

■ SAN JOSÉ, CALIF.

## DESERT WARMTH



JOHN DOLAN

**NOWHERE IN THIS WORLD DOES THE** gap between hospitality and hostility gape wider than in Afghanistan. Khaled Hosseini's successful first novel, *The Kite Runner*, is rife with the abuse of innocents over decades in that troubled nation. And yet, separate conversations with the lead creators of the stage version of that story—Hosseini, adapter Matthew Spangler and director David Ira Goldstein—reveal that all three hope the production will help dispel the myth that Afghanistan is a dustbin of barbarity.

*The Kite Runner* receives its professional premiere through April 19 at **San Jose Repertory Theatre**, not far from a large concentration of expatriate Afghans in Fremont, Calif. The book was an all-campus read at San José State University two years ago, and was developed for the stage last year in a student production adapted by Spangler, an assistant professor of communication and performance studies who describes himself as a product of the Frank Galati/Mary Zimmerman tradition at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. Spangler puts the protagonist/narrator on stage for the entire two-act performance—which, like the novel, begins in Afghanistan, moves to the San Francisco Bay area, and then returns to Afghanistan—along with the same *tabla* player, Salar Nader, who provided an aural backdrop for the student production.

"This story disrupts the stereotype that Afghanistan is an area of terrorists and mud huts," Spangler says. "There is a history of a kind of proud upper and middle class in Afghanistan."

Goldstein, artistic director of **Arizona**

**Theatre Company**, echoes that sentiment: "I think telling stories that humanize Afghanistan and its people is certainly one of the most noble things that the theatre can do at this time, and that Khaled can do."

Both Spangler and Goldstein are grateful to Hosseini for being generous with his time without making demands. "I'm wary of becoming an intrusive presence," Hosseini says. "For one thing, I know virtually nothing about acting or directing."

Such humility may be part and parcel of the Afghan spirit Hosseini embodies and writes about. A Bay Area doctor when he wrote his first novel, he continues to write while serving as a spokesperson for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, helping displaced people in Afghanistan and African countries such as Chad. Of the generosity of rural Afghans, Hosseini observes: "They're hospitable in a way that people always seem to be in the poorest nations of the world. Where people have the least, they seem most willing to share it." —*Scott Fosdick*

■ BROOKLYN

## Ye Olde Nosejobbe

**AS DRAGONS AND WIZARDS GIVE** way to science, young orphaned Gavin finds his calling in plastic surgery. The **Brick Theater's** April 24–May 23 premiere of *The Nosemaker's Apprentice: Chronicles of a Medieval Plastic Surgeon* launches **Terrible Baby Theater Co.**, founded by Nick Jones (*Jollyship the Whiz-Bang*), Rachel Shukert (*Stiletto Heels*) and Peter James Cook (*Sailor Man*). Jones and Shukert's script reconstructs age-old moral values as Gavin weighs his innate aesthetic sense against the demands of a surgery-obsessed French queen. *Apprentice* is the first of what Terrible Baby intends to be a line of thought-provoking, maximalist, pseudo-science, pseudo-history, archaic, comedic epics. Their motto (from the Latin): "It's a bad idea, but we're going to do it." —*Jenni M. Loer*

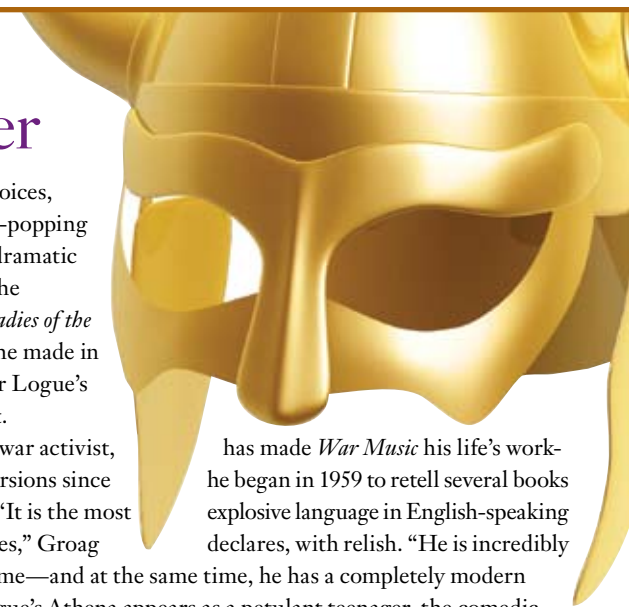
■ SAN FRANCISCO

## The Poem Is Mightier

**L**illian Groag is known for big choices, whether she's directing eye-popping operas, or writing plays about her dramatic family history (*The Magic Fire*) or the tribulations of stage royalty (*The Ladies of the Camellias*). But the biggest choice she made in adapting and directing Christopher Logue's *War Music* was to do very little to it.

Logue, a British poet and antiwar activist, in-progress, publishing multiple versions since of Homer's *Iliad* in his own idiom. "It is the most poetry in the 20th and 21st centuries," Groag faithful to Homer, in form and theme—and at the same time, he has a completely modern sensibility." For example, when Logue's Athena appears as a petulant teenager, the comedic effect is perfectly in line with Homer's own satiric portrayal of the petty deities who keep humanity under their thumbs.

For the **American Conservatory Theater** premiere, running through April 26, Groag has put her actors in gold masks to portray gods, and in desert fatigues as mortals. She trimmed Logue's verse to fit a three-hour run-time, and divided its narration thematically among three performers. The visual concept is plain: "No tricks, no eye candy." Jon Glover's score includes Wagnerian leitmotifs for the characters, and set pieces such as Achilles' chariot will be conjured imaginatively by Daniel Pelzig's choreography. Groag is adamant that stagecraft must not buffer the full blast of an epic poem colliding with an audience. "I hope that people will walk away stunned by the words." —*Nicole Estvanik Taylor*



has made *War Music* his life's work—he began in 1959 to retell several books explosive language in English-speaking declares, with relish. "He is incredibly