

#CHARLOTTESVILLE

by Priyanka Shetty

THE SCOTSMAN

2025 FRINGE FIRST AWARD

FOR OUTSTANDING NEW WRITING



FASCINATING, VIVID, SHARP. TOLD
WITH INTELLIGENCE AND FEELING.



BEST THEATRE TO SEE
SLICK, DEFT, COMPELLING



The
Guardian

An URGENT show about the
rise of the Alt-Right

VOGUE

STANDOUT ACT FROM THE
2025 EDINBURGH FRINGE





“ Priyanka Shetty snaps from voice to voice to create a rich vision of the social fabric torn by the 2017 Unite the Right rally attack in Virginia.

In a polished and confident performance, directed by Yury Urnov, Shetty creates a rich social collage...

The tapestry of perspectives makes #Charlottesville not just an obvious condemnation of loathsome beliefs, but a richer vision of how such disruption tears at the social fabric.

Going a step further, the Indian-born Shetty weaves in her own experience of discrimination... isolated incidents or part of a racist continuum that stretches from small acts of exclusion to the murderous ideology of fascism?

16-page Festival pullout inside

Play Trump doesn't want you to see!

+ My Festival: Kirsty Law's songs & stories
+ BITCH That joke isn't funny anymore

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
WWW.SCOTSMAN.COM



THE SCOTSMAN

Ambulance service in total breakdown, says surgeon

◆ Son offered video consultation after severe fall instead of call-out

EXCLUSIVE

Martyn McLaughlin
Investigations Correspondent

A surgeon whose son was left with two fractured shoulders when he collapsed on the street following a seizure has condemned the "total breakdown" of one of Scotland's frontline emergency services after it offered a remote consultation instead of taking him to hospital by ambulance.

Martin Logan's son, Gregor, both of his shoulders when he fell following a seizure in Aberdeen last month, prompting a passer-by to call 999 for an ambulance.

But staff at the Scottish Ambulance Service's control centre advised that, instead of dispatching a vehicle, it wanted to undertake a fur-

ther assessment by telephone or video – a decision that Mr Logan described as "appalling" for which the service was no longer fit for purpose. Instead, the father and son were driven by Police Scotland officers to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, where Gregor, 23, underwent emergency surgery.

The Scottish Conservatives described the incident as "deeply distressing" and said it should never have reached the point where Scotland's already "overwhelmed" police force were stepping in the place of paramedics.

In the wake of the incident in June, Mr Logan, a consultant orthopaedic surgeon, made a formal complaint to the SAS.

The service has told him that, based on the information provided during the call, there were no immediate

Continued on page 6



Wednesday 20 August 2015 www.scotsman.com

These disunited states offer a rich source of material

FRINGE

◆ Two shows encompass personal experiences that get under the skin of a country which is mired in tension

THEATRE

#CHARLOTTESVILLE – The Play That Trump Does Not Want You To See! Pleasance Courtyard/Venue 23 until 25 August **★★★★**

Ohio Assembly Royal Opera House and 26 August **★★★★**

With the US thrown into turmoil by Donald Trump's second presidency, it's fascinating to see American drama and aggressive certainty play out across the Edinburgh Fringe, and nowhere more so than in the two US-based, unmissable solo shows "Charlottesville... which is produced by Richard and Richard Jordan in association with the Pleasance.

"The Play That Trump Does Not Want You To See!" Sherry's show is a powerful, direct and honest look at the political climate of the US, and the profound crisis the US faces, and the impact of the election. The experiences that shape them include Sherry's own family history, inherited from his preacher father, and the premature birth of their son, when the couple's life hangs in the balance.

None of this, though, ever seems to lack the magnificent, raw strength



In what they call "an acoustic grief concert" – a one-hour cycle of songs punctuated by narrative – the two performers take the audience on a journey from childhood journeys from childhood shaped by religious faith (Sherry's Jewish) to a Sherry's own honest admission that by soul and blues – yet always succeeds in fitting it into the Christian sect through a youthful process of doubt, reflection and acceptance.

The result is a riveting tale of personal history and feeling, that cuts to the heart of the gathering racism and uncertainty that is helping to reshape America. And Sherry's piano stage is a testimony to her own Christian sect through a long, youthful process of doubt, reflection and acceptance.

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None of this, though, ever seems to lack the magnificent, raw strength

and laments to heart-rending rebel yell of rage and grief; it is a show where music comes from the very depths of the soul.

Charlottesville, above, and Ohio, left, speak about the state of America

The Monkeypox Gospel University Chapel/Venue 230 until 24 August **★★★★**

There's a lot going on in Nigeria Mputu's debut stage show "The Monkeypox Gospel" – and so there should be, given the range of the subjects he tackles, including the science of pandemics, the ethics of vaccination, and the impact

of the monkeypox virus on the community of the Sherrers. The show is a mix of music, dance, spoken word, and projections, all of which are used to tell a powerful story of getting Alzheimer's.

Alzheimer's is a disease that follows its mother at the age of 55, memory loss, and a deterioration of the illness and its effects.

The show takes time to heat up, but as with a frog's life, there's no escaping the message at the heart when Alzheimer's kicks in, cannot be stopped, and cannot be helped. What can is the right to have the same rights as a manatees, they ask?

The overall shape of the piece means the final

Edinburgh Festivals Guide
Wednesday, August 20, 2015

THE SCOTSMAN

the festival



Inside: The world's most comprehensive Edinburgh festivals coverage, with reviews, interviews & more every day

An orchestra unleashed makes for a compelling, thrilling event

EIF

Aurora Orchestra: Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony Usher Hall **★★★★**



Picture: Jennie Caldwel

What difference does playing a lengthy, complex symphony make? The answer was laid bare in a compelling performance of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony by the British orchestra that has made a thing out of distilling the prima donnas of music into page-turning, Aurora Orchestra's Fifth Symphony Usher Hall **★★★★**

When the players lock eye contact with each other, it is to be party to the music's most intimate moments. And the healthy freedom manifested itself in a delivery that was as supple as it was hard-hitting.

It was hard-hitting, too. Colton established a chilling atmosphere with the jagged opening chords of the Scherzo, before a sumptuous Largo, defined by the most magical playing of the strings and the sonorities. The Finale made its ultimate point brutally. Before the curtain fell, Aurora's gaveling bashing

on the strings

of each of the cellos, the strings of violins and harp – the latter's sonorities twisted by judicious use of feedback – was a rousing, energetic piece.

It was a performance art,

in which a traditionally instrumental and vocal ensemble became a circling, front-sounding folk dance. Ni Bhriain was equally masterful on the bows of the Norwegian Hardanger fiddle for a re-imagination of the traditional Eigh's Whistle.

Their closing Wiggle

was a tall order for young musicians to pull off in a festival audience at a morning concert, but the eight voices plus a similarly ingeous accompaniment proved to be over powerfully present, however deliverer of startling sound: some two thousand strong.

The music was a welcome mix to a little stage of the festival, for although we did reach back into romance and classics.

The piece, however, was

Kurt Weill.

Brahms's Liebeslieder

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JOYCE MCMILLAN

THEATRE

The Ego 200 Pavilion (Venue 210) 24 August **★★★★**

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#CHARLOTTESVILLE

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2025



“*Shetty's powerful stage presence is a living reminder both of the profound crisis the United States faces, and of its enduring capacity to offer new Americans from across the world the chance to find, and raise, their own voices.*

With the United States thrown into turmoil, it's fascinating to see American dramas of doubt, division, and aggressive certainty, and nowhere more so than Priyanka Shetty's impassioned solo show #CHARLOTTESVILLE.

A powerful docudrama about the events of 2017 in the city of Charlottesville, home of the University of Virginia, which Shetty witnessed as a young theatre student of Indian origin. Shetty chronicles all this in vivid narrative style, with sharp and telling use of projected video images.

The result is a riveting tale, told with intelligence and feeling, that cuts to the heart of the lingering racism and overt white supremacism that is helping to reshape American politics.

- Joyce McMillan, **THE SCOTSMAN**

10 Standout Acts From This Year's Edinburgh Fringe Festival

BY CHRISTOPHER BARNARD

August 19, 2025



“With some 3,000 artists putting up acts that range from fully produced new musicals to stripped-down stand-up, it is impossible to see everything. The prevailing mood is one of discovery, as Fringe-goers hope to glimpse the next Waller-Bridge in the medieval warrens of repurposed rooms and assembly halls scattered across the city. Though the Fringe tends toward the cheeky and outlandish, there are spots of gravity. Priyanka Shetty’s [#Charlottesville](#) is a multimedia examination of the violent [2017 protests in Virginia](#). An MFA student at UVA at the time, Shetty has created a piece that draws heavily on the work of Anna Deavere Smith, whose documentary theater has covered events like the 1992 Los Angeles riots. With [#Charlottesville](#), Shetty reveals, with the distance of eight years, that the hate and violence of that day were not a tear in our social fabric but a feature.”

 Photo: Rebecca Need-Menear

The best theatre shows to see at Edinburgh Fringe and EIF 2025

These are the shows we're looking forward to the most at the 2025 Edinburgh International Festival and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe

14. #CHARLOTTESVILLE

Drama

30 Jul-24 Aug 2025

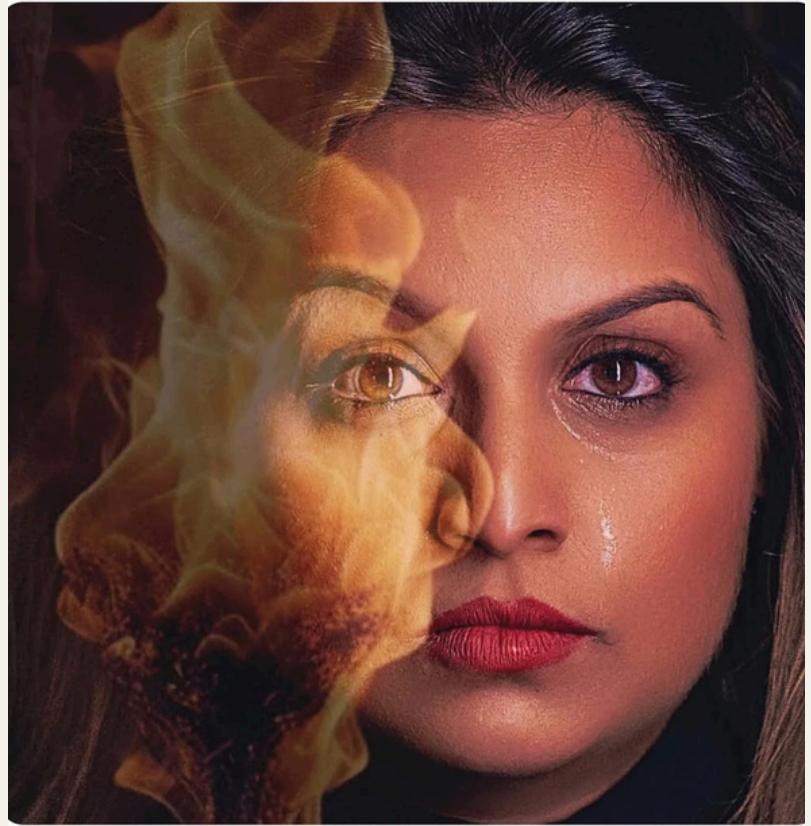


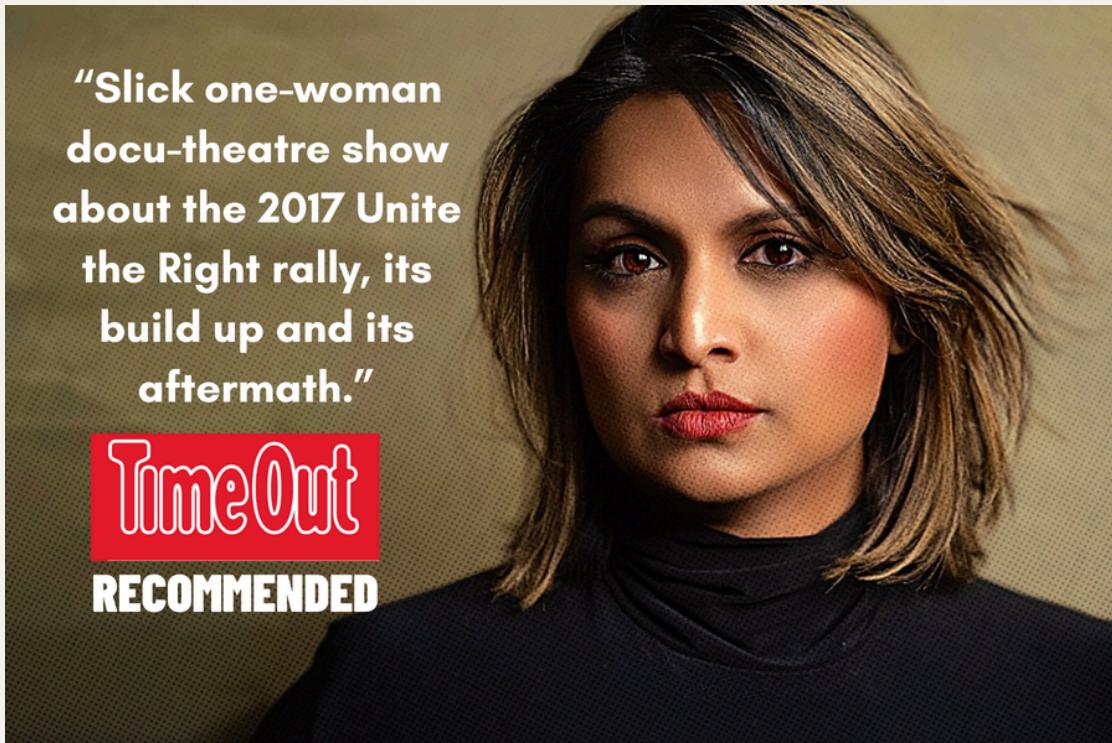
 Photo: Teresa Castracane

“US-educated Indian performer Priyanka Shetty’s solo show is a promising and topical docu-drama about the infamous Unite the Right white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 11th and 12th 2017. Having moved to Charlottesville to study acting at the University of Virginia shortly beforehand, Shetty was horrified at events and constructed the play verbatim from interviews, court documents and news reports.”

