



TIME: The week of Yalda, the longest night of the year and the winter solstice when Iranians gather to listen to Sufi poetry and music by fire light. The Zoroastrians believed it an inauspicious night — a sentiment that has changed over the years. It is the nineties, Islamic etiquette rules are strict, and the war with Iraq is newly over, but not won. The nation, shrouded in black half mourns while the other half are relieved to be freed of the burden of martyrdom and war. This was never their war. The youth are waking up and they want to party like it's 1999, because it almost is.



UCI New Swan Shakespeare Center

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

NIKA: Young woman in her twenties

BANAFSHEH/BANI: Young woman in her twenties/young man in his twenties

SINA: Wealthy bazaar merchant

FIROOZ/ FESTE: A wise Afro-Iranian sailor/pirate from the south. They are a close friend of Banafsheh's lost twin brother. They are mistaken for Hajji Firooz, a minstrel black-face character who appears at Nowruz, the spring equinox and the Iranian New Year.

MEGAPHONE: Voice of the Islamic Police

FEMALE GUARD



ROXANNE VARZI is Professor of Anthropology at UC Irvine. A writer, anthropologist, filmmaker and sound artist, her books include *Warring Souls: Media, Martyrdom, and Youth in post-Revolutionary Iran* and *Last Scene Underground: An Ethnographic Novel of Iran*. She is currently working on *Splinters of a Careless Alphabet*, a play and graphic novel about Henry Corbin and "the children of the Iranian Revolution."

ELI SIMON is Chancellor's Professor of Drama at UC Irvine and Artistic Director of the New Swan Shakespeare Festival.

## YALDA

A new play by Roxanne Varzi

Directed by Eli Simon

Wednesday, November 30, 2023

Humanities Gateway 1030

The University of California, Irvine

7:30 PM

## FEATURING

Vivianna McCormick (Banafsheh)

Zalen King (Feste)

Heather Lee Echevarria (Nika)

Tim Frangos (Sina, Megaphone)

Sammie Moore (Narrator, Female Guard)

Graphics and projections by Kasra Paydavousi

Music by Eyvind Kang and Jessika Kenney

Technical support by Jesús López Vargas

On the eve of Yalda, the longest night of the year, a twin, shipwrecked on the shores of the Caspian Sea and searching for her lost brother, cuts her hair and takes on the role of a man in order to survive in the land of Islamia.

This event is sponsored by the [New Swan Shakespeare Center](#) and [Illuminations: The Chancellor's Arts and Culture Initiative](#) at the University of California, Irvine. We would like to thank Ayanna Thompson, Julia Lupton, Pam Marsden, Shi-Wei Wu, the departments of Drama and Music, and the Humanities Center for their support.

Please follow the Shakespeare Center on Instagram @ucishakespeare. For more information about this play, visit <https://faculty.sites.uci.edu/professorvarzi/yalda/>