

REVIEW: ASHEQ: RITUAL MUSIC TO CURE A LOVER (ONELIGHT THEATRE)

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Shahin Sayadi brings Persian mythology to life in his play, now on stage in Toronto

Persian mythology is brought into modern day storytelling in *Asheq: Ritual Music to Cure a Lover*. The fully immersive multi-media work is created with boundless cloth and a single performer who takes on multiple roles at Harbourfront Centre Theatre. Created by Shahin Sayadi of Onelight Theatre, the performance explores the struggles of tradition within a small community.

In a small fishing village on the Persian Gulf, Farhad loses the love of his life to childbirth, resulting in a lifetime hatred of his son, Manoo. The son grows up and falls in love with an outcast woman, defying his father's wishes and disgracing the family name. Believing Manoo must be under the influence of evil spirits, the village elders call for a 'Zar' exorcism.

Shahin Sayadi wears many hats as a performer, writer, director, scenographer, set designer, along with many other roles listed in the program. As the one-man performer, Sayadi is able to bring an entire world filled with different characters, as he simply and seamlessly shifts between them by altering the cloth he is wearing, as well as his posturing and voice. The show is a mix of traditional storytelling with multi-media technology including incredible projections of scenery displayed on large white cloths that surround the entire stage. The cloths are manipulated by Sayadi through a simple rope pulley systems.

The lighting and projections portray colourful sunsets, oceans or the changing time of day, and are well-timed with dramatic pauses of Sayadi's speech. Sayadi is only joined on stage when the projections are filled with community members singing, chanting, and dancing ecstatically as the zar exorcism takes place. A tradition that still occurs within some communities today.

Although seldom used, microphones were placed on stage to present larger and unseen characters – I personally did not like this choice; I felt that it took away from the story and shook me out of this small village and back into the theatre space. Although Sayadi is a tremendous performer, I also could have gone without the sexual scenes with moans as well as the eventual birthing; I found them awkward and they went on longer than I felt necessary.

Asheq is a prequel to a trilogy which will be presented by the company from 2019 – 2021. Although I am not quite sure where the story will lead as there is no real 'cliffhanger', I would love to see the future work. It is difficult to pull off this kind of storytelling through a single performer with such intricate staging – but the company did just that.

Details:

- *Asheq: Ritual Music to Cure a Lover* is playing at the Harbourfront Centre Theatre (231 Queens Quay W, Toronto, ON)
- The show runs till Saturday, December 8, with performances Wednesday through Friday at 8:00 pm and Saturday at 4:00 pm and 7:00 pm.
- Tickets prices range from \$18.85 – \$24.50
- Tickets are available in person, by phone at (416) 973-4000 or online.

Photo of Shahin Sayadi provided by the company

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