#CHARLOTTESVILLE

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2025



"Slick one-woman docu-theatre show about the 2017 Unite the Right rally, its build up and its aftermath."

TimeOut

RECOMMENDED

“Deft, informative, and compelling.

Quoting verbatim from the diverse, interesting cross section of Charlottesville locals, Shetty builds up an intriguing picture of the city as a superficially liberal town with unaddressed tensions.

Shetty does a neat job of being an earnest presenter who nonetheless makes the agitators seem amusingly preposterous at times. Most notably when she reads out the cringe beat poetry of rally co-organiser Jason Kessler.

Shetty channels Trump, quoting his bizarre, shameful response to Heyer's death verbatim. We all remember the 'very fine people on both sides' stuff, but the unnerving thing is how mad Trump sounds, rambling on about a vineyard he owns when he's meant to be reassuring the nation.

- Andrzej Lukowski, **TIMEOUT**



“A masterclass in
engaging political
writing.”  Festmag

“**A PASSIONATE AND STIRRING DOCUDRAMA**

Shetty guides the audience through the tumultuous experience, easily moving between different characters and viewpoints.

Priyanka Shetty's one-woman performance is a masterclass... acutely paralleling the violent clashes with her own struggles to be accepted.

The play retains a sense of anticipation, culminating in a moving speech about the necessity of staying vigilant in the face of imposing oppressors.

Shetty's performance is an arresting example of using art to showcase political unrest, and #Charlottesville ensures that such events are never forgotten.

- Jemima Hawkins, **FESTMAG**

“Solidly crafted documentary play about the 2017 Unite the Right rally... Well constructed and lucid.”

THE STAGE



“

AN IMPRESSIVE UNDERTAKING.

Shetty presents us with a collage of voices of Charlottesville residents as well as with news reports about the incident, in which she also features. It's an impressive undertaking.

Shetty documents the role various far-right figures had in fuelling the flames, including Christopher Cantwell, who became known as the “Crying Nazi” after posting videos of himself sobbing. She outlines the tactics these people deploy online, how they cloak their racism in humour, and the rhetoric they use.

A pivotal incident in recent American politics, a harbinger of things to come... Shetty's play highlights the insidiousness of the far right in the US and why it is vital we pay attention.

- Natasha Tripney, **THE STAGE**

Theatre and Stage

Scotsman Fringe First awards: our final four winners of 2025 revealed



Final four winners of Fringe First Awards announced

As the Edinburgh Fringe reaches its closing weekend, we're delighted to announce four final winners of our Scotsman Fringe First awards. The Fringe Firsts were established in 1973 to encourage more people to premiere new theatre at the Edinburgh Fringe. Since then they have helped to launch countless stage and screen careers and are recognised across the world as the most important theatre award at the festival. The Fringe Firsts recognise outstanding new writing premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe. Shows are privately nominated by The Scotsman's team of critics, and winners are then decided on by a judging panel consisting of, this year, our chief theatre critic Joyce McMillan (as chair) plus writers Susan Mansfield, Mark Fisher, Jackie McGlone, Sally Stott, David Pollock, Fiona Shepherd and Fergus Morgan."



Priyanka Shetty honored with The Scotsman Fringe First Award for Outstanding New Writing



Priyanka Shetty with producer Richard Jordan marking his 19th Fringe First win

Theatre To See London

**Priyanka Shetty Wins
Scotsman Fringe First
Award for Riveting
Solo Show
#CHARLOTTESVILLE**



“Shetty is no stranger to the solo format, and with #CHARLOTTESVILLE, she further cements her place as one of the most vital and thought-provoking theatremakers of her generation. Born in India and now based in Philadelphia, Shetty’s work exists at the intersection of personal narrative, political urgency, and rigorous theatrical craft. Her plays interrogate systems of power, identity, and belonging often through the lens of her own lived experience as an immigrant woman of colour in America... As the Fringe draws to a close, Priyanka Shetty’s recognition with a Fringe First Award feels not only timely but entirely well-deserved. Her voice is one to watch not just in solo theatre, but in the broader landscape of contemporary performance.”



“

THERE IS ALWAYS DEPTH, VARIETY, AND CHARISMA.

Shetty's performance is a very authoritative one. She is empathetic, a conscientious student of ordinary Americans' voices, and she successfully collects and curates a complex body of narratives for us.

It is a little as if we are inhabiting some upside-down postcolonialism in which a visiting anthropologist from India is in Charlottesville trying to penetrate a particularly obscure and inaccessible culture. But when contextualisation comes, it comes from an unexpected source.

Shetty throws that long orange scarf around her neck and there is that stream of stern Hindi and for a few seconds Narendra Modi is being clearly written in the waters of all these voices. It is an electrifying appearance, in being authentically him and simultaneously, impossibly, blazing with an undisguised contempt for him. Class, nationality and race are now forgotten. The message is straightforwardly anti-authoritarian.

#CHARLOTTESVILLE

©THE EDINBURGH FRINGE

2025



“**#CHARLOTTESVILLE is a thought-provoking show and Shetty is an accomplished actor.**

Shetty has researched the alt-right groups involved in the events of 11/12 August in depth... She draws parallels between the increasing hard line racism in the US and the personal racism she encountered.

She does an excellent and very funny impression of the President, who notoriously first stated that ‘there were very fine people on both sides in Charlottesville’, although this scene brings some welcome light humour to the show, its content is of course frightening.

Heather Heyer’s mother describes in agonising detail her desperate attempts to find out what had happened to her daughter.

Very few people were paying attention before August 2017. Are we paying more attention now? Are we outraged, or are we complacent in the rise of fascism in the US and on our own doorsteps?

- Rosemary Kaye, [THE EDINBURGH REPORTER](#)

The Washington Post

Style

Arts & Entertainment

Power

Fashion

Of Interest

Still processing the turbulent past decade? So are these Fringe shows.



Priyanka Shetty in "#Charlottesville." (Cameron Whitman/Edinburgh Fringe)

"Philadelphia-based artist Priyanka Shetty performed #CHARLOTTESVILLE her docudrama about the 2017 Unite the Right rally in a low-ceilinged venue named for a bunker. The older patrons who packed her midday show were what Palestinian comedian Alaa Shehada would cheekily call "the Guardian crowd." The publication have #CHARLOTTESVILLE an enviable four stars, and the show, which debuted earlier this year at Washington D.C.'s Keegan Theatre became a festival favorite. In the style of Anna Deavere Smith, Shetty embodies a variety of interview subjects whose perspectives add up to a fuller picture. It's a fine line for an artist to write themselves into the history they're retelling, but Shetty treads it well, grounding herself into the context of events while not using them as an excuse to navel-gaze."



“*Shetty dismantles the myth of idyllic small-town America, revealing a community wrestling with hate that was never truly hidden.*

Her interviews and research peel back that civic façade, exposing the rot of prejudice and the structures that allow it to thrive.

In this riveting solo performance, Shetty embodies a gallery of far-right voices, often in their own words. The venom drips from their rhetoric, forcing us to confront the inhumanity behind these ideologies.

#Charlottesville doesn't allow us the comfort of distance; it presses the hate up to our faces, reminding us that the events of that weekend were not an aberration, but a catalyst.

The influence of that moment, and the emboldening it gave to extremist movements, continues to echo and Shetty makes sure we hear it loud and clear.

- Lee Hutchison, [THE NERD PARTY](#)

#CHARLOTTESVILLE

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2025

“Shetty’s confidence and versatility are impressive.”

North West End UK



“

The raw anger makes a lasting impression as she rightly rails against not only the shocking violence perpetrated by the far-right thugs at Charlottesville, but also at the everyday racism which she and other people of colour experience regularly.

Shetty spoke to more than 100 people including Heather Heyer’s mother, local citizens, a Conservative talk show host and counter-protesters. She plays many different roles during the course of the 70-minute performance, using the actual words they used in her verbatim interviews. Particularly memorable is Shetty’s portrayal of one of the counter-protesters describing her fear of being murdered by the white supremacists. There are some light touches, too, as she captures the mannerisms of the various characters.

Meticulously researched... a powerful production, directed by Yury Urnov, which lambasts the violent racism of the white supremacists, but also contends that what happened at Charlottesville was not an anomaly, but “the warning we ignored.”

- Tom Scott, **NORTH WESTEND UK**



“*Shetty tells the shocking story about the violence that took place with passion and factual evidence.*

An informative fast-paced exploration moving quickly between a wide range of characters and perspectives of people who were caught up in it.

Nothing upsets a certain breed of human more than someone who speaks out and isn't afraid to challenge the most appalling atrocities that people will do to each other.

Shetty has carried out hours of research speaking to Charlottesville citizens, visiting and getting first-hand information from far-right websites, collecting news reports and managing to obtain court transcripts with details of the prosecution of the white-supremacist conspirators.

These events need to be remembered and spoken about, especially with the fragile state we are currently facing politically across the world.

A truly outstanding performance which shocks and horrifies in equal measures.

#CHARLOTTESVILLE

©THE EDINBURGH FRINGE

2025



“ *From the moment the lights dimmed, Priyanka Shetty's #CHARLOTTESVILLE gripped the audience with an intensity that never faltered.*

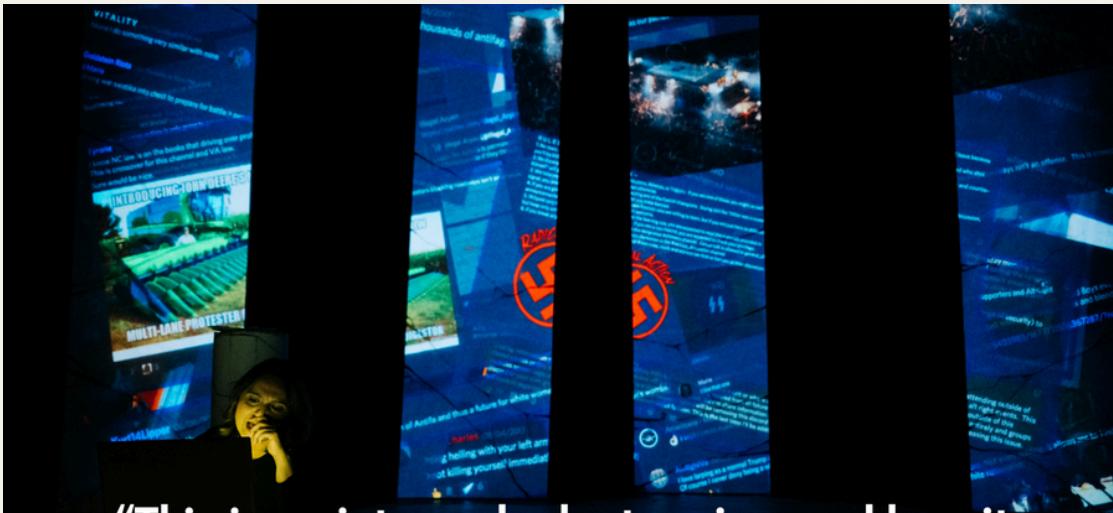
Shetty intertwines her own deeply personal experiences with meticulously researched testimony from those who lived through the events. The result is a layered narrative that moves between her student years, the courtroom, and the tense, chaotic streets of Charlottesville during that infamous weekend.

