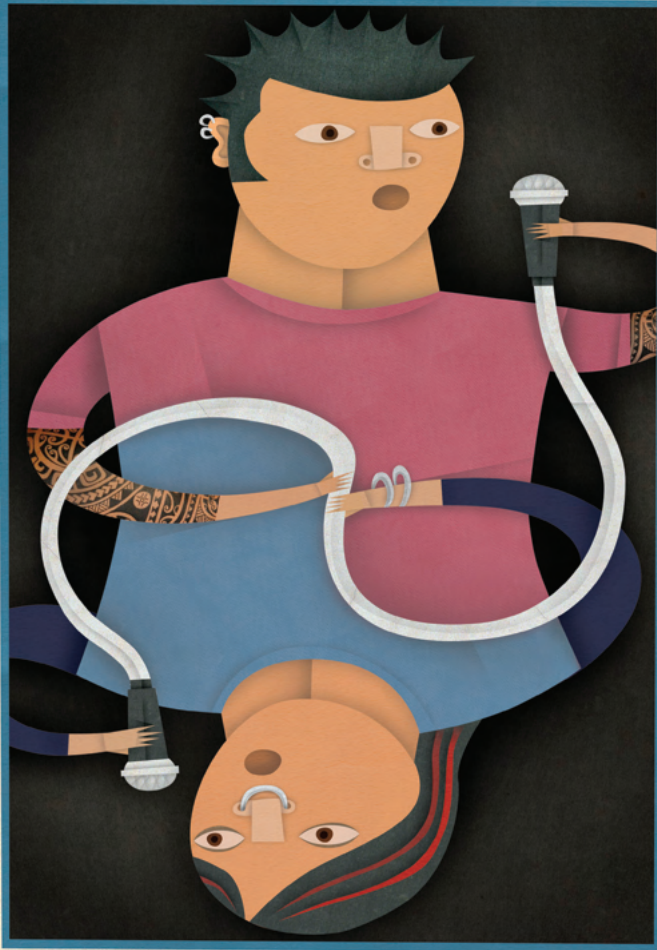


A ONE-HIJRA STAND-UP COMEDY SHOW BY ADITI BRENNAN KAPIL

BRAHMAN/II



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MARCH 27 - APRIL 27 2014

WRITTEN BY ADITI BRENNAN KAPIL • DIRECTED BY ANDREW VOLKOFF

CO-PRODUCED BY



BRAHMAN/I

A ONE-HIJRA STAND-UP COMEDY SHOW

Written by
Aditi Brennan Kapil

Directed by
Andrew Volkoff

Co-produced by
About Face Theatre and
Silk Road Rising

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BRAHMAN/I was originally commissioned by Mixed Blood Theater Company of Minneapolis, MN and developed at the Bay Area Playwrights Festival 2012, San Francisco.



CAST LIST

Fawzia Mirza* | Brahman/i

Damian Conrad | J

Understudies

Aila Peck | understudy Brahman/i

Joel Ison | understudy J

PRODUCTION TEAM

Andrew Volkoff*** | Director; Artistic Director, About Face Theatre

Corinne Neal | Managing Director, About Face Theatre

Jamil Khoury | Artistic Director, Silk Road Rising

Malik Gillani | Executive Director, Silk Road Rising

Aditi Brennan Kapil | Playwright

Corey Pond | Production Manager

Helen Colleen Lattyak* | Stage Manager

Roger Wykes | Set Designer

Jeremy W. Floyd | Costume Designer

Sarah K. Hughey** | Lighting Designer

Josh Horvath** | Sound Designer

John Holt | Technical Director

Sandeep Shekar Das | Dramaturg

Kareem Khubchandani | Choreographer

Casey L. Peck | Assistant Stage Manager

Kristof Janezic | Master Electrician

CoCo Lemery | Scenic Painter

Michelle Jacobson | House Manager

Al Gillani | Box Office Manager

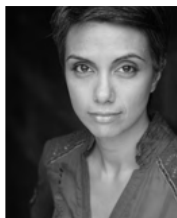
Deann Baker | Video Coordinator and Editor

* Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

** Member of United Scenic Artists, the union of professional designers, artists, and craftspeople.

*** Member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical labor union.

CAST BIOS



Fawzia Mirza, AEA (Brahman/i) returns to Silk Road Rising where she performed in *The DNA Trail* and *Scorched*. This is her About Face Theatre debut. Fawzia was one of four

actors to perform in the solo show *White Rabbit/Red Rabbit* by Nassim Soleimanpour, presented by the MCA and the Chicago Humanities Festival. She appeared at The Goodman Theatre in Pulitzer Prize winner, Quiara Alegria Hudes' play, *The Happiest Song Plays Last*; she was also an ensemble member of Christopher Shinn's world premiere play, *Teddy Ferrara*. She has worked with Rasaka Theatre, Lifeline Theatre, Theatre Seven, Halcyon Theatre, 16th Street Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare, Urban Theatre Company and Mixed Blood Theatre in Minneapolis. She's been in NBC's *Chicago Fire* and featured in Chicago-made Indie films *Jamie and Jessie Are Not Together*, *Scrooge & Marley*, *Promise Land*, *Silhouettes* and *The Queen of My Dreams*. She also appears in the web series: *Kiss Her I'm Famous*, *Easy Abby*, *The Throwaways*, and *Kam Kardashian* which she co-wrote, produced and stars in. Her new series *Brown Girl Problems* comes out in May. Her "day job" has her touring Sex Signals, the most popular sexual violence prevention show in the world. Catharsis Productions is producing Mirza's own play, a one person show *Me, My Mom & Sharmila Tagore*. www.fawziamirza.com



