



LA MAMA
presents



Make Me A Hour

by Emina Ashman

WINTER/SPRING 2019

This play is a dedication,

To the women ahead of her every grandchild on Netflix

To the women who suck snot out of their daughter's blocked nose

To the women who eat durians in secret downstairs

To the women on Monday evenings humming verses over water

To the women who perform shamanic healings in fishnets

To the women handling chemicals that may cause infertility

To the women baking bread for her toddlers on muggy days

To the women who memorise holy text and telenovela soundtracks

To the women who leave themselves out to shiver on stage

To the women who teach movement classes in their sixties

To the women unafraid to shout with their hips

To the women who sing through scarred lips

To the women who hand-wash bottoms

To the women who never sleep and keep glowing for others.

To the women who wished they saw silver in their father's hair

To the women who sleep alone in empty houses

To the women saying prayers in tongues that aren't her own

To the women resisting a blunt and binary world

To the women in constant combat with themselves

To the women who listen and to the women who don't

To the women who cry and to the women who won't

MAKE ME A HOURI

Written by Emina Ashman

Directed by Stephanie Ghajar

Set & Costume Design by Lara Week

Lighting Design by Shane Grant

Sound Design & Composition by Sidney Millar

Stage Management by Jordan Carter

Performed by Emina Ashman and Nisha Joseph

Publicity by Sassy Red PR

Photography by Keith Costelo

NOTE FROM THE WRITER / EMINA ASHMAN

My move in 2012 from Malaysia to Melbourne teemed with pain, fear and fascination. Moving overseas and losing my father four weeks in to moving, drastically transformed me as a woman and my relationship to life itself. It informed the questions I now pose in this play. Make Me A Houri is an honouring of what I called my 'siren years.' When the strongest anchor in my world had left me, I felt like a restless mermaid. This play is my way of honouring that mermaid's voice that longed to be heard, and wanted to be felt, as she undulated between heaven and earth in her time of mourning. This play is a celebration of her own sacred dance of discovering beauty, intimacy and the depths of human connection. This is an expression of her spiritual and creative journey and the relationships that have been an integral part of it.

Growing up around an esoteric Sufi Sheikh for a father, generated metaphysical questions about life, death, truth and certainty within me from an early age. I think that's a natural tendency when you grow up with incense, sacred geometry and trance around you. Spiritual mysticism and my Islamic cultural upbringing had definitely inspired, and influenced my writing. Make Me A Houri is a personal meditation and platform for me to re-define and re-imagine the dimensions of my faith.

Stephanie, Nisha, Lara, Sidney, Shane and Jordi, thank you for unravelling this script and helping me find its soul. Special thanks to Mama, Raghida, Laura and Josh for bringing your love, positivity and beautiful energy to me throughout the creation of this work.

NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR / STEPHANIE GHAJAR

When Emina first came to me with the script, I remember feeling this tidal wave washing through me. I read about these women, their stories, how they experienced and dealt with the oppressions that emerged from conservative lifestyles, and felt them transport me to the most defining years of my life, as I was trying to understand what it is to be a woman.

Emina's work goes deep into those memories, draws up images that translate and poke into your past to stir up the affect of the feelings that are so familiar to your own body. Even after you've already broken the ropes that bind you, their ghosts come back to haunt you, until you realise how your body in the present time comes so close to going back into the mold sculpted by your past.

The process of *Make Me A Houri* really delved into what that means, the memories, their imprints on our psyche and physicality, what holds us back, and when exactly we decide to release. It also opened a new scope of what femininity and feminism mean to each of us and how to explore and embody these concepts from the inside and from 'the other' side. But even when Emina's feelings and mine towards specific words and ideas about women of colour didn't align, the negotiations that sprung from those instances got the play to where it is today.

It is through sharing these stories that this play wants to bring its audience into a serene environment, allowing them to journey through their own memories and examine what it is exactly that releases them from their ghosts, to be able to find their own paradise.

CAST & CREATIVES

Stephanie Ghajar is a Lebanese Australian theatre and filmmaker, working in Melbourne and internationally. Upon returning from New York earlier this year, she started developing a new devised piece with Melbourne-based artist titled *The Promised Land*, stage managed Glassbreaker Production's *Two on the Night Train* (Gasworks Theatre), and dramaturged short films including *Stick a Fork in Me* (Wendyhouse Films). She is currently a script supervisor on the short film *Something Has Died in the Forest* (Eva Torkkola) and is also working with the Brooklyn-based theatre company, Anonymous Ensemble, on their next project, *Flight*. Ghajar is a graduate of the VCA with a Master of Dramaturgy. For previous work, visit www.stephanieghajar.com

Emina Ashman is a Malaysian-Australian performer and writer based in Melbourne. Her creative expression contours around acting, poetry, theatre-making and visual art. Her art contours around self-healing, nature, her own embodied experiences and connection to spiritual and sensual feminine energy. Emina holds an Honours in Independent Theatre Practice and a Bachelors in Acting and Performance Making from the Victorian College of the Arts. Theatre credits include *Bock Kills Her Father* (She Said Theatre/La Mama); *Roberto Zucco* (Le Poulet Terrible/La Mama); *Tales of a City by the Sea* (Samah Sabawi, La Mama and Too Ready Mirror (Darebin Arts Speakeasy). Her most recent performance was in the premiere of *Hungry Ghosts* (Melbourne Theatre Company). *Make Me A Houri* marks her debut as a playwright and performer of her own work.