The staging is stark: one chair, an American flag, a few small props, and a projection screen. Yet Shetty's commanding performance fills the space entirely. She shifts effortlessly between multiple characters with clarity, precision, and moments of biting humour. Multimedia elements provide real footage, names, and charges of white supremacists, grounding the piece in chilling reality.

The production is SUPERB. The research is THOROUGH, the storytelling COMPELLING, and Shetty's acting OUTSTANDING.

70 minutes that fly by in what feels like moments. Worth every penny - theatre that challenges, informs, and moves in equal measure.

- Ian J Cole, A SINNERS REVIEW



"This is an intense look at racism and how it intersects with the hopes of the American dream."

★★★★
EdinburghGuide

“Shetty is a confident performer as she alternates between direct address, performance, filmed clips, voiceovers, and a simple set.

Channelling a range of characters including professors at her university, newsreaders, lawyers and witnesses from the court case that arose from the rally, and many lived-experience interviews of people from that time, this is an intense look at racism and how it intersects with the hopes of the American dream.

Shetty’s writing moves between courtroom, her studies and the in-between. In a place where there should have been growth for Shetty and her dream, instead there is a harsher reality.

The text shows the sheer amount of research that must have gone into the show: the deep dive into the situation of the time through court reports and interviews, as well as Shetty’s own experiences, meld together to caption a period of time that leaves us with a feeling of doom and sadness.

This is a piece of powerful writing that raises awareness of challenges that have not disappeared but instead have come to the fore.

#CHARLOTTESVILLE

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"Directed by Yury Urnov, Priyanka Shetty combines intelligent writing with an accomplished performance to provide a thought-provoking play."

FringeReview
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED SHOW

“*The personal is political*” is more than an empty slogan when you’re an immigrant of colour in the USA. Priyanka Shetty came to study acting at the University of Virginia in the liberal town of Charlottesville. She didn’t find it an easy place to live – and then came August 2017 and Charlottesville imploded.

Shetty skilfully builds up the cumulative weight of evidence of what was a dangerous threat to the very fabric of our communities, a wake-up call long before the January 6th insurrection.

It is an assured performance with Shetty nimbly portraying one character after another with only subtle changes of voice or posture. Her interview with the mother of Heather Heyer is profoundly moving.

As the performance unfolds, the similarities of alt-right tactics of plausible deniability and ‘being just a joke’ are shown as being frighteningly close to everyday racism.

The pervasive consequences of letting everyday racism go unchecked and turning a blind eye to the rise of the alt-right are laid bare to chilling effect. The verbatim script is skilfully put together and delivered. Altogether it is a devastating piece of theatre.

- Clare Simpson, [FRINGE REVIEW](#)

#CHARLOTTESVILLE

@THE EDINBURGH FRINGE

2025



“

An immensely powerful and extremely important play.

Priyanka Shetty has created this astounding play from interviews with Charlottesville citizens and students, as well as from her own experiences at that fateful time.

Shetty moved from India to Charlottesville, with hope in her heart and an expectation of living the American dream. But when things go wrong, she is asked not to rock the boat but instead to develop a sense of humour... just a small part of a wider problem.

Priyanka brings marvellous characterisations to the inhabitants of the town that became a hashtag.

A must-see; if, like me, you knew nothing of this event, this show will plug a vital gap in your education.

- THE REAL CHRISPARKLE

#CHARLOTTESVILLE

@THE EDINBURGH FRINGE

2025



"In the style of Anna Deavere Smith, Shetty embodies a variety of interview subjects whose perspectives add up to a fuller picture. It's a fine line for an artist to write themselves into the history they're retelling, but Shetty treads it well, grounding herself into the context of events while not using them as an excuse to navel-gaze."

Naveen Kumar, [THE WASHINGTON POST](#)



"This is a fascinating and informative show with just one performer but Priyanka Shetty's delivery is varied and gripping. Theatre Vibe, the site that doesn't do stars awards five Fringe Festival stars (FFS) to #Charlottesville."



Lizzie Loveridge, [THEATRE VIBE](#)

"Shetty delivers a documentary-style play based on her experience of being a drama student at University of Virginia when the riots happened. Strong ideas, bound together with thorough research."

Tim Bano, [FINANCIAL TIMES](#)



"Priyanka Shetty does some serious heavy-lifting of the text, playing all of the characters and doing some remarkable physical and vocal work to bring each of them to life. The highlight was Shetty's portrayal of Heyer's mother and the words she shared with reporters shortly after the protest and her daughter's death: "If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention."

Grace Wallis, [A YOUNGISH PERSPECTIVE](#)

#CHARLOTTESVILLE

ACTORS THEATRE OF LOUISVILLE - LOUISVILLE, KY

2025



"Priyanka Shetty's
#CHARLOTTESVILLE
addresses harsh realities
with beautifully honest and
heartbreaking execution."

Stagedoor
Louisville

“*An electrifying performance... Shetty's descriptions of the violent events that occurred are raw and horrific.*

Under Yury Urnov's skillful direction, exposition of the “Unite the Right” marches loom with deep woe... haunting and powerful.

Shetty skillfully describes the likes of Richard Spencer and Jason Kessler with an unflinching matter of fact attitude. Her Chicago-style number about “Crying Nazi” Christopher Cantwell is darkly funny yet brutal.

#CHARLOTTESVILLE is a multi-media deep dive into Alt-Right social media influencers behind those events. The play contains powerful images and descriptions of hate rhetoric.

Biographical and fact based, she unravels her personal challenges with casting, misogyny and prejudice that inform Shetty's motivation to tell real stories of the events in Charlottesville. She is tirelessly framing a picture of a very difficult time.

As reactions were processed in the wake of this riveting work, the ever growing desire for peace grew strong with a prominent call for change.

- Kate Barry, STAGEDOOR LOUISVILLE



Spotlight



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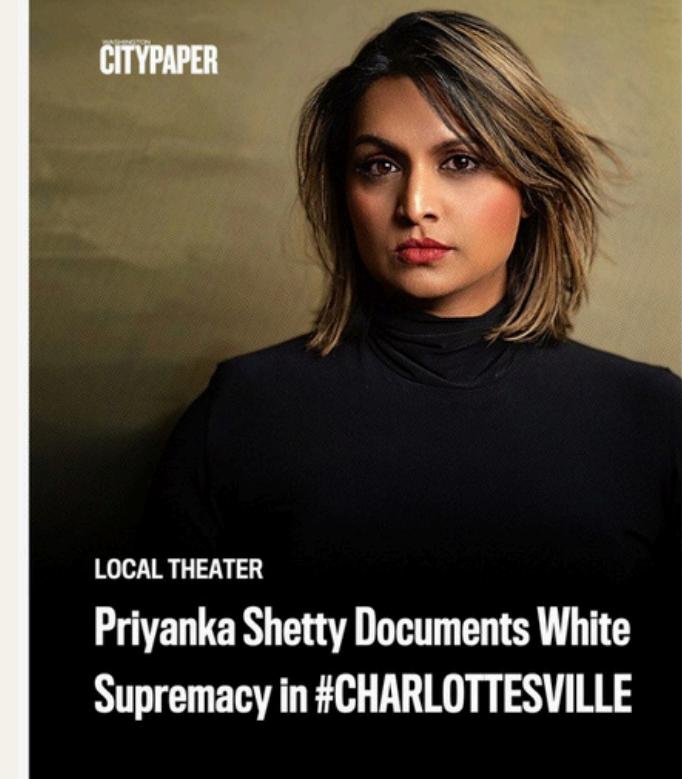
Virginia

'It's very much relevant today': the one-woman show on Charlottesville

Priyanka Shetty combines personal and political in **#Charlottesville**, a play that explores the deadly 2017 white supremacist rally

David Smith in Washington

Sun 30 Mar 2025 08.00 EDT



LOCAL THEATER

Priyanka Shetty Documents White Supremacy in **#CHARLOTTESVILLE**

METROWEEKLY

Spotlight



Shetty

Truth Detector

Priyanka Shetty re-frames an infamous historical event to meet the present moment in her powerful play **#Charlottesville**. By André Hereford

PRIYANKA SHETTY'S INCISIVE SOLO play **#Charlottesville** starts by asking, "Priyanka, where were you on August 11 and 12, 2017?"

Those days will live in infamy, not only for the brigade of torch-carrying, Dockers-wearing dickheads marching through the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, but for the tragic death of Heather Heyer, killed by a self-avowed white supremacist who drove his car into a crowd of counter-protesters.

The firestorm set off by the protests and counter-protests, and the ensuing state of emergency and vehicular mass attack, was only further inflamed by then-President Trump's tone-deaf, at best, comments in response.

On August 11 and 12, Shetty was a grad student, fresh from India, studying acting at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. In the years since, and following the successful debut of her solo play *The Elephant in the Room*, she constructed *#Charlottesville* verbatim from interviews with over a hundred community members, many whom she knew, as well as court transcripts and news reports.

The play is currently enjoying its world-pre-

KEEGAN THEATRE, WASHINGTON DC 2025



“ **METHODICAL, STIRRING, CHILLING...**

Political relevance is essential to Priyanka Shetty's #CHARLOTTESVILLE, a methodical, stirring solo play recalling the deadly 2017 Unite the Right rally in the college town.

Directed by Yury Urnov, Shetty channels people who witnessed, or were affected by, the 2017 events: most movingly, the desolate mother of Heather Heyer, who died when an avowed neo-Nazi rammed his car through a crowd.

Interwoven with Shetty's own experiences as a University of Virginia graduate student, and unfurling on Matthew J. Keenan's cracked-marble-like set, which evokes national ideals, #CHARLOTTESVILLE asks whether the Unite the Right was an aberration or a strand in long-term American bigotry.

Chillingly summons alt-right voices... A reminder that theater can offer bracing ideas that help us navigate reality.

- Celia Wren, [THE WASHINGTON POST](#)



“

MORE THAN A THEATRICAL PRODUCTION - IT'S AN EMOTIONAL RECKONING

Shetty crafts a riveting one-woman show in which she embodies more than a dozen distinct characters, each with their own cadence, emotional rhythms, and perspective on the tragedy.

What makes #CHARLOTTESVILLE particularly powerful isn't just Shetty's remarkable performance, it's the innovative structure. The result is a nuanced and multifaceted narrative that exposes not only the horror of the violence but also the lasting scars it left behind.

The play doesn't shy away from depicting the insidious forces of white supremacy, nor does it offer easy answers. Instead, it presents a raw and unflinching meditation on the fragility of civic unity and the dangers of collective complacency in the face of hate.

A bold, affecting, and deeply necessary piece of theater that demands to be seen.

- Barbara Papendorp, STAGE AND CINEMA

KEEGAN THEATRE, WASHINGTON DC 2025



“THRUSTS TELEVISION TRAGEDY INTO REALITY.

Shetty's writing matches her performance as smart, distinct, and impactful.

#CHARLOTTESVILLE is a seventy-minute realization taught through the lens of an immigrant and shaped by a court case that came out in favour of democracy this time. As a performer, Shetty's ability to expose her own experiences through line to her intended message is the truth of this play.

This doc-play's use of personal tie-ins to an event that feels so abstract, thrusts television tragedy into reality... unquestionably answers why this piece is necessary right now.

The piece is at its strongest when Shetty directly addresses the audience at its conclusion, spurring her call to action.

This play doesn't just address a rally, it addresses the state of the nation.



“

SEARING, URGENT, AND ENTERTAINING.

Priyanka Shetty's innovative, avant-garde solo performance has a meaningful and moving warning to convey. Inhabiting over a dozen characters, this performance artist makes an Anna Deavere Smith star turn as an actor-writer.

The most entertaining scene was the most absurd - the Cabaret-style takedown tribute to the "Crying Nazi" Christopher Cantwell, alt-right radio host and provocateur at the Charlottesville rally. Shetty's mocking is sharp and witty and offers the relief and power of laughter and cheers.

The emotional center of the play is with Shetty's portrayal of Heather Heyer's mother, Susan Bro. Here we witness not just a powerful actor-writer at work but the personal cost of hate, senseless violence, and illiberalism. Her loss is our loss. It's searing.

- Caroline Bock, **DC THEATER ARTS**

KEEGAN THEATRE, WASHINGTON DC 2025



“

MASTERFUL.

Shetty's command of gesture is masterful, making each of her subjects physically distinct.