Damian Conrad (J) is so grateful to be a piece of this incredible/hilarious show and to be working with two companies that have such important & unique missions. A graduate of

Graceland University's theatre program, Damian recently performed in Tangleknot Theatre's *Nickel and Dimed*, Fury Theatre's *Much Ado About*

Nothing, and toured the country multiple times with Griffin Theatre's long standing production of *Letters Home*. You can see Damian as *Alex* in the Indie Series Award nominated show, *The Dreamers*, the Chicago-based web series *Dudes* and NBC's new show *Crisis*. He has so much gratitude for all the people in his life that continue to love and support him fully and unconditionally. The world is much too beautiful a place to squander the moment we have to spend with it. www.damianconrad.com



Aila Peck (understudy Brahman/i) is thrilled to be returning to Silk Road Rising to work on this dynamic piece of theatre. Recent Chicago theatre credits include *The Lark* (Promethean Theatre

Ensemble), *The Elephant and the Whale* (Chicago Children's Theatre), *Julius Caesar* (Babes with Blades), and *Macbeth* (TheMassive). Recent film credits include: *The Scarlet Line: Season 2* (Wolfpoint Media). Aila is a proud graduate of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts B.F.A. Acting program. She would like to thank her family for their unconditional support and love every step of the way.



Joel Ison (understudy J) is a new talent to Chicago. He's a Texas Tech Graduate and Lubbock, Texas native and *Brahman/i* is his second production in Chicago since moving here in November.

He is so grateful for the chance to work with such talented and welcoming artists and hopes that this will not be the last time to work with the companies. He would like to send his love to his incredibly supportive girlfriend Jamy, Don, Sherry, his family back home and his agent Stephanie at Lily's Talent for giving him this great opportunity.

PRODUCTION TEAM BIOS

Andrew Volkoff (Director, Artistic Director AFT) Andrew Volkoff joined About Face Theatre in 2013 as Artistic Director. Andrew specializes in new and contemporary works and has directed numerous productions (including several world and regional premieres) in New York, across the U.S. and abroad. Andrew served as former Associate Artistic Director of Barrington Stage Company (BSC) in Massachusetts for five years and of Genesis Theatre Group in New York City for three years. He has also acted as the Co-Artistic Director of the Hangar Theatre Lab for one season. Andrew has served as the Associate Director on *Ella* for Rob Ruggiero at Dallas Theatre Center and other regional theatres, is a Drama League Directing Fellow, and a member of SDC. Proud to be the first director chosen to participate in the US/Bulgaria Directors Exchange Project, Andrew directed the Bulgarian premiere of John Kolvenbach's *Lovesong* in Sofia at the Nikolai Binev Theatre where it is in its second year of repertory. Andrew was born in Milwaukee, WI, attended Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota and is excited to be back in the Midwest.

Corinne Neal (Managing Director AFT) joined the About Face team in September of 2013. As both a passionate advocate for LGBTQA voices and a seasoned theater manager, this is nothing less than her dream job. Corinne holds a masters degree in arts management from Carnegie Mellon University and a BA in theater from Vassar College. From 2005-2008, she worked in New York City as an arts manager and freelance director. She has also served as General Manager at Bricolage Production Company in Pittsburgh and Managing Director for Collaboration in Wicker Park. She is thrilled to be working with the fantastic folks at Silk Road Rising on *Brahman!*

Jamil Khoury (Artistic Director SRR) is the Founding Artistic Director of Silk Road Rising. Jamil is currently writing the full length version of his play *Mosque Alert*, part of an online interactive new play development and civic engagement project, and has recently released his second documentary film *Sacred Stages: A Church, a Theatre, and a Story*, which he co-directed with Malik Gillani. He is also preparing for the shoot of his latest video play, *Multi Meets Poly: Multiculturalism and Polyculturalism Go On a First Date*, and is embarking on writing its "spiritual companion," *Cosmo and Nat Go At It: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism Embodied and Uncensored*. Jamil devised two critically acclaimed cabarets, *Re-Spiced: A Silk Road Cabaret* (2012) and *Silk Road Cabaret: Broadway Sings the Silk Road* (2009). He conceived of and was a featured playwright in SRR's production of *The DNA Trail: A Genealogy of Short Plays about Ancestry, Identity, and Utter Confusion* (2010). His short play *WASP: White Arab Slovak Pole* inspired the video play *bothland* (2011) and the documentary film *Not Quite White: Arabs, Slavs, and the Contours of Contested Whiteness* (2012). His video play *The Balancing Arab* (2012) was adapted from his short play *63rd and Kedzie*, originally part of Theatre Seven's Chicago Landmark Project. Jamil is also the author of the plays *Precious Stones*, *Fitna*, and *Azizati*.

