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# Shereen Ahmed as Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*

## A Conversation with Jamil Khoury



**Musical theatre actor Shereen Ahmed plays Eliza Doolittle in Lincoln Center Theatre's national tour of Lerner & Loewe's *My Fair Lady*, playing June 28 through July 10 at Chicago's Cadillac Palace Theatre.**

JAMIL: You are the first Arab American actor to play Eliza Doolittle in *My*

your own lived experiences, inform the ways that you embody this beloved character?

SHEREEN: When I approach embodying a character, I have the character's lived experiences inform my performance. Eliza's experiences inform me first and foremost, but I won't neglect that my own personal experiences have helped me shape and mold Eliza into who she is. I grew up surrounded by strong, resilient, ambitious Arab men and women and learned that sometimes you have to kick down the doors in order to have a seat at the table. That determination is something I continue to be inspired by in my community and I believe that is the foundation of Eliza Doolittle.

JAMIL: Obviously you were cast to play Eliza because of your extraordinary musical theatre talent. But as an Arab American actor, an Egyptian American, and a woman of color playing an iconic Cockney English role, what are the unique responsibilities, and perhaps even burdens, that you have confronted on this journey?

SHEREEN: It has been quite a journey I've been on and it has forced me to confront tough conversations on identity in the theatre. Eliza's race, ethnicity, and religion is never referred in the text—so Eliza can truly be played by anyone. I realized early on that being the first is not about me in particular, but about the door finally being open to a community that has for centuries been stereotyped and outcast. It is a gift to break the mold of what we typically see of the Arab woman in our media and to portray a woman who stands in her own power and strength. The audience feels that too—when I see people from my community in the audience, I know that they feel seen in this story, too.



JAMIL: What does this production of *My Fair Lady* tell us about Broadway's changing and evolving attitudes around the issue of casting?

SHEREEN: One of the things I love about this production, in particular, is that we are all incredibly diverse humans. We come from different backgrounds, religions, races, identities, ethnicities, etc. with one goal in mind - to tell the story at hand. Hiring people from a wide range of backgrounds creates better art. The rehearsal room becomes a melting pot of ideas and experiences that are lifted, challenged, and discussed. I know that when audiences come to see our show, they will be able to identify with someone on the stage. Stories have the ability to resonate deeper with audiences when they feel seen and invited into the theater space.

JAMIL: Finally, what do you hope Silk Road Rising audiences will take from this new production of *My Fair Lady*?

SHEREEN: I hope Silk Road Rising audiences are able to have a newfound appreciation for classic musicals. The period pieces that were once reserved for a certain group of people are now accessible to everyone and our production of *My Fair Lady* proves that.

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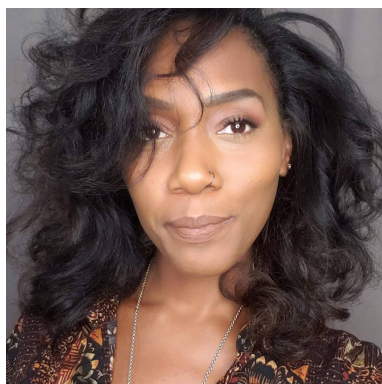
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