*The documentary-style play has Shetty playing all the characters and follows three main plot threads: the chronology of the Unite the Right rally as laid out in the 2021 case *Sines v. Kessler*, interspersed with excerpts of her interviews with Charlottesville residents and her own experiences as a student.*

In a few satirical moments, Shetty breaks from both documentary and autobiographical theater - notably a song and dance routine with music by Heather Mease and choreography by Megan Mazarick.

Shetty's play is urgent. #CHARLOTTESVILLE is artfully conceived and performed, and aptly meets the moment.

- Ian Thal, [WASHINGTON CITY PAPER](#)



“GALVANIZING...

Shetty's original writing of this play based on transcripts and interviews is masterful and tautly immersive for the audience.

The director at the helm here, Yury Urnov, has wisely created a pragmatically cohesive and cathartic show. Urnov has directed Shetty to be ironic, cutting, and droll in her psychological fighting defences against such a harsh and shallow infrastructure of hate, class, and racial divisions resulting in an authentically rounded performance.

*In this play, Shetty must meet the challenge of playing a large assortment of characters (akin to Lily Tomlin in *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* and Anna Deavere Smith in *Fires in the Mirror*) and she exceeds expectations. Fluid character transitions courtesy of the mesmerizing dramatic skills of Priyanka Shetty who does so with absorbing skill and aplomb. She amazes with her agility and dynamic stage presence.*

A jolting and beautifully realized production.

- David Friscic, **BROADWAY WORLD DC**



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Top Rated Plays List - The Highest Rated Shows In DC

The "Theatre In DC Top Rated Plays List" is a list of the top rated plays now running in the DC area based on what the current reviews are saying. To see the Washington DC Theatre Reviews of all the play reviews go to the [Theatre In DC Review Round-Up](#).

In The Heights

• Signature Theatre

Lights up on Washington Heights, NYC where the streets are full of music, and everybody's got a dream. With the neighborhood on the brink of gentrification, and a life-changing winning lottery ticket somewhere in their midst, the vibrant inhabitants share hope, loss and love as they plan their futures while cherishing their home.



[Washington Post](#)- Highly Recommended

[DC Theater Arts](#)- Highly Recommended

[Metro Weekly](#)- Highly Recommended

[Talkin Broadway](#)- Highly Recommended

[City Paper](#)- Recommended

[Stage and Cinema](#)- Highly Recommended

[MD Theatre Guide](#)- Highly Recommended

[Theatre Bloom](#)- Highly Recommended

#Charlottesville

• Keegan Theatre

A tour-de-force performance about the power of witnessing, constructed from interviews with residents of Charlottesville impacted by events surrounding 2017's "Unite the Right" rally and counter-protests. Award-winning performance artist Priyanka Shetty, was away that August and could only decipher the trauma through Twitter. She returns to interview, assessing the personal toll, while following up from recent trials of the co-conspirators.



[Washington Post](#)- Recommended

[DC Theater Arts](#)- Recommended

[City Paper](#)- Highly Recommended

[Stage and Cinema](#)- Highly Recommended

[BroadwayWorld](#)- Highly Recommended

Sister Act

• Ford's Theatre

Sister Act is a riotous musical comedy smash based on the hit 1992 film that has audiences jumping to their feet! To escape the mob, a nightclub singer hides in a convent. While there, she helps her new sisters to discover their powerful voices while she finds her own. This uplifting, Tony-nominated musical features original music by Alan Menken (Newsies, Beauty and the Beast, Little Shop of Horrors). It is directed and choreographed by Jeff Calhoun (Broadway: Newsies, Ford's: Violet, The Civil War, Freedom's Song, Shenandoah).



[Washington Post](#)- Somewhat Recommended

[DC Theater Arts](#)- Highly Recommended

[Metro Weekly](#)- Recommended

[Talkin Broadway](#)- Highly Recommended

[Stage and Cinema](#)- Recommended

To see Washington DC Theatre Reviews of all plays go to the [Theatre In DC Review Round-Up](#).

#CHARLOTTESVILLE IS...



HELEN HAYES AWARDS[©]
RECOMMENDED



The New York Times

home. Among the titles that caught my eye is Priyanka Shetty's docu-theater solo "#Charlottesville," about the events that roiled the Virginia city in August 2017. Borrowing from Anna Deavere Smith, Shetty built her text from interviews. Other intriguing



ONE-WOMAN SHOW

Priyanka Shetty to perform 7 roles in '#CHARLOTTESVILLE'

Michael Grossberg Special to Columbus Dispatch | USA TODAY NETWORK

When playwright-actor Priyanka Shetty moved from Columbus to Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2016, she didn't expect to write "#CHARLOTTESVILLE." • Abbey Theater of Dublin will present the Ohio premiere in a streaming production that will open Friday. • "My play is specific to Charlottesville, but we're talking about America," Shetty said.

At a glance

Abbey Theater of Dublin will present "#CHARLOTTESVILLE" at 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and on demand Feb. 10. Tickets are \$10. Call 614-410-4550 or visit dublinabbeyusa.gov/abbey-theater.

Born in India, Shetty moved to Columbus in 2015 to pursue an acting and theater career. After she took one of his CATCO acting classes, Bishara became Shetty's coach and mentor. He directed her in CATCO Is Kids' "The Kabuki Sleeping Beauty" and in the Theatre Company's "Sticks and Stones" and Stage Right Theatrics' "Ferguson." He's been important in the development of my new works and my development as an artist in America," Shetty said.

"She's done a brilliant job creating a play that represents its title," Bishara said. "No town should be defined by a singular event; she makes Charlottesville feel like a community of many different people who transcend stereotypes."

Director Joe Bishara, theater super-

“ Among the titles that caught my eye is Priyanka Shetty's docu-theater solo #Charlottesville, about the events that roiled Virginia city in August 2017. Borrowing from Anna Deavere Smith, Shetty built her text from interviews.

- Elisabeth Vincentelli

THE NEW YORK TIMES

“ Shetty physically and vocally transforms convincingly from character to character. The play dramatically conveys the chaos, uncertainty, and escalating violence of the two days of protest.

- Margaret Quamme

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

“ **STUNNING, UNFLINCHING, POIGNANT** ★★★★★

Priyanka Shetty doesn't flinch in her dynamic production of #Charlottesville. In 75 minutes, she muscles through the lead up, clash, and fallout of a day most Americans would rather forget. Her research is comprehensive. Her acting is poignant. Her stamina is stunning.

Stunning, unflinching reflection on 2017 'Unite the Right' rally, counter-protests, and local and national fallout, devised from interviews with multiple witnesses.

Priyanka does a spot-on characterization of multiple witnesses, sensitively respecting their perspectives while also upholding the truth of what happened. What results is a salve that deserves recognition beyond DC.

- Darrel Burnett II, [DC THEATER ARTS](#)

“ **A DURABLE MAINSTAY OF THE THEATRICAL CANON**

This powerful and intelligently written one-person show will continue to inform and remind the world of the dangers of white supremacy, antisemitism, and fascism... this very ambitious production should prove to be a durable mainstay of the theatrical canon.

*Priyanka Shetty has a very challenging job and, indeed, she delivers a splendid showcase of nuanced characterizations of these very real people so vividly, especially the portrayal of a grieving mother whose daughter was killed and a very apt portrayal of then President Trump's comments on these traumatic and horrendous events. Charlottesville takes on the persona of almost being a character in the play, somewhat akin to *The Laramie Project*. Emotions and political tensions run high throughout the play as the material certainly evokes strong reactions.*

-David Friscic, [BROADWAYWORLD DC](#)



Plays shed light on local violence, cultural divide

BY JANE DUNLAP SATHE
jsathe@dailyprogress.com | (434) 978-7249

The first play Tuesday's audience will see dives into residents' experiences when their small city was thrust into a harsh international spotlight by race-related violence. The second explores the challenges international students face while navigating complicated and often unspoken rules in a new culture.

Priyanka Shetty, the playwright behind both works, and her multicultural, multigenerational cast will begin the evening at Live Arts with the first public performance of "#charlottesville," her new play about the events of Aug. 11 and 12, 2017.

After a break, Shetty will perform "The Elephant in the Room," her one-woman show about her experiences making the transition from her upbringing in India to her studies and art in the United States. Community conversation time will follow.

The program also will be presented at 2 p.m. April 27 and 7 p.m. April 28 at the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center.

Releasing art from real-life experiences is never an easy task, but Shetty hopes audience members will join her on a quest for empathy, healing and changing destructive patterns that keep people apart.

"We're not going to sugarcoat anything, because it's too important," said Shetty, who's winding up the final year of her master of fine arts degree program in acting in the University of



PHOTO BY MARTYN KYLE
Playwright Priyanka Shetty is completing her master of fine arts program in acting at the University of Virginia Department of Drama.

Virginia Department of Drama. "We really have to come together and see what we're up against."

For "#charlottesville," Shetty interviewed local residents about their experiences during the violence after the Unite the Right rally and its fatal consequences. She felt a strong sense of responsibility to her interview subjects and their stories.

"It's such sensitive subject matter you can't write about it without interviewing the actual people," she said.

For Shetty, who'd written her one-woman show just the semester before, immersing herself in transcribing the survivors' interviews for "#charlottesville" was a way to process the events of Aug. 11 and 12, 2017.

"#charlottesville" and "The Elephant in the Room"

» 7 p.m. Tuesday at Live Arts
» 2 p.m. April 27 at Jefferson School African American Heritage Center
» 7 p.m. April 28 at Jefferson School African American Heritage Center
» **Tickets:** Pay what you can
» **More info:** hashtagcville.com

ville" was intense. At one point, she interviewed nine people back to back in a single day. Their experiences were gripping: grasping the pain they'd been through, and still live with, proved daunting — and sometimes haunting.

"Of course, it's not the same as their going through this traumatic thing," Shetty said. "I thought I was removed enough, but at the end of the day, I'm still human. It really did get to me."

"Those days were really hard, but I couldn't break down. I had to be strong and empathetic working with them."

Her cast of seven includes black and white actors, university and community members, Jews and Christians, LGBTQ and straight. Together, they're part of a team effort to take a look at painful events and heartening resilience through the lens of a community still coming to terms with what happened. Time brings perspective, and when people feel ready, the arts can help them make sense of what they've been through.

"I think that it's coming to a point where we can process it," Shetty said.

of Aug. 11-12. "We're in a position where we can talk about it."

"Elephant" brings out the issues through comedy and through drama — kind of an icebreaker for dealing with some heavy issues," Shetty said. "At the end of 'Elephant,' we are really talking about some serious things."

"#charlottesville" and "The Elephant in the Room" are the first two plays in a triptych Shetty has written to examine what being American means from different perspectives. Tuesday's performance will be the first time that two of the three plays have been performed on the same bill. Her third play, "The Wall," takes a closer look at immigration.

The production contains mature content and language.

Admission is on a pay-what-you-can basis; seating is on a first-come, first-served basis. For information, visit hashtagcville.com.

#CHARLOTTESVILLE

@59E59 THEATERS, NYC

2021

“

EARTH SHATTERING... RIVETING BLEND OF JOURNALISM AND THEATRE

First of all, credit must be given to Shetty for the absolutely masterful way in which she portrays each of the interviewees.

Watching Shetty transition from one to the other is not just a masterclass in acting; it's almost uncanny. Using mannerisms, body language, tone, volume, and speech patterns, each character emerges as powerfully distinct, and each of their experiences becomes intensely immediate.

#Charlottesville should be seen and discussed by everyone currently living in America. This is change-making theatre at its very best. Thanks to Shetty's forceful storytelling and spellbinding performance, it's a piece that should stick with viewers long after it's over.

-Erin Kahn, STAGEBUDDY

“

A FASCINATING STREET-LEVEL ORAL HISTORY...

During the play's most affecting section, Shetty plays the mother of Heather Heyer... The play does not neglect the lingering emotional and psychological effects on residents and how their view of their city (and perhaps country) has changed.

- John R. Ziegler and Leah Richards, THINKING THEATER NYC

“

EXACTLY THE KIND OF UNDERTAKING THEATER CAN AND SHOULD BE DOING

Shetty is skilled at doing the voices of the real-life characters she portrays, there are some chilling incidents effectively recounted. Shetty portrays, the mother of Heather Heyer, the woman who was killed when a white supremacist protester drove his car into a crowd of counter-protesters...This was the highlight of the piece – Bro's account of that day and of her grief is moving, and her observations striking. Exactly the kind of undertaking that theater can and should be doing. Priyanka Shetty deserves praise for taking it on.