Malik Gillani (Executive Director SRR) is the Founding Executive Director of Silk Road Rising. Malik is a recognized leader in the creation of innovative arts programming that expands artistic access. Most notably, he developed SRR's model for creating online video plays, which are now being accessed across the globe. Malik also established SRR's arts integrated education program, *Myths to Drama*, which was heralded as one of the finest elementary school arts education programs in the Chicago Public Schools system. He also piloted a new arts education program for

high school and elementary school students in partnership with San Diego's Playwrights Project called *EPIC* (Empathic Playwriting Intensive Course). Malik earned a Masters of Nonprofit Administration from North Park University and a B.A. in Liberal Arts from St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, with an emphasis on the Great Books. He is a Kellogg Executive Scholar (Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University) and has been awarded a Certificate of Professional Achievement in Nonprofit Management.

Aditi Brennan Kapil (Playwright) is a playwright, actress, and director of Bulgarian and Indian descent, raised in Sweden, and currently residing in Minneapolis. Her play *Love Person*, a four-part love story in Sanskrit, ASL, and English, has been produced to critical acclaim across the country. It was developed during a Many Voices residency at the Playwrights' Center, workshopped at the Lark Play Development Center in New York, and selected for reading at the National New Play Network (NNPN) conference in 2006. *Love Person* was produced in a NNPN rolling world premiere at Mixed Blood Theatre in Minneapolis, Marin Theater in San Francisco and Phoenix Theatre in Indianapolis during the 2007-2008 season. In 2008-2009, it was produced at Live Girls! Theatre in Seattle, Alley Repertory Theatre in Boise and Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago. *Love Person* received the Stavis Playwriting Award in 2009. Kapil's play *Agnes Under the Big Top: A Tall Tale* was selected as a 2009 Distinguished New Play Development Project by the NEA New Play Development Program hosted by Arena Stage, and was developed by the Lark Play Development Center, Mixed Blood Theatre, InterAct Theatre in Philadelphia, the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis and the Rhodope International Theater Laboratory in Bulgaria. *Agnes Under the Big Top* premiered at Mixed Blood Theatre and Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, CT in 2011, and Borderlands Theater in Tucson, AZ in 2012 in a NNPN rolling world premiere.

Brahmanli: A One-Hijra Stand Up Comedy Show is a part of Kapil's trilogy, *Displaced Hindu Gods*, and was commissioned by Mixed Blood, premiering there in October 2013. Kapil is currently working on a play loosely based on the character of Imogen in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, commissioned by Yale Repertory Theatre. She is a graduate of Macalester College with a BA in English and Dramatic Arts.

Corey Pond (Production Manager) is the resident Production Manager for Silk Road Rising, and is thrilled to be working with About Face Theatre. Previous work at SRR includes assistant director for *Re-Spiced* and *The Lake Effect*; house manager for *Yellow Face*, *Re-Spiced* and *Night Over Erzinga*; and stage manager for various staged readings. Corey holds a BA in Theatre from Illinois State University where he studied directing. Directing credits include *Lady Lazarus* (Gorilla Tango), *Flash* (KCACTF Region III, Best Director), *Doubt* (FreeStage, ISU), and *Going Nowhere* and *Double Feature* (Heartland Theater, 10-Minute Play Festivals in Normal, IL). Corey also enjoys adapting from sources like short stories ("The Lottery"), albums (*Everybody*), and autobiographies (*Stranger at the Gates*).

Helen Colleen Lattyak, AEA (Stage Manager) is a company member and Production Manager at TUTA Theater Chicago, where she has stage managed *Baal*, *The Wedding*, *Maria's Field*, *Uncle Vanya*, *It's Only The End Of The World*, *Tracks* and *Birds*. A few of her other stage management credits include *We Three Lizas* with About Face Theatre, *Mine* with the Gift Theatre, *Failure: A Love Story* at Victory Gardens Theatre, *Freedom, NY* at Teatro Vista, *Betrayal* at Oak Park Festival Theater, *RENT*, *It's a wonderful Life*, and *Celebrity Row* at American Theatre Company, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Doubt*, and *Be My Baby* for Peninsula Players Theater. Helen is a graduate of Loyola University Chicago and a member of the Actors Equity Association.

Roger Wykes (Set Designer) has previously designed the sets for *OklaHoma! for the Holidays* at About Face. Other scenic designs include *Impenetrable*, *Farragut North* (Stage Left Theatre), *The Last Duck* (Jackalope Theatre), *The Crowd You're in With* (16th Street Theater) *This, The Four of Us* (Theater Wit), *Kid Sister* (Profiles Theatre) and shows at Rare Terra Theater, Piven Theatre Workshop, City Lit Theater, Bohemian Theatre Ensemble, Promethean Theatre Ensemble, among others. rogerwykes.carbonmade.com.

