**PAAIA Interviews Tony Award Nominee Arian Moayed**

**New York, NY -** [Waterwell Theatre Company](http://waterwell.org/) is undertaking a professional stage production of Shakespeare's Hamlet set in 1917 Tehran, set during the dawn of World War I. Performing Shakespeare's words in both English and Farsi, Waterwell’s adaptation of *Hamlet* explores the shifting cultural identities that Persians were battling as the rest of the world modernizes.

The production features a cast of Iranian, Middle Eastern, and South Asian actors including Tony Award nominee Arian Moayed, the first Iranian actor to play the role of Hamlet in the United States. PAAIA recently had the opportunity to discuss Waterwell’s cultural adaptation of Hamlet with Mr. Moayed, who received a Tony Award nomination for Best Featured Actor in a Play in 2011 for his performance as Musa in [*Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengal_Tiger_at_the_Baghdad_Zoo).

**PAAIA:** Please tell us about your background, career in the performing arts, and your Iranian heritage.

**Mr. Moayed:** I was born in Iran and moved here when I was five. We lived an immigrant life in Chicago. I went to Indiana University for theatre and drama where I met Tom Ridgley. After graduating from college, we moved to New York City in 2002 and decided to start a theatre company.

Waterwell Productions started off small and now many people are involved. Waterwell’s drama school serves about 250 students, has 14 faculty members, and performs 11 productions a year. We have been creating work here for a decade now and are funded by the Department of Education (DOE).

**PAAIA:** What inspired Waterwell to adapt Hamlet to 1917 Tehran, and what are some of the cross-cutting themes that you explore in the play?

**Mr. Moayed:** The timing of 1917 Tehran, alongside the British infiltration of the Middle East, is reminiscent of what’s happening here today in the United States. There was a lot of push-back in the Middle East because they were bringing new ideas into the culture.

As a human being, I am an Iranian born immigrant living in the city dealing with dual identity. What is it to be an American and an Iranian – an immigrant and a non-immigrant? As Hamlet, I am constantly delving into those questions in a highly personal way. This production asks the audience to contemplate what happens if, when the ghosts come visit Hamlet, the play is done only in Farsi and Hamlet throws himself back into the Eastern tradition.

**PAAIA:** Did you find it challenging to perform Hamlet in two languages (English and Farsi)?

**Mr. Moayed:** It is challenging to play Hamlet period. If you add on top of that performing in Farsi, it has been one of the most challenging roles I have ever played.

**PAAIA:** Hamlet has been adapted to many cultures and settings, including recent productions in Iran. How is this different? And how does it reflect the struggles of Iranians everywhere?

**Mr. Moayed:** Two Iranian immigrants - one playing and one composing - the play of Hamlet in Manhattan set in 1917 Iran bridges the gap between ideas and ideals. That has been what we’re all about at Waterwell productions. This play is a first.

We have a unique cast of Iranian Shakespearean actors here in New York City that have never worked together before and are coming together for the first time. On top of all that, we have one of the greatest Iranian musicians ever, Mohsen Namjoo, composing music for the production.

We have also been careful not to politicize the different sides – including East and West, Iranian and American - while trying to become as real as humanly possible. As we put the production together, a lot of us noticed how Persian Hamlet is and how Iranian his character can be. There are a lot of Persian and interpersonal overtones.

**PAAIA:** In what ways can the Iranian American community support this production?

**Mr. Moayed:** Please help us get the word out to friends and family!

The production will run for a total of twenty-eight performances (Wednesday through Sunday, with weekend matinee shows) and will be presented in the newly renovated, state-of-the-art Sheen Center, **May 10 – Jun 3, 2017**.

To view an advertisement for Waterwell’s *Hamlet,* please click [here](https://vimeo.com/209822372), and click [here](http://sheencenter.org/shows/hamlet) to get tickets.