

LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES CREATIVE TEAM FOR WORLD PREMIERE OF *BHANGIN' IT: A BANGIN' NEW MUSICAL*

La Jolla, CA – La Jolla Playhouse is pleased to announce the creative team for its world-premiere production of *Bhangin' It: A Bangin' New Musical*, book by **Mike Lew** (Playhouse's *Tiger Style!*) and **Rehana Lew Mirza** (Playhouse's DNA Series' *Child of Colonialism*), music and lyrics by **Sam Willmott**, with additional music by Grammy Award nominee **Deep Singh**, running in the Mandell Weiss Theatre **March 8 – April 17, 2022**.

The musical will be directed by **Stafford Arima** (Broadway's *Allegiance*), with choreography by **Rujuta Vaidya** (*Slumdog Millionaire* Academy Awards performance) and musical staging by **Lisa Shriver** (Playhouse/Broadway's *Jesus Christ Superstar*), along with Bhangra specialist **Anushka Pushpala** (Artistic Director of Bhangra Empire). Due to scheduling conflicts, Amy Anders Corcoran, the show's original director, has regretfully had to step away from the project.

The full creative team includes former Playhouse Artist-in-Residence and Tony Award nominee **Robert Brill** (Playhouse's *SUMMER: The Donna Summer Musical*, *The Wiz* and others), Scenic Designer; Tony Award winner **Linda Cho** (Playhouse's *Wild Goose Dreams*, *The Orphan of Zhao*), Costume Designer; **Amith Chandrashaker**, Lighting Designer; **Jonathan Deans**, Sound Designer; **David Bengali**, Projection Designer; **Natasha Sinha**, Dramaturg; **Calleri/Jensen/Davis** and **Jacole Kitchen**, Casting; **Julianne Menassian**, Stage Manager.

"This brand new piece explores the complexities around identity in our culture through the lens of inter-collegiate Bhangra dance, resulting in a thoroughly charming and infectious musical comedy," said **Christopher Ashley**, the Rich Family Artistic Director of La Jolla Playhouse. "While Amy Anders Corcoran's schedule didn't allow for her to participate at this stage, we are deeply grateful for her incredible championing and leadership of the show throughout its development. Moving forward, we are delighted that Stafford Arima will be coming on board. I so admired his work on *Allegiance* – both at The Old Globe and on Broadway – and I know San Diego audiences will be thrilled to have him back in town. We're also delighted that Lisa Shriver is returning to the Playhouse. We can't wait to work with this amazing creative team to launch *Bhangin' It: A Bangin' New Musical* at the Playhouse this spring."

While East Lansing University senior Mary Darshini Clarke has spent her entire life trying to figure out where she fits in, she has always found community dancing on the school's prestigious bhangra team. But when she becomes the self-appointed captain of a new team of enthusiastic novices more interested in making friends than the right moves, Mary quickly learns that carving out her own path complicates her journey. As the pressure of the big national competition approaches, can both teams learn that what makes them unique could actually be the key to their success? Bursting with vibrant dance and electrifying music, *Bhangin' It: A Bangin' New Musical* is an exhilarating and joyous new musical comedy for America today.

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Artist Biographies

Stafford Arima is the Artistic Director of Theatre Calgary in Alberta, Canada. In 2015, he became the first Asian Canadian to direct a musical on Broadway when *Allegiance* opened at the Longacre Theatre. Arima was nominated for an Olivier Award for his direction of the West End premiere of *Ragtime*. Additional work: *Altar Boyz* (Off-Broadway), *Carrie* (MCC Theater), *Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* (Stratford Festival), *Saturday Night* (York Theatre Co., NYC), *Candide* (San Francisco Symphony), *The Tin Pan Alley Rag* (Roundabout Theatre), *bare* (Off-Broadway 2012), and *Mary and Max*, *A Christmas Carol* and *Billy Elliot* (Theatre Calgary). Arima was the associate director of *Seussical* and *A Class Act* on Broadway. He is a graduate of York University (Canada), and former adjunct and Granada Artist in Residence at the University of California, Davis. staffordarima.com

Mike Lew is beyond thrilled to return to La Jolla Playhouse, his hometown theatre. Previous collaborations with the Playhouse include serving as the 2018/19 Artist-in-Residence and a commission for *The Colonialism Project* (both with Rehana Lew Mirza), and the west coast premiere of his play *Tiger Style!* (also at Olney, Huntington and Alliance). His other plays include *Teenage Dick* (Ma-Yi at the Public, Donmar Warehouse, Woolly Mammoth, Artists Rep); *Bike America* (Ma-Yi, Alliance) and *microcrisis* (Ma-Yi, InterAct, Next Act). He and Ms. Lew Mirza are joint Mellon Foundation Playwrights-in-Residence at Ma-Yi Theater. Mike is a Dramatists Guild Council member, Tony voter and New Dramatists resident. Honors: Guggenheim, Lark Venturous and NYFA fellowships; Kleban, PEN, Lanford Wilson, Helen Merrill, Heideman and Keneda Awards. Education: Juilliard, Yale.