Jeremy W. Floyd (Costume Designer) is thrilled to be designing this joint production with Silk Road and About Face. He is originally from Alabama and is a graduate of the University of Kentucky (MA) and Northwestern University (MFA). Some of his more recent designs include *Coriolanus* with the Hypocrites, *Richard III* at Notre Dame Shakespeare Festival and *As You Like It* for Shakespeare in the Park, Wheaton. Some of Jeremy's other favorite works include *Murder for Two* and *Short Shakes! Macbeth* at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, *Harriet Jacobs* at Kansas City Repertory Theatre, *The Hot Mikado* (Drury Lane), *The Mandrake* (A Red Orchid), *Hamlet* (NDSF), *Gut Bucket Blues* (True Colors, Atlanta), *Sweeney Todd* (Williams Street Rep) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *A Handmaid's Tale* (Northwestern). www.jeremywfloyd.com

Sarah K. Hughey, U.S.A. (Lighting Designer) is the Resident Lighting Designer at Silk Road Rising, where she designed *Invasion!*, *The Lake Effect*, *Night Over Erzinga*, *Yellow Face*, and *Scorched* (Jeff Award for Lighting Design). This is her second project with About Face, having designed lights for *The Kid Thing* in 2011. She is on the creative team of interdisciplinary performance collective Yellow House. Sarah is the 2013 recipient of Chicago's Michael Maggio Emerging Designer Award. She holds an MFA from Northwestern University, and teaches lighting design at NU and Columbia College Chicago.

Josh Horvath, U.S.A. (Sound Designer) is debuting his first show with Silk Road Rising. About Face credits: *Raising Voices*, *Xena: the Musical*, *Winesburg, Clay*, *Say You Love Satan*, *Wedding Play*, and *We Three Lizas*. Chicago credits: Goodman, Steppenwolf, Chicago Shakespeare, Court, Northlight, Lookingglass, House Theatre of Chicago, Timeline, Congo Square, and Next. Regional credits: Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Long Wharf, Hartford Stage, Center Stage, The Alliance, Kansas City Rep, Milwaukee Rep, Kirk Douglas Theatre, California Shakespeare, and Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Josh is a four time Jeff Award winner and an eleven time nominee, an LA Ovation award winner, an artistic associate of Lookingglass, a company member of The House Theatre of Chicago, and a collaborative partner with The Goodman Theatre. Josh teaches sound design for theatre and film at Northwestern University.

John Holt (Technical Director) is excited to be collaborating with About Face once again! A freelance set designer and scenic artist, he serves as production designer and technical director for the Inconvenience Artistic Syndicate, which he co-founded in 2008. John has played an integral role in events since the company's inception, designing and collaborating in the creation of the play festivals Strapped and Post-Traumatic, as well as Brett Neveu's *The Earl* as a co-production with A Red Orchid Theatre, *The Fly Honey Show* burlesque, the original dance salon *Standing Room Only*, and the world premiere of Ike Holter's *Hit the Wall* as part of Steppenwolf's 2012 Garage Rep. Upcoming work includes Chicago Commercial Collective's remount of *Hit the Wall* and the Inconvenience's production of Penn Jillette's *Love Tapes*. Current design work includes Laura Jaqmin's *Do-Gooder* at 16th Street Theater in Berwyn and *Crime and Punishment* at Mary-Arrchie Theatre company. Other favorite Chicago designs include *Sordid Little Story*, *Down & Derby* and *Rise of the Numberless* for the New Colony, *Paloma Querida*

with Luna Negra Dance Theatre, *Passing Strange* and *Aida* for the Bailiwick, *Riff Raff* for Mary-Arrchie, *Arrangements* for Pavement Group and *Paper Thin Walls* for Abraham Werewolf. John is a graduate of the Theatre School at DePaul University. Thank you for supporting live performance!

Sandeep Shekhar Das (Dramaturg) is thrilled to be working with Jamil & Malik again at Silk Road, where he previously assisted on Yussef El Guindi's *Our Enemies: Lively Scenes of Love & Combat*, and where he first became 'frenemies' with the obscenely talented Ms. Mirza. Sandeep is an Artistic Associate at American Theater Company, where he writes, directs, educates, and recently dramaturged the world premiere of Ayad Akthar's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Disgraced*. He is honored that Andrew & About Face have invited him to work on this smart, subversive, hilarious play, and cannot express enough his admiration and respect towards Aditi for writing it. Sandeep is a member of DirectorsLab Chicago, a SDCF Observership Candidate, and an intrepid graduate of "the Program" at St. John's College, Annapolis. This autumn, he will be joining the MFA Directing Program at Northwestern University. Helioooooocentriiism!

