



Village Theatre

Production Preview Guide

IN ISSAQUAH:

Francis J. Gaudette Theatre,
303 Front Street North, Issaquah

SEPTEMBER 14- OCTOBER 23, 2011
WEDNESDAY THROUGH SATURDAY: 8:00 PM
SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS: 2:00 PM
SELECTED TUESDAYS: 7:30 PM
SELECTED SUNDAYS: 7:00 PM

IN EVERETT:

Everett Performing Arts Center,
2710 Wetmore Avenue, Everett

OCTOBER 28- NOVEMBER 20, 2011
WEDNESDAY THROUGH SATURDAY: 8:00 PM
SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS: 2:00 PM
SELECTED SUNDAYS: 7:00 PM

PATRONS HAVE DIFFERENT IDEAS OF WHAT MATERIAL OR THEMES ARE APPROPRIATE FOR THEM OR THEIR FAMILIES. FOR THIS REASON, WE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

THE PRODUCTION:

Seven desperate refugees know their chance for safety rests in the decision of three American agents. *Take Me America* is a gripping new musical about those who seek asylum in the United States, and the people who bear the responsibility of determining their fate. Inspired by true stories from across the globe, this compelling rock musical explores the humor in our humanity, the power of acceptance, and the delicate balance between caution and compassion.

VERSIONS AVAILABLE TO PREVIEW:

There are no versions of the musical available to preview because this is a new musical.

PRODUCTION LENGTH

Exact length to be determined

WHY DID VILLAGE THEATER CHOOSE TO PRODUCE *Take Me America*?

It is of the utmost importance to Village Theatre to continue developing new musicals as our mission stipulates a dedication to producing "new musicals that achieve national exposure." Audiences were moved by *Take Me America* at the 2009 Festival of New Musicals and many have specified the desire to see this powerful show take the Mainstage. The process of seeking asylum in the United States is both an important and timely issue, and we feel certain that Village Theatre patrons will appreciate this moving production as the first show in the 2011-2012 Season.

SCRIPT CONTENT DETAILS Please note: the following information may contain plot spoilers.

Village Theatre encourages parents to investigate the themes in this story to ensure that it is appropriate for younger audiences (under 13). There is no violence on stage during this production; however characters do discuss their violent histories at several points throughout the play. There are no drugs and alcohol represented on stage during this play; however a character does mention past alcohol and drug use briefly during one song in this play. There is very little swearing in this play. Characters will briefly kiss on stage during this play but there are no references of a sexual nature.

Please note that because this is a new musical, content is subject to change.



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The definition of asylum (inviolable place of refuge and protection based on well founded fear of persecuting on account of race, religion, sex, nationality, social group, or political belief and determined by an agent of USCIS) is spoken and/ or projected as seven refugees enter the waiting room of the United States Citizenship and Immigration (USCIS) office saying, “Take me.” As they remember past persecution, they begin to sing about the desire to be granted asylum in America. Meanwhile, three USCIS enforcement agents, Michael, Marsha, and Gary, begin to question the refugees about their past experiences as part of the final one hour interview in the asylum review process. As the questions end, the refugees break into a song in which they beg for admission into America, while sharing their nervous feelings. Gary interrupts, noting that this is his first day on the job after graduating from college and how he hopes he can make a difference. The song returns to the refugees, who share the reasons they wish to receive asylum and beg to be taken.

The refugees begin to sing that they are standing on the edge. They are joined by Gary, who sings that he too is standing at the edge of the rest of his life, feeling both nervous and excited. As the song ends, the USCIS agents begin to call their respective applicants. Marsha’s first interview is with a refugee named Malith Ogimutu, a Dinka man. She is attempting to clarify a situation in which Malith was tortured. Malith does not want to go into detail because Marsha is a woman and in his culture woman plays different roles. Eventually, he explains that he was tortured by the Janjaweed under a zinc sheet in the hot sun, after being arrested while tending to his cattle. Marsha asks more about his cows, and Malith explains that cows are important for many things in his culture. He begins to sing about the hopes he had in Sudan.

Gary is interviewing Asif, a Muslim man from Gaza, who fears for his life but does not want to share his political beliefs. The scene shifts to Gary’s interview with Zara, a pregnant Algerian woman, who apparently confuses easily. Like Malith?, she begins to sing about her old life. Together Malith, Asif, and Zara sing about their old dreams and their new fears.

Michael is interviewing Isabella, a refugee from El Salvador who keeps switching from English to Spanish during her interview. She is telling Michael how Guerillas tortured her family for information when he asks her if she was actually threatened by the guerillas. She continues to talk about the threats to her family as Michael attempts to determine what she is afraid of. She begins to sing, informing Michael that she used to want to be like her family and neighbors, but now she feared she would be the next one to be threatened.

Continuing his interview with Asif, Gary asks when the last time Asif had seen his wife was. Asif explained that she was killed in crossfire when Hamas had attacked Fatah. Gary wants to know if Asif wanted to avenge her death, but Asif claims he ran away. At the same time, Jean Alexis, a refugee from Haiti, is telling Marsha that he also ran away. The other refugees begin to sing about lingering dreams and Jean tells Marsha that he was targeted by Lavalas. The refugees continue to sing about remembering while Gary keeps trying to questioning Asif, who leaves because he needs to pray. Now Wu and Fan, refugees from China, are telling Gary their story. They sing about when they met and fell in love, as the other refugees continue to sing about their old dreams and new fears. As Asif prays, he sings about the joy of surfing in Gaza, something he thinks people would not expect to find there.

