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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Silk Road Theatre Project opens its 5th season with the
The World Premiere of
Shishir Kurup's
*Merchant on Venice***

September 15 – November 4, 2007

Chicago, IL – Artistic Director Jamil Khoury and Executive Director Malik Gillani announce the World Premiere of **Shishir Kurup's *Merchant on Venice***, a fresh new play that merges the Bard with Bollywood. The world premiere, directed by Stuart Carden, runs September 15-November 4, 2007, at **Silk Road Theatre Project**, 77 W. Washington Street, lower level of the Historic Chicago Temple Building. **The press opening is Friday, September 28, 2007, at 8:00 p.m.**

The Joyce Foundation is the Presenting Sponsor of *Merchant on Venice*.

In Shishir Kurup's ***Merchant on Venice***, Venice, Italy intersects with L.A.'s Venice Boulevard in a wickedly funny, wildly inventive and politically provocative re-imagining of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. Written in iambic pentameter and vividly colored by Indian, American and Latino pop references, playwright Kurup transforms Shakespeare's original by injecting the story with Bollywood musical numbers, L.A. punk, Hindu-Muslim tensions and a distinctly American landscape.

"The relationship between Hinduism and Islam in the Indian sub-continent, and hence between Hindus and Muslims world wide, is one that is rich and complex; it is affectionate and adversarial, intimate and estranged, unifying and divisive. Collectively, Hindus and Muslims comprise over one third of humanity. Thus, it is a relationship with global ramifications," comments **Khoury**. "This is a play that locates a particular inter-faith dynamic within a universal context, one of conflict and hoped for redemption. This adaptation makes you re-imagine what is possible in the theatre."

***Merchant on Venice* features Anish Jethmalani, Kamal Hans, Vince P. Mahler, Andy Nagraj, Marvin Quihada, Sadiyah Rifai, Amira Sabbagh, Madrid St. Angelo, Pranidhi Varshney and Tariq Vasudeva.**

The designers are **Lee Keenan** (scenic), **Rebecca Barrett** (lights), **Carol J. Blanchard** (costumes), **Robert Steel** (sound and original music) and **Daniel Pellant** (props). The Choreographer is **Alka Nayyar**. The stage manager is **Benjamin Herman** and the dramaturg is **Lavinia Jadhvani**.

Shishir Kurup (playwright) is an actor, writer, director, composer and ensemble member of the nationally renowned Cornerstone Theater Company. His modern verse play, *Merchant on Venice*, received California Arts Council, Kennedy Center, and NEA/TCG Awards and was work-shopped at NY's Lark

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Theatre and L.A.'s East West Players and Mark Taper Forum. His plays *On Caring for the Beast* and *As Vishnu Dreams* played at the Currican Theater in NY and East West Players respectively, the latter receiving critic's pick from the L.A. Times and Weekly. His one-man show, *Assimilation*, is published in the anthology *Bold Words: A Century of Asian American Writing*. Shishir is one of only six people nationwide to receive the TIME (Time for Inspiration, Motivation and Exploration) Grant from the Audrey Skirball Foundation in recognition of his body of work. He's also a Princess Grace fellow and Herb Alpert nominee for theater. Last year he co-composed songs for and directed Cornerstone's twentieth anniversary show, *Demeter in the City*, at Redcat in Disney Hall written by Macarthur Fellow Sarah Ruhl. This June he directed *Los Illegals* written by new Cornerstone Artistic Director Michael John Garces with stories culled from and cast with the Los Angeles undocumented community. Shishir has an extensive TV and film list but was most recently on *Lost*, *Sleeper Cell* and played a recurring character on NBC's *Surface*. He currently recurs on *Heroes*.

Stuart Carden (Director), is the Associate Artistic Director of SRTP, and serves as resident director, artistic advisor and co-producer of the Al Kasida Staged Reading Series. Recent credits for the company include the Jeff nominated, Midwest premiere of David Henry Hwang's *Golden Child*, curator of SRTP's involvement with Suzan-Lori Parks' *365 Days/365 Plays*, and the After Dark Award-winning productions of Resident Playwright Yussef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat* and *10 Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith*. Other recent work includes *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *The Pillowman*, *A Picasso*, *The False Servant*, *The Moonlight Room*, *Stones in his Pockets*, *The Game of Love and Chance*, *Life is a Dream*, *Ring Round the Moon*, *Private Eyes*, *Spring Awakening* and Charles Mee's *Big Love*. He will soon collaborate for his third project with resident playwright, Yussef El Guindi, on the world premiere of *Our Enemies: Lively Scenes of Love and Combat*. Stuart is an Associate Director with Pittsburgh Irish and Classical Theatre, an instructor in the Conservatory Program at Act One Studios and an alumnus of Carnegie Mellon University School of Drama.

