

Shakespeare & Co., Lenox, MA

Three Tall Persian Women, by Awni Abdi-Bahn; Directed by Dalia Ashurina.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“That’s what life is all about - peace.”

One Iranian man is no match for three tall Persian women. That becomes clear long before the end of Act One in this world premiere production of a play by Awni Abdi-Bahn. Her three women, Grandmother Mamani played by Lanna Joffrey, mother, Nasrin, played by Niousha Noor, daughter, Golnar, played by the author, Awni Abdi-Bahri, represent the immigrant women who prosper in America as they try to either maintain, or escape, their Iranian heritage. Nasrin cares for her mother and tries to maintain a relationship with her very Americanized daughter. Caught between two cultures she does what she can to keep her existing family comfortable with each other. It is a formidable task. Nasrin wants Golnar to marry and have a family of her own, but the young woman is highly independent and only wants what she wants.



Awni Abdi-Bahri, Afsheen Misaghi, Lanna Joffrey, Niousha Noor; Photo: Maggie Hall

Mamani and Nasrin want Golnar to marry Shayan, the son of a friend, but she is less than interested in the man she’s known since childhood. He is more convincable. Shayan is played by Afsheen Misaghi, who is handsome, charming and capable of wooing her with polite sincerity. Though no genuine interest is displayed by either of them initially when passion overtakes them the play’s humor becomes raucous and dangerous. This is a funny play.

Niousha Noor is lovely as Nasrin, almost too young to be believed as a mother of a twenty-something girl. She manifests motherhood without any difficulty and her visual youth only emphasizes the closeness of the estranged mother and daughter. Unlike one another, they still are a pair who cannot exist without one another. Noor dances, acts and moves under the

influence of a special mushroom tea in just the right ways. She is a special actress who understands how the physical aspects of a character can say as much, or more, than the words on the page.

Awni Abdi-Bahri plays Golnar as an acerbic woman afraid to express her own feelings publicly. As the author she knows what her character needs to convey, and she handles it beautifully. Cool, or inspired by the tea, her Golnar is very special.

Grandma Mamani is that rare stage character who can go as deep into the satirical and humorous as the actress wishes. Lanna Joffrey imbues her with as many nuances as any one actress could possibly incorporate into a performance without creating an unreal human being.



Niousha Noor, Awni Abdi-Bahri;
Photo: Maggie Hall

Joffrey is a master of the possibilities. Her performance is as memorable as this new play itself.

As good as all three women are, Afsheen Misaghi brings a special quality to Shayan. Always just an arm away from the women, he presents an unusual vision of closeness. This is clearly written into his character and he plays it brilliantly. His somewhat sordid love scene is hilarious and is an instant highlight of the play.

Director Dalia Ashurina has given the show a wonderful reality as she moves her actors around a crowded stage. Even her quiet moments are imbued with activity and her frantic



Niousha Noor, Lanna Joffrey; Photo: Maggie Hall

moments smack of reality played for laughs; it is a miracle that the actors don't break up and laugh at themselves and their characters going on.

A beautiful set has been designed by Dmid Akbari. A day-bed hides a piano and a counter hides a kitchen that seems functional. Lighting Designer Erika Johnson has some difficult

transitions to create and most of them work perfectly. Her romantic moments have visual clarity and her familial sequences are lit for that special set of relationships to overcome the setting which could easily distract the audience. The costumes designed by Andrea Herrera are ideal for the characters, particularly in the final scenes of the play .The author has set most of the show in Nasrin’s living room during a memorial for her late husband. Sound designer Bryn Scharenberg has created the memorial off-stage to perfection.

This world premiere production of Abdi-Bahn’s play should be the beginning of a long life for this fine script, one I expect to read about for a long time to come. There are no wasted moments, no scenes to cut, no relationships that cannot be understood and appreciated.



Awni Abdi-Bahri, Afsheen Misaghi; Photo: Maggie Hall

It is late in the season for something this special and the run is long enough for many people to see what can be developed by a company like Shakespeare and Company when they set their minds to offer a creative author the opportunity to work on an idea until it’s absolutely right. I suggest you see it while you can. Don’t wait for the movie.

+ 09/08/2024 +

Three Tall Persian Women plays at the Elayne P. Bernstein Theatre on the Shakespeare & Co. property at 70 Kemble Street, Lenox, Massachusetts through October 13. For information and tickets go to Shakespeare.org or call 413-637-3353.