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Latecomers will be seated at the first appropriate interval.

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Please turn off cell phones and other electronic devices prior to performance.

**Recordings/Photographs**

The taking of photographs or the making of recordings of any kind during the performance is strictly prohibited.

**Smoking Policy**

Smoking is not permitted.

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**Please Note**

Programs and participants are subject to change.

**Masks**

Masks must be worn at all times while in the theater for the first Thursday matinee and the second Saturday matinee. Masks are optional at all other performances.

This program is supported, in part, by grants from the Blandford, Chester, Hinsdale-Peru, Russell, Westhampton, and Worthington Cultural Councils, local agencies which are supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council.



The Director is a Member of the  
**STAGE DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS  
SOCIETY**, a national theatrical labor union.



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# CHESTER THEATRE COMPANY

James Barry and Tara Franklin, *Co-Producing Artistic Directors*  
Present

## ***Guards at the Taj***

By

Rajiv Joseph

Charles and Jane Johnson, Production Sponsors  
Jeanne and Frank Speizer, Director Sponsors  
Dr. R. Allison Ryan, Design Sponsor

### Cast

**Abuzar Farrukh\*** as Babur

**Ruchir Khazanchi \*** as Humayun

Set Design: Travis George

Costume Design: Oona Natesan

Lighting Design: James McNamara

Sound Design: Naveen Bhatia

Fight Choreography: Mike Rossmly

Stage Manager: Keri Schultz Kent\*

Wardrobe Support: Christina Beam

Set Painters: Jill Kovalchik and Carl Bridge

Assistant to the Costume Designer: Sophie Potts

Assistant Stage Manager: Rori Haft

Directed by Reena Dutt

\*Denotes members of Actors' Equity Association, The Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

*GUARDS AT THE TAJ is presented by special arrangement with  
Dramatists Play Service, Inc., New York.*

***The show will be performed with a 10 minute intermission.***

## ☪ DIRECTOR'S NOTE ☪

When I saw GUARDS AT THE TAJ for the first time at Atlantic Theatre Company in New York, I was struck by the complexity of brotherhood, loyalty, honor and dreams that unraveled on stage. The story was compelling, frightening, heartwarming and pee-in-your-pants funny. The cherry on top of this fabulous, fudge sunday was the backdrop being the Taj Mahal, a site I've visited every time I go to see my extended family in India. Spending my teen years in the southwest, I never thought an American diaspora story could be inclusive of folx who looked like me, owned my parents' culture and included mentions of Shah Jahan, Mumtaz Mahal and the rich history of the Mughal Empire in Agra.

Now that my perception has completely shifted, I owe it to Rajiv Joseph to have opened my eyes to American theatre and what makes it continue to grow. This story is global, going beyond the geographic placement of our characters, and like all stories, it's a slice of human life with all its raunchiness, joy, confusion and disgust. It's a story of chosen family and what a person is willing to do in order to find the love they seek. Like all the stories I crave telling, it allows us to rethink our own motivations, how we view the world, and what kind of world we want to build for our loved ones to live in moving forward. It opens an audience to the global nature of American diaspora using the universal backdrop of *Life*.

I am in awe of James Barry and Tara Franklin for making the choice to bring this ambitious play to Chester, MA. From the first moment James and I talked about it on the phone, I knew I would have a leader as passionate as I am. The support, freedom, and honest effort to bring it to life by the staff, interns, leadership, creative team and actors has been a gift. Chester Theatre Company is a special place.

I hope you enjoy experiencing this play on stage, as much as I've enjoyed the process in bringing it to life. Hold on to your seats, enjoy the ride and give yourself a hand (or don't...womp-womp) for being a part of what keeps American theatre alive.

Reena Dutt, Director

With Special Thanks to  
Stage West Theatre, Jim and Marj Schultz  
Jay Duckworth, Jennifer McClure  
Jill Kovalchik, Carl Bridge  
and Arnab Banerji!