Anish Jethmalani (Sharuk), is an Equity actor making his debut with Silk Road Theatre Project. Some of his stage credits include *Citizens of the World* at Steppenwolf; *Sita Ram* at Lookingglass; *To the Greenfields Beyond* at Writers'; *Omnium Gatherum* at Next; *Homeland Security* at Victory Gardens; *Mary Stuart*, *The Invention of Love*, and *Life's A Dream* with Court, *Romeo and Juliet* with Chicago Shakespeare; *Wit* and *A Christmas Carol* with The Goodman; and *Indian Ink* with Apple Tree. Anish is the current artistic director of the Eclipse Theatre Company. He is a graduate of Loyola University and The Oxford School of Drama.

Gerardo Cardenas (Armando) understudied Steppenwolf Theatre's *Sonia Flew* and was seen last summer in Eclipse Theatre's production of *Spinning Into Butter*. Past credits include working with Teatro Vista on their staged reading series and understudying their production of *The Sins of Sor Juana*. He also worked with Chicago Scriptworks on their reading of *Comes Love* and has appeared in numerous independent films.

Kamal Hans (Devendra) has appeared in *Fanny*, *The Tempest*, *Felix*, *The Normal Heart*, as Salieri in *Amadeus* and *Chess*. Other creative experience includes acting and producing in TV, film, and theater. He is a graduate of the Goodman School of Drama, Royal Academy of Dramatic and Illinois Wesleyan University. Kamal serves on multiple boards working to heighten the community's awareness of the enormous pool of South Asian talent.

Vincent P. Mahler (Shivananda, Rasik, Toufiq, and Sharuk Understudy) appeared in Silk Road Theatre Project's *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* (After Dark Award: Best New Play). Recent credits include *The Weir* for Signal Ensemble (Jeff Citation Ensemble nomination); and *The General from America* and *Guantanamo* with Timeline. He was Artistic Director for Frump Tucker Theatre, appearing in *How I*

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Learned to Drive, *Below the Belt*, and *An Empty Plate in the Cafe du Grand Boeuf*. For Pegasus Players, he performed in *The Lynching of Leo Frank* (Jeff Citation: Best New Play) and the Chicago premiere of *La Bête*. Other credits: Bailiwick, Buffalo Theatre Ensemble, Chicago Jewish Theatre, Circle, Interplay, Irish Repertory, New Tuners, and Seanachai.

Andy Nagraj (Jitendra) is a recent graduate of The School at Steppenwolf. He has appeared in the title roles in *Othello* at Ohio Shakespeare Festival, Disney's *Beauty & the Beast* at TheatreIV, and *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* at Modlin Center for the Arts. Andy is a singer and aspiring playwright. A native of Virginia, he earned his BA in Music from the University of Richmond.

Marvin Eduardo Quijada (Amithaba) was last seen in Silent Theatre's Original Piece *Noir*. He can be seen in Silent Theatre's next piece *Chaplin Christmas* which he co-wrote. He has worked with Teatro Vista, Journeymen, Chicago Dramatist, and Next.

Sadieh Rifai (Noorani) is a graduate of the School at Steppenwolf and has worked with Uma, Shantz and Steppenwolf Theatres. Sadieh was recently in the pilot *The Reynolds Influence* which premiered at the Music Box Theatre.

Amira Sabbagh (Kavita) performed in one of the earliest versions of Silk Road's popular *Precious Stones* production in 2003. Since then, she has been performing improv, children's theatre, staged readings, and industrial videos and commercials. She travels with SST Communications, a local company that does theatre-based training programs for organizations and institutions nationwide, lecturing on such issues as sexual harassment, workplace safety, and cultural diversity.

Madrid St. Angelo (Yogananda, Murali, Butcher) is a theatrical actor, director and activist. He previously performed at Silk Road Theatre Project in *Back of the Throat*. Recently he appeared in Jose Rivera's *Sueno* produced by Greasy Joan & Co. Upcoming: St. Angelo will be directing the Midwest Premiere of Robert Patrick's *Hollywood at Sunset*, a featured production in Curious TheatreBranch's Annual Rhinoceros Festival and a fall production of Edward Crosby Well's play *Flowers Out of Season*. St. Angelo is active in the GLBT community; having worked and organized with such community groups as the NGLTF, HRC and ACT UP. Currently St. Angelo is the Artistic Director for The People's Theater of Chicago. A graduate of New York's Neighborhood Playhouse, New School of Acting, he studied under the auspices of Sandy Meisner and William Alderson.

