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Shaheed: The Dream and Death of Benazir Bhutto

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by Giovannah Philippeaux EDGE Contributor Tuesday Mar 12, 2013

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The many faces of Anna Khaja who has written and performs in the Off-Broadway premiere of the acclaimed new solo play (Source:Maia Rosenfeld)

Appropriately debuting on International Women's Day, "Shaheed The Dream and Death of Benazir Bhutto" is an exceptionally crafted and acted play. A one-woman triumph, the play explores the events leading up to and including the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Written and acted by Anna Khaja, this work is a testament to her talent and capacity, gifts that Hollywood must take full notice.

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A thoroughly engaging experience, "Shaheed The Dream and Death of Benazir Bhutto," is an international journey that presents different perspectives on the life and legacy of Benazir Bhutto. Told as individual but interconnected monologues, the audience is introduced to eight distinct characters. From the obscure, a cab driver in Pakistan, to the notable, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, each character is unique in experience and presentation.

The audience is first introduced to Sara, a young student attending Boston University who has arrived in Pakistan to attend a rally being hosted by Benazir Bhutto. Being of mixed heritage and having not been raised by her Pakistani father, Sara has an incomplete identity. She was never taught to embrace her Pakistani half and instead developed a Western perspective regarding its history and value.

Drawn to Benazir Bhutto, faith and circumstance have brought Sara to Rawalpindi, Pakistan. This first story plays a critical role in establishing the overarching theme of identity in "Shaheed The Dream and Death of Benazir Bhutto." Just as Sara questions who she is, the audience begins to question who was the real Benazir Bhutto?

After Sara, the play then presents a distinctly American perspective on Bhutto through Rice. It is implied that Bhutto was attending the rally in Pakistan at the request of the United States. She was there to quell uprisings against the political establishment in place at the time. Rice threatens to freeze all of Bhutto's monetary assets if she does not make an appearance at the rally. This conversation takes on greater significance later when the audience is introduced to Fatima Bhutto.

What the audience sees is a human being, not perfect but flawed, struggling to define herself under a family legacy that is a weighty as the history of Pakistan itself.

being used as said puppet.

Fatima Bhutto is Benazir Bhutto's estranged niece. Fatima Bhutto believes that Benazir sanctioned the assassination of her father, Mir Murtaza Bhutto. Since coming to this realization, Fatima has stood in opposition to her aunt's pristine image. Instead, she now sees Benazir as a puppet of the West and is in Pakistan attempting to dissuade Benazir from

The finale character showcased in "Shaheed The Dream and Death of Benazir Bhutto" is Benazir Bhutto herself. Everything has led to this moment, everyone else has given his or her opinion as to who Bhutto really was. The preceding characters have painted a complex and conflicting picture, all that is left is for Benazir Bhutto to set the story straight.

But Bhutto's confessions do not result in greater clarity but rather more complexity. What the audience sees is a human being, not perfect but flawed, struggling to define herself under a family legacy that is a weighty as the history of Pakistan itself. She is a multi-dimensional person whose depth is compacted into singular dimensions for the sake of simplicity. Just as the stories about her are complex and confusing, she too is complex and confused. Amazing consideration is given to the depth and intricacy of this story and its title character.

The interrelation amongst personal narratives exists throughout the performance. It becomes six degrees of Bhutto as more layers are added. The result is a multifaceted story of Bhutto and the country she represented. Anna Khaja has expertly devised a method of expressing sincere and gratifying humanity. Khaja has taken a public and revered figure and turned her into someone tangible and normal; like a Boston University student attempting to find her way through life beyond the burdens it has delivered.

Khaja has delivered something outstanding, not only can she write a compelling story but she can also act. This production would have not been successful if Khaja could not effectively relate the many different narratives. The outstanding capacity represented in this production is awe striking.

"Shaheed The Dream and Death of Benazir Bhutto" is an amazing production. It calls upon the audience to bear witness to the frailty of image and the peculiarities of identity. This is a story of



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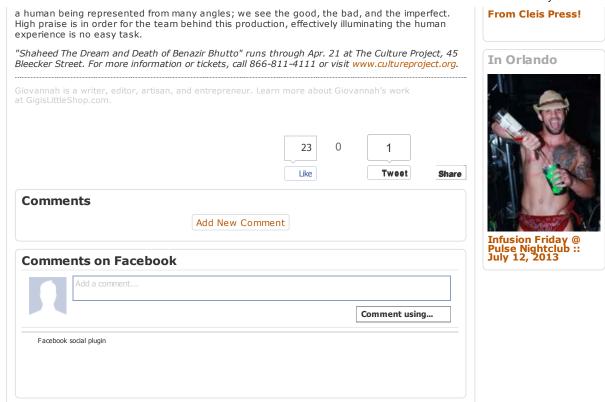


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