Kareem Khubchandani (Choreographer) is a PhD candidate in Performance Studies at Northwestern University writing a dissertation titled "*Ishtyle: Queer Nightlife Performance in India and the South Asian Diaspora.*" He is also a writer and performer; his original work has been presented at Eye on India's *Story Exchange* (2013), Serendipity Theatre's *2nd Story* (2009-2013), Rasaka Theatre's *Bombay In My Soul* (2011), and About Face Theatre's *The Homo Show* (2009). Kareem has choreographed for Trikone-Chicago, and Northwestern's A.N.U. Bhav, and he performs in drag as LaWhore Vagistan across the city. Most recently, he has

been touring his solo show *Lessons In Drag*. Find him on Twitter [@KareemPuff], YouTube [KKhubcha], Tumblr [diaryofanitemgirl], or Facebook [DesiDragQueen].

Casey L. Peek (Assistant Stage Manager) is thrilled to be working with Silk Road again, especially in conjunction with About Face Theatre. She has previously worked with Silk Road on *Invasion!* and numerous staged readings. Other Chicago credits include The House Theatre of Chicago, Mary-Arrchie Theatre Co., and Goodman Theatre.

LETTER FROM THE FOUNDERS OF SILK ROAD RISING

By Jamil Khoury and Malik Gillani

The world needs more co-productions. At least co-productions of plays that honor missions as beautifully and seamlessly as *Brahman/i* does. For when two companies with as uniquely “identitarian” missions as About Face Theatre and Silk Road Rising come together, our nice clean compartmentalized world of identity politics is bound to get a whole lot messier. Thank the goddess for that. Besides, who among us fits solely within one checkbox or demographic category? We all know the world is complex and complicated and forever in flux. It’s why we have storytellers, to illuminate how exhilarating and unpredictable that flux can be. And what better roadmap to chart this crazy course than Aditi Brennan Kapil’s wickedly smart, “one-hijra” comedy romp?

Imagine. Silk Road Rising showcases playwrights of Asian and Middle Eastern backgrounds who create protagonists of Asian and Middle Eastern backgrounds. We do so to expand Silk Road narratives within the canon of American storytelling, to combat racist representation and stereotypes, and to advance a polycultural world view. Basically, we love intersections. About Face Theatre creates exceptional, innovative, and adventurous plays that advance the national dialogue on gender and sexual identity. AFT’s commitment to diverse, multi-faceted LGBTQ representation broadens landscapes for sexual and gender minorities, and attracts allies from all walks of life. At heart, both our companies embrace plays that challenge and entertain. We challenge mainstream communities (however one defines “mainstream”) and we challenge cultures and communities being represented on stage (however one defines “being represented”). The entertainment lies in the delivery.

But there’s more to this marriage than the convergence wrought by a great play. We founded Silk Road Rising as an out and proud same sex couple. As gay men and as feminists, questions of gender and sexuality figure prominently in Silk Road Rising’s body of work. Our commitments to anti-racism and economic justice demand women’s equality and demand LGBTQ equality. Just as we challenge sexism, homophobia, and transphobia within our Silk Road communities, we also challenge racism and Orientalism within our queer and feminist communities. Perhaps those are the arenas in which *Brahman/i* best cements our ties that bind.

Brahman/i takes us on a journey with an Indian American intersex person. It is a journey of courage and heroism and self-determination that wields humor against adversity and finds triumph in our laughter. Playwright Kapil is a practitioner of what we call “theatre of decolonization.” And if there is such a thing as “stand up decolonization,” then *Brahman/i* nails it. Colonized minds, colonized bodies, and colonized histories serve as fodder for roasting. The violence and brutality of the British Raj is mined not only for its callous inhumanity but its utter ridiculousness and sheer laughable pomposity. *Brahman/i* reminds us that heritage can be a wellspring of courage and creativity and that the body never lies – it merely asks questions. Whoever knew that intersectionalities could be so much fun?

The world needs more co-productions.
Long live *Brahman/i*!



Jamil Khoury

Founding Artistic Director
Silk Road Rising



Malik Gillani

Founding Executive Director
Silk Road Rising

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Andrew Volkoff

“No person can ever be fully defined. We are all many identities and loves, many genders and none. We are in between roles, places, at the intersection of histories. We are crisscrossed paths of memory and destination, streaks of light swirled together. We are neither day nor night. We are twilight: both, neither and all. May the sacred in-between suspend our certainties, soften our judgments, and widen our vision.”

I find these insightful words from Chicago’s own Rebecca Kling from her “A Transitioning Mikveh” in her book, *No Gender Left Behind* sum up beautifully the heart of Aditi Brennan Kapil’s *Brahman/i*.

When I first read Aditi’s play, I was knocked out by the intelligence, daring, and sense of humor of the piece. Pulling from all the cross-sections of her identity, history, and personal mythology, *Brahman/i* crosses cultural and gender identity boundaries, mixes the sacred and the profane, and blends the genres of standup comedy and traditional play.

Besides finding *Brahman/i* extremely funny and smart, I also found it very moving. It brought up so many memories for me of being a young gay boy at an all-male Catholic high school, not feeling like I fit in and aching for my life to begin, elsewhere, as a different person, free. I think it’s a feeling many queer people can identify with, as can many of our allied friends. Being the outsider (for whatever reason) rarely feels good.

But, as Aditi illustrates in this piece, comedy is often both the shield and the weapon of the outsider, the other, something we learn to wield with both intent and subtlety.

