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PULITZER-WINNING DRAMA *DISGRACED*

TO TOUR UNIVERSITIES AND HIGH SCHOOLS IN CHINA APRIL 3 - APRIL 30, 2017

Despite reports of increased anti-Western bias, China's academic institutions welcome play and discussions about post-9/11 race and religion in America

(Beijing, China, March 23, 2017) The most produced play in America in 2015-16, **Ayad Akhtar's Pulitzer-winning drama *Disgraced*** will tour universities and high schools in China under the direction of Timothy Douglas from **April 3 to 30**, produced by **Ping Pong Productions** with grants from the **Henry Luce Foundation** and the **U.S. Embassy in China** as well as major support from Chinese hosts and other local partners.

The American cast will perform the play in English with projected Mandarin subtitles. The set and technical requirements of the performance have been changed to adapt to non-traditional performance settings such as classrooms and lecture halls on Chinese campuses.

In addition to the performances, specialists in US-Middle East Relations, American studies, Islamic studies and other experts will join the cast for post-performance panel discussions at each stop of the tour. The cast and director will lead students in acting workshops and close script-reading workshops of the text of *Disgraced*.

“The enthusiasm in China for this project has been overwhelming. People want to understand what has led America to this moment in history. This play offers insight into these complex and deeply fractious issues that our so-called ‘melting pot’ faces. Chinese academic institutions are profoundly interested in the discussions this play will raise. We easily could have extended the tour for three months to three times as many cities!” said tour executive producer, Ping Pong Productions founder Alison M. Friedman.

Cities include Beijing, Xiangtan (Hunan Province), Xi'an (Shaanxi Province), Nanjing (Jiangsu Province) and Shanghai. Schools include: Beijing No. 4 High School, Peking University, Tsinghua University, Hunan University of Science and Technology, Nanjing University, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an International University, Jiaotong University, Shanghai No. 3 Girls High School, Shanghai American School, YK Pao School, and other academic and cultural centers.

Disgraced is the story of a Pakistani-American lawyer living the American dream - an Upper East Side apartment, expensive suits, happy marriage, and the promise of becoming partner at his law firm. He and his wife, a Caucasian artist, invite his African American colleague and her Jewish husband for a dinner party. The heated discussion that erupts reveals hidden aspirations, fractured views on cultural assimilation, and the lies we tell ourselves and those we love to “fit into” the American Dream. *Disgraced* won the 2013 Obie Award for Extraordinary Achievement and was nominated for the 2015 Tony Award for Best Play.

Ayad Akhtar is an award-winning playwright, screenwriter, actor, and novelist. His plays *The Invisible Hand* and *The Who and the What* have both enjoyed successful runs off-Broadway and are currently being produced at theaters across the U.S. His 2012 novel *American Dervish* has been translated into more than 20 languages and was named the 2012 Best Book of the Year by numerous North American reviews.

The touring company comprises director **Timothy Douglas** (Associate Artist for Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park), and cast members **Fajer Kaisi** (*Law and Order, 30 Rock, Nurse Jackie*), **Rachel Leslie** (*Seven Guitars, All The Way, The Crucible*), **Ariel Shafir** (*Orange is the New Black, 30 Rock, Law & Order*), and **Samip Raval** and **Ivy Vahanian** who both performed in Timothy Douglas' 2016 production of *Disgraced* at Arena Stage in Washington D.C.

“*Disgraced* is a theatrical bombshell that doesn't let anybody off the hook.” – *The Seattle Times*.

“The personal tragedy that's unfolded [in the play] hasn't just been compelling on its own terms. It's been framed to make us think about major social issues in their most deeply personal, human contexts.” – *San Francisco Chronicle*

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For more information about the *Disgraced* China tour, cast members, and ways to get involved, please visit the [Ping Pong Productions website](#).

