

VENUS THEATRE

SOFT REVOLUTION: SHAFANA AND AUNT SARRINAH

November 21, 2016

Contact: Deborah Randall

202.236.4078 | deb@venustheatre.org | venustheatre.org

Venus Theatre presents Soft Revolution: Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah by Alana Valentine

Directed by Deborah Randall

Featuring: Nayab Hussain and Meera Narasimhan

November 25 - December 18, 2016

Thursday, Fridays, and Saturdays at 8PM and Sunday at 3PM

Dear Member of the Press:

Thank you so much for coverage. As we close out our year with script #58, we embrace familial love and the world that divides it.

This exploration has taken us so many places. The least of which has been coming to an understanding of Louise Pascale and her work in Afghanistan. She gave the music back to a whole society of people. She said it meant giving them their soul back.

Working with my sound designer on the significance of music brought us to the place of simplicity in the silences. So...staging silence...it's a challenge.

We discovered that love is conveyed in this world through laughter, food, and music and without these things there is a deep and strong weight to the silences.

I feel these rhythms will grow over the weeks of the run.

Alana has simply created a vehicle that is solid in writing this play. She writes like I direct, completely immersively. These actors, they have the difficult jobs. To keep this piece honest means walking through a terror I won't ever know.

It took a long time to cast this show because I wanted the right women who would bring their own experiences in as a source. We had no idea the world would become so threatening to them.

It's strange to want to protect my people and at the same time to ask them to get so raw and vulnerable. It is the dichotomy of creating theatre in a nutshell.

This is an interesting moment in time. I hope this tiny play can bring a little bit of light into our darkening world. Because, even the smallest match struck has the ability to illuminate in the darkness. That's the goal here.

Thank you so much for coverage!

Keep Creating,
Deborah Randall

CREATIVE TEAM

Nayab Hussain (SHAFANA) is thrilled to be making her return to Venus' stage. Past credits include: Theatre: *Play Nice!* (Venus Theater), *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (Staged Reading - Arena Stage) & *The Donut Play* (Off-Off Broadway, Castillo Theater). You can also see her in TV Shows such as the hit HBO miniseries *The Night Of*, *Veep*, and *Law & Order: SVU*. Looking forward to many more amazing projects, what a way to end the year...Thank you Deb for allowing me to be a part of this journey!

Meera Narasimhan (SARRINAH) is thankful to Deborah Randall, Nayab Hussain and Venus Theatre for this incredible opportunity. She has been performing in theater for almost four decades. She has acted in many community theater plays in the DC-metro area for over 26 years. She has also acted in numerous feature films, short films, shows on NBC, HBO, FOX, TV pilots, and in a music video. Meera hosted a monthly TV show *Potluck* on FPA airing in the DC metro area. Hobbies include collecting degrees (JD, 2xMAs, BS) and careers (medical, educational, journalistic, legal, and acting).

Deborah Randall (DIRECTOR) is the founder and visionary behind Venus Theatre. Born in Washington, DC, and raised in Prince George's County, she began directing as a student and president of the Drama Club at Prince Georges Community College. Her first paid acting gig was at Wild World Theme Park in 1986. She later went on to graduate cum laude from UMBC under the guidance of Xerxes Mehta, Wendy Salkind, Sam McCready, Alan Kriezenbeck, and Alice Robinson. She was in Mehta's *Marat/Sade* at UMBC with the Maryland Stage Company and in McCready's *Merry Wives of Windsor* with Shakespeare on Wheels. After college, Randall worked as an actor regularly in Washington, DC, and then began performing her own monologues. She has performed four solo shows, written two, and had one published. She has also written and staged works for multiple casts. She began doing public staged readings of other living playwrights in 2002, which led to cultivating strong relationships with many writers. The works of Randall and Venus have been seen up and down the Eastern seaboard. Venus Theatre began in 1995 as an all female improv troupe called Venus Envy. Venus led Take Back the Night Marches and did improvisational games at the House of Ruth as well as other empowerment projects. In 2000, Randall founded Venus Theatre, known for immersive staging and award-winning world premiere work. In 2006 Venus dropped roots in the county where the founder grew up. Venus hopes to bring culture to the community that has given her so much. Venus stands among the longest running women's theatre's in the world as she begins her 16th year producing script #58.