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Thank you for all your support!**



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## DRAMATURG'S NOTE

I vividly remember being a first row audience at the Atlantic Theatre premier of Rajiv Joseph's *Guards at the Taj* in 2015. Having never been to the Taj but having it mythologized in my mind was an immediate draw. The scenes that unfolded on stage on that beautiful summer afternoon stayed with me for years. Powerful, kind, magical, and above all, a celebration of beauty - both in its timeless glory and its very finite limits. Babur and Humayun spun a world just as magical as that of the Mughals in medieval India.

The Mughals were Central Asian conquerors who fell in love with India and laid their roots in Hindustan (The Mughals used this word to describe the Indian subcontinent) amassing a massive South Asian empire that lasted nearly three centuries. The Mughals were a decadent lot as is evident from their myriad possessions on display in museums worldwide. Precious stones, metals, and turning these into finely crafted artifacts seem to have been a particular hobby of the Mughals. The Mughals carried their Central Asian aesthetic with them but combined it seamlessly with traditions that they learnt in their adopted homeland. The result is a uniquely South Asian architectural hybrid, the prime example of which is the Taj Mahal.

Shah Jahan, the fifth Mughal ruler, was an avid builder. Unlike his father Jahangir, who was a connoisseur of gardens, and grandfather, Akbar, who believed in an utilitarian aesthetic, Shah Jahan had a penchant for the finer things in life and spared no expenses to acquire and incorporate them in his expansive coffer. The Taj Mahal, built between 1631 and 1653 was a celebration of the emperor's devotion to his favorite wife who died giving birth a thirteenth time in Deccan, Central India.

The Taj, like the emotion it memorializes, is a labor of love. Artisans from as far as Central Asia and material from as far as China were brought and carted to Agra to build this marvel. The monument stands to this day battling pollution, political misinformation and developmental ambitions. A testament to a former world of glory and a timeless reminder of love and desire. But what was really this monument of love built on? We have to turn to Babur and Humayun on stage for the answer. Behold a magical day and the *Guards at the Taj*!

Arnab Banerji, Dramaturg

## 🌀 HISTORY 🌀

The **TAJ MAHAL** is actually an integrated complex of structures, with the white domed marble mausoleum being its most significant component. The structure was meant as a funerary garden and mausoleum for Shah Jahan's favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal. The construction of the Taj Complex began about 1631 AD, and a labor force of about twenty thousand workers was recruited from across Northern India and Central Asia. Sculptors from Bukhara, calligraphers from Syria and Persia, inlayers from southern India, stone cutters from Baluchistan, a specialist in building turrets, and another who carved only marble flowers were part of the thirty-seven men who formed the creative unit.

**MUMTAZ MAHAL** had a very deep and loving marriage with Shah Jahan. Even during her lifetime, poets would extol her beauty, gracefulness and compassion. Mumtaz Mahal was Shah Jahan's trusted companion, traveling with him all over the Mughal Empire. Despite her frequent pregnancies, Mumtaz traveled with Shah Jahan's entourage throughout his earlier military campaigns. She was his constant companion and trusted confidant. She died in Burhanpur in 1631 AD, in the Deccan (now in Madhya Pradesh, Central India) during the birth of their thirteenth child. Today, the Taj Mahal stands as the ultimate monument to love and homage to her beauty and life.

The **MUGHAL EMPIRE** is the nineteenth century term used to refer to an early modern Muslim empire that controlled much of South Asia between the 16th and 19th centuries. The dynasty traced its lineage to Genghis Khan and referred to themselves as Timurid and Gurkani while referring to their South Asian dominion as Hindustan.

### **ROYAL LINEAGE**

1526-1530 Babur (*Namesake*)

1530-1540 & 1555-1556 Humayun (*Namesake*)

1556-1605 Akbar

1605-1627 Jahangir

1628-1658 Shah Jahan (*in power Scenes 1-4*)

1658-1707 Aurangzeb (*in power Scene 5*)

1707-1857 The Mughal Empire continued into the nineteenth century but lost its sheen and power over its last 150 years. The last recorded Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar II (1837-1857) was captured by the East India Company as the *de facto* leader of the unsuccessful Indian revolution of 1857, his children were executed in front of him, and he was exiled to present day Burma where he died an unremarkable death.