- Jonathan Mandell, NEW YORK THEATER

AUDIENCE REVIEWS

“

A brilliant thought provoking play about the impact of macro and micro acts of racism. Really pleased I went to see this play. - Kirsty

This was an incredible show, thought provoking and horrific about what has happened in the USA and as Heather's mother said (the girl who died in Charlottesville) if you are not outraged, you are not paying attention. whoever we are, we must keep standing up and calling this rotten administration to account. Thank you, Priyanka and good luck. - Alison Matthews

“

Reminded me of the horror of the attack and journalist photos I saw in Sydney. Well crafted mix of media, well performed. Worth seeing. - Norman

An excellent and engaging watch. Thought provoking, disturbing and very cleverly told/acted. Would definitely recommend. - Gill Bonello

“

Intelligent and thought-awakening play about our time. The play combines the personal and societal perspectives in a brilliant way. Glad I was able to get a ticket-go see if you have the opportunity! - Karin Peterson

This was definitely a tour de force performance and it had me gripped from beginning to end. Informative about a period in time/recent history which should not be forgotten about. Resonates. - Sandra Waterfield

“

Well-structured play, which picks up a lot of different threads about the incident and keeps them all fairly well balanced. The performer was engaging. Excellent and restrained use of audio-visuals on the back wall, especially the bios of the alt-right leaders. - Alison Harper

Excellent. Very moving. A personal take on the events but also looking at the big picture. Well done! - Rosemarie Leyden

“

Brilliant, powerful and well researched show. Deserves a much bigger venue. 5 stars for me! - Amr

Powerful production. Raises awareness of a dreadful episode in contemporary US history. It will haunt me. - Irene Edgar

AUDIENCE REVIEWS

“

A play by Priyanka Shetty that dives deep into the events surrounding the hate crimes of 2017 and explores in a very innovative and entertaining way the landscape of Americana. I recommend this to anyone who appreciates good satirical theater. This work of art was really entertaining, but also thematically and stylistically challenging at the same time. I enjoyed the performance, which varied between multimedia video, keeping the flow interesting and surprising. Priyanka does an amazing job portraying various characters, including various levels of notoriety. She deserves all the accolades and recognition coming her way. - Vegas K. Jarrow

“

#CHARLOTTESVILLE is an excellent play. An Indian woman came to America and wrote a play that identified America for what it is. Her play is confirmation that even if you don't say it, you see it. Priyanka Shetty is a gift to the truth. Go see the play at Actors Theatre of Louisville - white, Muslim, Jewish this play is about truth. - Sadiqa Reynolds

I went to the theater to see #Charlottesville - The hate crime that was not an isolated event in the US and set the tone for the #NewRegime Highly recommended. Bravo Priyanka Shetty! - Malú Huacuja DT

“

Go see this performance. Priyanka Shetty wrote and stars solo, taking her audience on a riveting, full-circle journey through the events of Aug. 11 & 12, 2017 here in my hometown. Priyanka interviewed hundreds who were directly impacted, and the result is a stunning, multi-character exploration of the human cost of extremism, the fight for justice and healing, and the broader context of what we're living through right now. - Jack Steinberg

Priyanka Shetty's play #CHARLOTTESVILLE asks us not to shrink back when our civil rights are under attack... instead, we should be more energized to create work of resilience and resistance. Not only was the documentary theatre that Priyanka created brilliant and blistering and radiant, the encouraging words from the talkback afterwards is still resonating with me. Congratulations again to Priyanka Shetty, who is marching forward with this piece to inspire us to keep creating Art that matters, and Art that resists, and Art that won't be silenced. - Heather Helinsky

This play is so great, I can't stop raving about it and I hope it reaches a wide audience. So important! I love how well Priyanka illustrates her excitement about coming to the US, only to be plunged into the brutality and ugliness of our history and current disgusting prevalence of racism (and all of the other bad isms). Thank you for showing how the US continues to fail to live up to our stated ideals. She did such a good job of portraying the disillusionment you went through. Her emotions came through perfectly. So powerful! Well done, dear Priyanka! And so brave! - Wren Steel

GUESTBOOK

“

Watch out, Anna Deavere Smith here comes Priyanka Shetty! IT. WAS. PHENOMENAL. You are a stunning actor, and I count myself so lucky to have gotten to see this. The whole show was put together beautifully. Many, many more people need to see it! The whole piece was simply organic. I was particularly moved that you showed no slides of the actual event until the end. It had a greater impact because of all we had learned from the interviewees. BRAVA!!!!

- Deb Kinghorn, Professor Emerita, University of New Hampshire

“

I can't begin to tell you how impressed and moved I was by #Charlottesville. The entire production was absolutely first-rate. In particular, I loved the set and sound design, but it was your performance that carried the day. Brava!

- Kevin Glaccum, Artistic Director, Azuka Theatre

“

Powerfully told and performed; you brought back so many memories of that day. Especially resonant was how people who had no involvement on the ground, as it were, were pontificating with such assuredness about what happened on all the network news shows. Was surreal. Definitely an event that messes with your sense of "home identity." Again, heartfelt congratulations on your magnificent performance.

- Robert Wray, Playwright

“

Powerful and well performed! One-person shows have to be so hard to perform, but you moved from person to person seamlessly. It was really cool seeing you become all those people. I know #CHARLOTTESVILLE wasn't originally a one-person show, but it works when you do it! Congrats on a great performance!

- Jeremy Llorence, Playwright and Professor, Otterbein University

“

Your performance, your play, were both absolutely mesmerizing. I was sitting forward in my seat, intently watching and listening, all through the play. Thank you for creating such an important and meaningful piece of theater.

- Cory Skurdal, Playwright

GUESTBOOK

“

I really enjoyed the play today. Thank you so much Priyanka, that was fantastic and congratulations. Your truly awesome ability to inhabit the range of different humans affected by the tragedy in Charlottesville, I found entered my consciousness in a way that articles on the subject failed to do.

LaNitra M. Berger, Director - African American Studies George Mason University

“

#CHARLOTTESVILLE is engrossing and thought-provoking. This production was flawless in acting, character-work and presentation.

I'm not surprised it's getting 5 star reviews everywhere! Theatre like this reminds me how important it is to be an artist.

- Diana Varco, Solo Performer and Playwright

“

#CHARLOTTESVILLE is, more than theatre or performance. In Judaism we say that the world stands, like a plane, on at the least three things - on Deep Learning (Torah), on Service that is akin to active prayer (Avodah) and on acts of Loving kindness (G'milut Chesed). Your piece was all three.

In a time when so many of us are siloed this brought faculty together from different parts of the university. We had students, faculty and community from a very diverse spectrum of backgrounds and hyphenates - including Jewish, Black, Muslim, Indian, Queer, Christian, experience all of this. For that alone I thank you. And I also thank you for coming into the classroom, so that students could have a more personal connection to you and your work.

You spread the value of what you brought in a theatre school helping to make deep connections and discussions during and after. This supplements what students are learning in a real-life, and in understanding how racisms manifest, and the narratives can be challenged in the world we live in.

- David Chack, Professor, The Theatre School at DePaul

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Written and Performed by Priyanka Shetty



press & reviews

Shetty's vigorous physical style, expressive face, and radioactive eyes draw the audience into the action. Be prepared for the driving force of Ms. Shetty's electrifyingly physical performance. Outstanding!



GET YOUR COATS ON

Shetty deals in big emotions and primary colours... look more carefully, however, and the complexity of the issues starts to emerge. The more we learn, the more we are drawn in to Shetty's story. Rebellious, colourful, thoughtful...



THE SCOTSMAN

"Shetty is a formidable performer, who succeeds in switching from humour to rage in a mere minute as she recounts the knock-backs, hostility and sadness with which she navigates the world of the arts and the so-called American Dream."

FEST MAG



"Amusing, Relatable, Incisive... she has a warm energy and comfortable rapport that makes the experience engaging and enjoyable. Shetty imbues her message with creativity and charm."



TV JERRY

"Her story is, by any account, one of strength, perseverance, and self-determination. On their own, any of her accomplishments exhibit great drive. When taken together, they're extraordinary."

WASHINGTON CITY PAPER



THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@KEEGAN THEATRE - WASHINGTON DC

2024



“ WONDERFULLY ORIGINAL AND ENTERTAINING... ”

A thought-provoking show... as relatable as it is enlightening. Shetty delivers her story with pride, resilience, and eloquence.

Shetty speaks to the audience in a warm and familiar tone as she prepares for her show. The crowd is a friend, a confidant.

As Shetty weaves the history of her life and attempts to bring the many varied moments into a singular point, she discovers the kaleidoscope of her personality and the uniqueness of her collective experiences.

Wonderfully original and entertaining in a way that is entirely her own.

- Kendall Mostafavi, **DC THEATER ARTS**

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@KEEGAN THEATRE - WASHINGTON DC

2024



“

DIRECT, UNAMBIGUOUS, FUN!

A deeply personal journey, performed with great vigor and heightened emotion by one of our favorite contemporary practitioners of melodrama.

Pacing is peppy, particularly in the liberal sprinklings of Bollywood homage that decorate the action.

She delves into some juicy, culture-shock material. Shetty also pokes the bear of theater, from the grind of auditions (she does a great delivery of the “Sell when you can; you’re not for all markets” bit from “As You Like It”) to the alternating exploitation and rejection of her work based on her color.

Direct, unambiguous, and fun... Shetty pours every ounce of energy at her ample disposal into creating an engaging evening of theater.

- Max Garner, **MD THEATRE GUIDE**

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@KEEGAN THEATRE - WASHINGTON DC

2024



“POWERFUL ACT OF SELF-DISCOVERY AND EMPOWERMENT...”

Priyanka Shetty, the multifaceted creator, leads audiences on a captivating journey, culminating in a poignant night of her one-woman show.

This meta-narrative provides a glimpse into Shetty's personal odyssey as an Indian immigrant in the United States and delves into universal themes of identity and acceptance framed through the lens of a creative artist.

The play is not just about Shetty's journey but also a journey to find acceptance, an identity, and a sense of belonging... As the minutes tick down before the performance, this sense of empowerment only grows as Shetty seems to accept both who she is and who she is not, and prepares to take the stage - fully open, accepting, and ready to rock. Shetty's THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM serves as a powerful act of self-discovery and empowerment.

- Jake Bridges, **BROADWAY WORLD DC**

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@KEEGAN THEATRE - WASHINGTON DC

2024



“ **A FIERY FIGURE...**

Priyanka Shetty deftly recalls her life story as an immigrant woman struggling to break free of stereotypes to create the life she wants, emerging from her chrysalis a fiery figure all her own.”

- Drew Morris, **MORRIS THEATRE DC**

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@KEEGAN THEATRE - WASHINGTON DC

2024



“EXTRAORDINARY...

Portraying oneself is an extremely difficult endeavor. Shetty achieves the greatest synergy between her writing and her performance... she is able to settle into an organic rhythm, at times relaxing so deeply into the sequence that she appears to be reliving the conversations spontaneously.

Her evaluation of what it means to have an identity shaped by Indian culture, legacies of British colonialism, and American culture unfolds almost as a stand-up comedy routine.

Her story is, by any account, one of strength, perseverance, and self-determination. On their own, any of her accomplishments exhibit great drive. When taken together, they're extraordinary.

- D.R. Lewis, **WASHINGTON CITY PAPER**

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@AZUKA THEATRE - PHILADELPHIA, PA

2023



“

THIS IS ONE YOU JUST CANNOT MISS.

Shetty's dynamic one-woman show where audiences immediately become a friend and a part of her backstage ritual.

It's an intense, emotional ride about cultural differences, so many challenges, love and loss, and not giving up. You'll leave the theatre feeling braver, bolder, hopeful.

- Brenda Hillegas, **GO HOME PHILLY**

“

ABSOLUTELY CAPTIVATING!

A mix of wit, straight forward truths, and humor this story takes a life all of its own! This show was absolutely captivating.

- LaToi Storr, **TOITIME.ORG**

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@AZUKA THEATRE - PHILADELPHIA, PA

2023



“

CHARMING AND ARRESTING...

Shetty's compelling skills and magnetism as an actor capture the attention and affection of the audience.

A bold immigrant story as unique as the immigrant experience itself. Shetty brings the show to vivid and joyful life.

Charming and arresting, Shetty skillfully leaps between herself, her mother, her blasé American classmates, her opinionated Indian aunties, and more.

A heartwarming, hilarious, unique, and entertaining piece of theater.

- Krista Mar, **BROAD STREET REVIEW**

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@AZUKA THEATRE - PHILADELPHIA, PA

2023



“

MOST ENGAGING...

She is a dynamic performer with lots of energy and I found her stories most interesting. I appreciated the important personal and universal issues that she presented and was glad to have seen it.

It is most engaging to follow her story, and I look forward to more by this talented artist.