Alana Valentine (PLAYWRIGHT) is an Australian writer based in Sydney, represented in the United States by the Peregrine Whittlesey Agency. Her play *Soft Revolution: Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah* premiered in 2009 and is now studied in schools. In recent years she has been the recipient of major International Awards including in 2012 the University of California, Santa Barbara-based 5th S.T.A.G.E International Playwriting Award for *Ear to the Edge of Time*. This prestigious award is given to a play about science or technology and attracted over 200 entries from 19 countries. In 2012 the judges were Pulitzer Prize-winning playwrights Tony Kushner, David Lindsay-Abaire and Donald Margulies, and Nobel Laureates Robert C. Richardson, Frank Wilczek and David J. Wineland. In 2014 she won the BBC International Radio Writing Competition (1000 entries from 86 countries) for *The Ravens*, broadcast on the World Service and later nominated for an Association for International Broadcasting Award for best creative feature. She also won three awards from the Australian Writers Guild in 2014 for her play *Grounded*, including the Major Award for best script of the year. She is presently writing a play co-commissioned by the National Theatre, London and the Sydney Theatre Company called *Crossing the King*. Alana's plays are published by Currency Press and her website is www.alanavalentine.com

PLAYWRIGHT NOTES

What do you do when you profoundly disagree with someone you love?

At the heart of *Soft Revolution: Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah* is the story of a young Australian-born Muslim woman and an intergenerational clash with her own Aunt. Based on interviews with Afghani/ Australian Muslim women and produced with the support of a large number of Muslim women from a diversity of Muslim cultures in Australia, this play will compel audiences with its portrait of women who are articulate, highly educated and

deeply spiritual. University student Shafana turns to the religion of her heritage for answers after a terrorist attack, resulting in a deep experience of faith and a controversial decision to wear the hijab. But for her Aunt Sarrinah, also a devout Muslim but old enough to regret the changes in her Afghan homeland, the hijab represents both a world from which she has escaped and her fears about the new world she has embraced. Above all, this play is a startling meditation on the clash between individual freedom and cultural context, experienced through two tender and fiercely drawn female characters.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

I knew when I read the script almost a year ago that it was one I wanted to produce. I knew I wanted to produce it last in our calendar year. And, I knew I wanted to lift a line from the play to summarize our year. "Sweet 16: Groovy Young Things". It's incredible to be in the 16th year running Venus Theatre. And, it hearkened immediately to those Sweet 16 parties that girls have.

There was no way to anticipate the depth and breadth and significance of this seemingly innocent year. We did not know how charged this script would be. We did not know that a play about a piece of cloth would resonate out into our world in such a timely and significant way. We had no way of anticipating that in the state of Georgia, for instance, laws would begin to be proposed to ban the thing we set out to explore.

This is a Muslim Afghani Australian story. Very specific. And, we know that specificity in the work conveys a universality in the experience. So, we hope you will take this journey of love with us.

We hope you will Google Nigella, the big handed cook, David Attenborough, the narrative scientist for the ages, and spend a little time in a Bollywood fantasy. These contemporary references encompass the world of the two women in our play.

After 911, their world shifted. In Australia the divide between the religious sects grew violent. The hatred grew and so did the assaults and the danger.

When we, as individual human beings, are left to explain the atrocities of monsters, we grab for light. The light of love is conveyed in the world of our Soft Revolution in three ways. Love is conveyed through: Laughter, Food, and Music.

We share our collective love with you with hopes it will convey even the smallest light shining out into what feels like a darkened world.

* Production photos and an electronic program can be located on our website
<http://www.venustheatre.org/press2016>



SOFT REVOLUTION: SHAFANA AND AUNT SARRINAH

Venus is a 501c3 nonprofit organization committed to setting flight to the voices of women with theatre for a lifetime. Venus is the only woman run theatre company in the state of Maryland and among the longest running women's theatre's on the globe.



VENUS THEATRE