**James McNamara** (Lighting Design) (he/him/his) is the Professor of Light/Sound Design and the Inaugural Chair of the newly formed Theatre Arts Department at Westfield State University. He is excited to return to The Chester Theatre Company, where he is an Associate Artist and has designed for the last 17 seasons. Professional Design: Shakespeare and Company, Ancram Opera House, LaMaMa ETC, CompanyOne, Lost Nation Theater, Pilgrim Theater Company, New Century Theatre, Strong Coffee Stage, New World Theater, Vermont Commons Group, Sankofa Dance Project, World Myth and Music and The Calvin Theater. Assistant Design: The Guthrie Theatre Center, The McCarter Theatre, Yale Repertory Theatre, The Clarence Brown Theatre and Bard SummerScape. Journeyman member in good standing with I.A.T.S.E. Local 232, he also served as Chair of Design Technology and Management of Region 1 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. James received his MFA in Theatre Design from The University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

**Oona Natesan** (Costume Designer) is a multidisciplinary designer with experience in costume and digital design. Past credits include *Chaaya* (CheeseDosa Productions), *Macbeth* (Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey), *Side by Side* (St Louis Rep), *The Night Diary* (Children's Theatre of Charlotte), *House of Joy* (St Louis Rep), *Little Red* (Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival), *The Jungle Book* (Enacte Art) and *Into the Woods* (Carnegie Mellon, School of Drama). Oona holds an MFA in costume design from Carnegie Mellon School of Drama and is currently based out of India.

**Mike Rossmly** (Fight Choreography) Broadway: *A Tale of Two Cities*; *Superior Donuts*; *Cymbeline* Off-Broadway: *White Noise*; *Measure for Measure*, *The Vagrant Trilogy*, *Troilus and Cressida* (The Public Theatre); *What the End Will Be* (Roundabout); *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, *This Space Between Us* (Keen Co); *Peerless* (Primary Stages) Regional: Yale Repertory Theatre, Westport Country Playhouse, Goodspeed Musicals, Paper Mill Playhouse, Asolo Rep, The Old Globe, TheaterWorks (Hartford), Princeton University, The Acting Company, Soho Rep., the Geffen Playhouse, Long Wharf Theatre, McCarter Theatre, Carnegie Mellon University, and others. Other: Resident Fight and Intimacy Director for Yale Rep, a lecturer in acting at David Geffen School of Drama, and the Combat and Intimacy Supervisor for Yale College. Nominated for a 2017 Drama Desk Award for his work on *Troilus and Cressida* for The Public Theater.



**Christina Beam** (Wardrobe Support) (She/Her) is a New England based costume designer and technician whose work spans theater, opera, dance and film. Christina holds an MFA in costume design from UMass Amherst, having completed an assistantship that included rigorous work in costume construction. Some of her recent design credits include Taylor Mac's *The Lily's Revenge* (UMass), *Re/Emergence* (The Re/Emergence Collective), *The Tempest* (Hartt), *A Walk in the Woods* (Shakespeare and Company), *The Mystery of Irma Vep* (Silverthorne Theater Company) and *Pride@Prejudice* (Chester Theatre Company). Her designs for *The Lily's Revenge* were included in the Emerging Artist Exhibit at the 2019 USITT Conference and also at the 2019 Prague Quadrennial, and they were recently displayed as part of the 2022 World Stage Design Emerging Artist Exhibit in Calgary. Her costumes for the "In the Woods" photography project were featured as part of the 2023 USITT/USA Prague Quadrennial Emerging Artist Exhibit, which was displayed at the USITT conference and at the 2023 Prague Quadrennial this year. Christina is also currently working as the Costume Shop Supervisor at Western Connecticut State University. For further examples of her work, please visit [www.christinabeamdesign.com](http://www.christinabeamdesign.com).

