



SONS OF THE PROPHET

BY **STEPHEN KARAM**



DRAMATISTS
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SONS OF THE PROPHET was originally commissioned by
Roundabout Theatre Company, New York, NY
(Todd Haimes, Artistic Director)
and produced in association with
Huntington Theatre Company, Boston, MA
(Peter DuBois, Artistic Director; Michael Maso, Managing Director).

For Bobo and Momo (Solomon and Hessna)

Pop-pop and Grammy (John and Liz)

Dad and Mom (Albert and Marie)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

At the risk of stating the obvious, N.B.: all the characters are equally human. Eschew broad comedy. Gloria may say ridiculous things, but her mannerisms aren't ridiculous. Timothy has the occasional arrogant, off-putting comment, but he is still sincere in his beliefs, etc., etc. This also pertains to the actresses playing multiple roles — maintaining believability is more important than dynamic changes in voice or posture.

The set should be spare.

The various locales should *suggest* human spaces, but not be burdened by realistic details. The play takes place in a pocket of Pennsylvania that's getting increasingly worn down; small towns whose identities were built around industries that are no longer operative. Cracked sidewalks, leaning porches, weathered siding. If the space allows, I say: let's see the back wall of the theater; expose the brick, electrical wires and sockets, etc.

A slash (/) indicates the point of overlap in dialogue. When it appears, the character with the next line begins his or her speech.

Words in brackets [] are expressed nonverbally.

Douaihy is pronounced: Doo — WHY — hee.

SONS OF THE PROPHET was commissioned and produced by Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director) in New York City on October 20, 2011. It was directed by Peter DuBois; the set design was by Anna Louizos; the costume design was by Bobby Frederick Tilley, II; the lighting design was by Japhy Weideman; the sound design was by M.L. Dogg; the original music was by Nico Muhly; the song “Come Come Ye Saints” was arranged/sung by Mark Abernathy; the arm choreography was by Stephen Karam; the production stage manager was Leslie Sears; and the stage manager was Morgan R. Holbrook. The cast was as follows:

JOSEPH	Santino Fontana
GLORIA	Joanna Gleason
CHARLES	Chris Perfetti
BILL	Yusef Bulos
TIMOTHY	Charles Socarides
VIN	Jonathan Louis Dent
DR. MANOR/ENSEMBLE	Dee Nelson
MRS. McANDREW/ENSEMBLE	Lizbeth MacKay

SONS OF THE PROPHET was produced by Huntington Theatre Company (Peter DuBois, Artistic Director; Michael Maso, Managing Director) in Boston, Massachusetts, on April 13, 2011. It was directed by Peter DuBois; the set design was by Anna Louizos; the costume design was by Bobby Frederick Tilley, II; the lighting design was by Japhy Weideman; the sound design was by M.L. Dogg; the original music was by Nico Muhly; the song “Come Come Ye Saints” was arranged/sung by Mark Abernathy; the arm choreography was by Stephen Karam; and the production stage manager was Leslie Sears. The cast was as follows:

JOSEPH Kelsey Kurz
GLORIA Joanna Gleason
CHARLES Dan McCabe
BILL Yusef Bulos
TIMOTHY Charles Socarides
VIN Jonathan Louis Dent
DR. MANOR/ENSEMBLE Dee Nelson
MRS. McANDREW/ENSEMBLE Lizbeth MacKay

CHARACTERS

JOSEPH — 29

GLORIA — 59

CHARLES — 18

BILL — 74

TIMOTHY — 28

VIN — 18

PHYSICIAN'S ASSISTANT — female, 40s/50s

DOCTOR MANOR —female, 40s/50s

BOARD MEMBER #1 —female, 40s/50s

TICKET AGENT —female, 60s

BOARD MEMBER #2 —female, 60s

MRS. McANDREW — female, 60s

The roles of the Physician's Assistant, Doctor Manor and Board Member #1 are played by the same actress. The roles of the Ticket Agent, Board Member #2 and Mrs. McAndrew are played by the same actress.

PLACE

Eastern Pennsylvania.

TIME

July 2006 – March 2007.

SCENE TITLES

Prologue — July

Scene 1 — **On Work** — August

Scene 2 — **On Pain** — September

Scene 3 — **On Talking** — November

Scene 4 — **On Home** — November

Scene 5 — **On Friendship** — November

Scene 6 — **On Reason & Passion** — December

Scene 7 — **On Yesterday & Today** — March

Scene titles (in **bold**) appear before each scene.