Rehana Lew Mirza's previous collaborations with La Jolla Playhouse include serving as the 2018/19 Artist-in-Residence and a commission for *The Colonialism Project* (both with Mike Lew). Her plays include: *Hatefuck* (2019 production at Colt Coeur and WP Theater); *A People's Guide to History in the Time of Here and Now* (Primary Stages commission; workshop production: AMDA); *Soldier X* (productions: Ma-Yi, Brooklyn College; 2015 Kilroys List; NYSCA/Lark commission); *Tomorrow Inshallah* (Storyworks/HuffPost commission; production: Living Room Theater, Kansas City); *Neighborhood Watch* (NNPN/InterAct commission); and *Barriers* (productions: Desipina, Asian American Theater Company). Honors include: Kleban Award, NYFA Fellow, Colt Coeur Company member, HBO Access Fellow, Lilly Award (Stacey Mindich "Go Write A Play") and a TCG/New Georges Fellowship. She and Mike also share a Mellon Foundation National Playwright residency administered in partnership with Howlround at Ma-Yi Theater. M.F.A.: Columbia University; B.F.A.: NYU Tisch.

Anushka Pushpala has been dancing, teaching and competing since she was four years old. Her training includes Ballet, Jazz, Bollywood and Bhangra. Beginning her Bhangra journey at the age of 10, she performed with various groups in the community. Once she entered college at UC San Diego, she joined her competitive collegiate Bhangra team, Da Real Punjabiz, dancing all four years while pursuing her degree. Since graduating, she has danced with various teams around the country as well as founded SHER and San Francisco Bhangra Club. Most recently, she has been working as the Artistic Director of Bhangra Empire, curating performances and videos, and the Bhangra Instructor for the Elite Naach Academy. She's excited for this full-circle moment to be back at her old stomping grounds, where her love for Bhangra culminated, and showcase this dance form in a new light!

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Lisa Shriver's Broadway credits include *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Farnsworth Invention*, *The Story of My Life*, *Ring of Fire*. As Associate Choreographer: over 10 Broadway productions, including *The Producers*, *Into the Woods*, *Oklahoma*. Off-Broadway: *Into the Woods* (Roundabout Theatre – Lortel Award nomination for Outstanding Choreography), *Fetch Clay Make Man* (New York Theatre Workshop). Selected regional credits: *Sideways*, *The Farnsworth Invention*, *Jesus Christ Superstar* (La Jolla Playhouse); *Sister Act*, *Rock of Ages*, *Austen's Pride* (Seattle 5th Ave); *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *The Tempest* – both with Christopher Plummer (Stratford Shakespeare Festival). Film: *A Beautiful Mind*, *A Christmas Carol* with Jim Carrey, *Hysterical Blindness*. As Associate: *The Polar Express*, *Mixed Nuts* with Steve Martin, Center Stage. TV: *A Very Murray Christmas* with Bill Murray (Sofia Coppola, Director), *Broad City*, *The Detour*. Other: Phish's NYE concert at MSG (3 years).

Deep Singh is a Grammy-nominated musician who has toured the world performing Indian Classical concerts. Singh's versatility as a performer, composer and producer has given him a unique place in the music industry resulting in some very innovative collaborations with leading artists from the East and West.

Rujuta Vaidya is a highly-accredited and globally-recognized Bollywood-style choreographer, who has been responsible for some of the biggest Bollywood musical extravaganzas in the entertainment industry. With choreography credits that include the Academy Awards 2009 (John Legend and AR Rahman's *Slumdog Millionaire* performance), Britney Spears' The Circus Tour, Black Eyed Peas' The End Tour, AR Rahman World Tour, Priyanka Chopra's "In My City," Sridevi's English Vinglish and the Disney-released Cheetah Girls 3 – One World, Ruj has emerged as a leading influence in the world of contemporary Bollywood dance. She has also released a hip-hop/Bollywood dance workout video called BYOU2 (www.byou.com) that has her collaborating with Sabrina Bryan of the Cheetah Girls on a dance instructional video for young girls that blends both styles from the East and the West.

Sam Willmott's projects include *Yo, Vikings!* and the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre's *Wake Up, Daisy!* (both with Marcus Stevens); the Emmy-nominated HBO documentary *Song of Parkland, Standardized Testing – The Musical!!!!* and the mini-musical *Scarlet Takes a Tumble*. His written work has received the Kleban Prize, the Fred Ebb Award, a Jonathan Larson Grant, the ASCAP Foundation's Cole Porter and Harold Adamson Awards, MAC's John Wallowitch Award and the Kennedy Center ACTF Musical Theater Award. He has written over 150 songs for the Korean English-language children's program, English Egg, and taught at Harvard University and Lincoln Center's Songwriting in Schools Program. SamWillmott.com

La Jolla Playhouse is a place where artists and audiences come together to create what's new and next in the American theatre, from Tony Award-winning productions, to imaginative programs for young audiences, to interactive experiences outside our theatre walls. Founded in 1947 by Gregory Peck, Dorothy McGuire and Mel Ferrer, the Playhouse is currently led by Christopher Ashley, the Rich Family Artistic Director of La Jolla Playhouse, and Managing Director Debby Buchholz. The Playhouse is internationally renowned for the development of new plays and musicals, including mounting 105 world premieres, commissioning 60 new works, and sending 33 productions to Broadway – including the hit musical *Come From Away* – garnering a total of 38 Tony Awards, as well as the 1993 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre.

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