**Naveen Bhatia** (Sound Design) is thrilled to make his return to theatre for this production of *Guards at the Taj*. See more of his work at [naveenbhatia.com](http://naveenbhatia.com). Naveen encourages attendees to donate to [prathamusa.com](http://prathamusa.com), a NGO dedicated to raising literacy rates in India.

**Travis George** (Scenic Designer) Past include: Netflix; *Iliza Shlesinger*, *Hot Forever*, *Live from Lincoln Center*; PBS; *Stars in Concert* 3 seasons, featuring Cynthia Erivo, Megan Hilty, Annaleigh Ashford; PBS and *Live from Lincoln Center* presents; *LANG LANG 's New York Rhapsody*, *Joshua Bell Live with Dave Mathews*; PBS, *New Year's Eve Live with the New York Philharmonic*. PBS and Westport Playhouse present; *Stars on Stage*, starring Shoshana Bean, Gavin Creel, and Brandon Victor Dixon. *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater*; *Odetta*. *Theater Harrisburg*; *BIG FISH*, *Velocity of Autumn*, *Far from Heaven*, *the Whipping Man*. Shakespeare and Company; *King Henry IV*, and *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. For Chester Theater Company; *Mary's Wedding*, *On the Exhale*, *To the Moon and Back*, *The Mountain Top*, *Arms on Fire*, *Body Awareness*, *Blink*, *Madagascar*, *Turn of the Screw*, *The Swan*, and *The Amish Project*. [www.travisgeorge.com](http://www.travisgeorge.com)

## 🌀 GLOSSARY 🌀

ALLAH: God

ALLAHU AKBAR: Takbir, it is an arabic phrase meaning 'God is greater than all,' used by Muslims in prayers and as a general declaration of faith or thanksgiving.

BHAI/ YAAR: Brother, bro, bruh

MAHALDAR: in the Mughal Empire, this is the chief officer of the imperial harem.

MANSABDAR: a military unit within the administrative system of the Mughal Empire introduced by Akbar. The word *mansab* is of Arabic origin meaning rank or position. Every civil and military officer was given a *mansab*, which determined their salaries & allowances. The term *manasabdar* means a person having a *mansab*.

PALANQUIN: a vehicle containing a bed or seat enclosed by curtains and carried on men's shoulders. In India, a *palanquin* is supported by one or two horizontal poles that are carried by four or six bearers.

RASAI/RAJAI: A large blanket very similar to a duvet or comforter with a cotton shell and cotton wool filling.

TALWAR: Sword

## 🌀 COMPANY BIOS 🌀

**Reena Dutt** (Director) is a city girl with a country soul who believes in creating with a conscience, on and off stage and screen. She most recently directed **YELLOW FACE** at UC Riverside (CA), the midwestern premiere of **AMERICAN FAST (IN)**, and assistant directed the Broadway transfer of **THE COLLABORATION** with Paul Bettany and Jeremy Pope. Her work can be seen next in Southern California for the world premier of **THIS IS NOT A TRUE STORY** by Preston Choi with Artists at Play (in partnership with Latino Theatre Co.). Dutt is also a film director and producer having screened films at over 80 festivals/networks worldwide including Sundance, LAFF, Outfest, NBCUniversal, and PBS. Fellowships: Drama League, Lincoln Center Director's Lab, Film Independent and SFFilm. For more information: [www.ReenaDutt.com](http://www.ReenaDutt.com)

**Abuzar Farrukh** is an actor, born and raised in Lahore, Pakistan. Abuzar is honored to be back at Chester Theatre Company, having performed in *Disgraced* in 2018. Select credits: *Invasion!* (Ancram Opera House), *The Night Diary* (Children's Theatre Of Charlotte), *Refugee* (Joakim Interfest, Serbia), *Honor Killing* (WAM Theatre), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Brown Box Theatre Project). He holds a BA in Theatre from UMass Amherst. Abuzar would like to thank James Barry & Reena Dutt for this wonderful opportunity. And a special thanks to Julie Nelson for introducing this play to me and for always supporting me! [www.abuzarfarrukh.com](http://www.abuzarfarrukh.com)