Happiness does not await us all. One needn't be a prophet to say that there will be more grief and pain than serenity and money. That is why we must hang on to one another.

—Anton Chekhov, letter to K.S. Barantsevich,
March 3, 1888

... it seems that in a little while we shall know why we are living, why we are suffering ... If only we could know, if only we could know!

—Anton Chekhov, *The Three Sisters*

I shouldn't be doing this, but I'm going to ...

—Judge Gary F. McKinley, Kenton, OH,
August 15, 2006

SONS OF THE PROPHET

Prologue

Night.

A deer decoy sits atop the crest of a hilly road. It looks real.

Headlights appear in the distance, growing closer.

Closer.

Closer.

Closer.

Just before impact, the stage goes black with the sound of twisting, crunching metal.

Scene 1

On Work

Joseph stands in a pool of light and performs a simple arm stretch (an ulnar nerve glide.) There is a kind of grace to his movement; he has the body-awareness of an athlete.

Lights reveal his location: a modest office in Nazareth, PA. The room is expansive. It's also virtually empty except for two desks. One desk is beautiful and bare save a copy of the New York Times. The other is ordinary and crowded with office supplies.

Gloria, a well-dressed woman, enters with an Allentown newspaper. Joseph stops his stretch, returns to the ordinary desk.

GLORIA. Joe, have you seen these headlines? I'm beginning to think Pennsylvania is the Alabama of the North.

JOSEPH. No, Gloria, did you get my email? I need to leave early —

GLORIA. No, my BlackBerry is busted, think you can fix? *(She plops the BlackBerry on his desk. The phone rings.)*

JOSEPH. *(Answering the phone.)* Gloria Gurney's Book Packaging, how may — no, wrong number ... bye.

GLORIA. *(Engrossed in the newspaper.)* With everything going on in the Middle East can you believe the paper leads with a story about high school football? A preseason look at who's the favorite to go to Hershey for the state playoffs ...

JOSEPH. Yeah, well, football's big here.

GLORIA. I'm learning. I spent most of my life in Manhattan, so ... I keep forgetting parts of Pennsylvania never made it above the Mason-Dixon line.

JOSEPH. I just need you to sign where I've flagged —

GLORIA. We're in *Nazareth* for the love of God, how can we be so detached from the Middle East when — drive ten minutes and you find yourself in Bethlehem, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon or any other town off I-78.

JOSEPH. Just need you to sign here ... also, I need to leave early —
GLORIA. Oh of course, I thought you might need to, go, get out of here —

JOSEPH. Why would you think I might / need to —

GLORIA. Well because of ... I heard about the bombing of the Lebanese airport, the civilian casualties — have you not seen the news?

JOSEPH. No, I mean, I've caught bits and pieces of it on TV, / but —

GLORIA. And that's exactly what Beirut's been reduced to again, isn't it — bits and pieces, God ... so much suffering in that part of the world ... (*They both go about some business. Gloria scans her copy of the New York Times.*) I don't know how the Lebanese are able to endure so much pain, it never ends for them, does it? ... and these images of Israeli tanks driving by Beirutis while — Beirutis sounds like a fruity candy, is that the right — / Beirutis? —

JOSEPH. Beirutis is the correct / term, I think.

GLORIA. — oh good, good, well ... I'm sure your family agrees that Israel's, their desire to defeat Hamas is so / untenable —

JOSEPH. Hezbollah, I think you / mean —

GLORIA. — oh Hezbollah is, also, yes, as well. (*Beat. They go about separate bits of business. Beat.*)

JOSEPH. Did someone tell you I'm Lebanese?

GLORIA. Well, you do share a last name with a young man who helped run the Geography Bee at Nazareth High this weekend ...

JOSEPH. I see.

GLORIA. I joined the board of that foundation, I *sponsored* the whole event, so when I heard them announce "former champion Charles Douaihy" — *Douaihy* isn't a common / name —

JOSEPH. No, yeah, Charles is my brother —

GLORIA. Yes, well, I found that out after speaking to one of his teachers, so ...

JOSEPH. I see.

GLORIA. ... who also told me that your family was Lebanese, so ...

JOSEPH. Yeah, we are.

GLORIA. No keeping secrets in Nazareth, that's all I'm saying.

JOSEPH. Right, but you realize I wasn't keeping a secret.