- Frank Burd, [PHILADELPHIA THEATRE REVIEWS](#)

“

IMPASSIONED, REAL, AND INTENSE.

Priyanka creates a rich character whose ambition and sense of betrayal and longing seems real and intense.

- Toby Zinman, [PHINDIE](#)

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@AZUKA THEATRE - PHILADELPHIA, PA

2023



“

MESMERIZING!

Priyanka's performance is bold... she tells her truth and does so exceedingly well. She frequently speaks to the audience and the audience members laugh in appreciation of her travails.

Tales of racism and near despair are replaced by hope and determination. I found The Elephant in the Room mesmerizing.

- Judy Cohen, [BEYOND MY BACKYARD](#)

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@TAPROOT THEATRE - SEATTLE, WA

2023



“

A STANDOUT PERFORMANCE...

A well done autobiographical piece, told with heart and humor, and beautifully delivered. It's the slightest bit meta and the largest bit superb. The storytelling is done craftily, weaving back and forth through the past and the present, with plenty of insight into her conflict between her Indian heritage and the requirements, it seems, of being an American.

Priyanka could be an excellent stand-up comic. But as soon as she lifts the audience with humor, she blindsides it with a truth so real that it brings the house to utter silence. It's this moment that makes this play stand out. The battle that plays out is done with an underlying seriousness that contrasts her humor masterfully. a standout performance that could easily stand on its own against any other full length show that I've seen.

- Greg Heilman, [HEILMAN AND HAVER](#)

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

©THEATRE CERCLE MOLIERE - WINNIPEG FRINGE

2023



“

SHE WON'T GIVE UP OR IN... ★★★★

The Elephant in the Room is herself... She fits in, then doesn't; she is needed for “diversity” and then isn't. But she won't give up or in.

Her search for identity — as a woman in India, as an Indian in America — might stand for all our searches for ourselves.

- Rory Runnels, [WINNIPEG FREE PRESS](#)

“

A VERY POIGNANT PERFORMANCE...

Priyanka takes us on her journey fighting against the norms of what she is expected to be doing and what she wants to do. A very poignant and professional performance that really captured the audience's attention.

- Murray Hunter, [THE JENNY REVUE](#)

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@THE EDINBURGH FRINGE - ASSEMBLY FESTIVAL

2022



“ **OUTSTANDING!** ★★★★★

Come for the Elephant, stay for a whirlwind performance. Leave having seen a great Fringe debut. Go see this!

Shetty's vigorous physical style, expressive face, and radioactive eyes draw the audience into the action. Be prepared for the driving force of Ms. Shetty's electrifyingly physical performance.

There is much humour at the expense of judgemental aunties, religion, and Bollywood... As the show progresses, the emotional tone gradually changes from one of youthful optimism underscored by the heartaches of family life and romance, to the stark realities of America.

A significant life story and a revealing perspective on everyone else from the view of an outsider. We're left in no doubt at the end what the identity is of this particularly problematic pachyderm.

- Christopher Goulding, [GET YOUR COATS ON](#)

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@THE EDINBURGH FRINGE - ASSEMBLY FESTIVAL

2022



“

COLOURFUL, REBELLIOUS, THOUGHTFUL...



One of the prevalent themes on the Fringe this year is artists who have crossed geographical borders and must negotiate new identities. Priyanka Shetty reflects on an extreme version of this experience in her solo show.

Shetty deals in big emotions and primary colours... look more carefully, however, and the complexity of the issues starts to emerge. The more we learn, the more we are drawn in to Shetty's story.

This is a loud and colourful play with a more thoughtful one tucked inside it.

- Susan Mansfield, [THE SCOTSMAN](#)

THE SCOTSMAN

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20-page guide to the best of the Edinburgh festivals inside

EIF, Fringe and Book Festival reviews plus your hour by hour guide to what's on

the **festival**



Football:
Still hope in Hearts despite Zurich defeat

SPORT



Priyanka Shetty finds herself stuck between two identities

Facing the elephant in the dressing room

THEATRE

The Elephant in the Room
Assembly Rooms (Venue 20), until 27 August
★★★★

One of the prevalent themes on the Fringe this year is work made by artists who have crossed geographical borders and must negotiate new identities. Priyanka Shetty reflects on an extreme version of this experience in her solo show, having left India and a secure job in software to move to the United States and train as an actress. We find her in her dressing room before a performance of her solo

show which her parents are planning to attend. She realises she is stuck between two identities, the one her Indian family expects from her and the one she is forging for herself. At this point, an anonymous package arrives, which turns out to be a box of tarot cards themed around Ganesh, the Hindu elephant god.

The cards provide a scaffold for the story's building blocks: Shetty's memories of India; the mother who wanted more for her, yet held her back at the same time; the restrictions under which she lived as a single woman; her excitement for "the land of opportunity and unlimited soda refills" and the much trickier reality of arriving there to find she was "either

misfit or a stereotype". The more we learn, the more we are drawn in to Shetty's story: the male colleague who encouraged her to follow her calling; the showdown with her mother when she broke the news; her rebellious short hair and love of heavy metal. She's not Indian as she was, but she's not white enough either.

Shetty deals in big emotions and primary colours: super excited, super disappointed. Look more carefully, however, and the complexity of the issues starts to emerge. "What do I do with my otherness?" she asks. "How colonised is my mind?" This is a loud and colourful play with a more thoughtful one tucked inside.

SUSAN MANSFIELD

THEATRE

Charlotte Johnson: My Dad And Other Lies
Pleasance Dome (Venue 23), until 29 August
★★★★

"Nobody wants to watch a play about my Dad saving the NHS!" gushes Charlotte, self-described macramé expert, pop star, jeweller, podcaster, everything-she-wants-to-be does but primarily "Daddy's Girl" daughter of Boris Johnson (injunction alert!). Or this character, played with a brilliantly bratty attitude, could also be the comic creation of Charlotte Johnson née Evans.

A delicious multi-platform parody of privilege, it's an upbeat hour of audience participation in which Charlotte laments her lot and encourages us to be "kind-er" and "more respectful" to "nepo(tism) babies" – children of celebrities – many of whom "built the Fringe" and whose offspring are performing sold-out shows this year. So, how's that fair, yah?

"We're here, don't judge us," she says in a show that lets the audience "shine" by forcing them to do the majority of the work, while sending spiky rebuffs to anyone who isn't entirely responsible, in true free market style, for their own success. The dynamic might be depressingly familiar, but the delivery by our "actually just very talented" host is pure, predictable fun. We're her sycophantic interviewers, flailing back-stage hands, and uncredited stage hands, desperately trying to do the Daddy's Girls musical opening number that, try as we might, we just can't get right.

SALLY STOTT

THEATRE

Manbo
Gilded Balloon Teviot (Venue 14), until 29 August
★★★★

"Grab my balls!" shouts Manbo, handing out coloured (plastic) balls as we are blasted, with the force of a hand-held wind machine, into his high-octane world of comic action adventure. Part 1980s action hero, equally part 1980s rock star, he's 100 per cent testosterone – whether he's blending a smoothie waiting for the call of duty, fighting evil villains in extreme locations with his vicious guard dog Fluffy, or fending off a particularly enthusiastic audience member with a foam stick.

With an ever-revolving wheel of movie references, from Rambo to Apocalypse Now, Rocky to James Bond, it's a physically challenging, extremely silly, hour of pure, embodied entertainment. "There will be audience participation," says Sam Dugmore, as Manbo, at the start – the kind where we're required to regularly get shot at, blown up and, at one point, create the carnage of a children's ball pool.

The story is gloriously far-fetched, set against the backdrop of Afghanistan and the military career of Manbo, who wants to quit, but just can't resist the opportunity to carry out a Bonnie Tyler-inspired training montage. He's the kind of character who could have essentially the same show on every year at the Fringe and it would still be a total treat to keep going back to them. An all-American romantic paired with every character played by Sylvester Stallone beginning with the letter "R", Dugmore uses mime with the power of a land mine, but also expertly balances shifts in tone and pace to create the excitement but also emotion of the great action films that he parodies, to celebrate "the best goddamn comic soldier in human history".

SALLY STOTT

THEATRE

Almost Adult
Gilded Balloon Patter House (Venue 24), until 28 August
★★★★

Straight out of college, Hope (the name is portentous) moves to London from MacClesfield, head full of the bright lights. Soon, she has a monosyllabic flatmate, a job in a dinosaur-themed restaurant and Tinder on her phone: her life's about to begin and she's nailing this thing called adulthood. Except it's not quite like that. We realise before she does that her Tinder date is just using her, and the sleazy manager at Dinoworld is a menace to the female staff.

Charlotte Anne-Tilley's self-penned one-woman play – her Fringe debut, at 23 – is a confident, poised piece of writing. She dons the character of Hope as easily as her pink dinosaur costume, full of charm, innocence and irrepressible cheerfulness. But when a colleague is sexually assaulted, her sense of fairness and justice impels her to speak out, and she discovers, abruptly, that the adult world is murkier than she thought.

In what is a very promising debut, Anne-Tilley skilfully balances moments of comedy with a darker picture of the vulnerability of young women making their way in the world, and the fact that there are still not enough safeguards to protect them.

SUSAN MANSFIELD

THEATRE

Self Service
theSpace @ Surgeons Hall (Venue 53), until 27 August
★★★★

Anne Rabbitt last appeared on the Fringe in 1986 with her double-act partner Doon Mackichan. In the 1980s, Rabbitt & Doon appeared alongside Jo Brand, Jenny Eclair, Paul Merton and others. While Mackichan went on to success in radio, TV and film, Rabbitt's career was dogged by bad luck: an agent declared bankrupt, a theatre which burned down just before her West End debut opposite Griff Rhys Jones. Having not been on stage for 15 years, Rabbitt is now back with a clever, quirky one-woman show in which she demonstrates she has lost none of the talent and courage which should, by rights, have taken her further up the showbiz ladder.

At the age of "not quite 60", she books herself in for a service. The 1962 *Classic Rabbitt* model has been reliable and family-friendly, despite the occasional breakdown. Now, there's a tendon issue and the cooling system is shot. With reference to the user's manual, a mechanic (shrink) (also played by Rabbitt) diagnoses problems and proposes solutions.

Self Service is a hard show to categorise, a mixture of autobiography, comedy and self-help. Rabbitt is disarmingly honest about the demands of being creative while raising kids, her frustration with her role-play job in corporate development and the feeling she has lost touch with who she is. She plays multiple parts, sings in a variety of styles and plays the accordion.

There is so much interesting material here that she could afford to take it more slowly, allowing the ideas more room to breathe. If the pseudo-self-help element does occasionally slip into cliché ("change yourself or change the story"), it's a small price to pay for a performance so likeable, talented and free of self-pity that we wish it went on longer.

SUSAN MANSFIELD

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

©THE EDINBURGH FRINGE - ASSEMBLY FESTIVAL

2022



“

SHETTY IS FORMIDABLE IN THIS ONE-WOMAN SHOW

She questions her duality, all the while adamant in her rebellion and sense of belonging.

There is levity in Shetty's declaration of love for metal and her mocking of Indian aunties who like to have a say on absolutely everything, but elsewhere we are immersed in the melancholy of gendered hierarchies and racial bias.

Shetty is a formidable performer, who succeeds in switching from humour to rage in a mere minute as she recounts the knock-backs, hostility and sadness with which she navigates the world of the arts and the so-called American Dream.

- Arusa Qureshi, **FEST MAG**

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

©THE EDINBURGH FRINGE - ASSEMBLY FESTIVAL

2022



“

PASSIONATE, ENERGETIC, ENGAGING...

Priyanka is a rebel at heart... who took power and gave herself permission to be who she wanted to be.

As the clock ticks we cycle back in time and, through lively characterisations. we meet a cast of important people who have shaped and influenced her life. There is a poignant memory of her brother, she wants him back, but like the trouble-free life of play that she remembers so fondly, he too is long gone.

A strong and passionate performance... for those of us who have never had to face similar cultural pressures, restrictions and rejections we can only admire the actor's journey.

The Elephant in this room is full of strength and deserves to be seen.

- Jim Judges, [FRINGE REVIEW](#)

2022

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@THE EDINBURGH FRINGE - ASSEMBLY FESTIVAL



“

I DARE YOU TO SEE IT AND NOT ROOT FOR HER.

Shetty's enthusiastic and driven performance carries the weight of the material, weaving a compelling narrative through her emotional intensity.