**Ruchir Khazanchi** (Humayun) is an awarded actor, songwriter, and musician, originally from Omaha, Nebraska. As a child of two educators, he's developed a passion for working alongside young people to establish a more equitable, joyful, and inclusive future in the arts as a teaching artist with TADA! Youth Theatre. He graduated from Northwestern University with concentrations in Theatre, Musical Theatre, Creating the Musical, and Screen Acting. His original shows and music have been performed and recognized with The Fled Collective, The American Music Theatre Project, Davenport's Piano Bar, Brooklyn Children's Theatre, and New Musicals Inc., where his original musical, *A BRIDGE TO THE MOON*, received 3rd prize in the "Search for New Musicals 2021". THEATRE: *FIDDLER ON THE ROOF* (Lyric Opera of Chicago); *THE APPLE TREE* (Porchlight Music Theatre); *THE ELABORATE ENTRANCE OF CHAD DEITY* (TheatreSquared); *MR. DICKENS HAT* (Northlight Theatre); *LEGALLY BLONDE* (Paramount Aurora); *KISS* (Haven Chicago). FILM/TV: *INSIGHT* (Pilot, ABC); *THE BECOMERS* (Zach Clark). He is proudly represented by Paonessa Talent and GBM. More at [www.ruchirkhazanchi.com](http://www.ruchirkhazanchi.com). Thank you to my teachers.

**Keri Schultz Kent** (Stage Manager) is excited to return to Chester for her fourth summer, after previously stage managing *Sister Play*, *I and You*, *Folk*, and *On the Exhale*. Based in Washington, DC, she has stage managed or ASM'ed at theatres including Arena Stage, the Kennedy Center Theatre for Young Audiences, Folger Theatre, Studio Theatre, and Rep Stage. Regionally, she has worked at Trinity Repertory Company, Baltimore's Centerstage, the Contemporary American Theatre Festival, TheatreWorks Hartford, and the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center (National Playwrights Conference). With the exception of the pandemic hiatus, she has been either the stage manager or IATSE crew for *Shear Madness* at the Kennedy Center since 2018. Member of AEA since 2002.

**Rajiv Joseph** (Playwright) was a 2010 Pulitzer Prize finalist for Drama for his play *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, and was also awarded a grant for Outstanding New American Play by the National Endowment for the Arts. He has twice won the Obie Award for Best New American Play, first in 2016 with *Guards at the Taj* (also a 2016 Lortel Winner for Best Play) and then in 2018 for *Describe the Night*. Other plays include *Archduke*, *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, *Animals Out of Paper*, *The Lake Effect*, *The North Pool* and *Mr. Wolf*. Joseph has been awarded artistic grants from the Whiting Foundation, United States Artists and the Harold & Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust. He is a board member of the Lark Play Development Center in New York City. He served for three years in the Peace Corps in Senegal and now lives in Brooklyn, NY.

**Arnab Banerji** (Dramaturgy) Associate Professor of Theatre History at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles. He is the author of *Contemporary Group Theatre from Kolkata, India* (Routledge, 2020). Arnab enjoys helping actors and directors share the stories they want to tell, a process people often refer to as dramaturgy. Recent credits include *Romeo and Juliet* (Santa Monica Playhouse), *Halo-Halo* (Playwrights Arena), *Kim's Convenience* (Laguna Playhouse), *Chitra* (Shaw Festival Theatre), and *Red Oleanders* (UCRiverside). Arnab translates plays from Bengali and Hindi into English. His translations have been seen on stage at UCR and Barnard College. His current research is in performances by the Indian diaspora, translations of Indian plays, and contemporary Bengali theatre. Arnab lives with his partner Sayantika and child Saira in Los Angeles. When he is not in the theatre, Arnab enjoys drinking specialty coffee, looking up restaurants around town, binge-watching American sitcoms, and browsing through graphic novels. Arnab would like to thank Reena for bringing him along on this beautiful journey.