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VOICES FESTIVAL PRODUCTIONS

In Conjunction with Capital Fringe Festival
presents

#CHARLOTTESVILLE

Written and Performed by Priyanka Shetty

Directed by A. Lorraine Robinson

July 14-16, 2023

Capital Fringe Venue: DCJCC – Theater J



WASHINGTON, DC (June 9, 2023) – **Voices Festival Productions** returns to Capital Fringe Festival this July after its acclaimed inaugural production of [The Gate](#) in 2022, to present **#CHARLOTTESVILLE**, **Priyanka Shetty’s** freshly expanded tour-de-force documentary play about the 2017 “Unite The Right” rally, the powerful counter-protests by local activists and community members, and the ominous reverberations left in its wake.

Principally constructed from verbatim interviews with residents of Charlottesville, VA, alongside testimony from the recent trial of the rally co-conspirators, the play speaks to the power of witnessing and the need to share difficult, even triggering, history. It’s **written and performed by accomplished solo performance artist and UVA alum, Priyanka Shetty**, who originally created the play as an 8-actor ensemble piece, but now embodies a dynamic cross-section of one of America’s most emblematic cities on her own. The performance is **directed by VFP Artistic Producing Partner, A. Lorraine Robinson** who oversaw an intensive workshop of the play in DC this past April. **#CHARLOTTESVILLE** will perform three times at Theater J in the DCJCC, one of the host venues for this year’s Capital Fringe Festival. **Show-times for the 70-minute piece are Friday, July 14 at 8:00 pm; Saturday, July 15 at 5:00 pm; and Sunday, July 16 at 2:30 pm.** Theater J is located at 1529 16th Street, NW in Washington, DC.

Initially away on summer break during those fateful days of August 11-12, 2017, Priyanka Shetty knew she had only a cursory understanding of the disturbing events – indeed of the city of Charlottesville itself – as news of the “Unite The Right” rally and the ensuing mayhem unfolded over her Twitter feed. And so she returned to interview local residents, community organizers, counter-protesters, local clergy, and university officials in an effort “to understand what happened here.” In the play, we follow Priyanka into the heart of Charlottesville and its history to assess the impact of the rally’s violence, along with its origins – How it ever came to be a gathering site for Neo-Nazis – and watch her pointedly ask everyone (including herself) what it means to call this seemingly friendly, certainly beautiful, deeply polarized town “Home.” Mapping deep-seated racial inequities that have long existed in town, the play presents, with updated urgency, excerpts from the recent trial of the rally’s co-conspirators tracing a line from the events of 2017, to the January 6, 2021 Insurgency on the US Capitol, to the moment where Charlottesville – and our nation – finds itself today.

The play was first staged in 2019 at Live Arts in Charlottesville, just steps from where **Heather Heyer** was killed by James Field in his 2010 Dodge Challenger. Now infused with new interviews – including with **Heather Heyer’s mother, Susan Bro** – Priyanka Shetty’s uniquely trained lens and perspective bring us up to date with contemporary quandaries as to how we memorialize history (and take down problematic memorials); how we respond to the politics of grievance and backlash (in the face of dynamic social progress); and how the nation contends with the rise of increasingly explicit anti-Semitic and racist rhetoric and actions.

“What’s remarkable about this piece of theater is how extraordinarily well Priyanka Shetty listens to people who were clearly traumatized in actively resisting all the assaulting actions of these White Nationalist, Neo-Nazi, Alt Right protesters,” remarks **VFP Founding Producing Partner, Ari Roth**. As to returning to Theater J, where he served as Artistic Director from 1997 through 2014 before a well-documented exit, Roth remarks: “Fringe called to ask me how VFP would feel about doing the play in the Goldman Theater at Theater, J and I told them, ‘Well, I was just there to welcome new Artistic Director, Hayley Finn. She’s terrific and, even more importantly, the play’s message and warning really resonate in that Jewish Community Center. We’re all fine with it and will be happy to be back.”

Adds director A. Lorraine Robinson after a recent visit to Charlottesville: “You walk around this beautiful city and you can feel the weight of its history. Cultured and pleasant on the surface, we know that there are other histories within Charlottesville that have been paved over and buried. We see its glimmering edifices, both new and historic, but as we’ve researched we’ve become acquainted with the city’s racist housing and urban development policies over the years and uncovered how some of these structures came to be, discovering, indeed, that: “What’s past is prologue.” The play serves as an inspiring and courageous reminder about how hard we have to continue to fight to advance and protect the progress of our democracy.”

The production is supported by the work of an excellent creative team, some of whom have been affiliated with the production for years, others of whom are busy DC-based artists. Local designers include **Anthony Amos** (sound and projection support); **Garth Dolan** (lights); **Elizabeth Long** (properties), all ably supported by production stage manager, **David Elias**. Creative team members

who've been with #CHARLOTTESVILLE previously include dialect coach, **Monica Blaze Leavitt**, and composer **Heather Mease**.