Ping Pong Productions (*Producer*) is a cultural exchange organization whose mission is to bring China and the world together through the performing arts. PPP toured the first two American theater companies ever to perform at China's National Centre for the Performing Arts, including Oscar-winner Tim Robbins and his Los Angeles-based theatre troupe The Actors' Gang. With offices in China and the U.S., PPP brings dance, theatre, and music groups to China and Chinese groups abroad. Using the arts as a bridge to deepen mutual understanding, PPP has brought more than 600 performances, workshops, discussions, and residencies to audiences, students, corporate events, and communities in more than 50 countries on five continents, including Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Sydney Opera House, and Edinburgh International Festival. PPP runs a pioneering education program, bringing performances and workshops by American and other international artists to schools and universities in more than 20 cities across China. PPP now is developing a mirror program to bring Chinese performers to schools, colleges, and community centers across the U.S. www.pingpongarts.org

Timothy Douglas (*Director*) previously directed *King Hedley II* at Arena Stage. D.C.-area credits include *Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)*, *Two Trains Running*, *The Trip to Bountiful*, *Permanent Collection* and *A Lesson Before Dying* (Round House Theatre); *Dontrell*, *Who Kissed the Sea* (2016 Helen Hayes Award nomination for Outstanding Director) and *Insurrection: Holding History* (Theater Alliance) ; *The Last Orbit of Billy Mars* (Woolly Mammoth); and *Much Ado About Nothing* (Folger Theatre) . Additional credits include *The Lake Effect* (Silk Road Rising), Off-Broadway's *Bronte: A Portrait of Charlotte* and the world premiere of August Wilson's *Radio Golf* (Yale Repertory Theatre) . Timothy is an associate artist at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park and has directed more than 100 projects for American Conservatory Theater, Guthrie Theater , Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Center Theatre Group, South Coast Repertory, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, PlayMakers Repertory Company, Berkshire Theatre Festival, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, New Zealand 's Downstage Theatre and Norway's National Theatre. He has served on the faculties of the University of Southern California, University of North Carolina, Emerson College, ACT and New Zealand Drama School. www.timothydouglas.org

Cast Biographies (in alphabetical order):

Fajer Al-Kaisi (“Amir”) is an actor for stage, screen, and audiobook narrator. An Iraqi-born Canadian citizen who grew up in Montreal, Canada, he now resides in New York City and holds a masters in Fine Arts from the University of Texas at Austin and a BFA in theatre performance from Concordia University in Montreal QC. Fajer has appeared in television shows including *Law and Order*, *30 Rock*, *Nurse Jackie*, *Mohawk Girls*, *The Blacklist*, *The Onion News Network*, *Person of Interest*, *Delocated*, *What would you do with John Quinones*, *Deadbeat*, *Madam Secretary*, *The Good Wife*, and *Unforgettable*. Film Credits include playing the interpreter in "Billy Lynn's Halftime Walk" by Ang Lee, Karim in the independent hit "I'll Come Running", The Callipine in the historical adaptation “The Jew of Malta,” and as Ahmed Al-Fatwah in the CBS movie of the week “Time Bomb.” Fajer's first love is the theatre and he continues to work regionally and around the world. He has appeared as Amir in *Disgraced* at both the Maltz Jupiter Theatre and at the Pittsburgh Public Theatre, as Bashir in **The Invisible Hand** at the Westport country Playhouse, as Abe in **Paloma** at the Kitchen Theatre in Ithica NY, as Tybalt in **Romeo and Juliet** and as Aeneas in **Troilus and Cressida** at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival among others. Fajer has voiced several books available on audible.com and audible India including *Beachhead*, *My Brother's Keeper*, *Fives and Twenty Fives*, *Two Hours*, *Gods Generals*, and many more. Fajer has also most recently made his foray into voicing video games iwht the ink stories hit “1979: Revolution.” www.fajeralkaisi.com/