Alone, Marsha talks about Gary’s first day. It has been sixteen years since her first day and she feels that it is her time to mentor a rookie. She thinks people can really make an impact working in asylum, a belief that she received from her hippie parents. She likens her happy childhood to a rainbow, claiming she now tries to bring rainbows to work. Marsha wants to be there for Gary because the first day is the hardest.

TAKE me AMERICA

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Gary is interviewing Wu Tang and Fan Tang, the couple from China. Wu Tang is explaining that he is a writer/ poet who was persecuted for being a rebel because his poems were considered too liberal. They discuss poetry, including the love poems Wu wrote to Fan from prison. Gary tells Wu that he will need to go get a physical examination for identification. Wu gets very upset, panicking in Mandarin, and is apparently having flashbacks of his time in prison. Fan begins to sing a love poem and Wu's flashback ends. He begins singing with her.

During a break from interviewing, Marsha, Michael and Gary argue about America's status as a melting pot. The scene begins to shift between the USCIS agents and Marsha's interview with Jean, who making very broad claims. Marsha begins to sing about catching interviewees in a lie. Gary and Michael soon join in Marsha's song. As their song ends, the refugees begin to sing about standing at the edge of the rest of their lives.

Jean returns from the waiting room to his interview. He tells Isabella and Malith? that his interview was both good and bad- he told a good lie, but he got caught once again. Isabella thinks he should go back and tell the truth, but Jean think that they would not grant asylum if they knew he was gay. Isabella tells him that he does not look gay, and Jean tells her that that is his biggest problem. He begins to sing that he is not granted asylum when he tries to appear gay, yet he is also denied when he is himself. He claims he is just not gay enough.

Alone, Michael talks about not being able to figure out the next generation. He joined the USCIS for the money and benefits. His home life is not so great, but he doesn't mind coming to work. He feels he became an agent as a last resort, because what else was he supposed to do with his English degree. Even so, he thinks he takes his job seriously. Finally, he remembers the shock of his first day when he realized the decision to grant asylum came down to his decisions.

Later, Gary is sitting alone at his desk when Fan enters the room. Gary is surprised and warns about maintaining his objectivity, as Fan tries to explain Wu's previous panic. Gary tries to get her to leave because she has already had her allotted interview time. She kisses Gary, who resists and responds. She kisses Gary again, but this time he yells at her to leave. Gary and Fan begin to sing about the situation and how no one would need to know.

Gary is once again interviewing Zara. He is trying to understand her involvement in politics. She briefly talks of her family, but is distracted by her pregnancy. Finally she tells Gray that her family was at the beach when a bomb went off. She has a difficult time remembering the date of the incident and eventually changes the subject saying she got a letter from Shar'Allah. The scene then transitions to Asif's interview with Gary. Asif is saying that he is unfamiliar with Shar'Allah. His description does not seem to be matching his deposition and the scene shifts back to Zara's interview. The switch between interviews continues as Zara and Asif discuss the oppressive situations in their home countries. Finally both refugees wonder what Gary wants from them. Gary catches Asif in a lie because Asif did want revenge for his wife's murder, but did not know who to kill. Now he is trying to find a way to move on with his life. Zara continues telling Gary that her family has been threatened. In each interview, Gary asks what will happen if they are sent back. All the refugees claim that they will be killed.

Gary, Marsha, and Michael later discuss the interviews that Gary has just conducted. Michael and Marsha are trying to teach Gary about the asylum process. They warn him not to take on the problems of the refugees and begin to sing a song to illustrate their point.



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Wu returns to Gary's office after he completes his physical examination. He begins to sing from his book of poetry about being lost between China and America. Gary walks in as Wu is finishing his song. Wu is embarrassed. Gary tells Wu not to be afraid of him and Wu admits that he does not envy Gary. They discuss Gary's doubts and Gary offers to switch places with Wu for a second, allowing Wu to sit on his side of the desk. The scenario reminds Wu a Greek myth and gets angry at Gary, who tells Wu that Fan propositioned him that morning. Wu is stunned and Gary yells at him to leave the office. Gary begins to sing about the situation and his doubts about his new job. Meanwhile, Wu confronts Fan, who claims to have acted as she did out of love for Wu because she wanted him to obtain asylum so badly.

The focus begins to shift between the agents, who are organizing the interviews of the day in order to make their final decisions, and the refugees who are nervously waiting in the waiting room. The agents realize the importance of their decisions. Meanwhile, the refugees begin to sing about the fear of waiting to know if they will be next to gain asylum. The agents debate individual cases, while the immigrants continue to sing, fearing what will happen if they are not granted asylum.

Gary begins to sing about his view of the world, while the refugees once again sing about standing at the edge. Once the final decisions have been made, the USCIS agents return to the waiting room. They call out the names of each refugee, either accepting their asylum request or denying it. The focus turns to each individual refugee, who tells of their future. The asylum process appears to start again, as the USCIS agents bid each other good night and the refugees begin to sing about their desire to be granted asylum in the United States. The play ends, as each of the refugees says "Take Me" in their native language.