

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

Arena StageAnastasia St. Hilaire, asthilaire@arenastage.org**Print Shop PR**Nicole Capatasto, nicole@printshoppr.com**WHO GETS TO DECIDE?****ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM FOR****THE MOTION**By **CHRISTOPHER CHEN**Directed by **HANA S. SHARIF**

(Washington, DC) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater today announced the cast and creative team for ***The Motion***. A fiercely intelligent and emotionally charged exploration of humanity by Obie Award winner **Christopher Chen**, *The Motion* journeys through memory, identity, and the fragile boundaries of belief. Directed by Arena Stage Artistic Director **Hana S. Sharif**, this thought-provoking dissertation will run **May 6 – June 14, 2026**, in Arena's in-the-round **Fichandler Stage**. Press Night will be held on May 14. For information and tickets, visit arenastage.org/motion.

"I could not be more thrilled to be working with the brilliant Hana Sharif and this outstanding cast and creative team to bring this play to life," shared **Chen**. "The play is a wild ride that wrestles with big questions, and I am so grateful to be working with collaborators who share its adventurous, provocative spirit."

What begins as razor-sharp debate between four scholars swiftly spirals into a real-life experiment: where the scientists become the subjects. Stripped of the world they know, they wrestle with profound and unsettling questions about purpose, morality, and what it truly means to be alive. Where certainty shatters, vulnerability reigns, and no conviction emerges unscathed, they find unexpected solace, love, and companionship. *The Motion* is a searing thinkpiece into the core of the human condition. Who deserves to love? Who deserves to live? And, most importantly, who gets to decide what it means to be human?

Last month, **Chen** was named a 2025 recipient of the **Steinberg Playwright Awards** (the "Mimi" Awards). Presented annually by the Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust to two early-to-mid-career playwrights, the \$100,000 award celebrates writers whose work consistently demonstrates exceptional talent and artistic excellence.

"From the first time I read it, I knew *The Motion* was something special—riveting, emotionally compelling, and unlike anything else in American theater," said **Sharif**. "Chris Chen is a once-in-a-generation playwright whose work pulls down the walls between audience and stage, drawing us into a profound exploration of who we are and how we live together, combining real intelligence with genuine heart and humor."

The cast bringing this live debate to the Fichandler Stage includes **Barzin Akhavan** (Broadway's *The Kite Runner*), **Peregrine Teng Heard** (Arena's *POTUS*), **Nehal Joshi** (Broadway's *The Cottage*), **Nancy Robinette** (Broadway's *Prayer for the French Republic*), and **Nikkole Salter** (Broadway's *The Great Society*), along with **Eli El** (Arena's *Fremont Ave.*) and **Yesenia Iglesias** (The Public Theater's *Public Charge*) as understudies.

The creative team joining **Sharif** includes set designer **Tim Mackabee** (Broadway's *The Elephant Man*), costume designer **Mika Eubanks** (Manhattan Theatre Club's *The Monsters*), lighting designer **Jason Lynch** (Washington National Opera's *The Crucible*), with sound design and original music by **Charles Coes and Nathan A. Roberts** (Arena's *The Age of Innocence*). The associate director is **Alexis Kulani Woodard**. Casting is by **The Tesley Office/Destiny Lilly, CSA** and **Raiyon Hunter, CSA**. The stage manager for this production is **Christi B. Spann** and the assistant stage manager is **Margaret V. Warner**.

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Barzin Akhavan (*Dr. Alan James*) Arena: Mary Zimmerman's *The Arabian Nights*. Other DC credits: *Pericles* (Folger); *Inana and Lidless* (CATF). Broadway: *Network*, *The Kite Runner*. Select NYC productions: *Fuente Ovejuna* (TFNA), *Macbeth* (CSC), *Richard II* (Public/WNYC), *Hamlet* (Waterwell), *2nd Stage* (Meet the Cartozian's), *Coriolanus* (TFNA). International: *Aftermath* (Melbourne, Paris, Amsterdam), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (Theater Calgary). Select regional theater companies: Seattle Rep, Guthrie, Berkeley Rep, ACT SF, Baltimore Centerstage, Huntington, Cincinnati Playhouse, Virginia Stage, Colorado Shakespeare Festival, 4 seasons with the Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival, 6 seasons with The Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Film: *F.A.S.T.* (Upcoming), *Zugzwang* (upcoming), *Ezra*, *Funny Face*. Select TV: *The Blacklist*, *Chicago Med*, *Girls5Eva*, *SMASH*, *Law and Order: CI*. MFA University of Washington.

