living playwright or an authority on that playwright thereby creating opportunities to interact with audience members, teach master playwriting classes and work with local actors on new material.

Other directorial work: Triad Stage, Inge Theatre Festival, Great Plains Theatre Conference, Creede Repertory Theatre, Idaho Theatre for Youth, Storefront Theatre, Miracle Theatre, CoHo Productions, JAW, Portland Center Stage, New Rose Theatre. She co-adapted and directed *Carver Country* for Portland's Literary Arts, based on Raymond Carver short stories and has served as literary consultant on various productions for Book-It Rep in Seattle. Among the awards Jane has received, she is especially proud of Profile being among the first 10 recipients honored by the American Theatre Wing in 2010 with a National Theatre Company Grant, Portland's Drammy Award for Best Director for Wings and the Drammy Lifetime Achievement Award for her founding of Profile Theatre Project. Jane directed the workshop reading of Yussef El Guindi's *The Talented Ones* at Artists Rep as part of their new play commission initiative.

# Director's Notes

With Jane Unger

Working on the World Premiere of a new play with an exciting writer, a talented cast and dramaturg, is the theatrical equivalent of birthing a baby – a singular joy.

Yussef El Guindi began writing *The Talented Ones* in 2013 and completed the first draft in 2014. Between then and now, this play has assumed an uncanny timeliness. We've gone from being a melting pot nation to an increasingly xenophobic one. As with many things since the 2016 election, this play, at the heart of which beats the immigrant experience, takes on an enhanced perspective.

*The Talented Ones* takes us on a roller-coaster ride of an American marriage through the unique lens of the immigrant experience. Cindy says "It's an immigrant thing.... We're the ones who have to prove it was all worth it. Leaving home. Living among strangers who don't give a damn about you. ...Because this is only really our home if we make it. That's the whole point of uprooting yourself."

Cindy and Omar are the product of families that took great risks and uprooted their lives to recreate new homes in the United States. In his writer's notes, El Guindi expressly states that Cindy and Omar "can be of any ethnicity." Their experience applies to any ethnic group coming to this country. Recently, I observed a naturalization ceremony at the Federal Courthouse in downtown Portland and over 30 countries were represented. I daresay that, just like Cindy and Omar, everyone in that courtroom embodied hope for a better life and the promise of dreams fulfilled, believing that U.S. citizenship holds a key to opportunity and success.

Currently our nation is focused on the difficulty of getting into this country. This is not a play about how hard it is to get here but what happens once you are here. *The Talented Ones* looks at the next step in the Americanization process, what happens to the 'dreamer' generation once they become adults expected to fulfill their parents' dreams. And how are these new citizens perceived and treated? Does anything really change or will they forever be treated as outsiders?

Regardless of background, many marriages come to a crossroads, a place where reality meets fantasy. One or both partners confront the idea of the person they thought they had married with the reality of the person to whom they are married. If the fantasy and the reality become irreconcilable, dreams evaporate and trouble erupts.

*The Talented Ones* holds up a mirror to all of us who have ever held onto dreams and expectations. It also opens a door into the world of the outsider, newcomers to this country whose obstacles are not as obvious as a border crossing.

I recently heard the great novelist Colum McCann talk about the power of storytelling as the true currency of democracy. By taking on someone else's story, we develop a better understanding of those around us. I invite you to take on the story of *The Talented Ones* for a better understanding of a question many of us are asking: What does it mean to be an American citizen in today's America?





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## NOTE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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Dámaso Rodríguez

**“It’s like all of it’s been this relay race, and it’s our turn to carry the baton. – Cindy, in Youssef El Guindi’s *The Talented Ones*.**

Welcome to Artists Rep and to the World Premiere of playwright Youssef El Guindi’s *The Talented Ones*. Today’s production marks the first full production born of our recently established new play development program, Table|Room|Stage. In 2014, with start-up funding from the Oregon Community Foundation, we announced our plans to commission eight new plays over the course of two years. Behind the scenes, we set the goal of seeing as many of these new plays as possible through to their full productions, and committed to helping the plays find future life at theatres around the country.

Luan Schooler, Artists Rep’s Director of New Play Development & Dramaturgy, and I then created the following guiding principles as a way of evaluating the projects we were considering for development and production. We are specifically interested in work that:

- Stands at an angle to the world and shows us something anew
- Explores the edges, depths and heights of human experience
- Uses language with originality and vibrancy
- Embodies a muscular narrative structure and rigorous intelligence
- Offers a distinctly theatrical experience
- Risks failure rather than repeats formula
- Has an opinion and seeks to change the conversation

We believe *The Talented Ones*, and Youssef El Guindi’s prolific and nationally acclaimed body of work, exemplifies the above and is the kind of provocative, timely and complex playwriting that Artists Rep has consistently produced for nearly 35 years. It also happens to be a wildly entertaining theatre experience sure to make you think, feel, laugh and gasp.