The main character of *Brahman/i* is, like most queer people I know, strong, visible, and vocal. Oppressed and repressed by cultural and social norms, *Brahman/i* is faced with creating their own mythology. Eschewing the role of victim, they are someone who’s able to take the spotlight and own it on their own terms, not apologizing for who they are. My attraction to the piece lies in it being a powerful story of a person labeled an outsider by society who overcomes that and comes to build their own identity, using comedy to shine a light on their own struggle from outsider to beacon. I find it a hopeful story of building your own mythology, finding your power, and claiming your life for yourself as you wish.

Live in the light and be a beacon for others. Own your power to define yourself. Laugh. And most importantly, love. Enjoy the show.



Andrew Volkoff

Director & Artistic Director
About Face Theatre

WORDS FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT: A STATEMENT ABOUT *BRAHMAN/I*

By **Aditi Brennan Kapil**

When I first conceived the *Displaced Hindu Gods Trilogy* – three plays riffing on the three deities of the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva – I was looking for my way into the Indian part of my heritage, as a woman, as a person of mixed race, as an immigrant twice over, as a person who lives amidst an amazing diaspora that flies in the face of any attempt at stereotyping. I believe that all immigrants engage in an act of re-mythologizing, we need stories to understand ourselves, both individually and in the context of society. So my *Displaced Hindu Gods* are a creative departure from traditional depictions. In *The Chronicles of Kalki*, the final avatar of Vishnu (traditionally male) is a badass girl facing down the demons of high school and puberty. The Shiva character in *Shiv* is a woman caught between past and present and the necessary act of destruction that leads to re-birth.

In taking on Brahma the Creator, I was drawn to the over-arching principle of Brahman, the cosmic spirit, genderless, omnipotent, omniscient, described as ‘neti neti’ which translates roughly as “not this, not this”. Some of the most powerful Hindu deities are depicted as being of both genders, and why wouldn’t god be both male and female? Not this, not that. Our society habitually categorizes, by religion, by nationality, by color, and in our first few seconds of life- by gender. More and more, these categories and assumptions grow obsolete, but our brains resist, sorting and grouping is how we understand the world. For me, a lifetime of resisting categorization, as an Indian/Bulgarian/Swedish-American speaking multiple languages, code switching from country to country, being of ambiguous color and cultural background, emigrating, immigrating, experimenting, becoming, led to the creation of Brahman/i in *Brahman/i, A One-Hijra Stand-Up Comedy Show*, a person who doesn’t and won’t fit into any single category, ever. And who owns that space and power, that spotlight and that microphone. This play is by/about/for people who never fit in, and who no longer care. And the power that comes with that moment of self-creation.



Aditi Brennan Kapil
Playwright

DRAMATURGICAL NOTES

HINDU HEROES AND THE HIJRA

By Sandeep Shekar Das

“Are you aware Brahmani, that the Hijra holds an ancient and sacred place in Indian society? If you were there instead of here, no one would be batting an eyelash? You are a member of an ancient order, first mentioned in the *Ramayana* in the 5th century B.C.!”

So begins Auntie’s well-intentioned attempt to offer comfort and context to her sister’s child who is in short supply of both. Understandably, Brahman/i immediately latches onto this potential for a “natural” place in society. Moreover, this is a privileged position, one attested by history and mythology as that of an “ancient order.” As fourteen year-old Brahman/i says: “superpowers, anyone?”

But the Hijra, while indeed playing a pivotal role in Hindu mythology, are not the intersex ninjas Brahman/i wants them to be. In contemporary India (as well as Pakistan and Bangladesh), the term Hijra commonly refers to those who are born male but identify, dress, present and live as women (with or without surgical or hormonal adjustments). The term also refers to those born in the same communities who fall within the intersex spectrum; they are marginalized, ghettoized—outsiders with whom Brahman/i would easily identify.

On the Subcontinent, the community labeled Hijra was historically much broader. In addition to intersex persons, it included barren women, impotent men, eunuchs, as well as those who today would fall under the umbrella term “transgender.” Perhaps the provocative unifying characteristic of the Hijra community (at least to those of us steeped in the dominant male/female paradigm) is the notion of a third sex, or third gender. In Sanskrit the term is *tritya prakriti*, which literally translates to “third nature.”

Disagreements exist as to whether or not this idea of a “third nature” was asserted from within the Hijra community or imposed on it from without. At its most reductive, the term Hijra (and the concept of *tritya prakriti*) has been used as shorthand for male homosexuals who live as women. But like the term “queer” today, Hijra in the past embraced all who were not “hetero-binary.” Likewise, the notion of a “third” in the *tritya prakriti* did not necessarily suggest a “tri-nary,” but rather a spectrum of all that was not “hetero-binary.” As Auntie correctly states (at least in one respect), the Hijra do hold a sacred place in Indian society.