Following the final matinee performance of #CHARLOTTESVILLE on **Sunday, July 16 at 6:00 pm**, **Voices Festival Productions** will host a **free, virtual Zoom discussion** involving journalists who covered various aspects of the Charlottesville saga, in conversation with the creative team, audience members, and those interested in learning more about the production (excerpts will be presented). **Registration for the discussion will be available through the VFP website after June 21, when tickets for all Capital Fringe Festival shows go on sale.**

About the Artists

An award-winning solo performance artist, **Priyanka Shetty** has performed her critically-acclaimed, one-woman show **THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM** at numerous venues across the country, including The John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, the Edinburgh Fringe as part of the Assembly Festival which was followed by a Scotland Tour, and most recently at the Orlando Fringe Festival where it won the “Edgy As F*CK Award,” and will open the 2023/24 season at Azuka Theatre in Philadelphia for its regional theater debut. The witty, dark comedy tells the story of a typical South Asian metalhead and software-engineer-turned-actor who must navigate life as an immigrant arriving in Trump’s America. Shetty made her Off-Broadway debut with #CHARLOTTESVILLE at the Drama Desk award-winning 59E59 Theaters’ “East to Edinburgh” Festival in 2021. Response was enthusiastic: “A Masterclass in Acting. Spellbinding performance and forceful storytelling... Riveting... Change-making theater at its best,” noted Eric Kahn in *Stagebuddy: The Insiders Guide To Theatre*. And Elisabeth Vincentelli reviewing the festival offerings for *The New York Times* wrote, “Among the titles that caught my eye is Priyanka Shetty’s docu-theater solo *#Charlottesville*.”

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM and #CHARLOTTESVILLE are part of Priyanka Shetty’s “Triptych of Solos,” which includes a third performance piece in-progress, **THE WALL**, exploring the immigrant experience from three different angles – the Hindu-Muslim communal riots in India, immigration issues and detention centers in America, and the aftermath of Brexit in the UK, unpacking the resulting political tensions in three countries to discover their shared roots in centuries of colonization. For more information, visit www.priyankashetty.com

A. Lorraine Robinson is a free-lance Director and Dramaturg who has worked with various DC area and regional theatres. Recent Projects include: Director for: **LET ME DOWN EASY** and **BALTIMORE** (St. Mary’s College of Maryland); **APOLOGIES TO LORRAINE HANSBERRY (YOU TOO AUGUST WILSON)** (VFP); **THREE STRANGERS SITTING AROUND A BACKYARD FIREPIT AT TWO IN THE MORNING LISTENING TO BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN’S NEBRASKA** (a site-specific play by Bob Bartlett); **THE PIANO LESSON** and **ANNIE** (Sitar Arts Center) and Dramaturg for **TOPDOG/UNDERDOG** (Avant Bard.) Lorraine received the Central Ohio Theatre Critics Circle Award: Best Director & Best Production for **THE LARAMIE PROJECT** (Contemporary American Theatre Company in Columbus, Ohio.) In 2017, 2018 and 2019 she received Tony Award: Excellence in Theatre Education Honorable Mention Awards for her work at Sitar Arts Center. Previously, she was the Co-Founding/Artistic Producing Director of MuseFire Productions. Lorraine is also a Board Member and Associated Artist with Transformation Theatre Company.

Voices Festival Productions is an independent production company based in Washington DC, which produces plays (and the occasional musical) that stimulate debate and discourse, introspection and awareness, informed by revelation of our underlying humanity in all its color and complexity, finding resonance between those living with conflict in the Middle East and closer to home, in our nation's capital, along the seams of our nation and its very real and perceived divides. We celebrate diverse, inter-cultural voices and encounters through inter-connected performance of both provocative and introspective new works for the stage, in dialogue with our moment.

In 2022, VFP presented four productions for our long-running Voices From a Changing Middle East Festival under the umbrella theme of Losing/Finding Home. We presented THE GATE written and performed by Robbie Gringras in Georgetown at Capital Fringe; the world premieres of MY CALAMITOUS AFFAIR WITH THE MINISTER OF CULTURE & CENSORSHIP by Ari Roth and HOME? A PALESTINIAN WOMAN'S PURSUIT OF LIFE, LIBERTY & HAPPINESS at The Corner at Whitman-Walker, and the On Demand virtual production of I, DAREEN T by Einat Weizman and Dareen Tatour. As part of its Voices From a Changing Nation series, VFP presented Rachel Lynett's APOLOGIES TO LORRAINE HANSBERRY (YOU TOO, AUGUST WILSON), and, over the past 16 months, two installments of "UKRAINIANS UNDER SIEGE" Readings Of Brand New One Acts From The War" in partnership with the Arts Club of Washington. Upcoming Fall, Winter and Spring Programming for VFP will be announced shortly. For more information, [click here](#).

Capital Fringe was founded in 2005 with a mission to celebrate cultural democracy and access to art and artistic expression for all. By embracing diversity and a spirit of independence, "we create earning opportunities for individual artists. We aim to challenge perceptions, shake up the institutionalized hierarchy, be brave and unafraid, and serve as a launching pad for unseasoned and established artists. Over the past nearly two decades, Capital Fringe has become known for providing space, resources, and opportunities for both individual artists and companies, as well as a place for community building and expression." For more information about venue parking and Capital Fringe's production history, [click here](#).

Tickets go on sale for all Capital Fringe shows June 21, 2023.

All tickets are \$15.

To purchase tickets, go to capitalfringe.org.

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