Thank you for being a part of our audience today! I hope you enjoy *The Talented Ones* and will join us again soon at Artists Rep for our fresh and unconventional take on Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which wraps up our 2016/17 season.

Until then,

Dámaso Rodríguez

# Full Synopsis

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## Warning: spoilers ahead!

Cindy and Patrick, both adults in their late 20s to mid-30s, are hanging out as Cindy prepares dinner and Patrick drinks a beer. Cindy admits that she always wanted to pursue a dancing career but she believes she should keep her job, as it is a steady flow of income for her and her husband, Omar. Patrick flirts with her and urges her to discuss the matters further with Omar.

As Cindy struggles with regret and the weight of her thoughts, we see visions of a younger Cindy dancing. Cindy develops a migraine and Patrick is concerned. As Cindy laments her lost dream, Patrick tells her he likes her ... more than he should as Omar's friend.

Cindy is obviously uncomfortable but as Patrick talks about his own dreams, there is a clear sexual tension. Patrick is confused why Omar isn't home yet, and reveals that Omar was fired from his job recently, which is news to Cindy. She wonders where he has been spending his days. Cindy is concerned about how they will be able to support themselves financially.

Cindy explains that she and Omar have an overwhelming sense of obligation to succeed because they are immigrants. They are the reasons their parents moved to the U.S., so if they are unsuccessful, they believe the sacrifices made would be for nothing. Patrick is not an immigrant, so he doesn't understand why she feels such pressure. Patrick goes in for a kiss, but she refuses. He is persistent and lifts her dress up, pushes her against the table, and kisses her neck. Omar appears in the background, watching.

As they mull over the situation, Cindy admits to even fantasizing about slipping a bunch of sleeping pills into Omar's beer. Cindy wonders why Patrick once went to jail and he says he will tell her about it if she kisses him. She does, just as Omar walks in. He apologizes for being late and seems to ignore the scene, but his anger slowly becomes obvious. Patrick gives the couple some time alone, but not before admitting that he believes he did nothing wrong. Cindy becomes defensive and wonders if Omar had been more considerate towards her, then maybe she wouldn't have felt the need to turn toward Patrick.

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Cindy and Omar discuss their desire to make their immigrant parents proud. Omar is especially haunted by the memory of his father. Cindy is terrified to hear that Omar heard about her dark visions of sleeping pills. Omar believes that Cindy is the one ruining the relationship, as is not allowing herself to be happy. They both seem to disappoint each other, but that hasn't always been the case. They reminisce about the day they first met at their naturalization ceremony. As their arguing continues, Omar quietly takes out the bottle of sleeping pills. He puts them in his beer.

Patrick has been eavesdropping and intervenes. He says he only made a move on Cindy because he thought their marriage is over. Patrick shares that one night during a candid conversation, Omar let Patrick know he was unable to perform in the bedroom. Patrick suggested going to strip club, there he might be able to determine if there is a medical problem. An experience at the hands of a stripper that night clearly indicates that everything is normal with Omar in that specific department. And, while he had the opportunity to stop the stripper's actions, he did not. Patrick believes that was an indication of the their marriage. In the midst of this conversation, Patrick cannot find a beer in the fridge, so he begins drinking Omar's. Omar notices and does not stop him.

Angry and frustrated, Cindy she stabs the cutting board with a knife, not realizing that Omar's hand is there. The three of them are shocked and as Cindy rips the knife out of Omar's hand, she hits Patrick in the face with the butt of the handle and knocks him out.

As Cindy stitches up Omar and Patrick is icing his head, Patrick tries to get Cindy to admit that she has feelings for him. She denies the accusations at first, but eventually admits that there may be something there. The conversation turns to one of race and Omar believes Patrick has it easier because he is not an immigrant. Cindy can't take any more of Omar's excuses and decides to leave with Patrick, who begins to feel dizzy. With Cindy out of the room, Omar threatens Patrick with a knife.

Omar reveals that Patrick drank the laced beer. They agree that Patrick should throw up to get the pills out of his system before it kills him. Omar apologizes to Cindy for not being a great husband. With the beer out of his system, Patrick tells Omar he is going to sue him. He is about to leave when he passes out. Cindy takes him to the hospital.

The next morning, Cindy is back home. Patrick is okay, but is staying at the hospital for another day. Omar says he is committed to bettering himself. Omar admits that sometimes he wishes he hadn't become a U.S. citizen – such high expectations only lead to disappointment. We see a flashback to the day Omar and Cindy met at their naturalization ceremony.

End of play.

# Discussion Questions

- \* Have you ever had to leave behind a dream of yours? Do you think you would ever go back to that dream under certain circumstances?
- \* Would you urge Cindy to go after her dreams, considering her concerns?
- \* Are you or your family immigrants from another country? Do you relate to the struggles of Omar and Cindy?
- \* Should Cindy and Omar work through their issues? Should she be with Patrick? Should she break ties with both of them?