Peregrine Teng Heard (*Professor Lily Chan*) is a DC-born, Brooklyn-based actor and playwright. She last appeared at Arena Stage in *POTUS* (u/s Stephanie and Jean). Other regional credits include *Tom Jones* and *Remix 38* at Actors Theatre of Louisville. New York credits include the world premiere of Chuck Mee's *soot and spit* (The New Ohio), *Call Out Culture: or, the unbearable whiteness of being* (Ars Nova ANT Fest), *Ski End* (Piehole), and *Sehnsucht* (JACK). Peregrine is the artistic director of The Associates Theater Ensemble, with whom she has devised and performed *The Cousinhood* (The Center at West Park), *Sheila* (A.R.T./New York Theatres), *Black Protagonist* (124 Bank Street Theater), and *Freesome* (The Brick). Peregrine's plays *Redemption Story* and *On the Prowl with Ada Tsiao* were O'Neill National Playwrights Conference Semifinalists in 2023 and 2024. www.peregrineheard.com

Nehal Joshi (*Professor Neel Bharara*) is astonished to mark his 9th show & 10th appearance here. He has appeared as Benny Van Buren in *Damn Yankees*, Ali Hakim in *Oklahoma!*, Amir in *Disgraced*, *Catch Me If You Can* (Helen Hayes nom), *Mother Courage* with Kathleen Turner, *Unknown Soldier*, *The Music Man*, & *Señor Discretion Himself*. DC credits include: *Babbitt* (Shakespeare Theater), *Woolly Mammoth*, *Olney Theater Center*, *Kennedy Center*, *Theater J*. Broadway: *The Cottage*, *All My Sons*, *The Phantom of the Opera* (closing cast), *Flying Over Sunset*, *School of Rock*, *Gettin' the Band Back Together*, *Les Misérables* (1st revival), *The Threepenny Opera*. Off-Broadway: *Cyrano*, *Working* (2008 revision), *Grand Hotel* (Encores!). Regional include: *Dallas Theater Center*, *The Old Globe*, *La Jolla Playhouse*, *Goodman*, *Huntington*. Video games: *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*. Television/Film "The Wire," "Search Party" (HBO), "Law & Order: SVU" (NBC), "Blackout," "Under One Roof." Honors: Special Drama Desk Award. IG: @nehaljoshi. He would like to thank you for being here today and supporting the American theatre.

Nancy Robinette (*Moderator*) was most recently seen at Arena in *Death on the Nile*, *The Heiress*, *Well*, and *Ah, Wilderness!*. Other recent roles in DC include Nan in *Jennifer Who Is Leaving* (Round House), *Carrie in The Trip to Bountiful* (Ford's), *Bubbe in The Chameleon* (Theater J), and Aunt Barb in *Problems Between Sisters* (Studio). She was recently on Broadway in *Prayer for the French Republic* (Manhattan Theatre Club), and earlier in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. For *Prayer*, she received

an Outer Critics Circle nomination; for her 40-plus years in DC theatre, she received a Helen Hayes Tribute.

Nikkole Salter (*Dr. Sarah Matthis*) has recently appeared in Washington DC productions including *As You Like It* and *Julius X* at Folger Theatre, *We Are Gathered* at Arena Stage, *The Confederates* at Mosaic Theatre Company, *Jumping Off Point* at Round House Theatre, and as Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth* at Shakespeare Theatre Company. On Broadway she portrayed Coretta Scott King in *The Great Society* at Lincoln Center Theater, and Off-Broadway appeared in *Gloria* (DR2) and her co-authored play *In the Continuum* at Primary Stages among others. A playwright and director, she has also appeared on television in *New Amsterdam* and *Godfather of Harlem*. Her honors include recognition from Helen Hayes Awards, Outer Critics Circle, OBIE, Audelco, IRNE and Acclaim. Nikkole is professor of acting and playwriting and inaugural chair of the Department of Theatre Arts in Howard University's Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine Arts. www.nikkolesalter.com

Eli El (*u/s Dr. Alan James, Professor Neel Bharara*) is returning to Arena Stage after performing in *Fremont Ave.* (2025), *The Great Society* (2018). Other theater performances include *The Piano Lesson* (1st Stage), *Testosterone* and *Migraaaaants* (ExPats Theatre), *AJAX* (Scena Theatre), *Radio Golf* (Roundhouse Theatre), *FAT HAM* (Studio Theatre), *A Thirst for Freedom* (Live Garra) and many more. He has completed and is currently involved with several independent film projects (*Once Upon a Time in The District*, *Unarmed Man*, *Harriet*, *The Meek*, *Last Night*, *THICK*, etc. Eli has directed (*The Healing Floor*) award winner DCBTF. He also directed a feature film and two shorts (*The Cracked Mask* and *Lay Me Down*). His motto is “you can learn from anyone, if only you allow yourself to.”