GLORIA. Right, but *you* realize I'm only bringing it up because ... there were all these people at the event who were surprised I didn't know you had a brother, that's all I'm saying.

JOSEPH. What people were surprised?

GLORIA. Well, that's not the point of the matter, you're missing the point of the / matter —

JOSEPH. Oh sorry, wait — what is / the point of the —

GLORIA. The point of the matter is just that you shouldn't feel shy about discussing your family / in the office —

JOSEPH. No, I'm not shy, / I just —

GLORIA. No no no, I understand —

JOSEPH. — when I'm in the office I just don't like to discuss / my personal life.

GLORIA. Your brother's disability. (*Beat.*)

GLORIA. Oh I [thought you were going to say] — sorry, sorry ...

JOSEPH. No, I — I just don't like to discuss my *personal life* in the office —

GLORIA. I respect that, obviously. (*They go about some business.*) The, the only reason I even brought it up is that ... and you may have already ... picked up on the reason / why —

JOSEPH. Not really, what is the reason / why —

GLORIA. Well, Joe, here's the ... even if no one's willing to discuss it, much of the publishing industry won't do business with me anymore.

JOSEPH. Who's not willing to discuss that?

GLORIA. I'm saying, Joe, you *know* where I'm coming from; you're a runner and — and with the knee problems you're having — we both know what it's like to be suddenly sidelined ...

JOSEPH. I guess, yeah.

GLORIA. Yeah, yeah, we both know what it means to be on top, then ... suddenly, fall from grace.

JOSEPH. I didn't fall from grace, I think I tore my meniscus.

GLORIA. I'm *saying* I was hurt you never told me — the teacher I spoke with, she mentioned your brother did a whole report about a *famous Lebanese relation* of yours, which is, Joe, that's all I've been trying to say.

JOSEPH. (*Genuinely unclear.*) *What* have you been trying to say?

GLORIA. You are a blood relative of Kahlil Gibran! — the best-selling author of all time behind Shakespeare and Lao Tzu!

JOSEPH. No, no no — we're distantly related, as in our great-great grandfathers / were cousins —

GLORIA. I don't care if he's your grandfather's fifth cousin removed — Gibran's name sells books — why would you hide this from me?

JOSEPH. I wasn't hiding anything — Gloria, I *am* Lebanese. And my parents were born in Bsharri, but that's the extent of my Arabian heritage. Look at me, I'm white. We were born and raised in Pennsylvania. We're white.

GLORIA. Yes, but you're white in the same way a *Jewish* person is white, you see what I'm saying?

JOSEPH. What are you saying?

GLORIA. We'd pitch it as a family memoir: I'd hire the right ghost-writer, weave in Gibran quotes —

JOSEPH. There's no story, you'd have to make stuff up.

GLORIA. The best memoirs are fictional. We can work in your athletic ambitions — a former Steamtown Marathon champion —

JOSEPH. My training's on hold —

GLORIA. Then we'll work in the athletic comeback element —

JOSEPH. I might not recover —

GLORIA. If Lance Armstrong died of testicular cancer, would he have won the Tour de France?

JOSEPH. (*"That makes no sense."*) No.

GLORIA. Precisely. The whole meaning of *The Prophet* according to Gibran is: "You are far, far greater than you know, and / All is well."

JOSEPH. All is well, I know. My father says that all the time. (*Beat. Gloria senses Joseph doesn't want to continue the dialogue, but can't help herself—*)

GLORIA. In Arabic, or does he speak / English —

JOSEPH. I need to get going, / I'm sorry —

GLORIA. Of course, no *I'm* sorry, look why don't you just ask your father if he'd be willing to —

JOSEPH. My father is in the hospital. He was in a car accident.

GLORIA. A car accident?

JOSEPH. Yes, I sent you an email because I didn't want to discuss this in the office, so ...

GLORIA. Oh my God ... I'm sorry, you shouldn't even have come in —

JOSEPH. ... he's stable — I was at the hospital all weekend, my uncle's with him now ... / that's why I need to leave early, so ...

GLORIA. Oh my God ... of course, I'm so sorry / I didn't know ...

JOSEPH. I'm fine, it's okay —

GLORIA. It's not okay ... God, Joseph, what happened?

JOSEPH. He was doing maintenance work up at Penn State, and driving home he swerved to avoid — the police think it's some sort of deer decoy hunters use or — there's also a deer statue near

Dunmore High School, they don't know — it was all smashed, so —

GLORIA. The Dunmore mascot?