In the myths and legends underpinning the Hindu tradition, we come across countless instances of the *tritya prakriti*, reflected both in human beings and as a ubiquitous gender fluidity amongst the gods. There is, of course, the story Auntie recounts in the play from the *Ramayana*. Also, in the great Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*, there are hordes of stories reflecting on gender fluidity and a “third nature.” One of the most famous stories concerns the great hero and warrior, Arjuna. As punishment for spurning her advances, the nymph Urvashi curses Arjuna to spend a year disguised or transformed (the text is unclear) as the “third-natured” Brihannala, serving as the singing and dancing tutor to a princess. In some versions, Arjuna also performs as marriage broker and midwife, thus passing on to all those with a “third nature” the honor of blessing weddings and newborns ever since.

In another famous story, the virgin warrior Aravan is asked to sacrifice himself to the goddess Kali in order to ensure victory for his side in the conflict central to the *Mahabharata*. Reluctantly, he agrees on the condition that he does not die a bachelor—although noble and virtuous, no king wants to marry his daughter to Aravan and have her so abruptly widowed. Instead, Krishna transforms into his feminine aspect, Mohini, and marries Aravan. The two spend the night together (some say three nights) before his sacrifice. Consequently, many Hijra now consider Aravan a patron saint.

In *Brahmanli*, Aditi Brennan Kapil presents us with the tantalizing notion that B might be some version of the Brahman: that is, the supreme existence in the Hindu tradition, source of all things, eternal, irreducible—whole. In some sense, this notion is reflected in the *Upanishads*, wherein attempts to ascribe qualities to the Brahman are dismissed with the simple phrase: “*Neti, neti*” (neither this, nor that). Brahman/i, embodying this existential investigation, struggles with the fundamental question: after identifying all that is not, what then is left?

INTERSEX 101

Adapted in part from information provided by the Intersex Initiative and the Human Rights Campaign.

What is intersex?

Intersex people are those born with external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, and/or an endocrine system that differs from most other people. There is no single intersex “body;” rather, it encompasses a wide range of biological and/or genetic conditions with nothing in common other than society’s having deemed them “abnormal.” Generally speaking, intersex is not an identity category. While some intersex people do reclaim “intersex” as part of their identity, most simply regard it as a medical condition, or just a unique physical state. Most intersex people identify and live as ordinary men and women—they can be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight. Technically, intersex is defined as a “congenital anomaly of the reproductive and sexual system.” Intersex conditions are also known as “disorders of sex development” (DSD) in the medical community.

How common are intersex conditions?

No one knows exactly how many children are born with intersex conditions because of the secrecy and deception that often surrounds it. Furthermore, there are no concrete boundaries that define intersex. Nevertheless, it is estimated that approximately 1 in 2,000 children, or five children per day in the United States, are born visibly intersex, prompting early (and frequently premature) intervention.

How do you know the true sex & gender of a child with an intersex condition?

Medicine cannot determine a baby’s “true sex,” nor can genetics dictate one’s gender identity. For example, people born with androgen insensitivity syndrome live as women, despite having XY (male) chromosomes. In other words, science can measure the shape and size of a sex organ, but it cannot conclude what size or shape it *ought* to be. That is purely a societal determination.

A child’s gender can only be determined once he or she is old enough to communicate. It is generally recommended that a child be assigned a gender based on our best predictions, and then allowed to decide for herself or himself once old enough to do so. Irreversible surgeries on infants should be avoided so as not to eliminate the child’s choices when he or she is older.

What is the correct pronoun for intersex people?

Pronouns should not be based on the shape of one’s genitalia, but on what the person prefers to be called. For children too young to communicate his/her preference, go with the gender parents and doctors agreed to assign based on their best prediction. Do not call an intersex child “it”—“it” is dehumanizing.

What is the difference between hermaphrodite and intersex?

In biology, “hermaphrodite” refers to organisms that possess both male and female reproductive organs (snails and earthworms, for instance). In this sense, there are no actual human “hermaphrodites,” although doctors in the past have used the term to refer to people with intersex conditions. Most members of the intersex community find the word “hermaphrodite” misleading, mythologizing, and stigmatizing. And while some intersex activists have reclaimed this term to use on themselves, it is not appropriate to use when referring to intersex people in general. Snails are hermaphrodites; humans are not.

Is intersex part of the “transgender” community?

While some people with intersex conditions also identify as transgender, as a group, intersex people have a unique set of needs and priorities. These needs are often made invisible or secondary when intersex becomes a subcategory of “transgender.”

What is the distinction between sex and gender?

It can sometimes be hard to understand exactly what is meant by “gender,” and how it differs from “sex.” Until recently, the terms were used interchangeably on job applications, school registrations, passport forms, Department of Motor Vehicles paperwork, etc. Today, they are two distinctive terms.

“Sex” refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that present, and often define, a person as male or female. “Gender,” on the other hand, refers to a person’s innate, psychological identification as either a male or female. This identification may or may not correspond to the person’s body or designated sex at birth. Gender is therefore distinct from sexual orientation.



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About Face Theatre is Chicago's celebrated center for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and ally (LGBTQA) arts that amplifies the nation's leading voices to spark social change. Our mission is to create exceptional, innovative, and adventurous plays to advance the national dialogue on gender and sexual identity, and to challenge and entertain audiences in Chicago, across the country, and around the world.