Yesenia Iglesias (*u/s Dr. Sarah Matthis, Professor Lily Chan, Moderator*) is a Washington, D.C.-based artist and educator from Bayamón, Puerto Rico. She is thrilled to be returning to Arena Stage after previously appearing in *POTUS*. Select local theater credits include: *The Garbologists* (Theater Alliance), *Metamorphoses* (Folger Shakespeare), *At the Wedding* (Studio Theater), *Primary Trust* (Signature Theater), *Daphne's Dive* (Signature Theater), and *Kid Prince and Pablo* (The Kennedy Center), among others. She has performed on stages across the DMV including Ford's Theater, Shakespeare Theater Company, Olney Theater Center, Imagination Stage, Round House Theater, and Constellation Theater Company. Regional credits include *Don't Eat the Mangos* (Huntington Theatre Company), and Off-Broadway in *Public Charge* (The Public Theater). Her work is also featured in various commercials, and audio books. Forever grateful to her family! MFA: University of Washington - PATP.

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

THE MOTION

By Christopher Chen

Directed by Hana S. Sharif

In the Fichandler Stage | May 6 – June 14, 2026

ABOUT: What begins as a razor-sharp debate spirals into a world-altering unraveling as four scholars are thrust into a kaleidoscopic odyssey through memory, identity, and the fragile boundaries of belief. As the world around them transforms, they find unexpected solace, love, and companionship. Collectively, they wrestle with profound and unsettling questions about purpose, morality, and what it truly means to be alive. *The Motion* is a searing, intelligent, and emotionally charged journey into the core of the human condition—where certainty shatters, vulnerability reigns, and no conviction emerges unscathed.

CAST

Dr. Alan James: Barzin Akhavan*

Professor Lily Chan: Peregrine Teng Heard*

Professor Neel Bharara: Nehal Joshi*

Moderator: Nancy Robinette*
Dr. Sarah Matthis: Nikkole Salter*
u/s Dr. Alan James, Professor Neel Bharara: Eli El*
u/s Dr. Sarah Matthis, Professor Lily Chan, Moderator: Yesenia Iglesias*

CREATIVE

Playwright: Christopher Chen
Director: Hana S. Sharif
Set Designer: Tim Mackabee
Costume Designer: Mika Eubanks
Lighting Designer: Jason Lynch
Sound Design and Original Music: Charles Coes and Nathan A. Roberts
Associate Director: Alexis Kulani Woodard
Casting: The Tesley Office/Destiny Lilly, CSA and Raiyon Hunter, CSA
Stage Manager: Christi B. Spann*
Assistant Stage Manager: Margaret V. Warner*

*Members of Actors' Equity Association

Support for *The Motion* is provided by **Michele and Allan Berman** and **Sue Henry and Carter Phillips**.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

TICKETS

Tickets start at \$49. Ticket prices and availability are subject to change.

Tickets are available at arenastage.org. Tickets may also be purchased through the Sales Office by phone at 202-488-3300, Tuesday through Sunday, 12-6PM, or in person at 1101 Sixth Street, SW, Washington, DC, Tuesday through Sunday, 2 hours before the show begins on performance days.

Groups of 10 or more may book tickets at arenastage.org/groups or via email at groups@arenastage.org.

Arena Stage's many savings programs include "pay your age" tickets for those aged 35 and under; military, first responder, and educator discounts; student discounts; and "Southwest Nights" for those living and working in the District's Southwest neighborhood. To learn more, visit arenastage.org/savings-programs.

PERFORMANCE DATES

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Sunday at 7:30PM
Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 8PM
Saturday and Sunday at 2PM
Weekday matinees at 12PM on May 28, June 3, and June 10
Times are subject to change. Please confirm on the website upon booking.

Southwest Night Performances: Wednesday, May 6 through Wednesday, May 13

Early Curtain Performance: Sunday, June 7 at 6PM

Audio-Described Performance: Saturday, May 30 at 2PM

Closed Captioning: Globetitles will be available at select performances.

College Night: Saturday, May 9 at 8PM

Pride Night: Wednesday, May 13 at 7:30PM

HBCU Night: Tuesday, May 26 at 7:30PM

Young Professionals Night: Saturday, May 30 at 8PM

Post-Show Conversations

Connect with the show beyond the performance at a post-show conversation on June 3 following the 12PM matinee, and on June 9 following the 7:30PM performance.

TRAVEL: Limited parking is available in Arena Stage's on-site garage for \$22 to \$40; call 202-488-3300 to purchase in advance. Drive-up valet parking is also available for \$40, cash only. For more information on transportation and other parking options around the Mead Center, visit arenastage.org/parking.

For complete Arena Stage 2025/26 Season details, visit arenastage.org/75.

The first racially integrated theater in our nation's capital and a pioneer of the regional theater movement, Arena Stage was founded in 1950 in Washington, DC. Today, under the leadership of Artistic Director Hana S. Sharif and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie, Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. We produce plays of all that is passionate, profound, deep, and dangerous in the American spirit, and present diverse and groundbreaking work from some of the best artists around the country. Consistently contributing to the American theatrical lexicon by commissioning and developing new plays, Arena Stage impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement and serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org

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