

Chicago Shakespeare Theater presents

Avaaz

Written and performed by Emmy Award nominee Michael Shayan

Celebrating the Iranian-Jewish immigrant experience
in a heartfelt and hilarious tribute to the playwright's mother

January 21 - February 9 in the Upstairs Studio



Chicago—December 20, 2024—[Chicago Shakespeare Theater](#) presents Olney Theatre Center's production of *Avaaz*, a “powerful, defiant, celebratory” (*Washington Post*) exploration of family and the immigrant experience. The production is written and performed by Emmy Award nominee and Out Magazine OUT 100 honoree **Michael Shayan** and directed by Tony Award nominee **Moritz von Stuelpnagel**, and runs **January 21- February 9, 2025** in the Carl and Marilyn Thoma Upstairs Studio.

In *Avaaz*, Michael Shayan—playing the role of his own larger-than-life Iranian-Jewish mother, Roya—welcomes audiences into her home to celebrate Nowruz, the Iranian New Year. She's preparing a feast, but the main attraction is the story of her great American journey from Tehran to “Tehran-geles,” California. What follows is a hilarious and touching tribute, exuberantly portrayed by the person who knows her best—her son. Hailed as “ingenious” and “masterful” by *BroadwayWorld* and *DC Theater Arts*, this radiantly queer celebration of resilience, rebirth, and joy is at once deeply personal and universal.

“It's an honor to take *Avaaz* across the country with Moritz and this incredible team, particularly at a time of overwhelming anti-immigrant sentiment,” says Shayan. “*Avaaz* offers a different narrative and grapples with complex truths in a fabulous, decadent, larger-than life party on stage. I can't wait to share the magic of 'Tehrangles' with audiences in Chicago and beyond!”

“Michael's story is enlightening, entertaining, and will fill even the darkest winter evening with light,” said CST's artistic director **Edward Hall**. “It's a unique perspective on the immigrant experience from a hugely talented performer and artist. I'm so happy to be sharing this with Chicago audiences and inviting you all to a thought-provoking celebration that discusses such complex issues with imagination and joy.”

Michael Shayan is a queer Iranian-American writer and performer from Los Angeles who was recently recognized by *Out Magazine* on the OUT100 list of the most “impactful and influential LGBTQ+ people.” He was nominated for an Emmy Award for the Discovery+ series *The Book of Queer* and also worked on the Emmy Award-winning HBO series *We're Here*. A fellow with the Sundance Institute, Shayan is writing a new play commission for Audible, and his work has been seen and developed at theaters including La MaMa, New York Stage and Film, Rattlestick, The Lark, Project Y, Dixon Place and Art House, among others. He was a Lambda Literary LGBTQ Voices Fellow in Playwriting, and his work has been featured in *The Advocate Magazine*.

One of the most in-demand directors nationwide, **Moritz von Stuelpnagel** returns to Chicago Shakespeare after last season's *Judgment Day*. His other credits include the Broadway productions *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, *Present Laughter*, *Hand to God*, for which he was nominated for the Tony Award for Best Director, and most recently, *I Need That* starring Danny DeVito. Off-Broadway credits include *Seared*, *The Thanksgiving Play*, *Teenage Dick*, *Important Hats of the 20th Century*, and *Verité*.

The design team for *Avaaz* includes scenic designer **Beowulf Boritt**, a two-time Tony Award winner (*Act One, New York, New York*) who returns to CST after *Judgment Day*; costume designer **Joshua “Domino” Schwartz**, a two-time Emmy Award winner for HBO’s *We’re Here*; lighting designer **Amith Chandrashaker**, a Tony Award nominee for *Prayer for the French Republic* who returns to CST after *Judgment Day*; and sound design by **UptownWorks** (*Lady Day at Emerson’s Bar and Grill* at Baltimore Center Stage). They are joined on the creative team by associate director **Aria Velz**, tour manager **Jerid Fox**, and stage managers **Allison Ann Bailey** and **Phillip Snider**.

CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER (CST)

A Regional Tony Award recipient, Chicago Shakespeare Theater produces a bold and innovative year-round season that includes Shakespeare, original plays, musicals, family programming, and international theatrical events. CST is committed to serving as a cultural center across its three stages—the 700+ seat Yard, 500 seat Jentes Family Courtyard Theater, and the 200 seat Carl and Marilyn Thoma Theater Upstairs as well as in classrooms, neighborhoods, and venues around the world. CST has a deep commitment to education and lifelong learning with robust programming for students, teachers, and lifelong learners, and engagement with communities across the city. Onstage, in classrooms and neighborhoods across the city, and in venues around the world, Chicago Shakespeare is a multifaceted theater—inviting audiences, artists, and community members to share powerful stories that illuminate the complexities, ambiguities, and wonders of our world. www.chicagoshakes.com

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