

## NS reviews

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# High and low tech meld in Onelight's mesmerizing Asheq

□ elissa barnard   □ Uncategorized   □ September 14, 2018October 6, 2018   □ 2 Minutes



**Onelight Theatre's artistic director Shahin Sayadi is the actor, writer, director and scenographer, among other things, for Asheq: Ritual Music to Cure a Lover, at Halifax's Sir James Dunn Theatre and Toronto's Harbourfront Centre in December. (Onelight Theatre)**

It's amazing what one man can do with cloth, music and light.

In the hour-long Asheq: Ritual Music to Cure a Lover, Onelight Theatre's artistic director Shahin Sayadi tells a Middle Eastern story as an enchantment of light and music with the basic pain of human experience.

His story is set in the hot sun by the sea on the Persian Gulf in a southern Iranian village where men dive for pearls and believe in a Zoroastrian goddess-figure of light, Mithra. They live in a world where light struggles with dark, good with evil.

Sayadi travelled to Spain and his native Iran to create Asheq with glorious, driving music commissioned from two, international musicians with southern Iranian roots: Habib Meftahoushehri and Mohsen Sharifian.

Sayadi was inspired by the East African and Persian traditions of southern Iran where modern Zar exorcism rituals are still held.

Sayadi creates an exotic world on a simple stage of sand with cement blocks and ropes to lift white, cloth walls that become, through light and moving image, heat, sun, sunset, the surface of the ocean and its watery depths.

The story is about a man whose simple path in life is interrupted by grief and about his son's love for an outcast woman which leads to a Zar exorcism of ecstatic dancing, drumming and chanting.

Sayadi is gifted at moving from his main character into a woman and a young boy simply by shifting his body and using a length of cloth.

Anyone interested in theatrical lighting must see Asheq for its fantastic, lush, expressive lighting design by Mike Mader, with stunning yellows and chilly blots of grey and floods of red when the bad stuff happens.

Asheq is a fascinating mix of basic, primitive storytelling with a sophisticated technology involving light, live video and sound with digital technology by Jake Damberg and projections designed by Mader.

It's takes a while to relax and get into this mysterious world which becomes mesmerizing. Sometimes the music fights too much with Sayadi's voice for attention.

Asheq straddles theatre and contemporary theatrical dance. It's up to the viewer to decide what it is about exactly.

For me it is an insight into stories of the outcast, of one seeking refuge, of communities expelling who they perceive as evil, of the nature of family shame – concepts I like to think are old-fashioned but really are not.

Onelight Theatre takes this hour-long show to Toronto's Harbourfront Centre Dec. 6 to 8. Its Halifax premiere is part of the Prismatic Arts Festival, an annual multi-disciplinary professional arts festival featuring work by Canada's Indigenous and culturally diverse artists, running through Sunday in Halifax with a slew of music, theatre and art including a show on a bus. For Prismatic details go online (<http://prismaticfestival.com/> (<http://prismaticfestival.com/>))Shauntay Grant launched her new book *Africville* at Prismatic and reads Saturday, 11 a.m. at Halifax Central Library as part of Word on the Street.

Published by elissa barnard



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