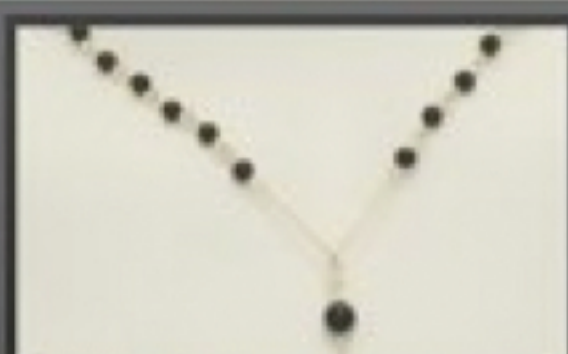
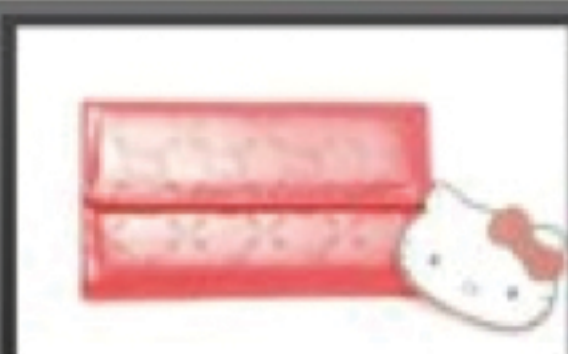


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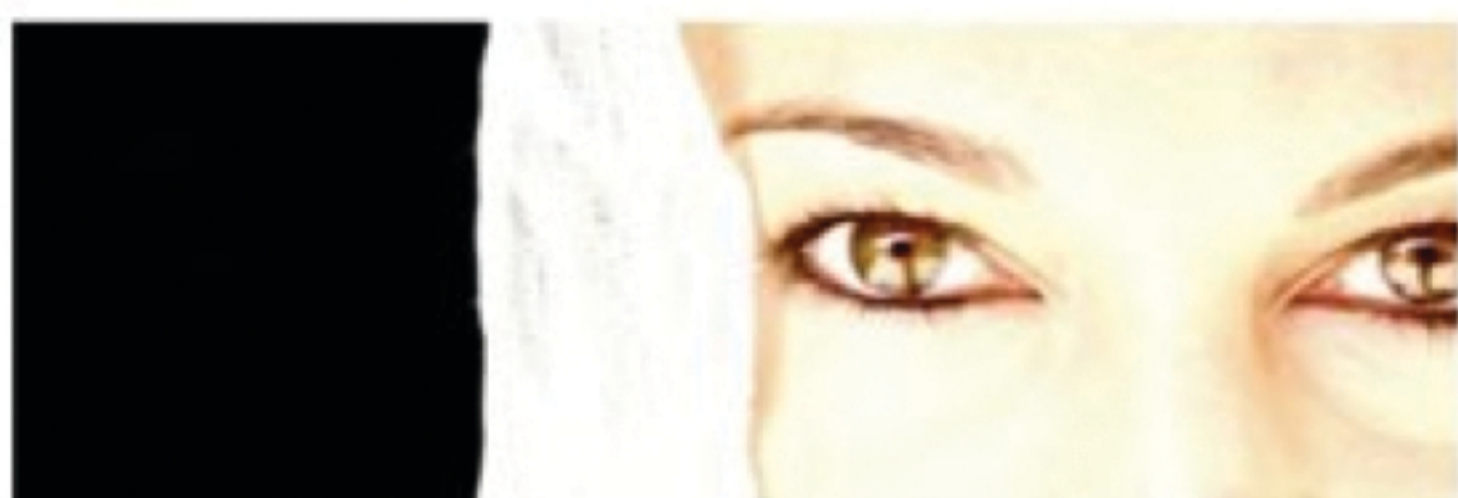
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Shaheed: The Dream and Death of Benazir Bhutto

Post by Camelia • August 13, 2010 • [Post a comment](#)