*It is difficult to not feel a sense of catharsis while watching *The Elephant in the Room*. No doubt those like Shetty, a product of two different cultures, can feel represented, but the championing of identity and self-expression is a breath of fresh air regardless of the viewer's background.*

Shetty's powerful life story is a fascinating, confrontational, yet hopeful dissection of cultural and systemic prejudice... Thought-provoking, sincere, and boldly performed.

*Shetty's excellent performance and commitment to the role sold the show, with several audience members held captivated, literally on the edge of their seats, enthralled... *The Elephant in the Room* is demonstrably a very distinct show for each individual and a unique take on important issues.*

- Eddie Dewing and Jasmine Feldman, [ED FRINGE REVIEW](#)

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@THE EDINBURGH FRINGE - ASSEMBLY FESTIVAL

2022



“

SHETTY IS AN IMMENSELY APPEALING PRESENCE...

Priyanka Shetty chronicles the culture shock, isolation and racism she faces after quitting her job as a software engineer in India and moving to the U.S. to become an actor.

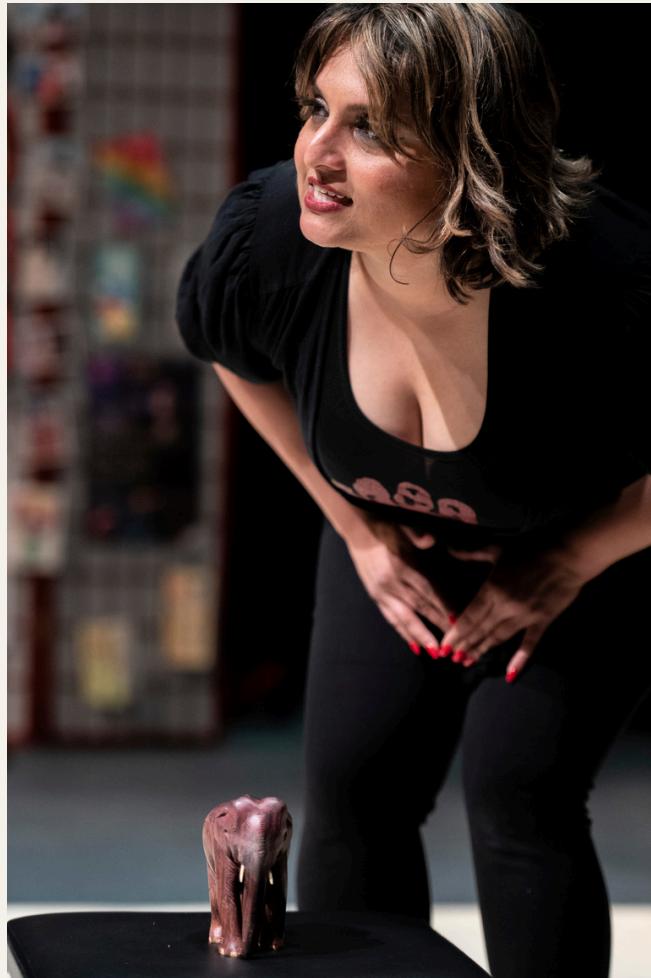
Undervalued by closed-minded professors who comment on Shetty's "otherness" and shove her into bit parts in school productions, Shetty realizes her only chance at success lies in charting her own path. The show builds movingly to this realization while still allowing room for humor.

- Joey Sims, TRANSITIONS

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@59E59 THEATERS, NYC

2022



“

IT'S YOU WHO WON'T FORGET THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM.

The struggle to define and carve a place for herself as a woman, an immigrant, and an artist, is at the beating, expansive heart of Shetty's autobiographical Elephant.

Shetty is a dynamic performer, vividly evoking other characters, major and minor, in her narrative, and using space and physicality for maximum immersive effect.

Humor pervades the show, and Shetty deftly interweaves Elephant's comedic strain with its moments of loss, struggle, questioning, and resistance.

- John R. Ziegler and Leah Richards, [THINKING THEATER NYC](#)

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

@59E59 THEATERS, NYC

2022



“

HILARIOUS, INTIMATE, AND HONEST...

Elephant comes highly recommended... its New York premiere delivers exactly as promised, with a hilarious, intimate, and honest portrayal of what it's like to balance one's identity.

We hear doubts, excitement, long-treasured memories, and many laugh-out-loud moments of pure hilarity. It was a treasure to hear jokes about everything from metal festivals to Indian aunties' commentary on, well, everything. Watching TEITR was a vivid and joyful experience that will feel familiar even though it is one woman's unique story.

Finally, a conversation is being had that skillfully celebrates similarity while also highlighting difference and mourning division... Whatever Priyanka does next, I plan to go see.

- Rebecca Russavage, **STAGE BUDDY NYC**

Public solitude and 'The Elephant in the Room'

Priyanka Shetty challenges societal stereotypes in her new one-woman show

Ashley Clark | Senior Writer

Priyanka Shetty is no stranger to adversity, whether that comes in the form of working against the tide of the patriarchal society in her hometown of Bangalore, India or the racial injustice she has faced during her transition to life in the United States. On Sunday night, Shetty gave an in-depth look into her journey from her blossoming theater work in India to her study here at the University. The play, "The Elephant in the Room," which is part of a triptych with "#Charlottesville" and "The Wall," will be on the road soon, but you can catch it at Live Arts, on the Downtown Mall April 23.

Shetty is in her final year of her MFA in Acting at the University, and "The Elephant in the Room" is one of her culminating projects. It picks out the particular moments that pushed her to seek not only a different career — moving from software engineering to acting — but a different home to pursue that path. Shetty commented on the fact that coming from India, where she ran her own theater company and was the director of a program called "What's the Scene" — a music review project aimed at shedding more light on independent artists — she has always been very comfortable wearing different hats and advocating for herself.

"I noticed that whenever there's a need for something, I feel the urge to fill it ... I like to take on the entire weight of the world onto my shoulders a little bit," Shetty said.

Like Shetty, "The Elephant in the Room" is not to be limited to one way of doing things, taking the form of a play-within-a-play. It's set in a dressing room an hour before the "play" starts, and Shetty calls on random scene numbers labeled by tarot card titles in order to decide which momentous scenes from her life arrive first for the crowd. The interactions could be anything from an emotional conversation about childhood with the protagonist, Priyanka's brother, or moments of honesty about being an international student at the University. At one point, Shetty's character describes attending the University as being a "small drop, but a drop that carries the might of the ocean," among a sea of students and white faces, desiring to see the "bones of this university." As for where the show can go next, Shetty is excited to see a future on the road, as well as the day when she can pass the character version of herself on to another actor and open opportu-

nities for women of color in the theater world.

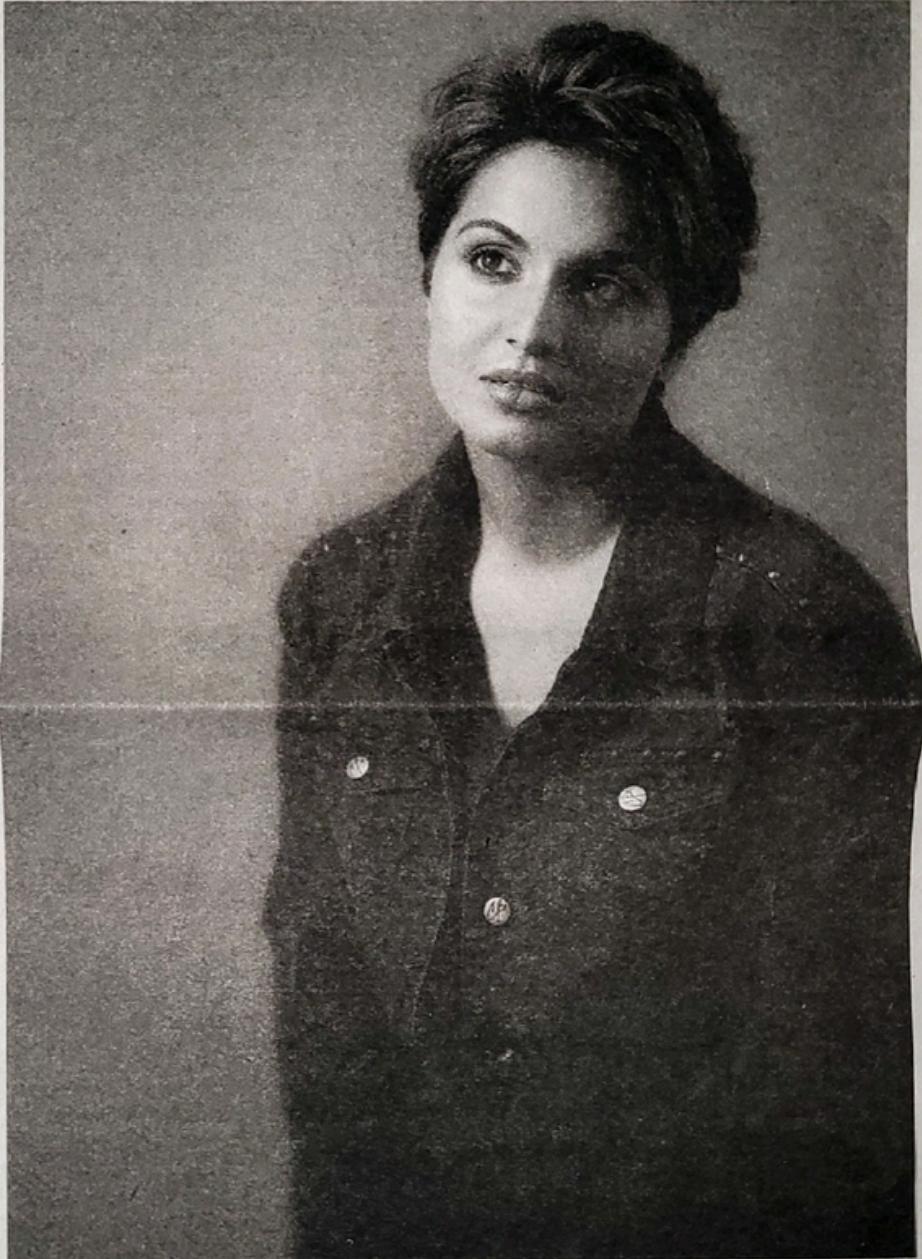
"I certainly wanted to see change, but I had to come to terms with the fact that it's not going to happen at the pace that I want it to happen," said Shetty. "And it's been going on for so long and at some point I was like, okay, change is slow and maybe instead of just sitting around waiting for things to change, maybe I should be the one who brings about that change — for myself and for others ... Beyond a point, the playwright or whoever the person is playing the character gives up ... someone else takes over. So in a way, I have also created a role for someone else."

The show is full of candid and sarcastic remarks about "first world problems," the true definition of "vulnerability," the nature of stereotyping Indian characters in media and whether or not you have to sound breathy when discussing yoga practices.

On the concept of true vulnerability, Shetty considers the theater the "best medium to share your own story" because for "one or two hours people are really receptive, and they can leave with some questions ... rather than just having a conversation where people can cut you off." The deeply personal levels that Shetty reaches in "The Elephant in the Room" never feel disingenuous. It is clear that she is displaying some of the darkest moments of her past as well as some of the most hopeful — without having it be unrelated. The play opens interacting with everyone in the audience and progressively gets more compact and darker, playing with the idea of public solitude in order to be within oneself and still participating with the audience.

"The Elephant in the Room" is meant to make you laugh, cry and leave having learned something important. When asked about what the most important takeaway from the show could be to an audience member, Shetty said, "to be able to view America through the lens of an Indian woman or an international student ... learning on both sides ... People will learn to probably look at their perspective of what they consider normal every day and maybe question that."

As for her experience transitioning from India to the United States, there were certainly some letdowns. "I feel like I am not able to explore my roots at all here," Shetty said. "One of the things I thought people here would really make use of ... a per-



COURTESY STALEY JOHIEL MONROE

MFA in Acting student Priyanka Shetty explores culture, stereotypes and intersectional identities in "The Elephant in the Room."

son with access to a completely different culture ... I know an Indian classical dance called Kathak, and ... Hindustani music and all those things which didn't really make their way — like I speak four different languages and that was never really channeled."

So, if people in the industry are not going to take advantage

of what she has to offer, "I have to do that for myself," said Shetty.

And her advice for other writers and artists? "If you think you have a story to share, that makes you a writer." Surely, Priyanka Shetty will share many more incredible stories in the future.

Shetty will be returning to perform her triptych, including "The Elephant in the Room" at Live Arts April 23.

Priyanka Shetty's monologue is for herself, her audience and even her acting-averse parents

Embracing the Elephant in the Room

AV KITCHING

PRIYANKA Shetty has mixed feelings about her parents watching her show. Shetty's monologue is based on her experiences of growing up in India, embarking on a career as a software engineer and then leaving it all behind to move to the States to pursue her dream of becoming an actor.