JOSEPH. Well, / the police think ...

GLORIA. That'd make sense, their mascot is — they're the Mighty Bucks, yes? ...

JOSEPH. Yeah.

GLORIA. ... though bucks have antlers, so if it was a deer decoy, a female deer, it wouldn't have antlers, I hope the police know that.

JOSEPH. I'm just glad ... my dad could have died.

GLORIA. Do they know who did it? —

JOSEPH. Gloria, sorry, can you sign where I've flagged here? — this sets up the health insurance plan under the name of your business. And your BlackBerry isn't broken, you just need to charge it.

GLORIA. Of course, I'll get that, here, go, get out of here ... and give my best to your mother. How's she holding up?

JOSEPH. Oh, my mother is / dead —

GLORIA. (*Genuinely embarrassed.*) Dead, oh God she's dead you've told me ten times, / I'm so sorry ...

JOSEPH. It's fine, / don't worry about it ...

GLORIA. No, I'm so sorry. She died of — it was cervical cancer, right?

JOSEPH. No, and / I —

GLORIA. Was it your aunt who had cervical —

JOSEPH. I don't know anyone who's had cervical cancer —

GLORIA. Someone had — was it your cousin who —

JOSEPH. My uncle had to go on oxygen a few weeks ago, I might have mentioned that.

GLORIA. That's what I'm thinking of, that's it. (*Beat.*) And how's your little brother holding up? God love him ...

JOSEPH. He's fine.

GLORIA. The teacher I spoke with said he has a, uh ... hearing problem, but maybe she meant ... is it ... (*Picks up a paper on his desk.*) Just noticed this handout on MS, does he have —

JOSEPH. No that's just some scrap paper — can I please have that? Sorry ... (*Joseph puts the paper in the recycling bin.*) Charles doesn't have — she probably told you he was born with one ear, it's not a big deal, he had one made out of his own cartilage when he was six, so you can't even tell.

GLORIA. One ear, what are the odds.

JOSEPH. It's not all that uncommon a defect.

SONS OF THE PROPHET

by Stephen Karam

WINNER OF THE 2012 DRAMA CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD, OUTER CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD,
LUCILLE LORTEL AWARD FOR BEST PLAY AND A 2012 PULITZER PRIZE FINALIST

5M, 3W

If to live is to suffer, then Joseph Douaihy is more alive than most. With unexplained chronic pain and the fate of his reeling family on his shoulders, Joseph's health, sanity, and insurance premium are on the line. In an age when modern medicine has a cure for just about everything, *SONS OF THE PROPHET* is the funniest play about human suffering you're likely to see.

"Explosively funny ... one of the many soul-piercing truths in SONS OF THE PROPHET, the absolutely wonderful ... comedy-drama by Stephen Karam, is that life rarely obeys the rules of dramatic consistency, or, for that matter, fair play. Written with insight and compassion, not to mention biting wit, it shines a clarifying light into some of life's darker passages, exploring how people endure the unendurable, and not only survive but also move forward through their blighted lives with sustaining measures of hope, love and good humor." —**The New York Times**

"Ravishing is the best word to describe Stephen Karam's new comedy SONS OF THE PROPHET ... At once deep, deft and beautifully made, SONS OF THE PROPHET stares unflinchingly at the Gorgon's head of grief—the kind of grief on which words have no purchase ... SONS OF THE PROPHET ponders this hard truth; it makes us consider the unacceptable. Just as darkness shows off brilliance, the play's poignant comedy makes us see that facing grief is the best way to ease its considerable grip. Karam's nuanced, comic storytelling — a delicate weave of the spoken and the unspoken, the outrageous and the unconscionable — holds pain and pleasure together in startling equipoise, never trivializing either." —**The New Yorker**

"This is a major, devastating new play, elegant and subtle and infused with the kind of wit that understands how perilously life lingers near the emotional abyss." —**Newsday**

"Devastating and thrilling ... by turns grave, poetic, wrenching, wry, and madcap, SONS OF THE PROPHET ... defies easy categorization. And it confirms Karam as a major voice in American theater." —**Vogue**

"In a single, dolefully sweet show, and one of the only new plays to take on the Great Recession at ground level, we discovered an important playwright in Stephen Karam ... Greatness is prophesied herein: Perhaps all's well in the future of American playwrighting." —**New York Magazine**

Also by Stephen Karam
SPEECH & DEBATE

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