



Zhamina Muhammad (center) as Snow White during outdoor rehearsals of “Islamic Snow White” by the Camden Repertory Theater. The musical is being performed in honor of Eid al-Fitr. TOM GRALISH / Staff Photographer

AN EID AL-FITR GIFT

Camden Rep is staging “Islamic Snow White” as a show for children to honor the holiday.

By Valerie Russ
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As Camden Repertory Theater’s musical *Islamic Snow White* opens, a beautiful young girl dressed like a princess sings about her life.

She wears a flowing yellow gown, its skirt made grander by a crinoline hoop skirt underneath. The puffy short sleeves are sewn with a red-and-blue striped material. A velvet blue vest covers its bodice. A burgundy hijab covers her hair, framing her face.

Snow White, played by 18-year-old Zhamina Muhammad, tells us about her mother’s prayers to have a child — and her death shortly after Snow White is born. When her father remarries, Snow White is initially happy with her new stepmother, but her umi has now become wicked and obsessed with being the most beautiful woman in the land.

Islamic Snow White was adapted from the children’s book *Snow White: An Islamic Tale* by Fawzia Gilani, and is playing Thursday and

THEATER

Islamic Snow White

Presented by Camden Repertory Theater at the outdoor Clinton Street Amphitheater, 719 Clinton St. Tickets are free with reservations at camdenrep.com. Thursday performances sold out. Friday’s shows are 2 p.m. and 5 p.m.

Friday at the Clinton Street Amphitheater, an outdoor space in a city park at 7th and Clinton Streets.

The performances are free (registration required) and are being presented in honor of Eid al-Fitr, which began Wednesday evening as Ramadan concludes, as a gift to local children and especially Muslim children, said Camden Rep founder and artistic director Desi P. Shelton.

“This production is our gift to you. Eid Mubarak!” says a message on the *Islamic Snow White* website. The Thursday shows are already booked to capacity.

At a dress rehearsal Monday, Muhammad, a high school senior at

Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy in Camden, said she was excited to be part of the show.

“I believe this production will mean so much to Muslim children,” said the actor, who is Muslim. “It is important for them to see themselves onstage and to see their stories being told. I wish I could have seen something like this when I was younger.”

While Jasmine in Disney’s *Aladdin* can be presumed to be a Muslim, “she isn’t covered [with a head scarf,]” Muhammad said.

Selaedin Maksut, executive director of the New Jersey chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), estimates that there are 300,000 or more Muslims living in New Jersey. While most are from the central and northern areas of the state, South Jersey’s Muslim population is growing, especially in Camden, Cherry Hill, Voorhees, Atlantic City, and Egg Harbor.

A cast of rising stars

The cast for *Islamic Snow White* includes Muslim and non-Muslim
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‘Snow White’

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actors and is a mix of professionals and actors-in-training, many in high school like Muhammad. A live band accompanies the production.

Part of Camden Rep for four years, Muhammad is set to enroll at Barnard College in New York this fall. She hopes one day to star in movies.

Haki Pratt, 17, plays three roles: as the jinni who tells the stepmother she is no longer the most beautiful in the land, the huntsman hired to kill Snow White, and the prince who falls in love with her.

A junior at Creative Arts Morgan Village Academy, Pratt has been working with Camden Rep since he was 7. He plans to attend Howard University as a psychology major and hopes to take part in drama department programming there, too.

Esiyah Waheed, who plays the wicked stepmother/Evil Queen, is 21 and has been with the theater company for six years. She'll soon graduate from Wiley College, in Texas, where she won a four-year scholarship

to study criminal justice, and she hopes to pursue a Broadway career.

Jamal P. Dickerson, resident musical director for Camden Rep, composed the show's original music, a mix of R&B, hip-hop, pop, jazz, and blues. He is a trumpeter and percussionist who grew up as part of the Universal African Dance & Drum Ensemble.

The play's narrative arc is the well-known Snow White story, told with a specificity to Islamic culture.

In the opening number, a chorus of young women joins Snow White on stage, singing. They wear Afghan-styled khushi dresses in an array of brilliant colors — deep rose, orange, yellow, purple, and green — with hand-sewn beading and tiny mirrors embedded in the bodices.

Once the musical's stepmother shows her evil side, we learn she no longer wants to pray the salat, even when Snow White reminds her it is time to pray.

When the huntsman is sent to kill Snow White, she runs away and gets lost in the woods. As she makes her way home, she



Esiyah Waheed rehearses as the Stepmother in “Islamic Snow White,” at Camden’s Clinton Street Amphitheater. TOM GRALISH / Staff Photographer

meets seven sisters and learns about the five pillars of Islam.

Dickerson said the various elements take their cue from the book, which centers a Muslim girl as the classic tale's protagonist.

By highlighting core elements of the faith, he said, “we wanted Muslim children to see that their religion has good principles, about universal goodness, that can help them become better persons.

“For non-Muslim children, we wanted to diversify their per-

spectives,” he said. “It’s about telling the story of Islam and the way the people live their lives.”

Shelton said the production will be headed to the DC Black Theatre & Arts Festival in Washington in June, and she expects to present it in Philadelphia as COVID-19 restrictions lift. In Camden, social distancing limits each performance to just 40 patrons.

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