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Rachel Leslie (“Jory”) is a New York City-based actor who works in theatre, film, television and audio book narration. Representative theatre includes *Seven Guitars* (Yale Repertory Theatre); *All The Way* (Cleveland Play House); *The Crucible* (Syracuse Stage & Cleveland Play House); *Nightlands* (New Georges); *Conscientious Objector* (Keen Company); *Fall of Heaven, You Can’t Take It With You* (Repertory Theatre of St. Louis); *The Trip To Bountiful* (Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park); *Richard II* (Shakespeare & Co.); *Much Ado About Nothing* (Folger Theatre); *Intimate Apparel, Gem of the Ocean* (Indiana Repertory Theatre, Syracuse Stage); *Trouble in Mind* (Milwaukee Repertory Theatre), and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (St. Louis Shakespeare Festival). Rachel enjoys the development of new plays and has done numerous workshops and world premieres including The Humana Festival, The O’Neill Festival, PlayPenn and New Dramatists. Film and television credits include *Difficult People, Unforgettable, Alpha House, 666 Park Avenue, Law & Order, The Ticket* and *Quietly*. Rachel is a member of Quick Silver Theater Company and The Actor’s Center. She holds a BA in Psychology from George Washington University and an MFA in Acting from Temple University.

Samip Raval (“Abe”) is an actor and director from North Carolina. He performed in *Disgraced* at Arena Stage and PlayMaker Repertory Theater. Other regional theater credits include the Eugene O’Neill Playwrights Conference, Shakespeare Theater Company, and Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Workshops & residencies include the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center Education, A Contemporary Theater, Signature Theater Company, Emerging Artists Theater, and LaGuardia Performing Arts Center of NY. He wrote and directed a short film *The Faucet* (Oxford Film Festival; Toronto Short Film Festival.) Samip has worked as a teaching artist in South Florida, New York, North Carolina, and abroad in Kenya and India. He is a member of the Actors Equity Association and a graduate of the North Carolina School of the Arts, School of Drama.

Ariel Shafir (“Isaac”) Based in New York City, Ariel is an original founding member of Stage/Studio 13, a theatrical collective which produces content from stage to screen including Dan Fogler's *Hysterical Psycho* (Tribeca Film Festival), *M'Larky* (Comedy Central), and *Don Peyote* (Netflix). Recent film & TV credits include: *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix), *30 Rock* (NBC), *Law & Order* (NBC), *I Love you...but I Lied* (Lifetime), *Bride Wars* (20th Century Fox), *What Happens in Vegas* (20th Century Fox). Favorite regional theatre stage roles include Fersen in *Marie Antoinette* at the Steppenwolf Theater in Chicago; Mercutio in the Jeff Award-winning production of *Romeo & Juliet* at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater; Israel Hands in Mary Zimmerman's world premiere of *Treasure Island* at the Lookingglass Theater; Uzi in the world premiere of *Captors* at The Huntington Theater in Boston; Simon in The Barrymore Award-winning production of *Scorched* at The Wilma Theater in Philadelphia; John Proctor in *The Crucible* at Playmakers Repertory Company in North Carolina; The Suzi Bass Award-winning performance as Versati in Steve Martin's *The Underpants*; co-starring with Andre DeSheilds in David Mamet's two-hander *A Life in the Theater* at The Alliance Theater in Atlanta. Ariel graduated with a degree in Fine Arts from conservatory training at Boston University and University of Oxford. www.arielshafir.com/

Ivy Vahanian (“Emily”) is honored to be rediscovering *Disgraced* in this new cultural backdrop. She worked with Timothy Douglas on his production of *Disgraced* at Arena Stage in Washington DC in 2016. She has starred on Broadway in *Coram Boy*. Off-Broadway credits include *Toys in the Attic* (directed by Austin Pendleton), *...And Jesus Moonwalks the Mississippi* (directed by Robert O'Hara), *Elephant in the Room* (directed by Dan Folger), *The Sweepers*. Regional credits include *All My Sons* (Actors Theater of Louisville), *The Credeaux Canvas* (Hartford Theaterworks), *Antebellum* (Hartford Stage), *Time Stands Still* (The Producing Unit) and others. Recent films include *Age of Kaos* (ComicCon – San Diego; LA International Underground Film Festival), and *Behind Closed Doors* (SBIFF, Cannes). Ivy is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University Drama Department. She also is a proud mother of three beautiful boys living in stunning Santa Barbara.

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