The hour-long show is running at Théâtre Cercle Molière (Venue 3) to Saturday.

"I've always wanted to be an actor," Shetty says. "I joined the drama club in school when I was 12, and at 13 I did

WINNIPEG FRINGE THEATRE FESTIVAL

the education they had invested in her, but despite their misgivings, Shetty forged ahead and in 2016 moved to the United States to pursue an MFA in acting at the University of Virginia.

The first play in her trilogy of solos, *The Elephant in the Room*, is a witty, dark comedy about Shetty's experiences of life as an immigrant in Trump's America.

The current version of the show, which was voted "Most Popular" at the 2012 Edinburgh Fringe by *The Scotsman* after its month-long run, is a refined version of the original work.



ARTS // PREVIEW

'THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM'

BY JIM FISCHER

As an actor, Priyanka Shetty has no problem making the character in the one-woman play "The Elephant in the Room" her own. The character is Shetty herself, after all.

Shetty is the playwright, too, for "Elephant," which deals with her experiences in two cultures, each posing its own set of problems for the young theater artist.

"This is my truth. Some of the truth comes as harsh realities, things people don't like to talk about," Shetty said in a phone interview. "It's not my whole life's story, but the part of it that is my transition from India to America. But everything I talk about is 100 percent true."

While "The Elephant in the Room" concerns Shetty's finding her way in two very different cultures, the immediate impetus for the decision to turn her experiences into a stage play was an instance of racism Shetty experienced in Charlottesville, Virginia, no less, where she is pursuing a master's degree in acting at the University of Virginia.

"The semester after [the Unite the Right rally and riots], I experienced my first real taste of racial discrimination on a personal level," said Shetty, who declined to elaborate on specifics. "That particular incident gave me the drive to follow through with writing the play, to say that this is real and it

happens and it's not fun. So I talk, in the play, about how it crushed me and how it made me feel."

But the story begins in India, as Shetty wrestles with "growing up in an Orthodox family that wouldn't dream of having an actor for a daughter."

"But I've been drawn to [acting]," Shetty said. "It's my true calling, what I was meant to do."

She founded a theater company in India in 2010, and eventually left a successful business career in the country to move to the U.S. to study acting.

While living in Columbus, Shetty worked with acting coach Joe Bishara, who directs "The Elephant

in the Room," presented this Sunday, July 22, as part of the South Asian Theatre Festival.

"Her story is immediate and authentic. It's exceptionally timely," Bishara said, describing the play as "a cross between a monologue and standup."

"There are humorous moments, but the topics are hard-hitting," Shetty said. "It's especially relevant to our current political climate."

COLUMBUS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

6:30 p.m. Sunday, July 22
549 Franklin Ave.,
Downtown
spotlightohio.com

One-Woman Show 'The Elephant in the Room' Returns to Columbus



STYLE

Arts & Events » Theater

Preview: Priyanka Shetty's "The Elephant in the Room" at the Firehouse, Aug. 10 and 11

by Claire Boswell

August 06, 2019

[comment](#) ▾



Priyanka Shetty, the playwright and star of the one-woman show, "The Elephant in the Room," is coming to Firehouse Theatre for a limited run Aug. 10 and 11.



THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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Published: 22nd October 2019 06:56 AM | Last Updated: 22nd October 2019 06:56 AM



By Vidya Iyengar

Express News Service

BENGALURU: When Priyanka Shetty made the switch from being a techie in Bengaluru to a stage actor in the United States, she thought she had done the "impossible." Having grown up here, Shetty was used to

2021

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

©ORLANDO REPERTORY THEATER, ORLANDO FL



“ JOYFUL AND HEARTBREAKING...

The Elephant in the Room is an important tale of perseverance, dedication, and achievement. To know everything that Priyanka has faced to arrive at her current level of success is truly an inspiration. And as an internationally acclaimed solo performer, Priyanka's talent is obvious as she transports the audience into her story and lived experiences.

At times both joyful and heartbreaking, The Elephant in the Room is an autobiographical, one-woman show. Using a carefully designed set and sound bites, this play follows Priyanka's journey from metalhead software engineer to American immigrant and successful actress. Skillfully leading us through her devastating challenges and hopeful triumphs, we watch Priyanka navigate her family's disapproval, encounters with true love, and the realization of her wildest dreams.

- Kristi Reif, ORLANDO DECODED

2021

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

©ORLANDO REPERTORY THEATER, ORLANDO FL



“

COMPELLING AND RELATABLE...

Priyanka Shetty provides an idea of the limitations women face in her narrative in India, as well as how the American Dream isn't all it is cracked up to be - at least for non white immigrants.

Shetty is a compelling and relatable performer who delivers her material with passion and vigor.

- Matthew J. Palm, ORLANDO SENTINEL

2019

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

©THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR PERFORMING ARTS



“

SHE'S A PERFORMER TO WATCH!

Priyanka Shetty has created a wryly funny one-woman show tracing her emancipation from duty to following her heart. This is a well-written show with nicely calibrated humor that leaves you wanting to see Shetty in both in more work that she has written and in other roles.

One of the funniest sequences in the show is when Shetty plays both her mother and her younger self. In rapid-fire dialogue, she manages to cover the eternal quest for separation from parents and eternal longing for acceptance and support... That she isn't willing just to break off ties and go her own way speaks to a determination to maintain a link to family and be true to herself. It's a wrenching process. One of the strongest points of the show is that she's not sending out a simple, feel-good, if I can overcome it so can you message. She's getting personal and honest about how close she came to giving up and the toll it took on her.

- Mary Ann Johnson, [MD THEATRE GUIDE](#)

2019

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

©FIREHOUSE THEATRE, RICHMOND VA



“

AMUSING, RELATABLE, INCISIVE... ★★★★☆

Shetty has a warm energy and comfortable rapport that makes the experience engaging and enjoyable.

Her adjustments to American customs provide humor, as they set up the differences that become more acute when she explores the surprisingly racist reactions she endures in academia.

Shetty imbues her message with creativity and charm.

- Jerry Sifter, **TV JERRY**

AUDIENCE REVIEWS

“

Narrating her journey into the arts - and the racism and family pressures that follow her - Priyanka is an energetic and captivating performer. Hilarious, moving, and entirely authentic. The use of tarot cards and sound effects immerse the audience in her rich world, and there isn't a dull moment - from metal concerts to her home in India to audition rooms and university classrooms in the U.S. An exhilarating “you'll laugh and cry” show!

- Maille-Rose Smith, 2022 Edinburgh Festival Fringe

“

A brilliant performance by Priyanka Shetty! She kept the audience fully engaged for an hour of intense, fast-paced monologue, filled with humor. It takes an exceptional talent to perform in such an intimate setting where the audience is just a couple of feet away! It seemed so authentic and real that it could well have been Priyanka's real-life story. If it is her real-life journey, the performance is all the more commendable as she is sharing it with a room full of strangers. A must-see show at the fringe in my view.

- Sharon, 2022 Edinburgh Festival Fringe

“

Captivating, intimate and deeply moving - Priyanka Shetty is an exceptionally talented actress and storyteller. Make sure not to miss this show!

- Suzanne H, 2022 Edinburgh Festival Fringe

A great show, Priyanka breathes life and compassion into the story, which hit home with many of her tales of family life. Had me fixed from start to end. Must see.

- Simon Birks, 2022 Edinburgh Festival Fringe

“

Mesmerising and personal storytelling. Wonderful stuff!

- Swathi Chaitanya, 2022 Edinburgh Festival Fringe

Wonderful, intimate, funny, and illuminating. Go see it!

- Paul Archibeque, 2022 Edinburgh Festival Fringe

AUDIENCE REVIEWS

“

I sincerely want to tell Priyanka a BIG THANK YOU - I am truly grateful for this play! Like her, I too came from the other side of earth - China to study at Yale and to seek my life's mission/passion. I too was once like that elephant. Thank you so much for showing me and letting me hear that elephant's voice. Priyanka, you are truly very talented, kind, and beautiful in every way. I have more faith for your future and mine, and many other girls from Asia.

- Angela Chan, Yale University (2025)

“

Beautiful play by genius young actress Priyanka Shetty, telling the story of finding yourself in the modern world. Highly recommend!

- Elena Love, Keegan Theatre (2024)

I watched The Elephant in the Room by Priyanka Shetty at the gorgeous Keegan Theatre in D.C. I absolutely loved it from start to finish. The way Priyanka commanded the stage was extraordinary. A one-woman show written and performed by her. Set design, use of props and clothing, the cadence of her voice, choice of music and word sequencing - and of course, the way she used the space seemed so carefully and intentionally chosen, but with an ease and comfort that made it feel so natural. To achieve this level of thoughtfulness and complete attention to all the parts... If everybody went to see moving, thought-provoking theater like this on a regular basis, this world would be a better place. Thank you for including me and giving me opportunities to see great theater and engage in robust discussion.

- Sara Lavan, Keegan Theatre (2024)

“

Saw this today and it was fantastic. Definitely worth seeing if you can. Priyanka Shetty is a brilliant actor, so good you forget you're seeing a one person show! Witty, hilarious, and powerful. Check it out.

- Jeffrey Harlan, Azuka Theatre (2023)

Highly recommend checking out this new one-woman play at the Louis Bluver Theater at The Drake in Philly. One of the best writing and acting performances that we have seen recently. It speaks to everyone trying to find their voice and individuality. The Elephant in the Room is a true tour de force. Priyanka Shetty was amazing.

- Charles McGovern , Azuka Theatre (2023)

AUDIENCE REVIEWS

“

*I just got to see Priyanka Shetty in her one-woman show *The Elephant in the Room* and OH MY GOSH!!! I was just amazed at what she was able to tell and show in it. The audience can tell that she puts her absolute heart into it and wrote this play that's so fresh and funny. The journey she is able to take you on is just eye-opening and jaw-dropping in such a modern way, while having themes relatable to literally everyone - especially artists or anyone who's went out on a limb for their career. So well done. Priyanka you are a true talent and a joy. Please, please, please go see Azuka Theatre's presenting of this piece. ★★★★★*

- Hunter Smith, Azuka Theatre (2023)

“

Priyanka Shetty is an unstoppable force!!! What a powerful performance last night on a subject that needs to be spoken about more on main stage. One of the best storytelling via monologue we have seen.

- Nitya Gupta, Taproot Theatre (2024)

I'm so glad I caught this show that proves Indian women are not a monolith. We in Seattle are so fortunate to get this opportunity to see Priyanka and her "The Elephant in the Room" which has been touring everywhere. And any person of color who has dreamed of being a performer will find much to identify with in the piece. She brings her full heart to the stage.

- Kathy Hsieh, Taproot Theatre (2023)

“

Highly recommend this show! Priyanka Shetty is a dynamic, engaging, and extremely talented performer. I laughed, I cried, and most importantly, I felt seen. One of the best shows I've ever witnessed. Don't miss it!

- Dina Najjar, Orlando Rep (2023)

*Witnessed *The Elephant in the Room* at Azuka Theatre on the lead Priyanka Shetty's birthday! So much nostalgia, international student immigrant stories, such specific time capsule references.*

- Jajwalya Karajikar, Azuka Theatre (2023)

GUESTBOOK

“

What a perfect way to spend this hot New York afternoon. I really enjoyed the show, and the audience was incredibly present and engaged with you, Priyanka. As I watched the show, I thought of how beautifully the play is in conversation with other plays about the struggle to hold onto one's values and purpose in a world that is constantly trying to reduce us to insiders and outsiders, mainstream and marginalized. You tell the story of that struggle to hold onto your identity and the courage it takes to do so. Congratulations for your art, ambition, and commitment to moving your work into the unique form and plan you have invented for it.

- John Eisner, Founder - The Lark Theatre

“

What a brave and healing solo show you've made of your life path to the stage, Priyanka. I first appreciated the artistry and honesty of THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM when it streamed from Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage. But seeing it live last night at Keegan Theatre, I could sense its many emotional touchpoints for an audience—all the ways your personal triumph over being “othered” inspires others in the room. Brava.

- John Stoltenberg, DC Metro Theater Arts

“

Priyanka, you are a force to reckon with and an artist extraordinaire! What a phenomenal four days of performances. You never missed a beat, never slowed down and never backed off from showing how truly phenomenal you are. You took the audiences each day on a personal journey that was both heart warming and gut wrenching. Glad we could be a part of your tour and give the tour year a fantastic end. Wishing you the very best that life can offer. It is we who got nourished with your performances of The Elephant in the Room! Onwards and upwards to #Charlottesville!

- Mala Garg, FICA Cleveland

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