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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**The Wilma Theater Continues Its 2009 – 2010 Season with  
Two Premiere Productions Examining Democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
*Language Rooms* by Yussef El Guindi  
and *Leaving* by Václav Havel**

PHILADELPHIA – **The Wilma Theater** grapples with the problems of democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the two plays that continue its 2009 - 2010 season, the World Premiere of Yussef El Guindi's ***Language Rooms*** (March 3 – April 4, 2010) and the US Premiere of ***Leaving***, Václav Havel's first new play in 20 years, translated by Paul Wilson (May 19 – June 20, 2010).

Winner of the Edgerton Foundation's prestigious New American Play award, *Language Rooms* pulls dark comedy from the hot-button issues of detention, interrogation, and creeping suspicion. The play follows Arab-American translator Ahmed as he discovers the divided loyalties and rising cost of the American Dream for today's immigrants; as Egyptian-born playwright **Yussef El Guindi** says, "the price for a better life is always a little higher than you think it will be."

Wilma co-Artistic Director **Blanka Zizka** says, "What I like so much about the play is that it deals with the world we live in right now, without suffering from ideological or political agendas or predictability. Just the opposite: the play is fresh, inventive, darkly funny, and fiercely original. It explores the absurd reality that can ensue from pursuing a dream without noticing that the dream has lost its moral standing, leaving merely insistence on loyalty."

The Wilma's World Premiere of *Language Rooms* grows out of an intensive development process, which began with a reading on the Wilma stage a year ago, in addition to workshops at Vassar & New York Stage and Film's Powerhouse Theater and at the Wilma last summer. The Wilma welcomes back Yussef El Guindi – who *The Philadelphia Inquirer* calls "laugh-out-loud funny" – for an extended residency during rehearsals.

Philadelphia audiences will also be the first theatergoers in America to see dissident, playwright, and statesman **Václav Havel's** *Leaving*, his first new play since becoming President of Czechoslovakia 20 years ago.

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[www.canarypromo.com/wilma](http://www.canarypromo.com/wilma)

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Havel began *Leaving* just before the events of the Velvet Revolution and the fall of Czechoslovakia's communist government in 1989, which thrust him into Czechoslovakia's Presidency. The play opens with a recently deposed Chancellor coming to grips with losing his political position. Suffering the indignities of powerlessness, his struggle echoes *The Cherry Orchard* and *King Lear*. *Leaving* is a meditation on politics and their perversions, and its insightful humor and pathos contribute greatly to Havel's previous work as a playwright and a much-admired international political figure.

Wilma co-Artistic Director **Jiri Zizka** – who, like Havel, is a native of Prague – traveled to the Czech Republic for a long private meeting with the playwright this past December. Havel says he feels he is “in particularly great hands,” with Jiri bringing his knowledge of the original Czech text to rehearsals, alongside Paul Wilson's vivid translation. Wilson likewise points out that Jiri's heritage makes him “uniquely qualified to bring out the nuances of the original work,” and his “long experience in American theater will make sure that American audiences get the maximum impact of the play's broad appeal.”

*Language Rooms* and *Leaving* are the kinds of plays on which the Wilma's artistic vision is built. These two plays present fresh, relevant, fiercely-held perspectives on the most important issues of our time. Their playwrights – one an up-and-coming talent, the other a renowned and honored elder statesman – show the breadth and richness of the international perspective the Wilma brings to the Philadelphia stage.

Tickets for *Language Rooms* and *Leaving* range from \$36 to \$65 and are available at the Wilma's Box Office by calling **(215) 546-7842**, visiting [www.wilmatheater.org](http://www.wilmatheater.org), or coming to the theater, located at 265 South Broad Street in Philadelphia. Student tickets are available for as little as \$10, depending on date and time, made possible through a grant from PNC Arts Alive. Two-play subscriptions are also on sale, starting at \$55, with additional discounts for students, educators, and seniors.

*Reduced ticket pricing for students is made possible by PNC Arts Alive, a five-year, \$5 million investment from The PNC Foundation with the goal to increase engagement in the arts, develop new audiences and make the arts more accessible to diverse communities in the Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey region. In advance, students can save 50% off full-priced tickets (excludes Opening and Saturday nights) and purchase \$10 tickets for Sunday evening performances. Tickets for same day performances can be purchased for \$10 at the Box Office. Tickets are subject to availability; valid student ID is required; limit one ticket per ID.*

*The Sporting Club at the Bellevue is the Season Sponsor for The Wilma Theater's 2009 – 2010 season.*

*Language Rooms is supported by DoubleTree Hotel Philadelphia as Artistic Lead Sponsor and the National Endowment for the Arts as Production Sponsor. Language Rooms is a recipient of an Edgerton Foundation New American Plays Award.*

*Leaving is supported by the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage through the Philadelphia Theatre Initiative, and Daniel Berger is Honorary Producer for this production.*

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