Enabled by broad community support, the organization thrives as an inclusive home where diverse artists, youth, audiences and community partners come together for artistic exchange and cultural dialogue. Thank you for your support!

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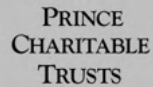


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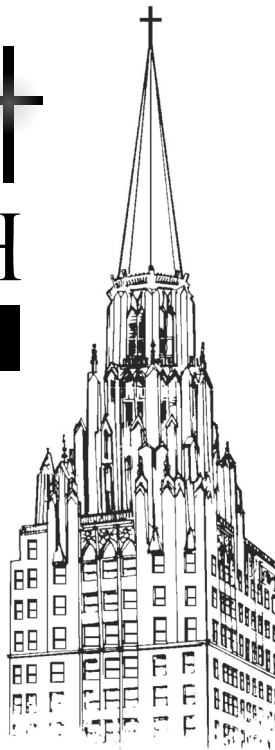
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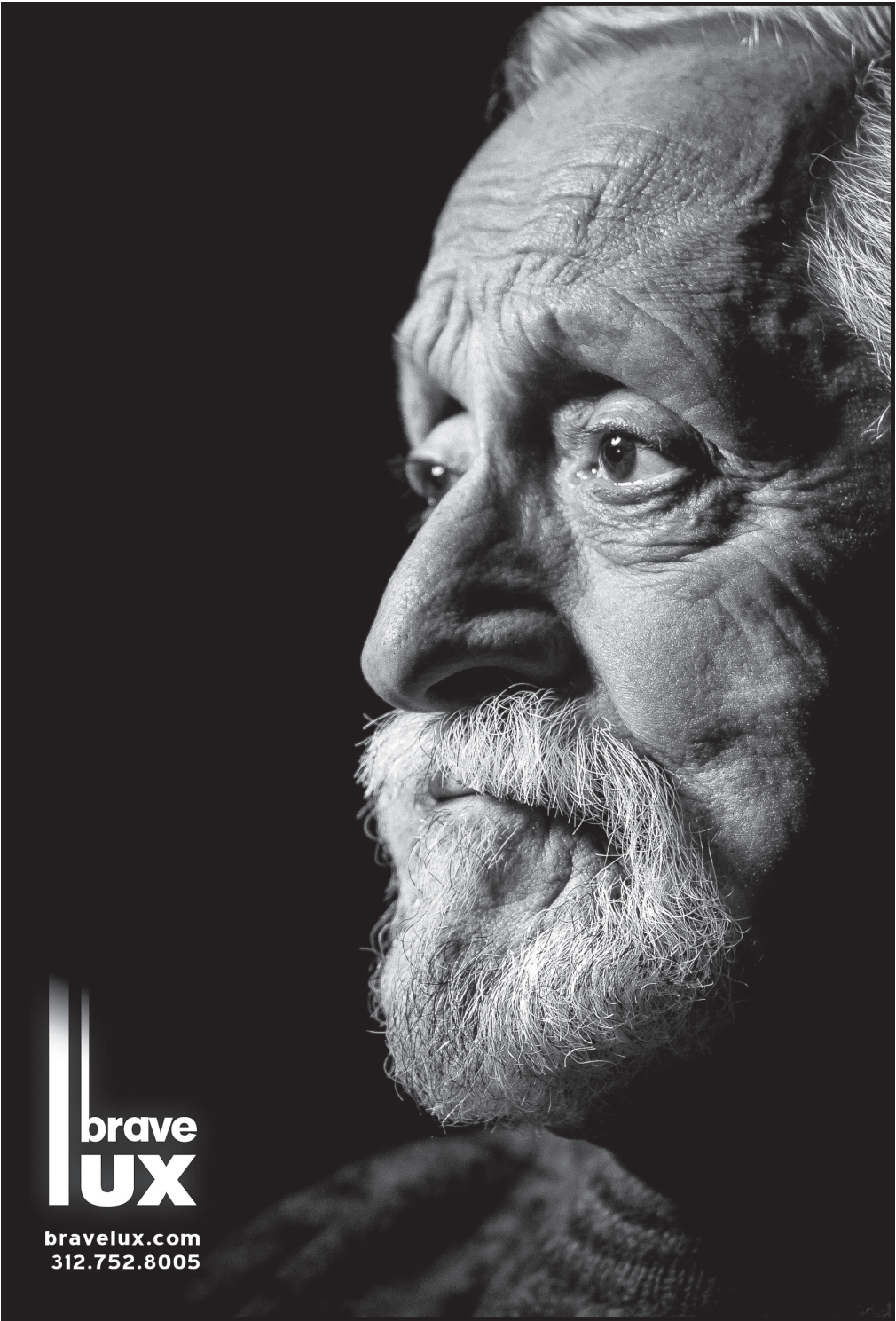
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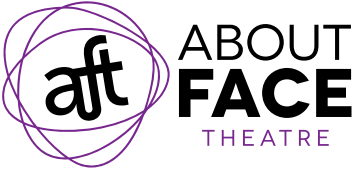
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