

PRESS RELEASE

*Phoenix World Theatre
Pallimukku, Ernakulam
Manjula Padmanabhan's Harvest*

Our new production, Harvest, directed by Terry John Converse and designed by M.F.A. Graduate Students from the University of Tennessee.

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Artistic Director: Charu Narayanan

Director: Terry John Converse (Emeritus Professor, Washington State University)

Designers: M.F.A Students from the University of Tennessee

Managing Director: Praveen Pallai

Phoenix World Theatre started in 2013 with 10 members of multiple talents, and now for our third production, Phoenix World Theatre is planning to present *Harvest*, Manjula Padmanabhan's award-winning play that centers on the international organ trade. Set in the imminent future, *Harvest* imagines a grisly pact between the first and third worlds, in which desperate people can sell their body parts to wealthy clients in return for food, water, shelter and riches for themselves and their families. As such, it is a play about how the "first" world cannibalizes the "third" world to fulfill its own desires. *Harvest* is a dark, bitter, savagely funny vision of the cannibalistic future that awaits the human race.

In *Harvest*, Om, a just-laid-off breadwinner for a struggling Indian family living in a cramped Mumbai tenement, decides to sell his organs to a shadowy company called Interplanta in hopes of reversing his financial plight. Guards arrive to make his home into a germ-free zone. Om's family is monitored around the clock, receiving frequent video phone-type inquiries and directives from the supposed organ recipient, an icy young blonde named Ginni. When Jeetu, his brother returns unexpectedly, he is taken as the donor. Om can't accept this, and ultimately Jaya, his wife is left alone. Will she too be seduced into selling her body parts, for use by the rich westerners?

The core of our production concept might be expressed in a single phrase: the dark side of Apple. While Apple Computers are never mentioned in the script, it is a perfect match for the point of the play, and as such it will be a guiding light for the set, light, and costume designers. The world is in love with everything Apple, yet many people have never questioned where and how all this shiny, hi-tech stuff gets made. We're all aware of outsourcing, but many of us are very much unaware of the enormity of the problem. Third world employees of Apple products are so overworked that that many of them are committing suicide by jumping out of buildings. In a feeble attempt to stop the suicides, large nets are draped around the factories.

Why are we using Apple-inspired branding in our production? Apple is American, and the fact that it's in the image of something one "harvests to eat" make it a perfect match for this play. Is Apple harvesting human body parts? No, not yet, but the familiar logo

— an Apple with a bite taken out it — is possibly a reminder of what companies like Apple are actually doing. Apple's first slogan was 'Byte into an Apple.' We like to "byte" into our Apple products, but Apple as a first world American corporation is cannibalizing bite by bite, third world donors for its bountiful "harvest."

Helen Gilbert in her introduction to the Anthology of the Post-colonial Plays rightly comments on the nature of the play. She observes: *Harvest* can be read not only as a cautionary tale about the possible (mis) use of modern medical and reproductive science but also a reflection on economic and social legacies of Western imperialism, particularly as they coverage with new technologies.

Collaborating with M.F.A Design Students from the University of Tennessee

Under the guidance of two esteemed professors from the University of Tennessee, and their six students, the overall objective is for the six M.F.A graduate students to create set, light, and costume designs for our upcoming production of *Harvest*.

The University of Tennessee group consists of two professors (Marianne Custer, Head of Costume Design, and Kenton Yeager, Head of Lighting Design) and their six M.F.A. graduate students—there are 2 costume designers, two set designers, and two lighting designers.

With the designers, and the Phoenix World Theatre actors we will tour the Kerala area, and conduct several design workshops. We have several sessions planned with the School of Drama in Thrissur, where students there will interact with students from both America and Kochi. Faculty from the University of Tennessee and faculty from the School of Drama will share their approaches to design and collaborate on workshops with both the US and Indian students.

Since *Harvest* dramatizes how the Western World is encroaching on traditional India, designers of this production need to be conversant in both American and Indian cultures. This collaboration of Indian and American artists is an exciting undertaking for all involved because it promotes mutual understanding and sharing between the US and Indian groups, and in this respect it is very similar to the goals of the USIEF (Fulbright Organization)

The Tennessee Designers:

- mcuster@utk.edu (Professor Marianne Custer, Costume Design)
- kyeager2@utk.edu (Professor Kenton Yeager, Lighting Design)
- nprodano@vols.utk.edu (Scenery-Nevena Prodanovic)
- tkapell@vols.utk.edu (Lighting-Tannis Kapell)
- Otrees@vols.utk.edu (Costumes-Olivia Trees)
- Vbercher@vols.utk.edu (Costumes-Victor Bercher)
- hwilkin6@vols.utk.eduWilkinson (Scenery-HenryAlexander)
- maranda.debusk@gmail.com (Lighting-Maranda Debusk)