Emina is also a proud member of MEAA and the Actor's Equity.

Nisha Joseph is a Melbourne-based actor and theatre maker. A 2016 graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts, she is best known for her roles in the comedic musical *Romeo Is Not The Only Fruit* (dir. Jean Tong) and award-winning short films such as *St. Bernie* (2017, dir. Elise Tyson) and *Big and Tall and Hairy* (2019, dir. Becki Bouchier) for which she also received a nomination for Best Actress at the 48 Hour Film Festival Awards. She has also recorded audiobooks for Audible including *Beautiful*, *Messy Love* and *Leila's Secret*. Recent credits include *The Bachelor S17E05* (dir. Katrina Cornwall + Morgan Rose Aldrich) and *The Childrens' Hour* (dir. Sarah Vickery), while her time in VCA saw her working with talented directors such as Gary Abrahams and Bridget Balodis. Born and raised in Singapore, Nisha speaks English and Malay and is a talented singer.

Nisha has been involved in developments and readings of *Make Me A Houri* with Emina since 2017 and is thrilled to be a part of the La Mama season.

Lara Week is a designer for performance and creative producer. Her designs for set and costume include *Caliban* with Western Edge Youth Arts (dir. Tariro Mavondo and Dave Kelman, Malthouse Theatre), *3 Sisters* (dir. Greg Ulfan, Metanoia Theatre), *South Sudan Voice* with Free Theatre (dir. Pongjit Saphakhun), *Night Sings Its Songs* (dir. Rodrigo Calderón, La Mama Theatre), and two seasons of Samah Sabawi's award-winning play *Tales Of A City By The Sea* (dir. Lech Mackiewicz and Wahibe Moussa) which she co-produced in 2016 with Daniel Clark and toured to Adelaide, Sydney, and Kuala Lumpur. This year, she produced and designed the premiere season of Sabawi's play *THEM* at La Mama Courthouse, directed by Bagryana Popov. Since 2011 Lara has been associate producer for Tribal Soul Arts, working with Patrice Naiambana to produce decolonial arts programs and performances in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, the Netherlands, UK, and Australia.

Shane Grant is an accomplished lighting designer having worked extensively with companies like Ranters Theatre, The Torch Project, NYID and many others. Shane has a BA Dramatic Arts (Production) VCA from 1994. Shane sat on the Green Room Awards Association Theatre Companies panel 2014 - 2017. Shane is currently an artistic director of Metanoia Theatre. Shane is also a writer and theatre maker; he recently enjoyed success with an adaptation of George Arnaud's novel *The Wages of Fear and Hard Boiled Bush Noir*, three tales of ice crime in the outback. Shane has written and performed monologues at Gasworks Theatre, La Mama Theatre and the Mechanics Institute Brunswick. Shane is currently the venues manager at St Martins Youth Arts Center. He continues to write and light in venues around Melbourne.

Sidney Millar has designed audio for theatre, dance, film and installations. Her unique style has emerged from her extensive experience as a performer and composer of classical and jazz music. She particularly enjoys using sound and music to create emotional states and subtle tensions in a work.

Originally from Adelaide, Sidney won numerous composition awards throughout her school years. Her love of music sparked an interest in audio design, which led to her studying a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Production) degree at the Victorian College of the Arts.

Whilst at the VCA, Sidney designed 'Three Blind Mice' which was nominated for the 2016 Melbourne Fringe Best Performance Award and subsequently toured to the 2017 Adelaide Fringe. Beyond the VCA, design highlights include *Wild* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Bread Crumbs* (Poppy Seed Festival); *Crazy Brave* (dir. Melanie Beddie) and *Lou Wall's Drag Race* (Melbourne Fringe). Sidney was the Associate Sound Designer to Russell Goldsmith for *Angels In America* (dir. Gary Abrahams); and *FIERCE* (Theatre Works).

Jordan Carter is a freelance Stage Manager who graduated from The Victorian College of the Arts with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Production (Stage Management) in 2018 and Swinburne University with a Diploma of Theatre Arts in 2012. Jordan has previously worked on *The Crucible* (dir. Adena Jacobs 2018), The Production Company's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (dir. Gale Edwards) and *The Book of Ducks* (writ. & dir. Glenn Saunders). Jordan loves the variety of work and people and the many new experiences of working in Stage Management. In her spare time, Jordan enjoys sewing, reading and dying rainbows into her hair.

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La Mama Theatre is on traditional land of the Kulin Nation. We give our respects to the Elders of this country and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people past, present and future. We acknowledge all events take place on stolen lands and that sovereignty was never ceded.

We are grateful to all our philanthropic partners and donors, advocates, volunteers, audiences, artists and our entire community as we work towards the La Mama rebuild. Thank you!

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