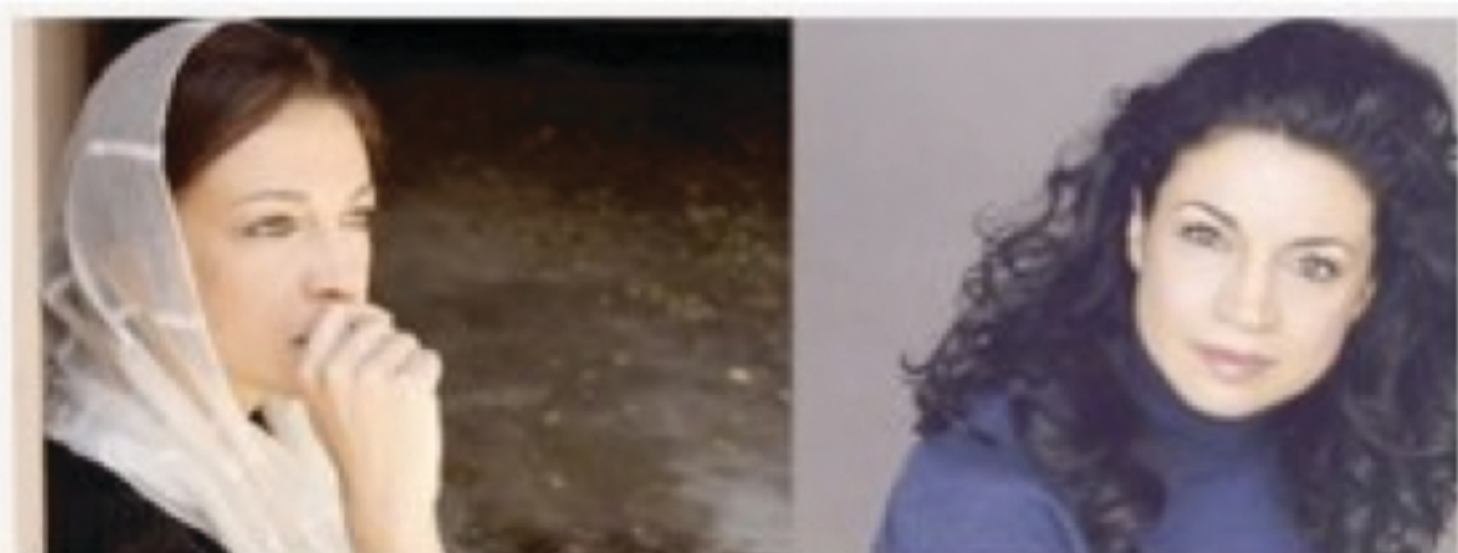
Award-winning actress and playwright Anna Khaja will be premiering "Shaheed: The Dream and Death of Benazir Bhutto" at the New York City International Fringe Theater Festival, starting tonight.

With "Shaheed" (which means "martyr" in Arabic), Khaja creates a powerful portrayal of the life and tragic death of Benazir Bhutto, the controversial former prime minister of Pakistan who was assassinated only two months after her return from an eight-year exile. Khaja depicts eight different characters — from an American college student to Condoleezza Rice to a Pakistani street merchant and, finally, to Bhutto herself — who paint the complex picture of an enigmatic international leader.



Anna Khaja portraying one of eight characters in "Shaheed."

Khaja, who was raised by her Pakistani father, said that "the lens through which I view Pakistan has, for the most part, been inevitably very American. Benazir's assassination filled me with questions about the world, about Pakistan, about myself. 'Shaheed' was born out of my personal journey to answer these questions."



Anna Khaja, right, explores the tragedy of the former Pakistani prime minister in her one-woman show "Shaheed: The Dream and Death of Benazir Bhutto." Photo courtesy of LA Stage.

Khaja's insight into the inspiration for the play is fascinating:

"My father Waseem was one of millions who traveled across the war torn Indian border to find cultural and spiritual freedom in the new nation of Pakistan. Despite sixty years of despotic rule, this nascent country has continued the fight for democracy. At the forefront of the people's struggle has been the enigma Benazir Bhutto.

"On the morning of her assassination, Bhutto was finishing her book dedicated to the compelling argument that Islam and democracy are inextricably linked. Hours later, before a crowd of thousands, she was dead, killed from a blast by a suicide bomber. Much of Pakistan was thrown into turmoil, its fragile dream in tatters.

"A tremendous paradox, Benazir was a practicing Muslim, a Harvard and Oxford elite, a 'political mother' to millions, the heir to a political dynasty, a corrupt megalomaniac, a warrior against terrorism, a dutiful wife to a back room thug, and in the end, perhaps, a true martyr. I find Bhutto to be a woman who is strong beyond our wildest imaginings and yet weak, egotistical and easily manipulated.

"As a Pakistani American, and as a woman, I struggle to reconcile my own notions of what these titles mean and how they could be embodied in single a person."



Khaja's "Shaheed" opened in Los Angeles earlier this spring and left audiences in awe. Critics praised this one-woman show, calling it "brilliant," "riveting" and "insightful." Backstage Magazine said: "In Khaja's performance and in her insightful script, she masters the challenging solo-performance format to paint a riveting portrait of a leader who was both inspiring and flawed."

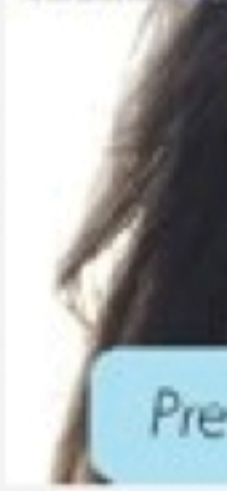
"Shaheed" is produced in association with Off-Chance Productions and is directed by Heather De Michele and produced by Luis Reyes and Anna Khaja.

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