Pranidhi Varshney (Pushpa) appeared in the title role in Lookingglass Theatre's production of *Sita Ram; Kama Sutra: The Musical*; and *Half the Sky* in Stages 2006. She is a Dock Street Singer at Navy Pier, and has appeared in several productions at Northwestern, from where she graduated.

Tariq Vasudeva (Tooranpoi, S.A.B.U. Rep, Aravind) recently appeared as R.P. McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* produced by the St. Sebastian Players. He is a 2006 graduate of Denison University (Ohio).

Previews are **September 15-27, 2007**. The opening press performance is on **Friday, September 28, 2007, at 8:00 p.m.** The production runs through **November 4, 2007**. Curtain times are Thursdays at 7:30; Fridays at 8:00 p.m.; Saturdays at 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. and Sundays at 4:00 p.m.

Tickets are available at the **Silk Road Theatre Project box office**, 77 W. Washington; by phone, 1-888-SILKTIX (745-5849); and online, www.srtp.org.

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Discounted parking is available for \$6 at System Parking, just 3 blocks from the theatre, at 230 W. Washington Street.

A special **Dinner/Theatre Evening** will be held on Friday, October 12, 2007. An Indian-inspired meal created by MaiChef Cuisine will begin at 6:00 p.m. in James Parlor on the 2nd floor of the Historic Chicago Temple Building. The package is \$80 and includes a ticket to that evening's performance of *Merchant on Venice* at 8:00 p.m.

Silk Road Theatre Project showcases playwrights of Asian, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean backgrounds, whose works address themes relevant to the peoples of the Silk Road and their Diaspora communities. Through the creation and presentation of outstanding theatre, we aim to promote discourse and dialogue among multi-cultural audiences in Chicago.

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Fact Sheet/ *Merchant on Venice*

Title: ***Merchant on Venice***
Playwright: **Shishir Kurup**
Directed by: Stuart Carden
Featuring: Anish Jethmalani, Kamal Hans, Vince Mahler, Andy Nagraj,
Marvin Quihada, Sadiah Rifai, Amira Sabbagh, Madrid St. Angelo,
Pranidhi Varshney and Tariq Vasudeva.
Dates: **Previews:** September 15-27, 2007
Press Opening: September 28, 2007 at 8:00pm
Regular Run: September 30-November 4, 2007
Schedule: **Thursdays:** 7:30 p.m.
Fridays: 8:00 p.m.
Saturdays: 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.
Sundays: 4:00 p.m.
Location: Silk Road Theatre Project, 77 W. Washington St. (lower level) Chicago, IL
Price: Previews: \$18-\$22
Thurs and Fri: \$28
Sat and Sun matinees: \$30
Sat evenings: \$33
Box Office: **77 W. Washington St. (lower level) Chicago**
1-888-SILKTIX (745-5849); www.srtp.org

Special event: **Dinner/Theatre Evening, Friday, October 12, 2007, \$80**
An Indian-inspired meal created by MaiChef Cuisine will begin at 6:00 p.m. in James Parlor on the 2nd floor of the Historic Chicago Temple Building, followed by an 8:00 p.m. performance of *Merchant on Venice*.

Notes of Interest:

- *Merchant on Venice*, is, at once, a modern adaptation of Shakespeare's similarly titled classic and an entirely new piece of dramatic literature. While it stands on its own as a distinct new play, and a distinctly American play, it maintains a lively and intimate dialogue with its Elizabethan predecessor.
- *Merchant on Venice* received California Arts Council, Kennedy Center, and NEA/TCG Awards and was work-shopped at NY's Lark Theatre and L.A.'s East West Players and Mark Taper Forum.
- Equity actor **Anish Jethmalani** has appeared at Steppenwolf, Writers', Next, Victory Gardens, Court, Chicago Shakespeare, The Goodman, and Apple Tree. He is the Artistic Director of Eclipse Theatre Company.
- Silk Road recently hosted DESI DRAMA: The First National South Asian American Theatre Conference. This historic conference marked the first-ever organized gathering of South Asian American theatre artists and professionals from across the U.S. Among the issues explored was the imperative of developing a canon of South Asian American plays. It is fitting that the first play produced by Silk Road post-Desi Drama is the work of an Indian-American playwright.
- *Merchant on Venice* distinctly evokes the mission and aesthetic of Silk Road Theatre Project, artistically and politically. It manages to explore the ever-sensitive terrain of Hindu-Muslim relations within a complex and compassionate storyline without favoring partisanship or stereotypes. Silk Road has found in this play a kindred spirit of sorts, an affirmation of its own journeys, both within the South Asian Diaspora, and within the always rich, sometimes conflicted arenas that bond Hindus and Muslims together.

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